



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

## THE CHRONICLES OF YAHWEH, PART 5 • Rick James

### Where Are We Today?

So, how many people have heard the gospel? A lot. Next question. Sorry, I dislike research, but I suppose that won't suffice for an answer, and we really do need some answers. You can't get serious about a task without knowing what has been done and what has been left undone.

But no sooner do we ask the question "How many nations still need to hear the gospel?" than we realize that assigning numbers to this thing is going to get tricky. For example, by "nations," do we mean, countries, languages, or ethnic groups? As there are less than two hundred countries and some sixteen thousand ethnic groups, the difference is not exactly semantics. And when we talk of exposing a nation to the gospel, do we mean they are in range of a Christian radio broadcast? That they have a Bible translated into their language? That there is a viable church within driving distance? No, providing accurate numbers is not going to be tricky; it's going to be impossible. But that doesn't mean we can't get a general picture of the work that still lies before us.

If we were to think about preaching the gospel to the world in terms of exposing it to the gospel message, we have indeed traveled far—insanely far in the last few decades, due in part to the advance of technology. Perhaps the best gauge of this progress would be the JESUS film, a cinematic version of the Gospel of Luke produced by Campus Crusade for Christ. Produced in 1979, the movie is lacking in special effects, acting, art direction, script... all around, just generally lacking. But Oscar nods was not its objective; exposing the world to the gospel was, and on that account it is the greatest movie ever made. As of this moment, 6 billion people have viewed the film, with 200 million indicating decisions to trust Christ. As there are only a little under 7 billion people in the world, this is a staggering accomplishment.

The film has been translated into over a thousand languages, which represent the vast majority of the tongues spoken by the world's population. What I mean by that is that there are currently 6,912 languages spoken in the world (ethnologue.com), but about 2,000 of them are spoken by fewer than a thousand people, and linguists generally agree that roughly 3,500 languages will disappear entirely by the end of this century. In fact, one falls out of use about every two weeks.<sup>1</sup> Ah, globalization.

With that understanding of languages, there are currently 2,400 languages that have some or all of the Bible and 4,037 languages with some form of the Bible in audio recording (CD, Tape, MP3). Only 3 percent of the world speaks a language that does not yet have an intelligible translation of the gospel, and most of these translations can be found on the Internet. In fact, 90 percent of the world's people, should they stumble upon a Starbucks, could go on-line and find the gospel in a language they understand. And they could read it as they sip a cup of coffee that cost them a year's wages.

In light of technology and globalization, I don't think there's an executive at Coca-Cola who doubts that somewhere between the years 2050 and 2075 everyone on the planet will both know about and have access to a can of Coke. I think the same is true for the gospel, and if not, shame on us. It is an amazing time to be alive and involved in the Great Commission. Of all the generations that have lived since Jesus uttered it, we alone live at a time of fulfillment.



### Remains of the Day

Yet, having been entrusted with the expansion of God's kingdom to the nations, we want to be the best stewards of the responsibility given to us. Better to do more than not do what we were supposed to. To that end, mission agencies have set as a goal establishing a vibrant church presence within every people group.

In seeking to establish a vibrant church presence in every known people group, this goal goes far beyond exposing a nation to the gospel or simply planting a church there. This goal goes far beyond reaching the major people groups in the world and even further beyond translating the gospel into all known languages; it breaks down the world's inhabitants into their smallest discernible ethnic identities (a number approximating sixteen thousand) and desires to establish the church there. Again, as we don't precisely know how small and distinct Jesus was being when he spoke of "nations" (ethnic groups), it's better to do too much than not enough.

Current statistics indicate that about 40 percent of the world's people groups are without a significant Christian presence. We refer to them as the unreached or least reached. By definition, the unreached lack an indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize the people group. This is based on a belief that it takes about 2 percent of a people group to be Christian in order for them to be influential enough to impact the whole.

Interestingly, the majority of these people groups (representing some 2.24 billion people) are clustered in what is called the 10/40 window, that area of North Africa, the Middle East, and Asia that lies between 10 and 40 degrees north latitude. The statistical details of these unreached or least reached people groups are as follows:

- The largest least-reached group is the Japanese, with over 120 million individuals.
- A total of 3,276 groups are primarily Muslim, including nearly 1.3 billion individuals.
- A total of 2,426 groups are primarily Hindu, including about 900 million individuals.
- A total of 555 groups are primarily Buddhist, totaling nearly 375 million individuals.

There are, of course, other unreached people groups in the world, but if you're looking to be on the front lines of the last frontier, think somewhere between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator. I mean, the sooner this thing is finished, the sooner we all can go home, right?

