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Becoming Alongsiders





The Heart of an Alongsider

By **DUKE DILLARD**, Editor

Duke Dillard served overseas for 18+ years before settling in Denton, Texas, in 2019 with his wife, Laurie, and their seven children. He helps people and organizations become fully who God created them to be. He loves spending time with his wife, children, and grandchildren.

EDITORIAL

Applying the models of ministry in the book of Acts to missionary practices today can give a sense of conviction but is often done in an over-simplified, cookie-cutter manner that disregards the massive differences between our world and theirs. Of course, first principles will apply across time and space, but, in my experience, our earnest desire for quick fruit and utilitarian bias drive us to take surface-level models and treat them like principles.

In this issue of *MF*, we take a deep dive into the concept of alongsiding. We define the idea and hear from people ministering alongside Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims from the US to Thailand and many places in between.

Depending on your experience and the circles in which you run, you may already have an opinion about this form of engaging the unreached. I encourage you to withhold judgment and dive into these articles with a learner's attitude. You will find that not even all the authors agree on the concept. Some people are mainly working with believers while others speak of coming alongside non-believers. Some are engaging in Insider Movement contexts while others are working in more traditional churches. I have heard people describe being an Alongsider as passive and fearful, but none of our authors give that impression. If you were leaning in that direction, you may be surprised at what you find in the following pages.

Much of the traveling ministry in the New Testament describes short stays and involves the establishment of footholds for the new Church. The model is to preach and perform miracles, establish leaders and move on.

After the church is established, and Paul and others return, again for short visits, they teach, encourage, and exhort. Paul and his apostolic band carried an authority that was recognized by believers throughout the Roman world.

Within this context, we see various models of ministry. Barnabas is sent from Jerusalem to the young church in Antioch. He is an outsider in an informal,

hierarchical structure. He assesses what is happening, retrieves Paul from nearby Tarsus, and becomes a co-leader in the growing fellowship (Acts 11, 13).

In Acts 18:26, Priscilla and Aquila invite Apollos, another traveling teacher, to their home and explain "the way of God more adequately," and then send him on his way. Paul sends two members of his apostolic band, Timothy (Ephesus) and Titus (Crete), to lead for a season as outsiders.

Toward the end of his life, John is writing to churches with fatherly affection, instructing them in the way of Jesus from a distance (1, 2, 3 John). And Jesus, toward the end of his ministry, calls his disciples friends, indicating the coming transition to a different kind of relationship (John 15).

These examples provide numerous insights into how the early church was formed, what was effective, how they interpreted and lived out Jesus' mission, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the limited nature of their context.

The way we carry out cross-cultural, long-term ministry in today's technologically connected world will involve the same level of listening to the Holy Spirit but may look quite different. The examples set and principles revealed in Scripture will guide us well, but we must be careful not to assume we understand the connections or can easily transfer practices.

Thus, we provide this issue on becoming Alongsiders not as a panacea or silver bullet, but rather as a way of ministry to consider. In a world devastated by a history of colonialism, racism, and ethnic hatred, we invite each of us to consider what God wants to reveal in our hearts about the way we view the masses who are different from us. The call to become an Alongsider is, at root, a call to humility, a call to empty ourselves (Phil 2), a call to love. These are first principles we can all agree on.

May each of us hear God's voice and be encouraged.

Duke Dillard 

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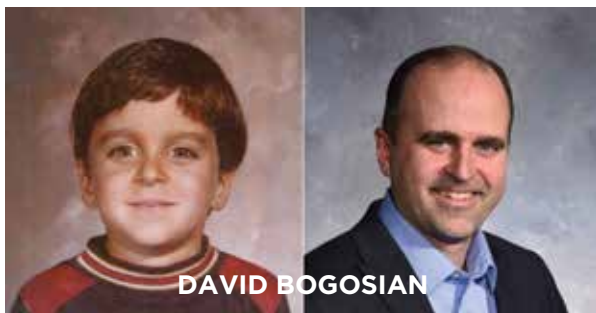
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50 Years of Frontier Ventures: Reflecting on Growing Up at the Center

For this issue, we asked three people who grew up at the US Center for World Mission to reflect on their experience. David Bogosian, Angela Clark, and Andrew Parsons are adults now but spent much of their childhoods on the campus. Read on to learn what life was like in the community through a child's eyes. Images supplied by the authors.

Expecting Great Things



David Bogosian served for 10 years in Asia with the Frontier Mission Fellowship. He has a passion for mission collaboration, research and strategy, and currently serves with Missio Nexus as director of the Third of Us Alliance.

Growing up in a collaborative mission community was the greatest privilege of a lifetime and continues to impact me to this day. I signed up for membership right out of high school. They didn't quite know what to do with someone my age, so they invented a special membership category to make it possible. This was typical of the innovative culture Ralph Winter fostered. In fact, his mission was the only one my parents could find that would welcome and encourage a growing family like ours—10 kids eventually!

Creativity was everywhere. New ministries were being birthed in every building on the 17-acre campus to tackle various challenges and gaps in frontier mission. My dad would lead daily tours in those early years, and I would sometimes accompany him. It was fascinating to hear him weave together all the initiatives of

the campus into the four sectors of Mobilization, Training, Strategy, and Services. New ministries like Caleb Project, Frontiers, AD2000, Global Mapping, and DAWN ministries were launched in small offices that used to be dorms and college classrooms. The whole atmosphere was one of an innovation hub or incubator, as Dr. Winter sometimes called it.

But the most impactful aspect for me personally was the broad representation of the Body of Christ. My family was Pentecostal. We served alongside Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists, and Nazarenes, many of whom had decades of missionary experience. It was amazing to discover that believers from all these backgrounds were just as Spirit-filled as we were! An elderly staff member, Henrietta Watson, had served in India. She pioneered the Institute for Hindu Studies on the campus. She prayed quietly and reverently in the old English style, using *Thees* and *Thous*. It was something I had never heard before! Yet, when she prayed, you felt as though you were transported before the throne of God.

When I look back, it was these types of encounters and experiences that I remember the most. Each morning, the community would gather to share what they were learning in the Word and to pray for the nations. So many times, I witnessed a particular theme emerging in that sharing—as if God was speaking to us collectively. As a young person observing a community practice daily spiritual disciplines together, I wanted to be a part of it all. From an early age, I began getting up early in the morning to pray, as

I observed my parents doing in concert with others. The spiritual disciplines I cultivated during that time have continued with me to this day.

One of the great aspects of the community was how they invited and made space for everyone to participate. My mom served on the housing committee that managed the many homes owned by the community. We kids often had opportunities to volunteer, especially in the summers. There was always something meaningful to do. Perhaps the most amazing thing was seeing God provide for the purchase of the campus. A large payment had to be raised monthly. We pitched in to help with mailings or joined our parents in intercession during their shifts in the 24/7 prayer room. We participated in prayer marches around the campus and believed God was going to do what seemed impossible. Every time, he came through and then we started all over again until the campus was paid for in full after a decade and a half of prayers.

We saw God's provision in our family support as well. We had no idea what would come in from month to month. We didn't have much, but neither did anyone else! We were all in it together. We always saw God providing what we needed, not just for ourselves but with everyone in our community. I saw families sharing with one another everything they had. We thought of it as living a missionary lifestyle, a way of identifying with those we were seeking to serve on the front lines. But in many ways, I feel like what we had there was the closest to New Testament church life I have ever seen.

Each Thursday, we would gather for a community meal, and, afterwards, we would meet to hear from a missionary and pray for an unreached area of the world. There was never any shortage of missionaries to hear from. The whole campus was full of them. They were coming and going from so many fields. We learned about places most kids never knew existed—let alone knowing someone who lived there. During those community times, any of us could walk right up to Ralph Winter and talk to him about whatever was on our mind. He never turned anyone away! So, I took full advantage of it. I was so fascinated by our conversations, eventually I had the privilege to be one of his assistants in the last

year of his life. Perhaps the most important thing I learned from sitting at his feet was this: If God wants something done, he will do it through anyone who is willing to try. He loves to take ordinary people and do extra-ordinary things for the sake of his mission. Having seen what God did through the faith of those Pasadena pioneers, I now truly believe if there are any regrets in Heaven, it will be among those who never bet it all on God's kingdom.

These Are Still My People



Angela Clark's parents have been on staff with the US Center for World Mission (USCWM), now Frontier Ventures, since 2000. She grew up on the campus of the USCWM from the age of 7 to 18 and joined the staff of Frontier Ventures (remotely) in 2022.

One of the biggest opportunities I had growing up with parents who worked for the USCWM, was to go on a two-week trip to Morocco. My dad had been asked to join the founder of the Nomadic Peoples Network on an exploratory trip of the region and hold a consultation for missionaries in the surrounding countries to learn about working with nomads. My dad asked me if I would like to come along. It was an excellent opportunity for me as a 17-year-old girl. I would help make three tall men look less intimidating. I heard the Muslim call to prayer for the first time, and I witnessed the complex politics of the region. I listened (not always understanding much) to conversations in five languages—two dialects of Arabic, French, Spanish, and English.

While growing up on the USCWM campus, I saw countless opportunities for growth. My dad would teach us what he had learned from the Perspectives course, or what he was learning from his work. I helped with mailings for *Mission Frontiers*, the

International Journal of Frontier Missiology, and people's personal newsletters. As I got older, I had jobs in Personnel, William Carey Library (now William Carey Publishing), and William Carey International University's Admissions and Records department (they are now a separate organization but were part of the same umbrella organization at the time). As a high school student, I was guiding prospective students from all over the world through our PhD program application process via email. I always wondered how they would react if they knew I was in high school. When I left the campus to go to college, I lost touch with what was going on there, even though I came home to visit.

In the intervening years, I was asked by friends who had taken the Perspectives course, if that was where some of my ideas came from. I had to think about it. Yes, those concepts are in Perspectives and that is probably why they were ingrained in me, but that was not how I was thinking about them. To me, they were just things I believed to be true, and probably first heard from my parents growing up.

Coming back to work at Frontier Ventures as an adult was, in many ways, like coming home. The name had changed, there were many new people, and people had left, but many aspects remained the same. I work remotely as do many of our staff, post pandemic. Even though the living together community aspect is no longer there, these are still my people; the ideology around missiology is still familiar. I continue to learn and grow here. One of the standout experiences since coming back was having the opportunity to be on the team that put on the first Perspectives intensive in Francophone Africa. I was honored to be involved despite not speaking French. A moment I will never forget, was at the celebration at the end of the course, when the students came up to the front, received their certificates and then were prayed for by the coordinating team and instructors. Being up at the front of the room, praying for these ministry leaders, I was extremely humbled. Who was I to pray for them? All I could do was rely on the Holy Spirit to give me words, or I would not have even been able to speak.

The Legacy of the FMF



Andrew grew up in the community of the Frontier Mission Fellowship (FMF) on the campus of the USCWM where his parents served for many years. He later worked in various roles for the organization.

Growing up within the FMF¹ community was very formative for my worldview and lifestyle.

There were practical things that contributed to this, like being able to participate in projects with the community, and then later my first job at William Carey Library. There were also more theoretical aspects, such as attending the morning community gathering ("morning meeting") or the many missiological presentations that happened each week. I had many experiences that affected me on a foundational level, including working for and with others in the community over many years. These situations gave me the opportunity to discover my passions and the role that I could play in advancing the kingdom.

Growing up across the street from the campus led to a closeness with other FMF families and their children. There was a feeling of community and purposefulness in that environment that I have since sought to replicate in my adult life with my own family.

In my opinion, the legacy of the FMF is a call to action from Dr. Winter regarding unreached people groups, which has evolved in the past decade or so to frontier people groups. This focus is invaluable to the greater mission effort: fulfilling the Great Commission. MF

¹ The Frontier Mission Fellowship (FMF) is the name of the Spiritual Order that comprised the US Center for World Mission (USCWM), which is now called Frontier Ventures.

The Development of Alongsider Ministry

Edited transcript of interview with **JOHN JAY TRAVIS** by **DUKE DILLARD** on Zoom on July 2, 2026.

John Jay Travis has been active in Muslim outreach since the 1980s and frequently teaches and trains internationally. He is affiliate faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary and the author of numerous book chapters and journal articles including the C1-C6 Spectrum.

DD Welcome! To begin, please share a bit about the origin of the term *Alongsider*, and what this expression means.

JJT I'm not sure who first coined the expression *Alongsider*, but I remember already using it in the early 2000s. The term caught on because it described so well what many, ourselves included, were trying to do in helping initiate and nurture movements to Jesus in areas that had very few Jesus followers.

The main idea of being an *Alongsider* is to add crucial spiritual value to an emerging movement of new followers of Jesus without taking over roles that could and should be held by the new followers of Jesus themselves. A foreign cross-cultural worker will often have advanced education and biblical knowledge, well-honed witnessing skills, leadership abilities and well-developed spiritual gifts in areas such as healing

or deliverance. This outside cross-cultural worker can seem so gifted that new followers of Jesus can be inclined to think they will never be as competent or able as this well-equipped, well-trained foreign worker—they could think to themselves, “why should I try to lead?”. An *Alongsider*, even from the earliest start of a fellowship or movement, recognizes this challenge and works to develop leaders from inside or within the unreached people group (UPG) where the fellowships or movements are forming.

Connected to the expression *Alongsider* is the term *insider*. In fields like anthropology and missiology, insiders are those from particular cultural, religious, or linguistic groups who see themselves distinct in some ways from other such groups. As insiders from different UPGs begin to follow Jesus and have a vision to reach out to others within their group, they often



Photo by Alvaro Reyes from unsplash.com

look to foreign, non-insider followers of Jesus, who could walk alongside them in their faith journey with Jesus to help equip them for ministry. Thus the term, Alongsiders. By the way, I need to mention that in this interview, I am using the term “insider” in the broader sense of the word to simply mean anyone who comes from and is “inside” a particular cultural, ethnic, religious and/or linguistic group or community.

While not wanting to inappropriately assume leadership of movements, Alongsiders I have known still dedicate themselves to understanding deeply the language, religion, and hearts of the people they are called to serve. They learn to see the religious or cultural “other” as a fellow human being, also in need of the love, grace, and life transformation that only Jesus can bring. An Alongsider can be a spiritual mentor or guide, but the way of mentoring or discipling is by walking side-by-side with insiders rather than in front or pushing from behind. Alongsiders move at the pace of the insiders, attentive to ways they can add spiritual value to the lives of those in emerging kingdom movements.

In short, the goal of the Alongsider is to work to present “every person mature in Christ,” while at the same time not stifling or holding back naturally developing leaders from among the insider community. It is important to emphasize that Alongsiders can be men or women, young or old, and come from any educational, cultural, national, or socio-economic background. I think this Alongsider function will make more sense as we talk later about the roles Alongsiders can assume in helping nurture developing fellowships and movements to Jesus. Most of the Alongsider work I have done has been among Muslims, therefore my examples in this interview will come from that context. But I have friends doing Alongsider work in other contexts, often among Hindus, and the principles are the same.

DD Thank you so much for this background information and descriptions. Tell us about what was happening in your own ministry that led you to Alongsider thinking and practice.

JJT In our first 14 years on the field, we did not experience what people today are calling a movement to Jesus or a “kingdom movement.” We did, however,

in those first years, go deep into language learning and cultural bonding. We led a multinational ministry team as well as a national team of Muslim and Christian background followers of Jesus. And during this time, we saw about 100 Muslims become followers of Jesus with four small fellowships planted. Also during those first 14 years, we helped produce a Bible translation for Muslim readers. This came about as a result of our years of living closely with Muslims. It didn’t take long before we realized that Muslims and Christians in the country were often speaking about the same spiritual topics but using different vocabulary. Church Bibles often used vocabulary that was not inviting for Muslim readers. We were convinced that a fresh translation of the Bible for Muslims was needed. By the grace of God, we were able to see such a Bible translation produced, and it is now in its ninth printing.

Our desire to see movements birthed was because we wanted to see whole families, communities, and networks of people come to faith together. We longed to see families and communities transformed by the Spirit and Word of God. We prayed, “Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We believed God wanted more than just handfuls coming to faith here and there (even though just one believer is reason to rejoice!). But frankly, we were discouraged at not seeing movement-like growth. We said to ourselves, “Well, maybe this is as good as it gets!” At that point, for the first time, we took a one-year sabbatical in our home country.

