

Chapter 1

Who Are “A Third of Us?”

“A third of anything is significant.”-MJN

Forty-two-year-old Mrs. Taufik is the mother of two teenagers, and one wife of her husband's two. He splits his time between his younger wife in the coastal city of Padang, on the west coast of Sumatra, but less and less time with her in the mountainous interior town of Bukittinggi (High Mountain). As an ethnic Minangkabau, Mrs. Taufik is a staunch Muslim, along with 99.72% of her people. There's a Minangkabau saying, "To be Minangkabau is to be Muslim." Scanning every direction from her home she can see dozens of mosques that, at around 5:00 a.m. every morning, vie for her attention with loud calls from their minarets by piercing the dawn declaring that God is Great. That masculine blare gets her up each morning for the first of five prayers that she will offer to Allah throughout the day.

Life is rather monotonous for Mrs. Taufik, but with her husband seldom present, she wraps her life around the needs of her growing children. Thankfully, her husband sends her enough Rupiah each month to meet her minimal needs, though she can barely squeak by and often he misses a month. To make up for the lack, she harvests kangkong (spinach-like plants) that grows in abundance in the ditch running behind her small house. She cuts some each morning then takes it to the market to sell at her 12'x12' wooden stall. With the meager profit, she purchases fresh foods at the market before heading home at noon. After her village-wide two-hour siesta she spends the rest of the afternoon caring for her children, making certain that she and her daughters are at the mosque by 7:00 p.m. for final prayers. Once home she goes to bed, only to start the same routine the following day. Only Friday, the day of corporate worship at the mosque, is different.

As an unreached person, Mrs. Taufik has no opportunity to access three life-giving essentials so common to us who know Jesus as Savior and Lord. She lives out her life where, although there are portions of the Bible in her language, she is not aware of that and there is no one in the vicinity to tell her. She lives in an area where there are no churches – all she sees around her are myriads of mosques. Finally, there are no believers in Jesus to meet, even if she had reason to do so. Mrs. Taufik lives in what those in mission circles call an unreached “frontier people group” – living out her existence on the frontier beyond gospel awareness – together with the 6,815,000 others of her “people group.”

The Unfinished Task

Ever since the Day of Pentecost, devote followers of Christ have avidly been taking the Good News of Jesus across continents, countries and cultures. Yet after 2000 years, the reaching of all peoples, like the Minangkabau of Sumatra, with this good news is still incomplete. This is true even though there has been no greater effort in the history of mankind that compares in scope and expenditure to this undertaking. Literally hundreds of thousands of message-bearers have been sent, billions of dollars expended, and

innumerable prayers offered on the quest to give every human being an opportunity to hear the gospel. Over the centuries dozens of vibrant regional sending centers have sent out message-bearers and continue to do so. Although the propagation of the gospel has continued unbroken and unabated for centuries, the task remains unfinished.

Today, a third of humanity – A Third of Us – do not have access to the gospel! Stop a moment to think about that. *More than three billion* people have yet to hear the good news of Jesus, being denied the opportunity to believe in him as Savior from their sins and making peace with God. Of all the injustices in the world – and there are many that are quite distressing – this is the most serious of all. Why is that? Because of the eternal consequences for that *one third who have no opportunity to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ*. A third of anything is significant, especially this third.

That's not to say believers have ignored the spiritual plight of the lost. Throughout history, message-bearers have been sent to many places and peoples to proclaim the Good News. Some have had remarkable and distinguished ministries. Others, who comprise the vast majority of those who have gone out, have served quietly and inconspicuously. Most, through self-denial, have given up much only to see little response. However, this much can be said of all: they served in the past and are serving in the present in obedience to the call of God on their lives to reach the unreached. But even with all these efforts, the task remains unfinished for the third who have yet to be exposed to the good news of salvation. So who are these remaining third of us and where are they?

The Three “Nos”

With all the efforts of thousands who have served around the world, one would not expect that so many people still await the arrival of the gospel. But this is the case. Although remarkable progress has been made on some fronts, the fact remains that a third of humanity has no contact with the gospel and remain unreached.