### Students

Well, we need to look at one last chapter in the story of God's global plan of redemption, one that has direct implications for us. We need to grasp the significance of this statement made by missiologist David Howard:

*All too frequently the Church has fallen into lethargy in relation to its world-wide obligations. But God does not leave Himself without a witness. Whether it be a Nicolas Von Zinzendorf, a Samuel Mills, a C. T. Studd, a Robert Wilder, a John Mott, a Jim Elliot or a hundred others who could be named, God singles out a man to prophecy to His church. And with remarkable frequency that man has been a student.<sup>2</sup>*

In one sense this shouldn't surprise us. When we think of the great heroes of the Bible, it's easy to forget that many of them were just over the throes of puberty when God began to work in their lives. Daniel, Joseph (of Genesis), David, Gideon, Samuel, Solomon, Josiah—when God called them, they had barely begun to shave (which I suppose is a moot point, as clean shaven was not a desired look for Jewish men).

Yet God choosing to use young people is one thing; his choosing to use the university is quite another. The college campus is bested only by the brothel, casino, and communist party for Most Godless Institution on the planet. Consequently, we might assume that God's redemptive plan would have bypassed this worldly setting. But instead it has become the capital of the missionary enterprise, a commuting hub, transporting the gospel and kingdom workers to all destinations north, south, east, and west.



Campus ministry is not the brainchild of any person or organization but is based on the observation that in the last five centuries God has used the campus and college students as his primary vehicle for fulfilling the Great Commission.

The Reformation was staged on the campuses of Wittenberg, Geneva, Zurich, and Toulouse. The Pietist movement of the seventeenth century was birthed in the German universities of Leipzig, Württemberg, and Halle. The spiritual heritage of the United States was grounded upon the Puritans, who proliferated their teaching and trained their leaders through the institutions of Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and Dartmouth. And the great awakenings of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries were invariably led and spread through students and campuses, including the ministries of Wesley and Whitefield, which were incubated at Oxford University. In fact, the greatest missionary thrust in the history of the church was the Student Volunteer Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a collegiate missionary enterprise that sent out some twenty thousand full-time missionaries to the far-flung reaches of the planet.

God has been the architect of the campus mission strategy, and he continues to energize and utilize it today.

#### [A Seamless Strategy for Twenty-First-Century Missions](#)

If you were to ask any missionary what is the most needed resource to complete the Great Commission, his or her answer invariably would be “people.” The gospel is powerful, but it cannot provide its own transportation. Now consider the brilliance of God in addressing this need for missionary labor through college students: Today’s college students have nearly four months a year allotted for summer break. What this provides is an enormous temporary labor force that can be utilized either by McDonalds or, more strategically, for short-term missions. Think about it: when will working adults ever have four months free of commitments to pioneer ministry in another country?

Now add to this another door open only to students. There are countries—particularly those in the 10/40 window—where missionaries are forbidden access. Muslim countries, for example, do not warmly welcome incoming evangelists. But college students with a student visa can travel to virtually any country and enjoy an open door at any of that nation’s universities, providing a place to stay, a reason to be there, and a base of operation for ministry. And while college students typically comprise less than 1 percent of a nation’s population, they are in fact the powerful percent. In any given country, the religious, athletic, military, social, political, and scientific leaders will all come from this 1 percent. To reach the campus with the gospel is to affect the entire country, making the university the ideal target of missions.

There is a final providential twist to all this. A common obstacle to foreign missions is the time required to learn a new language. However, on the college campus—this being the most educated stratum of society—students often speak multiple languages, and most speak English to some degree, allowing students to share their faith without a language barrier.

And so a group of students, free of commitments for several months, can go into a closed country with their student visas, sharing Christ without a language barrier, and when they leave the country, some members of the team can remain behind (audit a class) and continue to disciple the new and young believers. A seamless strategy. With the Great Commission in mind, Jesus told his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2). It certainly seems that the college campus has been a major answer to that prayer, and as the task moves toward completion, college students will undoubtedly be at the center of it.



### Conclusion

That's what God has been up to. That is the plot of history, of Scripture, and of our lives as well. Being involved in the Great Commission is really not an option for a follower of Christ; the only question is how and where we are to be a part of it.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> John Noble Wilford, *Languages Die But Not Their Last Words*, New York Times, September, 19, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in David Bryant, *In the Gap* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1984), p. 97.

Excerpt from *Mission Impossible: The Plot of History and the Drama of Today* (Critical Concepts Series, Volume 1), Rick James. © 2008 CruPress. All rights reserved.

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