On the sabbatical, we learned a lot about intercessory prayer. Coming back to the field, we helped form a group of national and foreign Christians who spent a lot of time weekly in prayer and fasting for a spiritual breakthrough in our area. Other groups also sensed the same urgency for prayer. At the end of that four-year period of concentrated prayer, we met a woman we will call Fatima, who identified herself as a Muslim who follows Jesus. We had met other Muslims who followed Jesus, but there was something unique about Fatima. She would talk about her calling to her own Muslim people. She would say, “I need to make sure that in my lifetime all my family and friends understand who Jesus is, and how they can follow him.”

Before we met Fatima, she had already received a lot of spiritual input from other Alongsider-oriented workers. For several years, she had been reading the contextual New Testament that we had helped produce. Now she was on task to reach her own people, and we were walking alongside her in the process. My wife and Fatima became very dear friends. Fatima would interact with us and pray with us, but she was very clearly the one in charge of a small growing network of home fellowships... well, God of course was the one in charge... but she was the human vehicle God was using. Fatima gathered around her a group of four women and one man who became a small team that then went around sharing with family and friends about the good news of Isa al-Masih (Jesus the Messiah). This was 20 years ago and it is still going to this day. We have tracked with Fatima and this small movement all these years as Alongsiders. We text with Fatima and the leaders of this small movement on a very regular basis and we actually plan to see them, God willing, next month.

One key factor in this small movement is that from the beginning it was led by Fatima and her team of fellow cultural insiders. The four fellowships we were connected with in our first 14 years before we met Fatima were started and led by national Christians, some of whom were of Muslim background. Even though these national workers were very “contextual” in their language, clothing, and lifestyle, they were never really viewed as insiders by the insiders. With Fatima and her team leading, however, the fellowships and movement felt very natural and indigenous from the beginning.

DD Very good, wow! That’s wonderful. Thank you for sharing that. I know you and your wife wrote an article on the roles of cross-cultural Alongsiders in the December 2013 issue of IJFM. In that article, you described the seven distinct roles in the lives of Alongsiders you’ve known. What are those roles, and could or should all Alongsiders engage in all seven roles?

JJT We learned a number of things about being Alongsiders through our own experience, but also through interacting with other like-minded cross-cultural workers. It seemed to us there were at

least seven roles Alongsiders can assume without overwhelming or negatively affecting an emerging movement. I’ll begin with being an intercessor.

1. INTERCESSORS

Intercessory prayer is a foundational aspect of being an Alongsider. This role can begin before one actually moves to a UPG. Intercession impacts everyone involved. It can also open doors for witness as Paul talks about in Colossians 4. This role will likely continue for a lifetime.

2. LEARNERS

Ideally, every type of cross-cultural worker should have a learner’s posture, even those workers who feel their main task is to communicate a message and not necessarily learn what insiders are thinking. The Alongsider approach seeks to first understand before trying to be understood.

This principle is quite similar to all forms of training and education. In the education process, effective teachers or communicators first try to understand what’s already in the minds and experience of their students. Then they are able to make connections between what’s already understood and accepted and what new information or material are needed.

Being a learner is also a very important point in applying principles of contextualization. If we, as Alongsiders, do not really understand what people are thinking, feeling, and believing, we could very well be throwing out the baby with the bathwater, rejecting insider beliefs and practices that are already in keeping with biblical teachings.

3. FRIENDS

Alongsiders often stress how those they walk beside have become some of their best friends. They are not just a focus of prayer or a UPG to study but cherished friends and coworkers. This was certainly the case for my wife and me with people we have walked alongside. True friendship runs deep, is heartfelt and will likely last a lifetime. Taken together, friend, learner, and intercessor are three foundational roles that greatly shape the heart and mind of Alongsiders.

4. WORKERS OF MIRACLES

“Worker of miracles” is the expression we’ve used to describe those who regularly pray for healing of the sick, the emotionally hurt, and those tormented by demons. It became our practice to regularly pray for miracles for Muslims who were in need. Muslims in our area greatly appreciated these prayers, as the Quran speaks of Jesus as healing the sick, miraculously feeding the hungry, and even raising the dead. Again, this is a way that an Alongsider can serve that does not take over leadership in an emerging movement.

In fact, there was a one-year period where, along with five national coworkers, I went out in a van every Thursday morning into the surrounding countryside offering to pray for the sick and troubled. In the van, we would pray, “Lord, lead us to where should we go.” We would sense this place or that place and go there. We’d get out of the car, talk to a few people, and then just say, “We pray for the sick and those in trouble. Does anyone here need prayer?”

Amazingly, within 30 minutes of stopping, we were almost always in a Muslim home praying for someone who was very sick or troubled. We would then go back to the same house the following Thursday to see what happened during the week. That went on for a year. The result was that my coworkers, some who had never prayed for a Muslim before, became comfortable in doing so and numbers of Muslims were touched by God’s power. A beautiful thing was that in terms of empathy, we were entering into the struggle and the pain of people, and we were following in the pattern set by Jesus when he sent out the 12 and the 70 to heal the sick, cast out demons, and proclaim the kingdom of God (Mark 6:12-13; Luke 9:1-2; 10:9).

5. PROCLAIMERS

As just mentioned, the followers of Jesus prayed for the sick and demonized while also proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. There are many ways, however, that proclaiming or communicating the gospel can take place, and this is one role that an Alongsider could and should do. In fact, as insiders see Alongsiders proclaiming good news, it can serve as a model or encouragement to insiders.

Three means of proclamation we have seen that are very effective are Discovery Bible Studies, general

inductive Bible studies, and relatedly, using scripture during times of praying for healing.

A Discovery Bible Study (DBS) involves inviting a group of insider friends to read a number of select Bible passages over time on certain themes, for example, sacrifice. The facilitator (Alongsider in this case) is not the teacher or expert. Rather, he or she helps the group read the passage or passages several times, maybe retell what they just read, and then answer at their own pace a set of probing questions.

This type of Bible exploration is closely related to an inductive Bible study where, say, an entire book of the Bible is read and studied. I have known some Alongsiders that take a year to carefully study Luke-Acts with new followers of Jesus. Another movement I know of tends to do the same with the book of Mark, where both followers of Jesus and pre-followers read and explore as a group. Both DBS and inductive studies can connect well with Muslims because technically, Muslim theology acknowledges the validity of the Old and New Testaments, calling them the *Kitab Taurat*, *Kitab Zabur*, and *Kitab Injil*. More precisely, Muslims view the *Taurat* (Torah) as the book of Moses, the *Zabur* (Psalms) as the book of David, and the *Injil* from the word *evangel* as the book of Jesus (Gospel or New Testament). For all intents and purposes, these three books acknowledged by Muslims cover the contents of the present-day Bible.

Finally, linking together miracles and proclaiming, many times I prayed for Muslims in the hospital, reading first a passage from the *Injil* (New Testament). For example, if someone had a fever, I would go to Luke 4, where Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever. This proved to be a very fruitful way to show the power and goodness of God through Jesus.

6. EQUIPPERS

As insiders are developing their own Jesus-centered fellowships and movements, some Alongsiders will serve in equipping roles. This is usually going beyond just the basics of following Jesus to more specific questions and issues where outside input and equipping could be of help.

An example may be ways of resolving interpersonal or group conflict in honor-shame societies. There are

some cultures in the world where conflict resolution is almost unheard of. Interpersonal conflict just means broken relationship, maybe for years! The people of a culture may be utterly amazing in hospitality, but totally at a loss to mend a broken relationship. God, it seems to me, has gifted different parts of his Body with different gifts or strengths.

Something else we introduced into movements in multiple places was a simple model of inner healing prayer. Inner healing is actually seen in Scripture at many points, such as with Peter in John 21, the woman at the well in John 4, the woman who cried over the feet of Jesus in Luke 7, and the story of Zacchaeus. In each case, Jesus met people in their trauma, pain, or shame and by accepting and loving them, reset the course of their lives. The stories are in Scripture, but a model is very helpful. One model we used a lot as Alongsiders is explained in the book called *Two Hands: A Guide for Inner Healing Prayer* by Ann Muller.

Other equipping activities may be in Bible translation, videos, and literature. Some Alongsiders have assisted with job creation. Some very trusted Alongsiders have helped insiders think through issues of critical contextualization, in other words, what elements of one's religion and culture are biblically acceptable, which aspects may need to be modified in light of the Bible, and which elements would need to be either marginalized or rejected outright.

7. STEWARDS

"Stewards" are Alongsiders who continue serving and partnering with movements as members deepen in their leadership, vision, and kingdom transformation.

Stewards pay careful attention to the recognized needs of movements, as well as to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The Lord can work through relationships between trusted stewards and indigenous leaders to bless movements in various ways, as well as bring needed correction and wisdom in areas where spiritual blind spots may exist. Transformation in the lives of individuals, families, and societies is the hope, and synergy of local leaders, and Alongsiders may yield valuable insights.

Being a movement steward can also involve helping impart vision to the movement to reach out to other UPGs. In this way, members in one movement can be

used to help start other movements. An Alongsider can help at this point in the equipping of appropriately gifted people in movements.

Some have thought that Alongsiders should ideally distance themselves from movements once a movement is taking place. The concern is that an Alongsider's influence may stifle indigenous leadership or create unhealthy dependencies. My observation, however, has been that in highly relational or communal societies, friendships are expected to last, and that sharing, even of material resources at times, can be strategic and not necessarily harmful.

A final aspect of this stewardship role is being a bridge person with the larger outside Body of Christ who may wonder about movements. As questions arise, Alongsiders can share what they have seen take place in the field. In fact, Duke, this is what we see Paul, Barnabas, and Peter doing in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem council, where they explained the miracles God was doing among Gentiles, as well as why these newly emerging fellowships were rejecting circumcision and other aspects of Jewish law and tradition. I have often shared about movements with various Christian groups, trying to show how these new expressions of faith in Christ are Biblical even though they are different in some ways from other more traditional expressions of following Jesus. This bridge-person role is important, therefore, for the sake of understanding and unity in with the body of Christ.

DD Thank you. That's excellent and very helpful. And that's interesting to hear you talk about all that, even for my own understanding. It's a much more active role than one might assume. I think perhaps the stereotype is because there's some level of contrast to a more traditional ministry approach, that the Alongsider just sits back and whatever the local believer says, that's okay. But you're describing very active roles in which you're doing a lot of input and a lot of activity within the culture, with people. There is even leading and modeling happening. I'm just saying that in my own mind, I think when people think about a different approach, they sort of go to the other extreme, which says that since it's another culture, those from that culture must always know best, therefore we can't say anything. But

you're describing something that's not that, which is very interesting for me.

JJT Absolutely. Thank you, Duke, for helping connect some of the dots here. Yes, it's a very active role. One of the main reasons for ministering in this way is to help indigenous leadership flourish from the beginning without inadvertently being undermined. And going through all the seven roles I discussed earlier, Alongsiders are being shaped as they share life and ministry closely with cultural insiders.

DD Thank you again. You've been doing this for a couple of decades, reflecting on it, putting it into some kind of form that's understandable for others. But, of course, you didn't start here. How has the Alongsider paradigm changed in your thinking since you first stepped into it and what do you imagine the future holds?

JJT Great questions. Several things come to mind.

First, I am thinking about the Alongsider role more broadly than in just what are called *insider movements*. I have written elsewhere about these kinds of movements. Insider movements are where the new followers of Jesus maintain a cultural and social identity within the religious community of their birth. With these kinds of movements that grow inside a non-Christian socio-religious context, the Alongsider must work with tact and wisdom.

The Alongsider approach in serving any type of movement where the believers wish to fully maintain their cultural distinctions, is very important. As the disciples of Jesus reach out to the rest of their people, they wish to be regarded as ambassadors of Jesus, not as "agents of foreigners," a charge I have too often heard.

Second, I imagine Alongsiders from the earliest days encouraging not only multi-generations of believers (as in 2 Tim 2:2) but also emphasizing the next biological generation. In the movement with Fatima, we hope to see her and her team soon to discuss this crucial issue. It will also be interesting to see in what ways second-generation followers of Jesus may be different from the generation of their parents.

Third, I am thinking about specific approaches or ministry models that an Alongsider carefully and prayerfully could or should share with leaders of emerging movements. I mentioned earlier, for example, introducing models of inner healing, models for conflict resolution, models of Bible study, as well as equipping in areas of job creation, Bible translation, and media communication. Are there other such areas?

I imagine this will vary from place to place and from one movement to another. One developing movement I am thinking a lot about lately is where a particular Alongsider is relating closely with tribal chiefs in Africa. He has a long-term Alongsider perspective and is very committed to seeing kingdom transformation take place. He has been involved superbly in the seven roles mentioned above. In the area of proclaiming, he has done something fairly unique. He has developed a five-page narrative he calls God's Story. Whenever he meets with Muslim village chiefs, they take half an hour or so to hear again the big picture of the biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation, beginning with God creating people in his image. This Alongsider is seeing that by telling this story over and over again, it is seeping into the thinking of these leaders, offering a narrative that, in time, will change their worldview, bringing both salvation in Jesus and kingdom transformation to this people group.

Fourth, the internet and social media. The world is so different today than even how it was 20 years ago. People everywhere can now read everything. Information is no longer in a vacuum where religious leaders on the ground can control the flow of spiritual ideas. Alongsiders should use the internet in the best ways possible to help resource movements with videos, articles, and especially Scripture on phone apps. These things are already happening, but they should be carefully and prayerfully happening all the more in the years ahead.

DD Thank you for your time and for helping us better understand what it means to be an Alongsider and to catch a vision for what God does as we step into this kind of ministry.

JJT Thank you for the opportunity. 

Transformative Process of an Alongsider Approach to Frontier Mission

By **H. L. RICHARD**

H. L. Richard has been engaged with issues in the Hindu-Christian interface for four decades and has published numerous books and articles on pioneer servants of Christ in Hindu contexts.



The fundamental premise of the missionary movement from the West is that we have good news, and it is our responsibility to be good stewards of that deposit and spread that good news to all the nations and peoples of the world.

An Alongsider approach significantly shifts away from this premise and the actions and approaches that have developed from it. “Alongsider” has become a popular word and is used in local church contexts and everyday E0 evangelism contexts, but, missiologically, the term was developed in frontier E3 contexts where it marks a turning from colonial and traditional Christendom approaches to life and ministry.¹

This could sound like changing or adjusting the gospel, God’s “good news.” But it is rather a recognition of the profound nature, the multi-faceted reality of Jesus Christ and his work for our redemption. The central proclamation of the book of Acts was resurrection; in many other places in the New Testament the focus

is on the cross. There is no universal gospel formula repeated in the Scriptures, rather many varying statements give slightly different emphases.² Indian theologian A.J. Appasamy made this point with an illustration:

Once a friend said to me, “two and two make four, whether in the East or in the West. We may illustrate this in England by counting apples and in India we may use mangoes. But the fundamental proposition is the same. In the same way the Christian Gospel is the same whether in the East or in the West.” This is by no means correct. The Christian Gospel is not as simple as an elementary arithmetical proposition; it is rich and varied in its nature and, therefore, calls forth different responses from different people.³

This basic understanding lies behind the focus on contextualization, making the gospel relevant to varying

¹ The E-scale was first suggested by Ralph Winter. (Edward R. Dayton and David A. Fraser, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, (1980). “The E-Scale helps compare the cultural distances that Christians need to move in order to communicate the gospel with others. E0 refers to evangelism of church-going Christians. E1 extends to the very same culture through one barrier, that of “church culture.” E2 evangelism presses into a close, but still different, culture. E3 evangelism pushes to very different cultures” (Winter and Koch 2002: 16).

² See for example (only some selections from the apostle Paul): Romans 1:2–4, 16–17; 3:21–26; 5:8–9; 8:1–4; 10: 9–13; 15:8–12; 1 Cor 15:1–8; 2 Cor 4:3–6; 5:14–15; Gal 3:13–14; Eph 1:7–8; 2:4–10; Phil 2:5–11; Col 1:13–14; 2:13–15; 1 Thess 1:9–10; 5:9–10; 2 Thess 2:11–13; 1 Tim 1:15; 2:3–7; 3:16; 2 Tim 1:8–10; 2:8; Tit 2:11–14; 3:4–8.