Just what is meant by “unreached?” Put simply we are speaking about large swaths of humanity who have no access to the gospel. They are people who have no or woefully insignificant contact with three life-giving essentials so common to followers of Christ. The three essentials can be summed up in what can be identified as the “The Three Nos”: no Bible, no church, and no known believers¹, or a combination of these.²

This designation or description of three “Nos” is not new. Frank Severn, the highly respected former Executive Director of SEND International, mentioned the three in an article in 1997. He stated, “It would be good if every church would focus some of its mission resources on a people group ‘which has no church, no Bible, and no believers.’”³ More recently Rick Warren, in the context of *Finishing The Task*, has popularized the three correspondingly as “the three B”s. He frequently refers to those who have no access to the gospel as, “No Believers, No Bible, and No Body of Christ.”⁴

¹ There are places where there is so minuscule number of believers, that it is as if there are none at all. We are talking about places where there less than 2% believers, but in most cases even less. Most places have no reported believers. A close approximation of “No believers” are Frontier People Groups on Joshua Project lists: <https://joshuaproject.net/frontier>

² I say, “or a combination of these,” because thanks to the untiring efforts of Bible translators over recent years, in many of the languages of these unreached groups portions, if not the entire Bible, has been translated. But the awareness and distribution of these scriptures is woefully wanting. The majority of the people within these groups do not know a Bible translation exists, or if they do, don't care.

³ Frank Severn, “Some Thoughts on the Meaning of All Nations.” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Volume 33, Issue 4, 1997.

⁴ <https://www.finishingthetask.com/about-finishing-the-task/>

Let's take a moment to consider these three "Nos." Imagine living in an area where there are no believers in Jesus. With no Christ-followers within the vicinity, there would be no opportunity for a person living there to encounter the gospel through another person who could personally explain it. A friendly face and sympathetic heart would be absent to cordially convey the saving power of the gospel. Salt and light within the community would be nonexistent. It would be a spiritually dark place, a place of lostness, with no hope and with no one to show the way.

Imagine if there were no Bible or access to a Bible either. Without the availability of Scripture, God's written revelation intended for all mankind would not be accessible. God's prescribed way for living would be absent. God's moral standards would be ignorantly violated. God's message of hope would not be known. God's requirement of belief and repentance could not be read. Worst of all, the story of the Savior Jesus could not be understood and appreciated.

Lastly, imagine if there were no church. This is not necessarily speaking about a church building, but more importantly about a body of Christ-followers that displays communion with Jesus and each other. Without a community of Christ-followers, there would be no gathering together with others of like precious faith for encouragement. There would be no fellowship with like-minded believers, bringing health to the soul and strength to godly commitment. For lack of social interaction there would be no possibility of being built up in the faith. There would be no disciple making. It would be a place of lonely, spiritual barrenness. There would be no ability to start and sustain a movement for Christ. These three together is what is meant by no access to the gospel. No believers. No Bible. No church. And this is the plight of over a third of humanity – *A Third of Us*.

Where are the Nos?

Naturally the question arises, "Just where are these Nos found?" The answer can be a bit complex but not difficult. There are three broad arenas in which the unreached are found.

Imbedded in Unreached People Groups

Those of us who live in modern globalized, urbanized and high-tech nations, many times miss or ignore the fact that there are smaller "nations" within larger nations that are called people groups. These ethno-linguistic clusters are distinguished by their distinct language, culture, worldview and most times inhabit ancestral lands that have been theirs for generations. Mrs. Taufik, as a Minangkabau living in southwest Sumatra, is a prime example. Although she is Indonesian by nationality, she prefers to identify herself by her tribal heritage. That identity is what is most dear to her – being Minangkabau. Ever since the 1974 Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, varying definitions for "people groups" and with it "unreached people groups" have been offered. Each successive attempt has endeavored to improve and clarify. They come into play as we consider reaching of A Third of Us.

