

Heading In The Wrong Direction

When I started working in the Middle East about a decade ago, I was astonished to discover that over 40% of the earth's ethno-linguistic people groups were considered unreached; that is, without a witness of the gospel. I remember the exact number because it was emblazoned on my heart: 6,943. That was the number that our small team brought before the Lord of the Harvest, prayed into and wept over. I determined back then that if there was anything worth giving my life to, it would be to see that number decrease.

A few months ago, I was on a plane, flying back from spending a week at one of our indigenous ministry schools in the 10-40 window. I had taught a weeklong intensive on the person of Christ. It was an incredible week to watch these emerging leaders, the majority that came out of Muslim backgrounds, absorb hours and hours of Christology; some hearing for the first time the doctrines of Jesus' pre-existence, incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension and return. Tears ran down their cheeks as I taught about the cross. Joy and courage filled their hearts as they heard about God's grand plan for all things made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ. It was truly amazing.

While I was there, our local pastors in the country informed me that indigenous churches from around the region were inquiring about sending their young leaders to be trained at our Missions Base and House of Prayer. I was deeply encouraged; my heart was bursting with all the possibilities that lay ahead. I found myself thinking, *Lord, it's happening! You are really doing this!* I settled into my seat for the long flight back to the States and opened my computer to catch up on some work. I was behind on updating our information booklets for MAPS and opened , one of the leading research groups on world evangelization, to find updated statistics on

the progress of world evangelization. As I perused the site, my eyes fell to the global summary of the home page:

Unreached People Groups: 7,403

At first, I thought there certainly had to be some kind of mistake. It could not be possible that there are *more* UPGs now than ten years ago. I tried to figure out what was going on and searched through the site. And then it hit me: Joshua Project updates their statistics every ten years and this was the new number. My heart sank. When I started working in the Middle East a decade ago, that number was 6,943. Today the number of ethno-linguistic people groups in the earth has risen to 7,403; that is almost a 7% increase.

What does this mean? This means 7,403 tribes, families and people groups are without a witness of the gospel.

Fresh tears ran down my face once again. I felt as though I had just experienced emotional whiplash. I tried to reconcile what I was reading with all the language that has been used over the last ten to twenty years in the Charismatic movement and in broader evangelicalism. I found myself saying over and over, "Lord, how can this be?" When you look at the trends of the church in America over the last twenty years, it is hard to understand how we got here.

Millennials are the first generation in history to be handed all the information, data, statistics, names and locations of every unreached people group on the planet, and on our watch, *the number of unreached people groups went up.*

Read more of this amazing story here and listen to the episode on MAPS Global podcast. {eoa}

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