³ Appasamy, A.J., *My Theological Quest*, Indian Christian Thought Series No. 1 (Madras: The Christian Literature Society for the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1964), 23–24.

cultural contexts. But an alongsider approach is skeptical towards much contextualization. Contextualization is an attempt to de-westernize Christianity; to radically adjust the biblical message to resonate with local socio-cultural and religious contexts.

Yet contextualization too easily becomes the making of adjustments to a fixed (Western) package of religious information and practice. The “Alongsider” name comes from prioritizing insider understandings and interpretations of the good news of Jesus, so Alongsiders desire to see a more organic development of a vital synthesis of gospel realities within cultural contexts.⁴

Frontier Ventures prepared a definition/discussion paper on the meaning and usage of Alongsider terminology within the organization:

An insider is a person who has an inherent understanding of his/her culture because he or she has grown up “inside” that culture. An outsider is a person who enters another culture with little, and no intuitive, understanding of it. An Alongsider is a person who began as an outsider but has over time learned much about a second culture and developed deep relationships with insiders to that culture which enable continually deeper learning.

An Alongsider is a person whose posture as a witness for Christ is to walk beside others as a listener, learner, discernor, influencer, and fellow traveler in cross-cultural and cross-religious contexts. Alongsider, thus, represents an approach to engagement with others, or a style of life based on a recognition of social and spiritual realities. It is rooted in an attitude of humility, servanthood, and a recognition of limitations and liabilities in engaging situations with which one is not

adequately familiar.

At least at some level, older cross-cultural (mission) practices generally assumed a leadership/parental role for the outside missionary. This new (Alongsider) approach eliminates a presumption or practice of control and places the outside cross-cultural worker alongside (not *in front of*, certainly not *over*) people encountering Christ. Thus, an Alongsider works reciprocally, both learning and contributing, towards appropriate discipleship to Christ in the insiders’ complex socio-religious contexts. This posture of mutuality values the insights of both the Alongsider and the insider while leaving decision-making with the insider.

Yet the Alongsider is most certainly a change agent, and particularly at the pioneering stage where no known believers are present, he or she uniquely (albeit inadequately and far from spotlessly) represents the kingdom of God. Therefore, the Alongsider needs to prayerfully discern to whom, how, when, where, and what to speak.⁵

An insider is a person who has an inherent understanding of his/her culture because he or she has grown up “inside” that culture.

These are not theoretical issues. There is no greater hindrance to the spread of the gospel than the sense that it is a foreign religion that does not fit with local sensibilities. There is no doubt that attrition, the turning away from Christ and his people after profession of faith by a person or group, is often related to personal identity crises due to cultural and social dislocation. The final goal of evangelism, the only goal worthy of Christ to be held by an Alongsider, needs to be holistic cultural and societal transformation.

Harvie Conn noted a shortcoming in engagements with Islam in his study of “The Muslim Convert and His Culture:”

⁴ A synthesis of gospel and (non-Christian) culture sounds like a fundamental definition of syncretism. Note that traditional understandings of syncretism are slippery at best (see Richard 2014 for an extensive discussion of syncretism related to religion). A simple summary is to say that contextualization is appropriate mixing of gospel and culture, syncretism is inappropriate mixing of gospel and culture. All the disputes arise over the understanding of what is appropriate and inappropriate, and Alongsiders need discernment in walking along this line, which almost always amounts to a gray area rather than a clear line.

⁵ From an unpublished document for internal use within Frontier Ventures which has undergone a few revisions and is now being revised and expanded again.

Turning to Christ is not always seen as also a turning to culture, where the believer rediscovers his human origins and identity, and a turning to the world in acceptance of the mission on which Christ sends the believer in eschatological pilgrimage. In this process, conversion does not remake, it unmakes. The results of this are tragic for Muslim listeners.⁶

The transformation that the gospel brings is *within* families and cultures, not against or outside a person's natural heritage. Evangelicalism has emphasized that conversion is an individual turning away from sin, but Andrew Walls has subtly shifted this emphasis, suggesting that conversion is the turning of everything in the life of a people and society to God.^{7,8}

Too easily conversion becomes turning away from a "non-Christan" people and society to join the Christian church and civilization. This is a subtle denial of the biblical emphasis that the gospel is for all peoples, and all peoples in their cultural and linguistic diversity will be present in glory.⁹ The fullness of this process of turning everything in the life of a people to God takes generations and cannot be casually measured by counting "converts."¹⁰ And if "converts" are extracted

from their familial and cultural contexts, they are not only to varying degrees "unmade," but they hinder the deepest work of God which is the transformation of families and societies.

The transformation that the gospel brings is *within* families and cultures, not against or outside a person's natural heritage.

It should not need to be stated that participation in this process of the transformation of a person and people is deeply transforming for the Alongsider; at least as transformative for the Alongsider as it is for the "convert." In this broader, Wallsian sense of conversion, the Alongsider and his or her own family and cultural/civilizational context is also still being converted. Who has yet learned to "obey all that he commanded" (Matt 28:20) or brought "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5)? Alongsiders care about the process as well as the results of their cross-cultural work and will learn in the process how hard it is to die to self.

The high calling of the cross-cultural worker has long been recognized, but living out that role in Christ-like ways remains a momentous challenge. Dying to self and serving others is a challenge within one's own family and society; the fears, uncertainties, and conundrums of representing Christ in foreign contexts compounds the importance and anguish of life as an Alongsider.¹¹ Churches and Christians that put missionaries on pedestals as heroes of faith need rather to listen, learn from, and even measure the anguish and accompanying glory that are evident in the cross-cultural transmission of the gospel by unworthy Alongsiders. "These are those who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes white in the blood of the lamb" (Rev 7:14).



6 Conn, Harvie "The Muslim Convert and His Culture," in Don M. McCurry (ed.) *The Gospel and Islam: A 1979 Compendium* (Monrovia, CA: Missions Advanced Research and Communication Center, 1979), 105.

7 Walls, Andrew, *Christian Conversion and Mission: A Brief Cultural History* Ed. Mark R. Gornik, American Society of Missiology Series no. 68. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2025), 81.

8 The full Walls statement: "People who become Christians do not throw away a worldview called 'primal' or 'Muslim' or 'Buddhist' and take a new one called 'Christian;' they amend their maps of reality to include new information and correct what they now see as errors. The new Christian elements will be placed on the old map, and elements that seem characteristically 'primal,' or 'Muslim,' or 'Buddhist' may still be on the operational map—and not necessarily in operational conflict with the Christian elements. Christian conversion involves turning what is already there—primal things, Islamic things, Buddhist things—toward Christ." Walls writes from deep engagement with African contexts where Christianity has brought transformation. In interreligious contexts his terminology should be adjusted by eliminating "Christian" terms; people who become followers of Jesus put new biblical elements on their old maps, etc. etc.

9 Rev 5:9, 7:9, 21:26, etc.

10 Note the last sentence in Walls' posthumous book: "Conversion is not simply a personal matter; when applied to attitudes and priorities, relationships, and ways of thinking, it takes generations" (Walls 2025: 130).

11 For a deep dive into this "anguish" see "The Anguish of Authentic Interreligious Encounter: Equipping for Long-Term Engagement," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 41:1-4 (2024): 81-88.

What Alongsiding Is NOT

By **SCOTT WALKER** All Scripture references are from the NIV.

Scott Walker has walked alongside Hindu people for 15 years in both India and in the US diaspora. He is the national director of MARG Network, an organization focused on discipleship to Jesus in Hindu communities. He speaks on Hindu ministry issues and is a Perspectives instructor.

Several years ago, my wife and I heard a knock at our door. A neighbor—a Hindu housewife—asked, “Can you help me get a Bible? You are the only Christians I know.”¹ This lady’s closest connection to Jesus was through her relationship with us. Our faith in Jesus was well-known and accepted by the dozens of South Asian families we lived amongst. Over time, we had earned a reputation as being trustworthy. Our presence and relationships in the community, which we had been intentionally developing, led this woman to seek us out when she was struck by a desire to learn more about Jesus. This is a common first step for Hindu people who want to explore Jesus begin—by reaching out to a known, trusted, Christ-following friend.

An Alongsider is a follower of Lord Jesus who is in an ongoing relationship with individuals or families from a different, non-Christ-following culture with the aim of introducing and walking with them towards biblical, faithful discipleship to Jesus. Importantly, Alongsiders do not have control or dominance in these relationships, but instead relate as peers, walking side by side. Alongsiding, then, is what an Alongsider does.

I do not imply that alongsiding means solely a friendship apart from spiritual discussion.

1 In the West, *Christian* and *Hindu* are primarily used as religious identifiers and denote spiritual acceptance, loyalty, and practice. A *Christian* is a disciple of Jesus; a *Hindu* is associated with Hindu deities and Vedic or other Indian spiritual practice. In South Asia, these words, along with *Muslim*, *Jain*, *Sikh*, and *Buddhist*, identify the community to which an individual belongs. A Hindu is born to Hindu parents and is distinctly not Muslim or Christian, regardless of spiritual belief or practice. A Christian is associated with the Christian community and a legacy that is intermingled and inseparable from the British occupation of India. Throughout this article, the words *Hindu* and *Christian* are used in a South Asian understanding.

Friendships between non-Christ-followers and disciples of Jesus are good and all too rare, but proper alongsiding friendships serve as weight-bearing foundations for ongoing gospel communication. A friendship alone with a disciple of Christ does not in itself equate to saving faith in Jesus. Alongsiders recognize they are called to be communicators, both sharing truths and listening carefully and empathetically to the other. Alongsiding absolutely includes communicating about Jesus early and frequently.

This ministry philosophy of alongsiding challenges two common assumptions about cross-cultural gospel ministry. First, it recognizes the limitations that exist when disciples of Jesus engage people cross-culturally. In these situations, the gospel messenger is an outsider. Even if an outsider is humble, seeking to learn, and cultivating relationships, they remain distinctly an outsider. These differences in culture, background, and familial context limit the amount of close, life-on-life modeling that can be directly transferred. “Follow me, as I follow Christ,” (1 Cor 11:1) is biblical truth, but how far does that extend when the gospel messenger has a freezer full of beef from his family’s cattle ranch and is sharing the gospel with a vegetarian Hindu family living next door in an American suburb?

Second, alongsiding avoids the constraints of “preaching to strangers.” Ministry to strangers removes the opportunity for unreached peoples to develop trust in



the messenger and, consequently, his or her message. It minimizes the opportunity for witness to grow over time in favor of single, one-off encounters. It short-circuits the opportunity for an ongoing, deepening conversation about the gospel and its relevance to an individual or family situation. It does not foster space for an entire family group to interact together about what they are learning about Jesus.



Although witnessing to strangers has real barriers that must be overcome, there are two caveats that should be noted. One, God honors the faith of his people and will sometimes orchestrate a messenger bringing a message about Jesus to a stranger that powerfully speaks to their life and situation. The New Testament stories of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well, Peter and Cornelius, and Paul and Ananias (amongst many others) illustrate this fact. Two, reluctance to share the gospel is sometimes simply cowardice rather than wisdom. Even though there are notable stories of people embracing the good news of Jesus shared from a stranger, I would submit that they are, perhaps, a loud minority. In general, there are clear obstacles and challenges about presenting the truth of Christ to strangers in the absence of trust.

This issue of developing trust is, in my mind, the central issue of evangelism in any discussion of mission amongst unreached people groups in today's world. The reality of ministry among unreached peoples in 2026 is that, rather than speaking of Jesus to "those who have never heard," we are speaking of Jesus with "those who have heard of Jesus, often wrongly or incompletely, and who do not trust those who told them." Most unreached peoples that a Western disciple is likely to meet, whether in the global diaspora or in the large cities of Asia and Africa, will be people who have heard the name of Jesus.

Amongst the Hindu diaspora in the United States, possibly one third of Indian adults who have

immigrated to the US in adulthood attended Christian "missionary schools" in India in their childhood. These are local schools that were set up during the colonial period throughout India. They are commonly regarded as offering the highest quality education in their immediate areas. The Hindu students who attended these schools experienced weekly chapel services, memorized Scripture verses, and sang Christmas carols. I have been told many fond stories of these missionary school memories by Hindu immigrants, but I have heard only a few accounts of how this exposure to biblical teaching led to faith in Jesus. The issue in these cases is not the lack of awareness of Jesus, but a lack of trust in his relevance for their lives.

Fruitful and faithful ministry amongst the unreached should focus on developing trust between believers and the unreached. Alongsiding brings that emphasis squarely into place. I strongly advocate for this ministry philosophy of alongsiding in conversations about sharing the gospel in Hindu communities. As I discuss this idea with others, I commonly hear that alongsiding is unevangelistic, passive, or cowardly.

Alongsiding is not unevangelistic. One Sunday afternoon, a Hindu couple called us and asked if they could visit our home. We did not expect to have visitors that day, but we valued our friends highly and assured them that they were welcome. After a couple hours spent together, when it was about time for us to begin putting our baby to bed, we asked our friends if we could pray to Jesus for anything for them. "Oh yes," the couple replied. "That's why we came today. We want you to pray to Jesus for us." How startled my wife and I were! Our past conversations with this couple had been stirring up in them a strong desire to seek Christ!

Sometimes people incorrectly assume that if you focus on building deep relationships, you must surrender evangelism and witness. This is simply not true. Alongsiders recognize that developing a sustaining relationship with someone is critical to developing a credible, patient witness. As I recently heard from an Indian pastor, when discussing witness amongst Hindus, "Spiritual decisions are important decisions, and important decisions are made collectively, so they are rarely made in a single conversation." Walking

alongside someone gives the best opportunities to address varying cultural and spiritual skepticisms that might be blocking faith in Jesus.

A particular challenge for the Alongsider is that the people to whom he or she is relating may express disinterest in Christ. Obviously, not everyone who is introduced to Christ will want to walk further down that road. Alongsiders want to spend their time in faithful ministry with spiritually interested, open people who are wanting and willing to explore devotion to Jesus. Accepting a cross-cultural friend's desire to no longer learn about or discuss Jesus is difficult. In these situations, it is best for the Alongsider to maintain a warm cordiality and polite connection, while allowing your friend to slowly distance themselves from you. This is a normal process that can maintain relational harmony. Although painful, the gradual distancing of one relationship will make space for new relationships that may prove more fruitful. Allowing people and relationships to transition is one reality of being an evangelistic Alongsider.

Alongsiding is not passive. True alongsiding requires the active cultivation of cross-cultural relationships. First, large amounts of initiative are often required, especially at the beginning. In diaspora settings, it is expected and normal to develop a level of polite but distant agreeableness in the workplace or in the neighborhood. And this is a fine thing! But true alongsiding goes beyond just learning someone's name. It takes the further step of becoming more personal, more aware, and more concerned. Alongsiders expend effort to visit someone's home, ask questions about an individual's family and how they are doing, and inquire about an individual's spiritual interest and openness. All of this, and particularly the conversations about spiritual practice and allegiance, are done through the sharing and exchanging of stories. Building a cross-cultural friendship adds a level of confusion and uncertainty to the mix. Listening to someone's stories, choosing to care for them, and taking steps to introduce Jesus and give opportunities to respond requires significant effort. Simply, being in relationship takes work. Alongsiding is not passive.

Alongsiding is not cowardly. Rather, it requires great boldness, courage, and faith to bring up spiritual topics early in conversations with people who do not likely share your same spiritual beliefs. As individuals grow interested in Jesus and begin considering how to follow him, courage is needed to allow people the openness and freedom to make their own decisions about how to respond to Jesus and communicate about him within their extended families. Operating from an organized, established structure can be comforting and directive. Alongsiding is rarely that.

Embracing the reality that there are limitations in what a cross-cultural believer can understand may be deeply discomfoting; cultivated reticence, the antidote to this problem, is not our natural response.² When we are making cross-cultural friendships outside of our familiar Christian culture, the differing religious practices and questions about identity can be extremely sensitive and challenging to navigate. Engaging the frontier by walking alongside someone cross-culturally is never cowardly.