One of the more recent and probably best definition of unreached peoples comes from David Platt, a deeply committed mission-minded pastor, and past president of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist, one of the largest missions in North America. Platt states, "Unreached peoples and places are those among whom Christ is

largely unknown and the church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help.”⁵ The three Nos align with this definition. “But,” one may ask, “how many ethno-linguistic people groups are there, and how many of them comprise the unreached third of us?” According to research-orientated Joshua Project,⁶ the world contains around 17,400 distinct people groups. Of these 7,397 (or 42.6%) are classified as unreached.⁷ These unreached contain 3.2 billion of the 7.8 billion people in the world today – well over A Third of Us!

The table below displays a clear way to understand the current status of people groups. Viewed graphically, the world’s population can be divided into three distinct categories using the “access – no access” paradigm.”⁸

World Population: 7.8 Billion

UNREACHED & UNSAVED No witnessing community within their people group or area 3.2 billion / 41%	A Third of Us (No Access)
UNDER-REACHED & UNSAVED Most have never had a clear presentation the gospel, although it is nearby 2.14 billion / 28%	Some Access
REACHED BUT NOT SAVED Some knowledge of the gospel, nominal acceptance, “Traditional Christians” in name only 1.56 billion / 20% --- and --- REACHED & SAVED True followers of Christ 900 million / 11%	Full Access

As Christ-followers, besides being concerned for those with no access that comprise the top tier of this graphic (our main focus), we also need to understand those with full access to the gospel and are considered true followers of Christ (or to use a biblical euphemism are “born again”). To make sure we have it correct, a true Christ-follower is one who believes:

1. The Bible as God’s unique revelation to man, that is both truthful and trustworthy in all that it says from start to finish.

⁵ <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/rethinking-unreached-peoples>

⁶ Joshua Project is a Directing Member of Alliance for the Unreached

⁷ <https://joshuaproject.net>

⁸ David Barrett defines these categories as follows: **World C** – all persons who individually are Christians anywhere in the world. This is Christianity in its broadest expression and includes Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, Evangelical and all derived or deviant forms of Christianity; **World B** – all non-Christians who have heard the gospel, or who live within societies and areas where they were or are likely to hear it during their lifetime. These are evangelized non-Christians; **World A** – all non-Christians who are unevangelized and likely to remain so without a new effort by Christians to take the gospel to them. Quoted by Patrick Johnstone, pp.67-68.

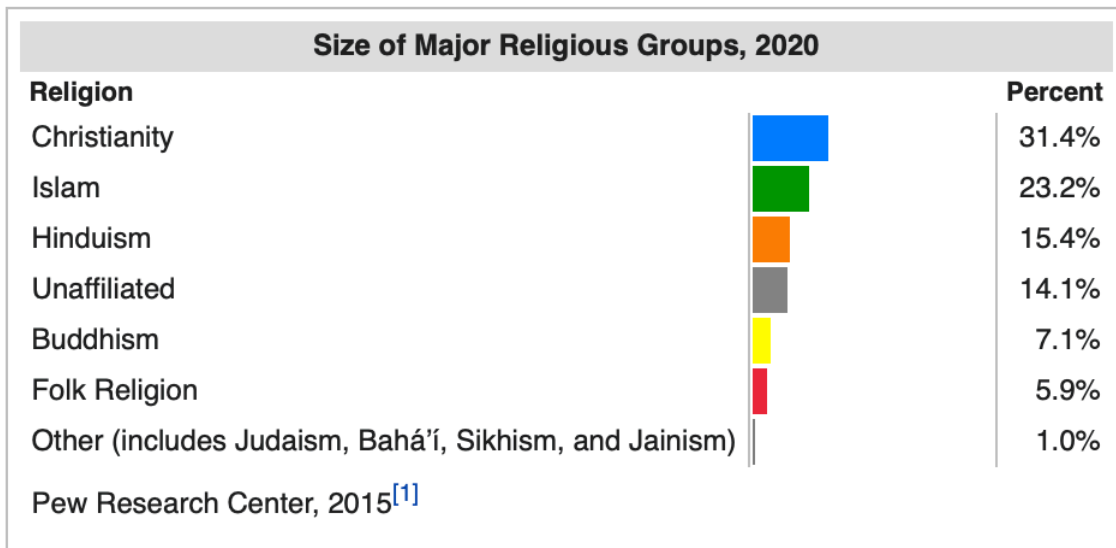
2. Jesus to be the unique incarnation of God, who is fully God and fully man, who lived a sinless and perfect life on earth, the Jewish Messiah, qualifying him to become the Redeemer of mankind.
3. Salvation is only through the person and work of Jesus Christ when he died an atoning death on the cross for mankind; something a person must personally believe and accept by faith in this life.
4. Intentional witness to the lost, as a means of bringing them to faith in Christ.⁹

As seen in the visual above, 89% of the world’s population are not true followers of Jesus. But more alarmingly, and this is our main concern, 41% don’t even have a chance to become so, because they have such limited access to the gospel.