Most disciples of Christ have not experienced exploring Jesus in a true, ongoing cross-cultural relationship with someone else. Because of this, the idea of alongsiding might seem hesitant, lazy, or fearful. These traits, however, do not represent what it is like to consciously choose to love both God and unreached persons (and note that we truly can never love an amorphous "people," rather we love specific and individual persons and families) with the earnest desire that our friends, neighbors, and colleagues would come to love Christ. Being an Alongsider requires consistent intentionality, rather than isolated or sporadic evangelistic bursts. It takes significant effort to develop cross-cultural friendships. It takes courage to move forward into unknown and uncertain spaces. The privilege to walk alongside others is open to anyone who loves God and loves people with a witnessing spirit, intention, and courage. 

2 Richard, H.L. "Cultivated Reticence: The Supportive Role of the Alongsider in Hindu Ministry," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* 32:4 (2015): 173-180.



The Fence and the Edge

By **BRIAN S. NELSON**

Brian Nelson and his family helped plant a church in South Asia and London. He has served 37 years with Christar, currently teaching in various contexts and meeting with other organizations and people ministering among Hindus.

“If you attend your family’s celebration of the festival, you’ll be tempted to participate.” I’ve heard this warning being given to disciples of Jesus from Hindu families on numerous occasions in South Asia and in the UK, but I have thought to myself, “Really?” However, it’s not my family, it’s not my background. Maybe the risk *is* great.

“Remember, we don’t use the word *bhagwaan* (a Sanskrit word meaning “god”) as followers of *Yeshu Prabhu* (Jesus Lord). We worship only the Most High God, *Parameshwar*.” Are those words for “God” so different? How much did *I* understand about the God of the Bible, the God who is there, as a Christ-follower in my 20s in the United States when I was praying at home or worshipping with others? What actual *concept of God* did I hold when I approached him?

“You weren’t here in church last Sunday. We were concerned about you.” Genuinely concerned? Very possibly. Recognizing that Hindu families have numerous family/extended family obligations and special occasions, which often are scheduled on Sunday mornings, is essential, though not easy to accept. Growing up, *my* extended family never expected anything from me on Sunday mornings. Many times, I’ve heard Hebrews 10:24–25 used to make the point that Sunday morning church attendance is mandatory and should supersede all other commitments. Is that really the point the author of Hebrews is trying to make?

Over the years, as I’ve wrestled with and reflected on these (and other) statements directed at my Hindu friends who have begun following Jesus, I

have grown increasingly troubled. One day I was reminded of the interpretation of the Old Testament Law and the myriad “additional laws” codified by Jewish religious authorities before (and after) Jesus arrived on the scene. To an extent, these “additional laws” were devised to help keep the people of Israel from “falling” into heresy and compromise and to protect against syncretism (the mixing of elements of different religions), which was of special concern during the periods of national exile. I once heard this system of more restrictive additional rules described as erecting a “fence” to keep earnest Jewish people well away from the true “edge” of God’s instructions so they *couldn’t* “fall off into sin.”



The Fence & the Edge

This same tension between the significant freedom allowed by God’s instructions and our human habit of instituting more restrictive boundaries is a common phenomenon for Hindu people beginning to trust Christ.

Let’s think about both the “fence” and the “edge” for a moment. The “fence” is not erected to keep our Hindu friends out. It is “built” for what, generally, are good reasons: to preserve the distinctiveness of the people of God and to protect Christ-followers from sliding

back, from falling outside of God’s instructions towards beliefs and practices that do not align with devotion to Jesus. They help keep devotees of Jesus safely away from the cliff edge of the canyon. How concerned are you about the “edge?”

A distinct problem, I believe, is that many Alongsiders do not realize how different our (usually Christian) cultural worldview is from the Hindu worldview. Therefore, we can struggle to grasp how far a Hindu person already has come in the journey to Jesus before encountering yet more restrictions: our well-intentioned “fences.”

Underlying our “fences” are genuine desires to make clear the distinctiveness of following Christ. Conceptually, at least, the motivation for a “fence” can be stated like this: “We don’t want to confuse people. It should be clear how devotees of Jesus are different.” However, are not the following personal characteristics—not always easy to display in cross-cultural and cross-religious situations—what make us distinct: love, purity, compassion, grace, kindness, sacrifice, humility, resisting sin?

In the following sections, I propose several areas where I’ve routinely seen discrepancies between what I believe is the actual “edge” of God’s instructions and the narrower, more rigidly defined “fences” that Christian communities often find “acceptable.” In each section, I will list first what I believe an “edge” is, and then what I have seen as a narrower, more restrictive “fence” that has been erected.

Communication

Vocabulary readily comes to mind as a key aspect of communication. Avoiding certain “very Hindu” words and using “acceptable” words is understood by the Christian community to indicate genuine faith in Jesus.

The “edge”: *Yeshu bhaktas* (devotees of Jesus) must not address in prayer and worship the gods and goddesses named in the pantheon of different Hindu beliefs.

The “fence”: Some groups of Christ-followers send clear signals that, “We don’t like to hear ‘*Bhagwaan*’ (God) around this place.” They insist on the use of certain words for God: *Parameshwar* (Almighty or Most High God). Even *Ishwar* (God) or *Deva* (God) are considered inappropriate by some who follow Jesus. And perhaps your Hindu friend was asked to change his name from that of a Hindu god (Ram, Krishna, Shiv, etc) to a “Christian” name (Thomas, George, Samuel).

The “edge”: Growing as a disciple of Jesus includes the use of words that attribute moral error, guilt, harmful attitudes, evil intentions, etc. to an individual or group. A Christ-follower knows that words such as “ignorance,” “human weakness,” or “mistakes” do not adequately describe our human condition and why we need a Savior.

The “fence”: Pressure often is applied early on to new believers: “Why don’t you ever use the word ‘sin’ in your conversations?”

So much of communication is non-verbal. How do the ideas of “fence” and “edge” show up when it comes to symbols, jewelry, dress, etc.?

The “edge”: For example, one who worships Jesus won’t be wearing a necklace displaying the image of Krishna.

The “fence”: The facial expressions and other body language of Christ-followers when a Hindu woman wearing certain jewelry and *sindoor* (reddish cosmetic powder worn by married women along the part of their hairline) is present may communicate clear disapproval. The unspoken standards of what a traditional Christian group considers pious may either include or exclude things that your Hindu friend doesn’t associate with any Hindu god or religious practice.

Communication may come in the form of direct prohibitions like, “Followers of Christ should not attend certain Hindu holidays/festivals.” Or “*Prasaad* (food offered to idols; fruit, nuts, sweets worshippers set before idols when visiting a temple) should not be received by God’s people.”

The “edge”: We are commanded to worship only the triune God.

The “fence”: “If you attend that festival function, you surely will be tempted to participate; therefore, do not even go.” Viewed from another angle: “If you attend or if you take *prasaad*, how will your Hindu family/friends know you are different (now, as a follower of Jesus)?”

Consider one more item under the heading “Communication”: Is it possible to be *overly* Word-centered?

The “edge”: The Bible is God’s inspired Word. It is “complete in its revelation of God’s will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do” (excerpt from a typical doctrinal statement).

The “fence”: “Well, if your Hindu friends aren’t really readers, they need to become readers!” Groups

encourage lots of written content through Bible studies and teaching in Sunday worship gatherings. But can there be too much—an unhelpful amount—of “content” (written or otherwise) for the average new person from any religious background? What about the people groups in the world more oriented to oral tradition?

Identity and Belonging

The “edge”: Followers of Christ are members of God’s family, brothers and sisters in Christ. To identify with Jesus and therefore with others who are devoted to him is central to the identity of a *Yeshu bhakta*.

The “fence”: Groups of Jesus-followers often make direct statements (or act in ways that imply): “Join us... and leave them.” “This is (we are) your new family.” Often there is pressure to get your Hindu friend into the waters of baptism without much discussion, especially without understanding their possible hesitancy and the wider context of their relationships. Sometimes there may even be a “let’s get this done before anyone can stop you” approach.

These issues of “joining us” and “leaving them” abound. Followers of Jesus seem to be more concerned about people “leaving Hinduism”—whatever that means—than turning from sin. Is it not enough to say: “Join us?” Maybe the Christian group needs to ask itself: “Why are we so strong on the idea of ‘joining’?” Are there other words/images for embracing someone new, for belonging to the “new community,” that could be used?

Alongsiders must ask themselves: “Is this *really* a new family for our Hindu friends?” The group’s desire is that their Hindu friends embrace the biblical model—and perhaps even say those words: “my new family”—but how much do most churches act like family? Whether intentionally or unintentionally, we magnify or reinforce the idea of “us and them” even by how church membership is viewed or how it’s presented. Is church membership a must? Doing church—regardless of the form it takes—tends to involve increasing levels of commitment, yet most Hindu people are part of families and communities that already require much of their time and energy.

Sunday Worship Attendance

The “edge”: God intends for us to be “faithful” in gathering with his people.

The “fence”: Most followers of Christ define “faithful” or “consistent” in a certain way. A group may “build the fence” of “weekly Sunday morning worship service attendance,” with missing one out of five acceptable. Many Hindu events have a religious (“worship”) element/aspect, so the people who choose that event over Sunday church not only are missing church but placing themselves in a spiritually risky environment rather than “fleeing temptation.” Thus, to put it a bit extremely: Better to reject all other options and go to church!

Theology

Let’s consider just one example: the atonement.

The “edge”: The Scriptures clearly teach that Christ died for us/for our sins.

The “fence”: A Christ-follower must accept penal substitution as the most accurate of the so-called “theories of the atonement” and be able to give a basic definition.

The Lord’s Supper

The “edge”: Christ-followers must examine themselves before participating in the Lord’s Supper. Your Hindu friend must not approach communion irreverently.

The “fence”: The group of Christ-followers insists your Hindu friend devoted to Christ does not take communion (participate in the Lord’s Supper) and tries to keep him/her from doing so... until he/she expresses exclusive devotion to Jesus and understands (can articulate something about) the atonement. Your friend must understand: “This is not *prasaad*.”

Final Thoughts

Above are just a few of the examples that hopefully prompt Alongsiders to recognize the hurdles that Hindu people considering Jesus must overcome to meet Jesus. As they consider Christ and the prospect of more closely relating to a Christian fellowship, many Hindu people are wrestling with this question: “What’s being asked of me by these followers of Jesus that will alienate me from my family, my community?” May the Lord help us find others with whom we can share our thoughts and experiences of “fences” and the “edge.” ❏

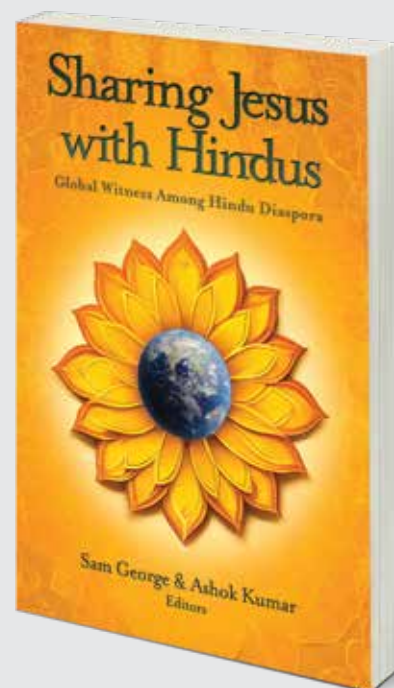
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Sharing Jesus with Hindus

Global Witness among Hindu Diaspora

Sam George and Ashok Kumar

Sharing Jesus with Hindus is the collective wisdom of many seasoned ministry leaders and practitioners about how to minister effectively to contemporary global Hindus. The contributors are situated in different parts of the world, and some come from Hindu backgrounds themselves. Emerging from an international conference on mission to and among Hindus worldwide, this book provides practical ministry strategies and scholarly reflections drawn from decades of insight.



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The Conversion of a Missionary

How Philippians 2 Taught Me to Become an Alongsider

By **DR. LYDIA CARMEL**

Dr. Lydia Carmel came to know the Lord at a young age but spent a season of her life far from him. God's grace and redemption in her life give her much reason to celebrate. She holds a Master of Arts in Christian Education and a Doctor of Educational Ministry from Dallas Theological Seminary and currently serves with two organizations, walking alongside Hindu international students.

Many people assume a missionary's primary role is to go and convert others. In my experience, being a disciple maker has looked more like walking alongside people as God draws them to himself. Perhaps that is why I have adopted the term "Alongsider" rather than "missionary."

It took me years to understand this. Missiological anthropologist Dr. Darrell Whiteman describes the process as a missionary's "second conversion." The first conversion is when someone places their faith in Jesus and is cleansed from sin. The second occurs when a disciple of Jesus experiences a "cleansing of unnecessary assumptions about the gospel and the way that it is to be communicated." Whiteman points to Peter's experience in Acts 10, where God confronts his cultural assumptions about Gentiles and expands his un-

derstanding of the gospel's reach. Looking back, I can see how God was preparing me for that second conversion long before I knew what to call it. That second conversion was not a change in the gospel I believed, but a change in how I understood my relationship to the people with whom I hoped to share the gospel. Through Philippians 2, God gradually taught me that cross-cultural ministry begins not with expertise, but with the humility of Christ.

My story begins in elementary school at Vacation Bible School. Missionaries serving in a country marked by gang violence came to speak about the work God was doing there. Something stirred deeply in my heart. I began writing in school assignments that I wanted to become a missionary when I grew up, though I had little understanding of what that actually meant.

In fourth grade, my pastors announced that a woman our church had sent overseas to the Middle East had been martyred for her faith in Jesus. I still remember the weight of that moment. Even as a child, I knew the gospel was worth giving up everything, even though I did not yet understand what it truly meant to embody that kind of love or sacrifice.

After college, I was sitting at a coffee shop talking to my Christian friends about God. I loved Jesus deeply and wanted others to know him, too. Our waitress overheard our conversation and began to engage with us. I saw it as the perfect opportunity to share the gospel, but at the time the only way I really knew how to do that was by inviting her to church.

She accepted my invitation and came the following Sunday. After the service, she gently revealed that she had spent much of her life in North Africa sharing the gospel and was just visiting the United States during a season of transition. Some people would have called her a missionary, though that was not how she primarily described herself. That conversation quietly dismantled some of my assumptions about ministry. Until then, I had largely imagined missionaries or pastors as people who possessed answers and delivered them to others. She modeled something different.

She told me she came to church with me because she saw potential and wanted to help me learn how to share my faith in Jesus with others more naturally. Looking back, she was one of the first people to embody 1 Thessalonians 2:8 for me, “We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.”

In 2016, she went back overseas, and I found myself sitting in Dr. Whiteman’s seminary classroom as he taught about the conversion of a missionary and Philippians 2. As he spoke, I sensed the Holy Spirit moving in me. At the time, I assumed God was preparing me to go somewhere. I did not yet realize he was first preparing to change the way I saw people.

I began to meditate on Philippians 2:1–11 and pray God would help me develop friendships with people of other nations. Over time, I realized the passage was teaching me more than just doctrine about Jesus. It was inviting me to approach people with the same

humility, nearness, and self-emptying love that Jesus showed toward humanity.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians emphasizes unity amid differences. Living in a Roman colony shaped by status, honor, and social hierarchy, the Philippian believers faced many of the same temptations we face today: rivalry, self-promotion, and division. Into that context, Paul calls them to embody the humble mindset of Christ.

Philippians 2:1–4 begins with an exhortation to be of the same mind, have the same love, do nothing out of selfish ambition, and to count others as more significant than ourselves. To me, this echoes Jesus’ final prayer in John 17 before his crucifixion: “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

The gospel itself does not change across cultures, but Scripture gives remarkable flexibility in how the gospel is embodied and communicated. Love, humility, and unity within the body of Christ remain nonnegotiable. Missionaries and ministry leaders can sometimes become so focused on effectiveness, strategies, programs, budgets, education, experience, and authority that it begins to overshadow love. I have seen disagreements over methods create tension and division among believers.

On one occasion, a missionary told me, out of deep passion for evangelism, that if I did not see a Hindu come to faith within one year, I was “calling Jesus a liar” with my life. At first, this accusation caused me to put a lot of pressure on myself to produce “fruit” as I understood it at the time, which was visible conversions. However, this thinking risks reducing God’s work to things I can easily measure. Jesus’ incarnation looked like weakness before exaltation and the cross looked like failure before victory. Instead, Philippians 2 has challenged me to ask a deeper question: What kind of fruit is God producing in me as I walk with others?

Regardless of our opinions, Jesus makes it clear that the world will recognize him, in part, through the unity and love of his followers. This conviction has

caused me to take unity among believers very seriously, especially because I have made my own share of mistakes along the way. These days, it is rare for me to talk about walking alongside Hindus without also discussing the importance of unity within the global church.

Paul uses the Greek word *phroneo* for “mind,” referring not simply to intellectual agreement, but to one’s mindset, orientation, and posture toward others. Unity is more than shared beliefs; it is an embodied posture of humility and love shaped by Christ himself. At the same time, I have learned how complicated unity can feel. I walk alongside forward caste Hindus in America while remaining connected to both local American and Indian churches. I desire to create spaces where Hindus do not feel they must abandon every aspect of their culture in order to follow Jesus. Yet churches, mission organizations, and believers often hold very different perspectives on how Christ should be communicated.

Adding to this complexity is the painful reality that many Hindus carry wounds caused by Christians and Christian institutions. As I learned more about India’s history, I became aware that many Hindus associate Christianity with painful experiences connected to colonialism, cultural disruption, or negative encounters with Christians and Christian institutions. Whether those perceptions are fully accurate or not, they shape the way many Hindus hear the message of Jesus today.

Jesus does not call his followers to tolerate abuse or hypocrisy in the name of unity. We see this clearly when he cleanses the temple during the final week of his life. Even while confronting sin, Jesus continued loving his people with both grace and truth. God has always worked through imperfect people to accomplish his purposes in the world. Therefore, even in the midst of pain and disagreement, I try to “make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).

Philippians 2:5–11, often called the Christ Hymn, moves downward into humility before rising upward into exaltation. Verses 6–8 describe Christ’s descent into humility while verses 9–11 reveal his exaltation. Though Jesus was divine, Paul says he did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. The

Greek word *harpagmos* carries the idea of clinging to privilege or using status for one’s own advantage. Jesus had every right to exercise divine authority and power, yet instead he “emptied himself” by taking the form of a servant. This does not mean Jesus ceased being God. Rather, he willingly embraced human limitation, vulnerability, and suffering.

This passage slowly transformed the way I approached both Scripture and culture. C.S. Lewis warned against what he called “chronological snobbery,” the assumption that modern people are inherently more enlightened than those who came before them. I have realized how easy it is for Western Christians to approach both the Bible and other cultures with the same posture of superiority. Bible scholar Tim Mackie describes reading scripture as an act of loving an ancient neighbor by learning to understand their worldview before forcing our own assumptions onto the text. The more I learned to approach Scripture with humility and curiosity, the more I began approaching people the same way. I also discovered that humility and love require learning because different cultures often express and receive love differently. Over time, I began seeing both Bible reading and cross-cultural friendships as opportunities for humble listening and learning. Rather than trying to quickly master what I did not understand, I began learning to slow down, ask questions, and just enjoy being with God and others.

That posture slowly reshaped my own life after this “second conversion.” About a year after I began praying in Dr. Whiteman’s class, God brought my first Hindu friend into my life. I knew absolutely nothing about India or Hinduism. I had recently completed a Master of Arts in Christian Education, but I quickly realized approaching this new friendship as a “master” of anything would not serve either of us well.

Instead, I entered into the friendship as a humble learner. The night before we met for our first lunch together, I went to an Indian buffet and ate one of everything on the menu simply so I could begin understanding a small part of her world. Looking back, it seems humorous now, but at the time it was my sincere attempt to move toward someone else’s culture with curiosity and humility.

When we met, I asked her simple questions about her

life, family, and faith. Over time, those conversations blossomed into a decade-long friendship that eventually led me to visit her hometown in India, learn Hindi in order to communicate with her family, and continue growing not only as an Alongsider, but as a disciple of Jesus.

Nearly a decade later, I still do not consider myself an expert on Hindu people or culture. If anything, walking alongside Hindus has made me increasingly aware of how much I still must learn. Yet perhaps that is part of the invitation of Philippians 2 and the ongoing conversion that started this whole journey. Jesus did not move toward humanity as a distant expert, but in humility, proximity, and love. He relinquished privilege, entered human experience, and walked among people as a servant. Alongsiding, then, is participation in the posture of Christ. The longer I walk with Hindus, the more convinced I become that the greatest barrier to cross-cultural ministry is often not cultural difference, but our unwillingness to lay down our own assumptions, status, and certainty to love as Jesus loved. 



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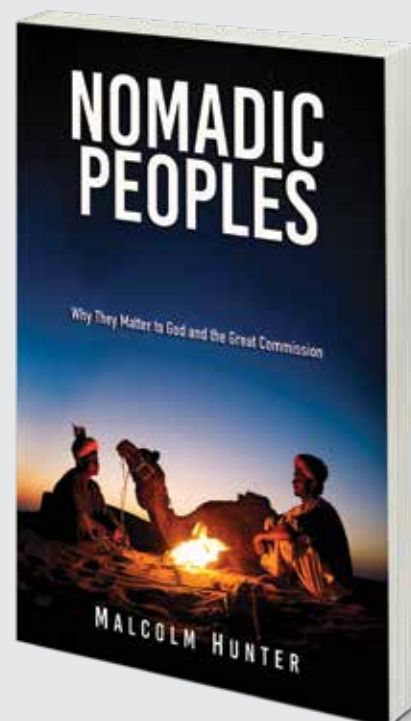
Nomadic Peoples

Why They Matter to God and to the Great Commission

Malcolm Hunter

Across the world's deserts, mountains, and high plateaus live millions rarely seen or understood. Nomads are often dismissed as technologically backward, resistant to change, or impossible to reach. But the real obstacle may not be the desert. It may be us.

In overlooking nomads, the global church has neglected one of the last great strata of unreached peoples. *Nomadic Peoples* issues a clear and urgent call: The gospel is for nomads, too, and the church must rethink its assumptions if it is to reach them.



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Walking and Talking Alongside

By **ANIL YESUDAS** All Bible references are from the New King James Version.

anil yesudas is an Interfaith Activist and a Housing Rights Activist. He is a full-time commended worker from the Woodside Bible Chapel, Maywood IL, which is part of the Brethren Assemblies in the Chicago region. He was commended in Nov. 2004. His wife, Christina, works for the US Postal Service. They have two children, Mantra and Dev.

Jesus talked about “things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27), as he walked alongside two disciples towards Emmaus. One of them was Cleopas (Luke 24:18). According to some, there is a possibility that the other disciple was either Luke or maybe Cleopas’ wife, Mary.

Being an oral-aural learner, I came across the term *Alongsider* through conversations with H.L. Richard in the Rethinking Forum circles. Slowly, over time this concept, along with other contextual nuances, became a part of my own journey to communicate the unchanging message of the Bible.

My maternal grandfather, T.A. Kurian, was an evangelist who worked among the Hindus in North India from the 1940s to 1990s. Towards the end of his life, he wrote 17,000 lines of poetry on the life of Jesus

in Hindi,¹ which uses many contextual words. Early in life, I was influenced by my dad, George David. He worked among Hindus in North India for about 60 years from the 1960s onward. He was impressed by the idea of contextualization and verbalized it often. However, the aura of denominational legalism subtly discouraged him from fully expressing contextualization in action. My dad studied under Bruce J. Nicholls, who was one of the evangelicals speaking and writing² on contextualization in the 1970s.

1 Kurian, T.A. *Yesu Charit Manas* [A sacred reservoir of the life story of Jesus] (Sagar, MP, India: Thompson Kurien, 2000).

2 Nicholls, Bruce J. *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture* (Exeter, England: The Paternoster Press, 1979).

Growing up in North India, I actively helped my dad with the church that met in our living room. I continued to work among the Hindus along with my job in the pharma industry, in India and then later in the United States. In 2006, I resigned from my secular job to serve the Lord on a full-time basis. I work alongside Hethne³ in the diaspora.

Alongside Locally

While technology has helped us to connect with others remotely, we have found that it is important to meet with Hindus in a personal, physically proximate, tangible, and face-to-face manner. We cannot effectively walk alongside remotely. God has intentionally placed us in a particular local, geographic area, to meet up with people and live life with them. We cannot use an impersonal medium of communication and emphasize a personal God and personal salvation.

We have intentionally planted ourselves locally, to focus on a particular community. Incidentally, we may travel and meet someone in another city briefly. However, that is a small and secondary aspect of our work. We primarily make local, genuine, and lifelong friends. We do not encourage anyone to make what is secondary, the primary. We design our lives to meet Hindus in our immediate local area.

We respect the communicators who painstakingly work in their local area. It would be a pitiful practice for us to visit a town briefly and try to walk alongside someone else's contact. We actively avoid an attitude of a commando operation. Once I visited a town and one Hindu follower of Jesus wanted me to lead a contextualized devotion at his place. I insisted that he connect first with the local person leading contextual worship. Simultaneously, I contacted the local leader, who was my friend, to follow his wisdom and instructions, and waited for his plans for any devotional activity there.

We refrain from taking up the role of a zealous traveling preacher, whose agenda is only to find exciting stories for their next newsletter. We refuse to travel to another location and connect with the handful of Hindus that are in someone else's circle, thinking that we can do wonders during our short stay there. The local leader

is the primary communicator, not we who visit there for a short while.

I have not found much value in being invited to a place, where they would advertise to gather a large crowd of Hindus, for me to address. The expectation of the local leaders there is that people will listen to me because I look contextual. I am skeptical of that approach. I do travel sometimes. However, if I am going to a place, I would rather go meet a local worker quietly. If occasion permits, I will casually meet with just a handful of his immediate contacts, within their normal frequency of meeting. If I do address a larger crowd, it should be comprised of the followers of Jesus interested in contextual work.

Alongside Long Term

We have found it to be of value when we decide to befriend for the long term, maybe even for a lifetime. If we have been in communication with someone, and that person changes locality, then we look for a contextual leader in that town and introduce them. Most of the friends that we work with locally have been influenced by many others who invested their lives in them, even before we met them. God uses a series of people to infuse his message over time.

We have performed the last rites of some of those whom we have worked with over a long period of time. We do not engage with our contacts only for a short while. We do not abandon our friends, as soon as we figure out that they are not interested in our message. We patiently wait for opportunities to engage with them in a friendly manner, contextually, and on theological merits. If the Lord chooses to give us life, we are ready to walk and talk with them until their last breath. We cannot talk about an abundant life of "eternal endless time" and have no time for our friends.

It is not enough for us to just meet people during event-based devotion time, but we willingly live and celebrate life with them. We are beside them during their joys and sorrows in life. We intentionally design our life to communicate about our Lord Jesus. And we do it in a manner that happens in the natural course of living life, not with an attitude of an urgent agenda. Lord Jesus said, "I am coming quickly" (Rev 22:7), but not in the American sense of the term. God is very patient, and so must we be.

³ Hethne refers to people of Hindu faith or background, a term coined by Ashok Kumar, a Lausanne catalyst.

We move at the pace of our Hindu friends. Walking side by side is not just strolling casually with ease, but an uphill journey, like climbing a mountain. We do not run ahead and yell at them to climb up soon. Nor do we irritatingly push them from behind, destabilizing them. Rather, we climb alongside them. Hopefully, they can watch us in our walk with the Lord and mimic us.

Alongside Laterally

Relating with Hindus is best done as a family and community, which is a more stable structure and design. Making friends is not just an individual but a corporate task. They become our “family friends.” We do not try to isolate and insulate the individual from the family, rather we are willing to walk as a family with their family. Those of us who are single determine to walk with the community of Alongsiders, not in a solitary manner. And our family friends become friends of the community.

Contextualization is learned through those who are contextualizing. Some people who seem to have learned and formulated their contextual expression solitarily are those who have, over time, consistently inherited some learnings from their previous generations, coupled with reading scholarly works. The transmission of

cultural values for them has come through inheritance and intergenerational learning. They have not suddenly created something in a vacuum. Reading 25 books on contextualization or attending a few academic programs would not expedite being contextual. That would just be the beginning. The *guru-shishya*⁴ aspect of Indian Hindu culture has some very important nuances to pedagogy and learning.

Those who want to learn alongsiding must walk with Alongsiders and work closely with those Alongsiders who have been contextual. There is a mutual benefit in doing so. It forms a small community of Alongsiders. Also, one does not necessarily need to belong to an Indian-Hindu heritage to be a good Alongsider. What is of importance is to learn how to walk alongside in a manner that is culturally relevant, which can be learned from someone who has practiced alongsiding contextually for a while.

Jesus walked alongside to talk about “things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). What are the possibilities that followers of Jesus walk alongside Hindus in a genuine, patient, and contextual manner to talk about “things concerning him”? 

⁴ Teacher-student

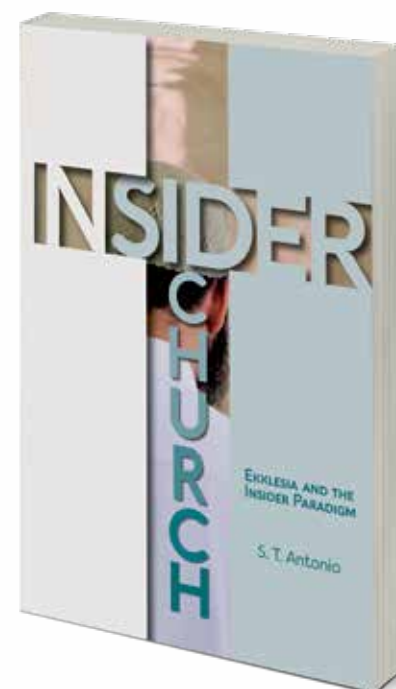
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Insider Church

Ekklesia and the Insider Paradigm

S. T. Antonio

In the last few decades, the Church has witnessed a growing harvest of Muslim-background believers coming to Christ. However, a divide remains over whether the “insider” paradigm contributes to the flourishing and multiplication of healthy, biblical churches among Muslims. S. T. Antonio advances this conversation beyond the old arguments through a fresh analysis of the insider paradigm by asking the question, What is church? Starting with the identity-shaping narrative of the people of God, Antonio digs deep into the nature of biblical ekklesia from multiple angles—local and universal, visible and invisible, the classical “marks” of the church, and missional identity.





Coming Alongside Hindu Families Called to the Impossible

By **TIM SHULTZ**

Tim Shultz and his wife Melanie have been serving as missionaries since 1987. They have three adult children and three grandchildren. They live in New Jersey.

I was first introduced to India and Hindu people during the first missions conference I attended. I was a 19-year-old college student from a backwater, small town in northeast Ohio and quite unaware of the larger world. I vividly remember sitting spellbound while the missionaries described their experiences living and serving in different countries all over the world. I was fascinated.

One evening, a missionary spoke about India. He said that most people there were Hindu and lived in villages. I didn't quite know what a Hindu was, and I had never seen a village. Images of village huts, bullock carts, and palm trees filled my mind. Then, the missionary said that there were 700,000 of these villages in India with no local church. My sense of wonder turned into shock. I had no idea that there were vast populations of people in the world with no access to a local church. "How could this be true?" I wondered. My understanding of the world was changing fast, and my young, impressionable soul was deeply moved. To make a long story short, I was sure that God was speaking to me, so I surrendered myself to be a missionary to India. I was going to make sure that a local

church was planted in every Indian village so that Hindus could be introduced to God. Remember, I was 19 years old so cut me some slack, okay?

As God is wont to do, he refined and clarified my vision. Over the years, I learned that Jesus really is Lord of all and his Lordship extends to everyone, everywhere. This includes every Hindu village in all South Asia. I also learned that missionary presentations about shocking spiritual need within vast populations of non-Christians, the kind which had so moved me, may be effective for mobilization or fund raising but are not always accurate representations of how those people may or may not be experiencing the Lordship of Christ. I moved away from thinking about the world from a window seat at 30,000 feet and began to live among Hindu people on the ground.