So, this people group reality coupled with the “access” perspective is one way of seeing where A Third of Us are located. Besides being imbedded in Unreached People Groups, there is a second arena in which those without any access to the gospel are found.

Insulated in Other Religions

Not only are A Third of Us found imbedded in unreached people groups, they are also insulated or encased in other belief systems. These billions of people are so protectively enclosed within their traditional religions that it is difficult for the gospel to gain access. Now, don’t think that these non-Christian peoples do not believe in something, for mankind is innately religious. But their religious traditions have built walls of protection around them so that their religious traditions and way of life insulates them from disruption and change – the very things that occur when exposed to the gospel. Statistically, this is how the number of adherents of the world’s major religions can currently be understood:¹⁰



One may ask, “Isn’t it a good thing that most people belong to a religion? After all, can’t God work through other religions to bring people to himself?” That is a delicate question

⁹ I am indebted to Patrick Johnstone for giving these in broad categories in his book *The Church is Bigger Than You Think*.

¹⁰ <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>. Note that the survey done by Pew in 2015 projected the data for 2020.

that needs to be addressed, for why bother with reaching unreached peoples if somehow, in some way, through some other belief or means, people can be saved? If this is so, let's leave Mrs. Taufik alone, because her sincere belief in the teachings of the Koran is enough to have God accept her, right?

Although there may be points of similarity between Christianity and some other religions, there are clear fundamental differences that make them incongruent. I recall a Christian apologist saying that the popular belief that all religions are fundamentally the same and only superficially different simply is not true. It is more correct to say that all religions are superficially similar but fundamentally different. This especially holds true when it comes to belief in the gospel. God tells us that our root issue and spiritual predicament is sin (Romans 3:23). All people are sinners by nature and by choice, and only belief in Jesus, the sinless Son of God, who paid the penalty for that sin when he died on the cross, can bring forgiveness for those sins.

One disconcerting fact about gospel access when it comes to considering adherents of other religions is that very few Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslims personally know a Christian from whom they can encounter the gospel. Formal research bears this out. Mission researcher Todd Johnson states, "Broadly speaking, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims have relatively little contact with Christians, and this has not changed much in the last two decades. An estimated 87% of Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims do not personally know a Christian."¹¹ Probably the opposite is true too: 87% of Christians do not personally know a Buddhist, Hindu or Muslim. With this lack of personal interaction, we are limited in our ability to even begin to give witness to adherents of another religion. There is no personal access.

Besides being found imbedded in Unreached People Groups or insulated in other religions, there is one other arena in which those without access to the Bible, to a church, and to known believers are found.

Inhabiting Gospel-restricted Locales

A final category to consider when determining where the unreached are located has to do with geography. As mentioned earlier, the definition we are using for unreached peoples is taken from David Platt. Here it is again: "Unreached peoples and places are those among whom Christ is largely unknown and the church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help." Notice that unreached locales (places) are part of the definition. The reason for that inclusion is summed up by Platt as follows:

...biblical mission strategy should focus on both peoples and places where Christ is largely unknown and the church is relatively insufficient to make Christ known in its broader population without outside help. As followers of Christ in the church, we must send and go as missionaries to unreached places around the world. We should also send and go as missionaries to more reached places with a significant population of unreached peoples. And we should intentionally work in more reached places that have significant potential for reaching unreached peoples and places.¹²

¹¹ Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 3rd edition, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, p. 29, technical notes on p. 965. The method for calculating this is described in Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross, *Atlas of Global Christianity*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pages 316-17.