What I found was family. Looking back, I can't imagine what else I thought I would find, but remember, my thinking had been almost entirely shaped by the so-called "big picture" of missions mobilization, unreached people, who goes to heaven, and who goes to hell. I must confess

that I subconsciously believed that Hindu people were fundamentally different than me. Everyone I knew in my own culture, including myself, was intensely loyal to their family and lived a family-centered life, but it somehow never occurred to me that Hindus lived like that as well. I had objectified Hindus, classified them, spiritualized them, (de-spiritualized them, actually) and judged them, even though I knew nothing at all about them. As I began living within Hindu communities and coming alongside Hindu families, I found that Hindu people aren't different. They live in large extended families and clans and groups of families and clans with comparable culture (caste) that usually have more influence on the life of the individual members of their family than what normally takes place in most Western families. A heart for the gospel to grow among unreached Hindu people is a calling to come alongside Hindu families.

We got to know the entire Khedut family through their two sons who played cricket with their friends in a small, abandoned lot near our house. One day, I walked over to watch them play. They were afraid that they had somehow trespassed, so the oldest boy named Mukund asked me in his broken English if everything was okay. I said it was, and a friendly relationship developed between me and these 10 teenage boys. Eventually, Mukund invited my wife and me to come to his house, so we followed him home after the cricket match. His parents, brother, sister, grandmother, and brother-in-law warmly received us, and we spent a pleasant afternoon with them drinking tea, eating some spicy snacks, and just getting to know one another. Over time, we shared meals with them at their house, invited them to our place for tea (they were afraid to eat what we made; the women wouldn't touch a thing, always fasting, apparently). We all became friends, a cross-cultural friendship in which we came alongside them, and they came alongside us in daily life.



Over the space of about a year, we found that the Khedut family had some problems. They gradually shared their concerns with us because we were safe—outsiders who would not gossip within their network of other Khedut families. We prayed for them in Jesus' name and tried to be an encouragement. We did not try to formally lead them to Christ. One day, Mr. Khedut told me that he was a sinful man. I said that I already knew that, and he cried with remorse and shame. I simply said, "Jesus will forgive all your sins." He looked at me and said, "Really?" "Yes," I said, "he has authority from God to do that." I led him in a prayer asking for forgiveness from God in Jesus' name. What followed can only be understood as the power of the Holy Spirit and the eternal truth of the gospel. Mr. Khedut began getting his life in order, his family was happier than they had been in years, and word spread throughout their entire extended family about us and our powerful God, Jesus Christ.

In the following three years, we got to know the entire Khedut family and many of their friends and their families. They blessed us and we sought to bless them whenever we could. We went to family gatherings and events. We put together times for singing hymns about Jesus (*bhajans*), we read the Bible together, and they took us to pray for their family members. Coming alongside the Khedut family in this way gave us the opportunity to be witnesses for Christ to hundreds of Hindu people. As a result, many people began traveling toward devotion to Jesus.

To be honest, though, their devotion to Christ remained uneven; many continued to struggle with sin, and most regrettable of all, we realized that we did not know how to effectively partner with these forward caste Hindu families in mutual discipleship toward loyalty to Jesus Christ. In many ways we failed, but we trust in the grace of God for all of these people. The Khedut family is thriving today. They love us, but they have never become unambiguously loyal to Jesus Christ, though they "believe" in him. Their ultimate loyalty lies in a Vaishnava religion called Swami Narayan. The gospel movement we hoped to see happen became an exhausting, confusing struggle that didn't bear lasting, observable fruit.

We met the Desasvami family in the courtyard of their apartment building. We were walking down the street, saw them, said hello, and five minutes later were drinking water in their apartment. This is *atithi*, an unexpected guest

whom we treat like God. *Atithi* is a warm and exemplary aspect of Hindu culture. This family was Mr. and Mrs. Desasvami and their young children. A lady named Rose from a different family, but the same caste (Brahman) also lived with them. We eventually realized that one of Mukund Khedut's friends was the son of Mr. Desasvami's brother, who lived in an apartment a block away. We visited with all of them often and got to know them well. As in the Khedut family, this highly religious Brahman family had problems they would share with us. We would pray for them and try to encourage them, though we never really connected deeply with them as we had with the Khedut family. One day, the sister-in-law of Mr. Desasvami and mother of Mukund's friend told us that she believed in Jesus. We were joyfully shocked, but her husband became furious upon learning about this, threatened me, and stopped any further contact. Our relationship with the entire Desasvami family ceased.

A few months later, Rose invited us to meet her new husband in their apartment. We were surprised because she was certainly aware of the anger which the Desasvami family had for us, but it became clear that she had been speaking with the Desasvami sister-in-law who had told us that she believed in Jesus. As we sat in their home, she told us and her husband that she, too, believed in Jesus.

Then she told her very religious husband that he should, too! These people were Brahmins, the highest Hindu caste, and her husband made it quite clear that this was off the table. We saw them around town from time to time, but no relationship was possible.

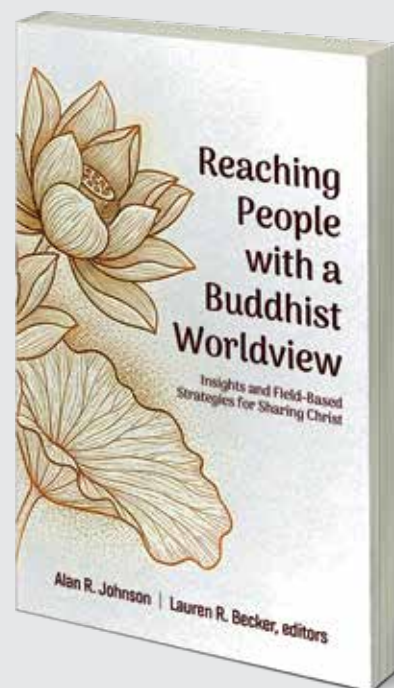
These are two examples of coming alongside Hindu families in mutual benefit and being granted a measure of influence for Christ within their social networks. We could offer many others, some much more successful, but I chose to use these two examples because they were the crucible in which we discovered the widely experienced but rarely talked about reality that it is basically impossible for Christians to come alongside forward caste Hindu families and disciple them toward loyalty to Christ. Does that offend you? It's true. But the fact that it's impossible doesn't mean anything. Many people who come alongside Hindu families do so in the realm of the impossible, though they often don't think they are making very much headway. But doing the impossible is what we are called to do if the Lord leads us to come alongside a Hindu family in the name of Jesus. Once we accept that, we can relax and put aside the internalized pressures that often trouble us about this kind of ministry and focus our energies on the business of doing the impossible. 🙏

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Reaching People with a Buddhist Worldview ***Insights and Field-Based Strategies for Sharing Christ***

Alan R. Johnson and Lauren R. Becker, editors

Reaching People with a Buddhist Worldview explores why the message of Jesus often sounds unintelligible and the Church feels so foreign to Buddhists. The introduction explores the challenges of communicating the gospel in Buddhist contexts. Five subsequent chapters provide an overview of Buddhist life in various countries, identifying worldview-based barriers to the gospel and offering insights to address them. A final chapter discusses implications for ministry, arguing that long-term missionaries skilled in language and culture continue to play a vital role in reaching Buddhists.



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Alongsiding in East Africa Things as They Are

By D. ANNE (Pseudonym)

D. Anne (pseudonym) serves as the founder and director of Transformed by Love (transformedbylove.org), an organization committed to equipping East African brothers and sisters to love God and their South Asian neighbors.

In Amy Carmichael's book, *Things as They Are: Mission Work in Southern India*, published in 1905, she wrote about the "truth—the uninteresting, unromantic truth"¹ in hopes that her audience would understand that the "reverses" are more common than the successes; that the work was more complex than imagined; and that most of the strategies set forth from Western theological classrooms and church pulpits may need to take a different path than their ideologies espoused. In my experience, these truths are still evident today.

South Asians in East Africa

East Africa has a small yet influential upper-caste South Asian population of about 200,000, primarily from India. They've played a key role in regional commerce and industry since the early twentieth century, with many of my Indian friends being third- or fourth-generation Kenyans who have never visited India. They speak fluent Kiswahili, attend Kenyan schools, and hold Kenyan passports. While their mother tongues may be Gujarati or Punjabi, they

participate in local religious communities such as temples, gurudwaras, and mosques. When I was called to share the gospel with South Asians 10 years ago, I thought, "How convenient, they live right next door!"

Little Interest in South Asian Ministry

As I began my organization, I naively believed we would be welcomed with open arms by our East African brothers and sisters. We have several local partners available to share their wisdom and experience in South Asian outreach, many of whom are Hindu-background believers or fellow missionaries who have spent years working in India. As one of our primary goals is to partner with local churches and church leaders, we met with the missions pastors to explain our vision for training and mentorship, but after more than 10 years, we have seen little interest from the corporate Body of Christ in South Asian ministry.

An often overlooked fact is that most churches in East Africa operate under a strict hierarchical, institutional model commonly called "chimney-stacked." They follow a top-down approach to ministry, much like traditional businesses. We came across this in 2022 when we were invited by a large denomination's

¹ Carmichael, Amy, *Things as They Are: Mission Work in Southern India* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1905), 158.

mission department to train members at a church in a predominantly South Asian neighborhood. On the first day, as I was speaking, the senior pastor pulled an elder out of the room and prevented him from continuing because he hadn't received the pastor's prior permission. Since then, this pastor has not allowed us to access his church, explaining that he did not invite us. This isn't an isolated incident. Even when individuals or mission pastors are genuinely eager to connect with South Asian neighbors and submit their proposals through the right channels, we often receive no response or only a cautious "maybe," which usually ends up feeling like a firm "no."

The Average Congregant Does Not Feel Empowered to Share the Gospel

We have tried to start contextualized ministry training and discipleship with individuals or small groups. This has revealed that the average congregant does not feel empowered to share the gospel. There is the "man of God" belief that hinders a believer from taking any initiative without the pastor's permission. The concept of the priesthood of all believers is frowned upon by those in authority, who believe it diminishes the importance of their position and may cause them shame if a congregant is more effective and gifted.

I had a group of South Asian ladies who began training in house-church planting. One of the ladies even baptized her friend in her bathtub. However, when their pastor learned they were ministering outside his influence, they were threatened with church discipline and expulsion. As their church is a major source of community for them since becoming Jesus followers, they felt unable to leave it. In my experience, there is almost universal resistance to contextualized ministry training and the house-church planting model, as most church leaders view them as threats to their authority and church coffers.

Our Dilemma—an Even More Significant Factor to Consider

That said, an even more significant factor to consider is a deep historical enmity between East Africans and South Asians. When the region gained independence in the early 1960s, two percent of the population was Indian. Yet, they owned the majority of retail,

wholesale, and manufacturing businesses in East Africa, a situation that continues to this day. As East Africans become more educated, they often remain low-paid and sometimes poorly treated employees, excluded from leadership, and denied access to administrative roles within these companies.

Over recent years, we have conducted surveys at several churches to explore the root of racial division. We asked, "Africans, what are some obstacles you face when reaching out to South Asians with the gospel?" Because of the survey's confidentiality, participants were very honest about their perceptions of South Asians. Few expressed positive views. The main themes revealed beliefs that South Asians regard Africans as second-class, often citing historical colonial competition for jobs, saying, "They've taken all the best jobs and outcompete us in everything. It's like they don't like us, and yet they live in *our* country." Others felt resigned, believing, "I think fate has doomed them to disbelief in Christ, and it's nearly impossible for them to be saved."

We have been dismayed by the comments confessed in this survey and have struggled with how to help our brothers and sisters in Christ move forward, past the pain, to a place where they can lay down their biases and beliefs and love each other and their neighbors without fear or hatred. If you are taught that Christ came to give you health, wealth, and success, it is very hard to accept "reverses" and suffering, especially from a people group you have little in common with. The crux of the dilemma comes down to, "How can you share the gospel with someone you hate?"

Alongsiding, More Questions Than Answers

When we have found brothers and sisters who are eager to share, we struggle to find opportunities to come alongside one another. It is not just churches and businesses that are chimney-stacked; community groups and service organizations have South Asian and East African versions of each. It is two distinct, separate groups sharing a country and a region for multiple generations, yet living entirely separate lives, socially and spiritually. It is, unfortunately, caste.

The small group of believers from South Asian backgrounds we've attempted to partner with over the years has faced similar challenges in engaging in contextualized ministry or alongsiding. East African pastors who led them to faith advised them to avoid "contamination through association," a practice that has harmed relationships within their families and communities. For example, a young woman from a Hindu background who became a believer here in East Africa, within months of coming to Christ, attended a discipleship training school overseas. Her separation from her family and community, and the conventional evangelism and discipleship teaching she received at this school, fostered a dismissive attitude toward her heritage and culture, leading her to reject contextual teachings and training and to believe that Western styles of worship are more aligned with the gospel. Hers is not an isolated case but is prevalent among many Hindu-background believers with whom we have engaged.

Things as They Could Be?

Honestly, we need help! We especially seek fellow Alongsiders, particularly believers from Hindu backgrounds, to travel to East Africa and help us promote racial reconciliation through the Holy Spirit's power. Your insights, wisdom, and capacity

to express love to our neighbors, regardless of their skin color or community, are vital. We need experts in contextualized ministry and ethnodoxology to assist our East African brothers and sisters in fostering connections with our unique South Asian diaspora culture via Yesu *satsang* training, arts seminars, and cultural events. Additionally, we should brainstorm ways to create cross-cultural service opportunities to build rapport and strengthen bonds. Your prayers are greatly valued.

I believe we need a transformation in our East African churches and fellow ministry organizations regarding our South Asian neighbors. In Ephesians, the apostle Paul writes, "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us" (Eph 5:1–2). We are called to be imitators of Jesus and his love. "Love is the sphere in which the believer lives. That standard by which Christian love is shaped and energized by the self-giving love of Christ on the cross."² Just as Jesus' sacrifice was the supreme token of his overwhelming love for the world, we are called to exemplify that same love to one another (see John 13:1–15). 

² NIV Application Bible Original Meaning Notes, Application Notes, (Zondervan, 2025).

RELATED READING

Downward Discipleship

How Amy Carmichael Gave Me Courage to Serve in a Slum

Anita Rahma

Follow in the footsteps of Amy Carmichael, whose defiance against injustice shined a light in India's darkest corners. Her extraordinary journey reveals the profound impact of unwavering faith when pitted against social wrongs. What fierce conviction drove this fiery Irishwoman to forsake the familiar for the forsaken, trading comfort for conflict and compassion?

Downward Discipleship beckons you to learn from Amy's life. In these pages, Amy's 50-year mission to rescue temple-bound girls becomes a canvas for seven invitations of discipleship. Rahma weaves in her own stirring narrative from Jakarta's slums, presenting a model of discipleship that is as demanding as it is rewarding, and as challenging as it is inspiring.





The Value of Patience in Walking Alongside Hindu Families

By **ELISE METZLER** (Pseudonym) All scripture references used are from the NIV.
Hindu names have been changed to protect identities.

Elise Metzler (pseudonym) and her husband live with their son in Dallas, Texas, where they continue to minister alongside Hindu families. Elise planted churches for five years in Southern India, where she and her husband continue to visit and minister.

“Sravani, how has your devotion to Jesus been lately?” Sravani sat quietly, reflecting to herself how she wanted to answer my question. She responded by asking me a question that surprised me. It didn’t surprise me because it was wrong or shameful of her to ask, but because Sravani and her mom had been following Jesus as his disciples for four years at this point in time. Her question quickly made it clear to me that there were still many layers of the good news of Christ that had yet to be uncovered or fully understood. She asked me, “Elise, the good and the bad that we do in this life comes back to us in the next, right?” It was apparent to me that my dear friend who had heard the gospel many times and studied much scripture alongside me was still operating out of a perspective about the afterlife that involved *karma* and reincarnation. After all, these are basic concepts the vast majority of Hindus are taught from an early age.

Karma, reincarnation, and *dharm* (duty) are key concepts of the Hindu culture that provide reasoning for life, death, and everything in between. For many followers of Christ from a Western Christian perspective, it’s difficult to reconcile that a person

could be a follower of Jesus while also still processing through the concepts of *karma* or reincarnation. However, walking alongside unreached people groups requires a great degree of forbearance and reliance on the Holy Spirit to slowly open friends’ eyes to the endless layers of the gospel. Jesus models a kind of approach to relational evangelism with his closest disciples that starkly contrasts our Western fast-paced, results-driven evangelism and discipleship strategies. Our Messiah models relational ministry that is steeped in great patience, and reliance on the Holy Spirit through prayer.

Conversion Happens in Stages for Many Hindus

Dr. Martin Alphonse, in his chapter that addresses challenges of pastoring Hindu converts from *Sharing Jesus with Hindus*, points out that after the initial process of religious conversion, “It is not that every Hindu who decides to become a Christian abruptly walks away from all of his or her former beliefs of Hinduism and is transformed... overnight. It is quite a long process... it is a transformation in one’s

worldview, which is the most difficult change to cope with.”¹ As a Western Christian who grew up within Christian culture, this concept of decades-long, perspective-shifting transformation was new for me. My close friend, Manasa, began exclusively following Jesus in 2017, and has been like a daughter in the faith to me, who has transformed into a co-laborer over the years. However, it wasn’t until 2023 that she mentioned to me in a conversation late one night that she wasn’t sure what happened to us in the afterlife. I was shocked. Not only had we often talked through the gospel and Jesus’ second coming countless times, but she had also preached the gospel to others many times. Yet, this was another facet to the gospel diamond that was being uncovered, seen, and understood for the first time.

It took us walking in a life-on-life discipleship relationship for over six years for her to finally grasp that night that as believers, heaven and eternal life with Christ are done deals. I remember reading Hebrews 9:27 together about how “man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement.” With tears of relief rolling down her face, she asked, “Is this really true, Elise?” While in many ways, I felt I had failed her in accurately teaching the good news of Christ in its fullness, God was also revealing to me that walking alongside unreached friends takes much more time and forbearance than I realized.

It has puzzled me for a long time why Jesus’ disciples were so confused when he was finally arrested, killed, and rose from the dead considering how many times he told them those events would take place over the three years of ministering alongside them. I can’t imagine the patience it must have taken our Lord to bear with the disciples in their consistent misunderstandings, doubts, and questions about what various parables meant, the reason for Christ’s coming, and even his identity as the Son of God. Tim Shultz, in his book, *Disciple Making among Hindus*, discusses how Hindus often surrender their whole selves to Jesus in stages. “The stages have to do with a growing trust or faith in

Jesus as their exclusive Lord. They begin by praying to Jesus among their original deities. Then, they will pray to Jesus as their chief deity. At the next stage, Jesus becomes their *Ishta Devata*, their chosen and exclusive Lord, and, finally, they acknowledge him as the supreme Lord of everybody in the world.”² Patience while walking alongside Hindu friends makes possible the space and time for a message to be communicated in multiple episodes. Thus, we don’t have to be responsible to communicate everything about the gospel in one or two interactions.

Obviously, there are many examples in Scripture in which we see people completely grasp the good news through the power of the Holy Spirit when it is preached to them, and immediately determine to leave their life of sin or idols behind. Some examples like this include the demoniac, who immediately shares the news of how Christ healed him to people in the Decapolis (Mark 5); the woman at the well who excitedly shares with other Samaritans about the Messiah who told her everything she’d ever done (John 4); or Cornelius, who immediately asked that he and his entire household to be baptized (Acts 10).

Yet, there are also countless examples in the New Testament of followers of Christ who required authentic relationship, processing, patience, and forbearance to make the decision to fully trust in Jesus and surrender all to him. Nicodemus knew all the Scriptures backwards and forwards as a Pharisee, yet it took Jesus explaining what it means to be spiritually reborn for him to grasp what true faith meant (John 3). And while it would be easy to observe that so many of Christ’s closest disciples immediately left behind their careers to follow him, it’s also true that it took them years of walking alongside the Messiah in the flesh for them to fully grasp that he was the Son of God.

The Silver Bullet to Destroying the Ability to Witness

A grave mistake I made in my early years of walking alongside Hindu friends and sharing Christ with them, involved lacking patience. I remember sharing an

¹ Alphonse, Martin. “Challenges of Pastoring Hindu Converts,” in *Sharing Jesus with Hindus: Global Witness Among Hindu Diaspora*. ed. Sam George and Ashok Kumar (William Carey Publishing, 2024), 69.

² Shultz, Tim. *Disciple Making among Hindus: Making Authentic Relationships Grow*. ed. Lewis, Aidan. (William Carey Library, 2016), 91.

illustration about finding life through the narrow road in Christ alone from Matthew 7:13–14. While what I shared with these friends was true, and spoken out of love, they were also the words that not only ended my friendship with these girls but also exterminated my ability to continue to minister or share truth with them. Anil Yesudas, in his chapter about Christocentric *satsang* from *Sharing Jesus with Hindus*, states, “It will take several episodes of communication before anyone can understand and appreciate the person and work of Christ... The Word must be patiently communicated over a long period.”³ Like Anil, I’ve seen a multitude of ways God uses a patient witness infused with humility to allow friends’ hearts to slowly soften to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

A good friend of mine named Priyanka consistently invited me over to spend time with her and her family. Throughout the course of our friendship, my devotion to Christ naturally came up. I began sharing the gospel, my testimony, and different New Testament stories of miracles Christ had done. She seemed warm and receptive for a season. Then, one day, she asked if I would stop talking about my devotion to Jesus with her. She communicated that she still cared for me and for our friendship but didn’t want to hear more about Christ at that time. Over the next several years, we stayed in touch. Her mom even regularly called me to catch-up. When my husband and I returned to India to host a wedding reception for my Hindu friends, she came. At the end of the reception, she came up to me and specifically stated, “Elise, I really enjoyed the worship to Jesus during the ceremony.” It was because I respected Priyanka’s wishes, and continued to love her, bear with her, and pray for her that I still can speak gospel truth into her life and her family’s.

One of my favorite examples of Christ, bearing in patience with his disciples as they grasp the full paradigm of the meaning of the cross and resurrection, is Jesus’ response to his disciple, Thomas. At this point in time, the disciples had lived with Jesus for three years. They had seen him do countless miracles and

consistently reveal the Scriptures to them, and yet, even after he told them time and time again that he would die and rise again, they still doubted him when he came to them in his resurrected state. Jesus knows Thomas’ doubts, but instead of arguing with him, correcting him, or shaming him like he had every right to do, he humbly gave Thomas the evidence he needed to trust and believe. He said to Thomas, “Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe” (John 20:27). As Thomas continued to seek Christ with his whole heart, Jesus provided the evidence he needed, and Thomas surrendered fully to the Messiah.

The Call to Patience in Sanctification

When unreached brothers and sisters come to saving faith in Jesus, God has revealed to them that Jesus is their Savior; that he is the Son of God who takes away the sin of the world and provides relationship with the Father and eternal life for all who trust in him. And yet, my Hindu friends often don’t know how to begin to pray to God; they don’t know what the Trinity or common grace is; they don’t understand the implications or intricacies of communion. But God grants them his seal of ownership and puts his Spirit in their hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Cor 1:22), and he begins the mysterious process of sanctification.

Anil Yesudas once shared the spiritual illustration of comparing our journeys with Christ to a car commute. He said, “People are all in different places. Some people know exactly where they’re going, and they’re rushing down the highway. Some people are going slowly in a neighborhood towards their destination. And some are parked along the journey.” Jesus entrusted the most precious message that will ever exist to eleven ordinary men who questioned and doubted him, abandoned him after his crucifixion, and struggled to believe. And yet, the very disciple who denied being a follower of Jesus three times is the one on whom Christ chose to build his church which would never be overcome (Matt 16:18). May we all humbly seek to walk alongside our unreached friends with the same patience and forbearance of our Lord Jesus Christ in order that he may receive the glory due his name. ✎

³ Yesudas, Anil. “Christocentric Satsang: Contextualized Worship for Hindus,” in *Sharing Jesus with Hindus: Global Witness Among Hindu Diaspora*. ed. Sam George and Ashok Kumar (William Carey Publishing, 2024), 101-102.

A person wearing a backpack and a light-colored shirt stands with their arms outstretched in a misty, open landscape. The person is facing away from the camera, looking towards the horizon. The mist is thick and white, filling the background and creating a sense of depth and atmosphere. The person's shadow is cast on the ground in front of them.

The Limits of Letting Go Submitting to Local Leadership

By **DEBORAH BERNHARD & JIM HARRIES**

An edited transcript of a webinar by the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission.

Deborah Bernhard is a former missionary in Thailand, facilitator of the Rethinking Forum for the Buddhist World, and co-editor of *Vulnerable Mission for Practitioners*.

Jim Harries is a long-term missionary in a Kenyan village, the author of multiple books and articles, and the founder of the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission.

How far should Western missionaries and practitioners go in relinquishing control and submitting to local leadership? What are the risks, tensions, and transformative possibilities when ministry is carried out in indigenous languages and with local resources alone, as advocated by the Alliance for Vulnerable Mission (AVM)? This interview-style webinar explores the paradoxes of “letting go” in cross-cultural ministry. This candid dialogue challenges conventional mission strategies and wrestles with what “weakness” and “submission” may mean in practice.

Facilitator The heart of Vulnerable Mission is to reach out with the gospel while respecting local ways of doing things and intentionally trying not to dominate. To do that, we want to use local languages and resources in ministry, valuing close collaboration with local communities on their terms. So, what should our relationship with local Christian leaders look like? Deborah, after several years of learning the languages in Thailand, and being committed to the ideas of Vulnerable Mission among the Shan people, how did that affect your choices about how you related to local leaders?

Deborah My goal was to use the local language and resources of the Shan, among whom there were few churches. The churches were primarily Thai. I wanted to respect the Thai church but also wanted to focus on the Shan community.

For the first few years I lived in a Shan village where there was a mix of people who had come from Myanmar and those who were born in Thailand. After that, I moved to a setting where the Thai were the predominant community. I think they expected me to come to their church. I remember a church leader asking me, “So, when are you going to buy some land? What denomination is going to give you funding for building a church?” And my response was to explain that I was there to reach Shan people in a reproducible way without using outside money and in local languages. I think that was a bit shocking for them. The Thai church did occasionally visit villages to do evangelism in Thai and offered food and clothes to people. They didn’t really understand me speaking Shan, and I think they gave up on me being useful at some point.

I had decided to limit myself to personal relationships with Shan people without the structure of a “project.”

I think I wasn't taken seriously by many. I wanted to stay in the background, and there's a price to pay for that stance. Money buys results, but Vulnerable Mission refuses to buy results, and it can seem that the spreading of the gospel progresses way too slowly. I believe, though, that we need to be patient, and if the gospel grows without outside "help," the result will be a much stronger church that's deeply embedded in their culture, language, and way of life. The Thai church wanted to bring Shan people to their church on Sunday, have them speak Thai, go through baptism classes—an attractional model. But many Shan people worked seven days a week, lived in isolated places, didn't have transportation or documentation for getting past police check points. So, it was just an impossibility for the Shan to get to church, and I only knew one Thai person who had learned to speak Shan.

Facilitator So, you had relationships with the church people, but you weren't submitting under their leadership. You didn't make sense to them, and their approach didn't seem to make sense in terms of reaching the Shan. Jim, how is all that different for you or similar in Kenya?

Jim The question I would ask is if it is even possible for someone from Europe to work under local leaders in Africa without dominating them. This is because of the anticipation I have frequently encountered that a European will bring a gold mine with them. This kind of expectation will continue unless and until the European has developed a sufficient reputation that they do *not* have available resources, and until they have a grasp of the local language so they can cease using English. Using the local language enables you to see the world the people are speaking from, and that's the world in which we're trying to reach them with the gospel.

Broadly speaking, I agree that our aim should be to work under the local church, and it's important that we learn from them. One approach I'm using is to visit many different churches because if I was constantly at one church, I would dominate it. I don't want them to know beforehand when I will be there, so they can plan their own program in advance, leaving it up to them to slot me in if they want when I do attend.

Facilitator Ministry in both your contexts is obviously entangled with the complexity of intercultural relationships, race, and socio-economic realities in the post-colonial era. The big challenge seems to be how to relate to local leadership if people *want* us to work from dominant positions? But then, Jim, what are some *positive* examples of collaboration that you could give?

Jim My main formal interaction is to show up at a service or an event and participate in prayer, participate in singing, and later participate in a cup of tea. And then if they want me to share God's Word, I'll do so. I prayerfully do what I can but if an event goes on for a long time, like three to five hours, I don't oblige myself to stay until the end. It's contributing where you can and not trying to contribute where you can't.

Facilitator That sounds like a really useful little rule of thumb. I imagine it takes years of discernment to work out which one belongs in which category. Deborah, how has that been for you? Have you found fruitful ways to collaborate with the Thai church or with other local groups, communities, leaders?

Deborah In the first place I lived, I was with a Shan church that was part of a Thai church association; I was basically a missionary serving them. The church had a pastor. I lived like the local people and served them and did what they asked me to, basically. I didn't give them money, but I did drive them to the market or the hospital occasionally in my pickup due to the remoteness of the village. Looking back, I see that this could have created dependency on outside resources. For example, they wanted me to go with them on evangelism trips to different villages. They would set up their generator and show the Jesus film to villages at Christmas and put on programs for the kids. For me, it was a bit uncomfortable, and it's not how I would have done it, but I joined them because I wanted to be a learner. I learned a lot and have a lot of respect for the people in that church.

Facilitator Moving on from the positive experiences of collaboration, could you each tell us something that's been a painful experience that has helped you to learn as you go?

Deborah I'll share one story about something I experienced. A young Shan woman and I were going around to different farms where members of her extended family lived. I learned a lot watching how she used Shan vocabulary to communicate the gospel and how that clicked in people's minds much quicker than if I came in there speaking in Thai. Her uncle came to Christ, but shortly after he was killed in a car accident. The young Shan woman and her Thai husband were the ones arranging the funeral, so the Thai husband asked the local Thai pastor to preach at the funeral. All the family were there, some of whom had heard the gospel from her, and some were just on the edge of coming to faith. The pastor preached in Thai in a very Western style. He was pacing around and almost shouting. That is really contrary to how people in the Shan culture behave, especially in a spiritual setting. I could tell that the people there were very shocked when the Thai pastor told them you're going to go to hell if you don't convert.

After that there was not so much openness anymore among her family. Those at the funeral spoke to the ones who weren't there, and they didn't want to hear about Christ anymore because of their impression of what it meant to follow Christ. I think that stopped a lot of the potential that I had seen up to that point.

Facilitator So sometimes the local Christian communities can approach some of these cross-cultural issues differently. Do you have a difficult experience to share, Jim?

Jim My own kind of achievement-oriented, time-oriented way of living makes it difficult to work with local leaders. I find the way my African colleagues go about doing their church business to be very frustrating at times. Time is not an issue for them, so everything is delayed. So, for example, on a particular occasion our meeting happened at 1 a.m., because you first have a cup of tea, and then the ladies must kill a chicken and cook it, so we ate about midnight. And by 1 a.m. I was dead tired, struggling to enjoy the meeting that went until 3 a.m. And then, if you're visiting someone, and maybe there's a big thunderstorm coming, instead of quickly finishing so you can get home before the thunderstorm, the meeting drags on, and then it's wet, muddy, and dark, and you have to struggle home by bicycle in all that.

I find it hard work to day-in, day-out follow the African pace. I can put a few hours aside and move into their world, but then I must come back into my world. When they take hours and hours doing what they're doing, I don't have to be there. Now, that may be a cop out, but lack of awareness of time and any "achievement" orientation is part of the real difficulty, I think, for a Westerner working under African church leadership.

Webinar Participant A Have you ever, in a culturally appropriate way, sat down with local believers and heard from them how we can and should submit to their leadership?

Jim I've tried those talks, but it's more about living it. So, the few times when I've had the conversation, I think it's actually been when my Western identity has been very prominent. And I just need to put that identity and power aside and not expect my hosts to tell me not to use money, not to use their language. It's our responsibility to be what we term vulnerable, and we shouldn't try to hoist it onto them.