¹² Platt, *ibid.*

Geographically, there are vast regions where Christ is largely unknown. Many of these are designated “Restricted Access Nations.” These are countries where national governments forbid the propagation of the gospel, along with the entrance of gospel-bearing messengers. Some of the most restricted are: North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, Sudan, Yemen, Iran, India and China.¹³ Others can be named. The sources of restriction vary; such as communism, ethnic antagonism, Islamic oppression, and Hindu fundamentalism. These are places where many of the A Third of Us reside.

Fortunately, in our modern globalized world, the barriers of geography have somewhat diminished. On the one hand, there has been an acceleration of global communications and internet capability that has given ability to penetrate highly restricted areas. The gospel can be either broadcast or narrowcast into regions that formerly were inaccessible. However, the challenge of personal follow-up remains, making these technological means helpful but inadequate by themselves.

On the other hand, today there are more movements of peoples beyond their traditional homelands than ever before. Migration, caused by numerous factors, and both globally and locally in scope, have resulted in the ability for Christians to meet otherwise unreached peoples as they come into areas where Christians are present. We no longer need to solely rely on strategies and structures that assume fixed, isolated people groups. But in the end, without a visible indigenous church within the ethnic homeland, no people group will have the ability to evangelize itself and become “reached.” Thus the need for believer’s presence in a given locale.

Is My Unsaved Neighbor Unreached?

“I recall when I was still teaching that I had some students pass through my classes that did not know the gospel,” a retired high school teacher said to me, who had spent a career teaching in a mid-size town in the mid-west. “They didn’t have an inkling about who Jesus is,” he continued, “so there are unreached people right next door, right?”

This is a common misconception about what is meant by unreached. When we meet those in our community that are unsaved, it is easy to assume that they are also unreached, equating unsaved with unreached. However, that is not the case. It is an easy misunderstanding of the terms that needs clarification.

It can be said with confidence that everyone in communities across North America are reached with the gospel. What is meant by this is that they all have access in some form or another to the gospel. Access to the gospel gives them opportunity. They have the opportunity to believe it, reject it or ignore it. The bottom line is that they have access to it. Besides encounters with believers, the good news of Jesus can be accessed daily by television, radio, internet, cell phone, published books, and pamphlets. Online digital evangelism is occurring non-stop. More recently, as result of the coronavirus pandemic, there are online church services accessible by the thousands.

¹³ https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/?initcid=20SRP&initpkg=20SRP-0&cid=7010b000001YkjbAAC&pkg=a150b000004P00wAAC&gclid=Cj0KCQjw14v4BRDaARIsAFjATP-lkdAzvV7dihAQDB4_bNg2THi9eMfgYr1gksXldDRgN6Pi-sCd2Sr4aAjTiEALw_wcB&gclsrc=aw.ds

But that's not all. There are over 350,000 churches throughout the US alone, most of which preach the gospel where the story of Jesus can be heard and learned. Additionally, the Bible is not only available, but can be found in over 100 different versions or "specialty editions." Along our highways giant billboards proclaim some variety of evangelistic message that can't be missed. Most importantly, however, is that born-again believers can be encountered readily in most every community who can point a seeker to Christ.

Across North America, the three "Nos" do not exist. There are Bibles in abundance, there are believers galore, and there are churches aplenty. All these add up to full access to the gospel. No one is unreached, though many remain unrepentant. Everyone has access and opportunity to encounter the gospel to become a follower of Christ.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Taufik has none of these. Mrs. Taufik remains unreached. Mrs. Taufik remains un-accessed. Mrs. Taufik awaits the proclamation of the gospel, along with the 3.2 billion people who comprise A Third of Us.

Reaching A Third of Us...

Through the centuries the Church, by sending out hundreds of thousands of missionaries and expending billions upon billions of dollars, has engaged in the task of world evangelization. However even with all that, the task is still far from complete. 3.2 billion are still unreached. When understood from the three "Nos," it is obvious much remains undone.

There are three broad categories in which the unreached are found: *imbedded in Unreached People Groups*, *insulated in other religions*, and *inhabiting gospel-restricted locales*. It is up to us to provide access to the gospel to the billions who comprise A Third of Us.