Webinar Participant B If I may add from my South African context, such dedicated conversations are sometimes difficult to have. At the same time, it's very important to look out for clues when people themselves want to discuss this and do so perhaps in a culturally different way than we are used to. We need to be very attentive to hints where we may have overstepped the line and learn from where we have behaved inappropriately.

Facilitator Working in the indigenous way of doing things can be pretty challenging. Leaving our Western selves behind has its limitations and its painful points. A lot of the challenges are inner, personal struggles in which we struggle to have patience and also know where to draw the line. We need to consider how our time, gifting, and calling from God are well used in the places we serve. We need to know when to say "no" to those things which could lead people to see us like a bank account or a ticket to the West. It's not necessarily easy but hopefully it's the route towards a long-term kingdom of God impact of the gospel in that culture on its own terms. In the end, we're all still leaning on the grace of God in the Holy Spirit for the outcomes of what we do and for forgiveness for our mistakes. ▣



Welcomed In

Adopted as an Alongsider

By **GEORGE MCBRIDE**

George has served in Thailand for several decades and had the privilege to be an Alongsider to many Thais who became believers.



Bringing God to Live in the Neighborhood

Two weeks ago, my wife and I were the only two believers at a birthday party in our neighborhood here in Borsang. About 15 people filled the house. Over the years, these neighbors had heard the teachings of Jesus through us and had begun applying them. None of them had yet made an open declaration of faith, but the kingdom was already at work among them. As the evening wound down, one of the women looked around the room and said, “Our neighborhood is so safe. It is the only safe neighborhood in this area. We are safe because we all love each other and look out for each other. We can walk home tonight unafraid. Thank you for bringing God to live in our neighborhood, showing us how to love one another.”

She was not thanking a program or a project. She was thanking neighbors who had been received as her own. That is the heart of what I want to describe

in these pages: An Alongsider is an outsider who is adopted by a community and enabled to function, with growing influence, as an insider.

Every Alongsider has to begin with two questions: Who am I coming alongside? And what value am I bringing to them? How we answer shapes everything that follows.

Two Kinds of Alongsiders

There are at least two ways people use the word “Alongsider.” The first is the visiting specialist. Someone comes from outside—sometimes from another community within the same culture, sometimes, as in pioneering work, from another culture entirely—to share knowledge or skills the community can use. This kind of Alongsider is usually transient by design. They offer what they have to people ready to receive it, and when the skill or knowledge has been passed on, they return home. Their gifts are real and worth

honoring, but their reach is naturally limited. Without a deep grasp of the language and culture, they tend to connect with only a subset of the community, most often those already in the faith.

A couple we know illustrates this well. They are considering a move to Thailand, and later this month they will make an exploratory trip. They asked whether they could serve our communities and offered three or four topics they felt equipped to teach. Their willingness is a genuine gift. Yet because they do not yet know the culture or the language, the wider community would find it hard to receive what they bring. For now, their influence would most likely reach only a subset of the greater community: most likely those who are already in the faith.

The second kind of Alongsider is the one I want to spend the rest of this article on, because it has been my own experience. This is the outsider who is adopted by the community itself and trusted to bring value to the whole of it, not merely to a believing subset. I am thinking especially of pioneering settings, where there may be no one yet following Christ. There, the Alongsider does not arrive as a teacher with a platform. He is welcomed in, and over time the community gives him an insider's voice.

A week after that birthday party, we visited another neighbor. They asked how it was that we seemed to know God so well. Had we learned about him from our Christian religion? My wife answered first: "We know God because he lives in our hearts." We explained that religion can teach us right from wrong, good from evil, kindness from malice, but people in every religion are taught those things. We emphasized that we lack a helper, and Jesus has sent us that Helper (John 14).

In both moments, we were not running a ministry. We were simply loving our neighbors as people who had been welcomed among them. That welcome is what makes everything else possible.

Beyond the Neighborhood

But the influence of an Alongsider does not need to stop at the edge of his own neighborhood. When a community receives you as one of its own, it can carry you into places you could never have entered on your own.

A young man called Boy lived with us for two of his college years. He is in his thirties now and recently married. He comes from a village in Sukhothai. His bride is from a village in Lampang, where they will make their home. Because of the years we had invested in him, Boy asked me to speak at his wedding.

The wedding was held in Lampang and attended by 1,400 residents. I know the people of Sukhothai well—Boy's friends and family—but I did not know the people of Lampang at all. The decision rested with the bride's father, who was paying for the wedding, and Boy advocated for me. I spoke, and it went well. I received warm responses during and after the event.

But the real value of that day was not my speaking. It was coming alongside Boy and his bride to affirm their worth before the community in Lampang. The kingdom is advancing there now. And back in Sukhothai, my standing deepened too: Those who had advocated for me had taken a risk, and they were honored when it went well. In both places, the fragrance of Christ (2 Cor 2:14–16) was recognized and welcomed.

Something similar happened closer to home. Gate, who joined our community through marriage, recently lost her mother. Because Gate's mother was from a different community, the funeral was held there, in her own home community. We went to support Gate, and two things followed.

First, Gate asked me to speak at the funeral. This lifted the standing of Gate and her family among their own people, and it gave me a meaningful way to engage in a community I would otherwise never have met.

Second, the funeral lasted for several days. In the early days, no one else from our community had joined the processions. But once they saw and heard that we were there, over 18 people from our community came to stand with Gate and her family. Present as trusted insiders, we were able to show the wider community what it looks like to love a neighbor, and the community responded.

What Makes an Alongsider Effective

What can we draw from these stories? Some of the most important lessons are not in the events

themselves but in how we set the stage for them. Through the stories, though, you can begin to see what it means to be an effective Alongsider.

First, an effective Alongsider has initially been an insider at home. Many of us, when we came to Christ, drifted out of our birth communities and into the Christian community, where our deepest relationships formed—and we then found it hard to reach the people we came from: siblings, parents, coworkers, schoolmates. Yet our birth community—our family, our neighborhood, our ethnicity—was given to us by the providence of God. It is the first field he asks us to labor in. I could come alongside Boy and Gate only because I had first learned to live as an insider in my own neighborhood in Borsang.

Second, we must live transparently. Living in community is both a blessing and a challenge: People can see our lives up close. The hardest part of reaching those nearest to us is that they truly know us—and they will ask, as our neighbor did, whether the God we speak of really lives in us. A friend once challenged me with words I have never forgotten: “Let your natural life be spiritual, and your spiritual life be natural.”

Third, we bring value by serving as a priest within the community. We are blessed to be a blessing (Gen 12), a blessing to the entire community. As priests we stand between God and the community: representing God to the people through a Christ-centered life and representing the people before God through intercession. As God’s priests to the community, we embody and share the values of the kingdom. Kingdom values are universal and beneficial for every community. The problem is rarely the values themselves; it is the wrapping. Too often we communicate them in the language of Western Christianity, using terms and cultural assumptions that are foreign to the people we are living among. The message gets lost inside a package wrapped in layers of Western culture that is incompatible with the culture of the people we try to reach. An effective Alongsider learns

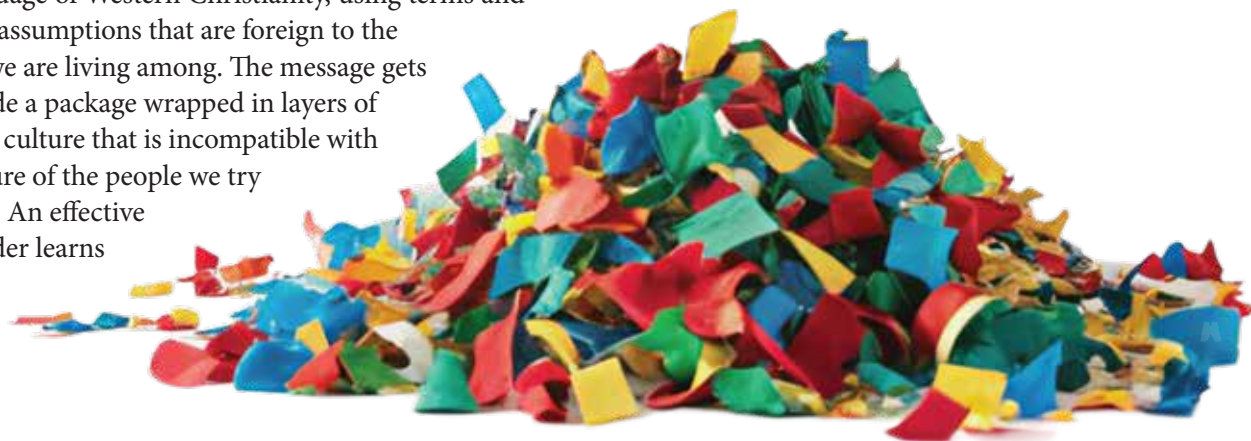
to express kingdom truth in the idioms, stories, and relational patterns of the community itself, so that the message can grow in the local soil of the hearts.

Fourth, we are not in charge. We are not the directors of a ministry; we are participants the community has invited to contribute. Invitation is the key. I spoke at Boy’s wedding only because he advocated for me, and the bride’s father agreed. I spoke at the funeral only because Gate asked. The community opens the door, and we walk through it as guests who have become family.

Fifth, we work with what the community already has. If I am teaching others what it means to be an insider, I cannot lean on financial, educational, or vocational resources imported from outside. We work with what is available, so that they can work with what they have—and so that what grows can be carried forward in a reproducible way without people needing to depend on me or resources that they can get exclusively from me.

Our goal is not to control the advance of the gospel but to see it grow organically, generation after generation—affirming insiders who will go further into new communities than we ever could.

I think of the woman at the birthday party, walking home unafraid through the one safe neighborhood she knows, thanking us for bringing God to live among them. I think of the kingdom now taking root in Lampang among people I could never have reached on my own. None of it came from a program I ran. It came from being welcomed in, loved as a neighbor, and trusted to bless—and then watching the community carry that blessing to places I could never go. 🎉





What Is Conversion in Islam?

An Alongsider's Perspective

By **ANONYMOUS** All scripture references are from the NIV.
MF knows the author who lives in a Muslim country in Asia.

A Vision of Jesus

In 1990, I met a retired diplomat in an Asian country. I will call him Alif. We were fellow aficionados in a rare hobby. He also discovered that I lived by faith. I told him the story of how God had just given my family a fully paid house. I also shared the life of faith that Jesus (*Isa*) taught in Matthew 6. He said, "We don't have anything like this in Islam. Can you share this with my family?" So, my wife and I were invited to his home during a Muslim festival. Thus began my friendship with Alif that lasted until his passing 17 years later.

A year into our friendship, Alif asked if I could read the Bible with him. We began reading the story of Jesus. A year later, as he was reading the Quran before prayer, he was struck by the references to *Isa* as someone greatly honored by Allah. That night *Isa* appeared to him in a dream.

He summoned me and told me about it. I was stunned and shared John 14:21, "Whoever has my commands and keeps them, is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and *show myself to them*." I explained the transactional nature of the verse and the connection between "love" and "show". He expressed his desire to love Jesus and obey him. He kept repeating, "Jesus showed himself to me!"

He asked me why Jesus would appear to him. I suggested that the great obstacles between Christianity and Islam, mostly historical and political, led to many stubborn inter-faith prejudices. Many Christians believed in Jesus by faith, but God seemed to cut through all these systems of logic and reveal himself to Muslims in dreams and visions. He concluded, "I have no choice; I need to be baptized!"

How Much Water?

My immediate concern was if Alif wanted to become a member of the Christian religion. Many Muslims believe that water baptism and an identity change are necessary for joining the Christian religion. In some countries, Muslims who convert are declared *murtad* (apostate) and killed, or excommunicated (cut off socially). But in John 3, Jesus explains to Nicodemus that the way to God's kingdom was spiritual rather than religious or physical conversion.

Did Alif want the spiritual or the religious/physical experience? Were both mixed up in his mind?

I suggested we read the Bible to understand baptism, so he could get his motives right. We started in Matthew, working our way through the gospels and Acts, discussing every passage on baptism. We discovered over 10 types of baptism. Choosing your verses in the Bible meant choosing a denominational view. This was confusing. But in the epistles, the dust seemed to settle, and we could see the forest rather than the trees.

"For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Cor 12:13).

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called: one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:4-6).

The spiritual baptism that came with Jesus was the real thing. "In that case," he exclaimed, "I am already baptized spiritually." I emphasized that nothing could change his status with God because it hung on something that God did and that he responded to. "But I would like to be baptized with water!" "That's fine," I said.

When we baptized him (with water), he explained to my friends that he believed in Jesus, but that he had not left Islam. Rather, he now felt a completed Muslim. Even though I had known him for over two years, the whole incident was surreal to me. When we tried to fill the bathtub he asked if sprinkling was okay since he was an old man, and "the water doesn't really

matter, does it?" He had read the Bible and realized that water wasn't the big thing that Christianity made it out to be. Jesus was the real thing!

Is Jesus God?

A few years later, Alif moved away from the capital city. I would travel to see him a few times a year. On one trip, I asked him if Jesus was God. He was stunned and told me I was a guest in his house, and if I asked that question again, I should leave his house. It was like a slap in his face! And in mine, too! But if the Bible said that Jesus was God, would he accept that? His response: "If God tells me that Jesus is God, I will accept it from God, but not from you!"

I returned home discouraged and shared with my family at dinner. My second son, 10 years old, said, "Oh! He has the same problem I had." He is the family theologian. Five years ago, after expressing faith in Jesus, he asked "If Jesus is God, and God is God, why are there two gods?" We didn't tell him about the third one. That would have really freaked him out. My wife's explanations fell short, and he cried in mental frustration. My wife finally explained that this was a spiritual mystery that was difficult to explain, and we would pray that God's spirit would explain the truth to him (John 14:26; 16:13-14).

Now, five years later, at the dining table, I asked him if he still had the problem. He said "No, but don't ask me to explain it." I tried explaining it. I reminded him that Mum had said we would pray for God's spirit to clarify. "So, it looks like God has answered our prayers." Also, I noted that in the last five years we prayed to God daily, usually in Jesus' name, sometimes mentioning God's Spirit. We couldn't just put on a show for five years. And since we hoped he trusted us, his parents, our faith in God and in Jesus seems to have passed by osmosis to him. So, perhaps we could all pray for Alif that he would experience the same revelation and assurance that our son had.

The Diplomatic Network

Some months later, Alif moved back to the capital and invited me to a tea party at a private club. The tea was attended by seven people, all retired diplomats including the country's former attorney general.

This was Alif's professional network, almost all Muslims. He introduced me as someone who had taught him the Bible. When his friends remarked on his reading of the Bible, he said, "Yes, and I believe in Jesus, too!"

Romans 10:9–10 talks about confessing Christ as evidence of conversion. The problem is that we use confession to prove conversion before the fact. It becomes a Christian hoop to jump through, something to measure through some physical demonstration rather than something spontaneous from within.

At another social event, I was introduced to another retired ambassador, whom I shall call Baa'. Besides the introducer, Baa' said that we had another friend in common—Alif! Some years ago, he said, three retired ambassadors met for lunch. When the third person visited the toilet, the second ambassador (Alif) asked Baa' to pray for him. Baa' was shocked because a Muslim had asked him, a non-Muslim, to pray for him. After that he told Baa' about me, about reading

the Bible, and his vision of Jesus.

The Alongsider's Perspective

Because I placed myself in the position of a learner with Alif, I was learning alongside him, while helping him, with God's Spirit as our teacher. Every new experience he went through was also a new experience for me. I had known Jesus much longer than he had, but Jesus at work in a Muslim was an experience that was as new for me as it was for him. My only resources were the same ones he had: the people of God (me), the word of God, and the Spirit of God. In Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, these are the only resources he leaves with them to face the future.

Because I saw myself as a learner, I didn't use doctrine to measure experience, but rather used his, and my, experience to authenticate truth from the Bible. His unprovoked sharing of his faith was something refreshingly spontaneous and affirmed in my mind his conversion and connection with the living God through Jesus. 

NOW AVAILABLE!

Rethinking Christian-Muslim Relations

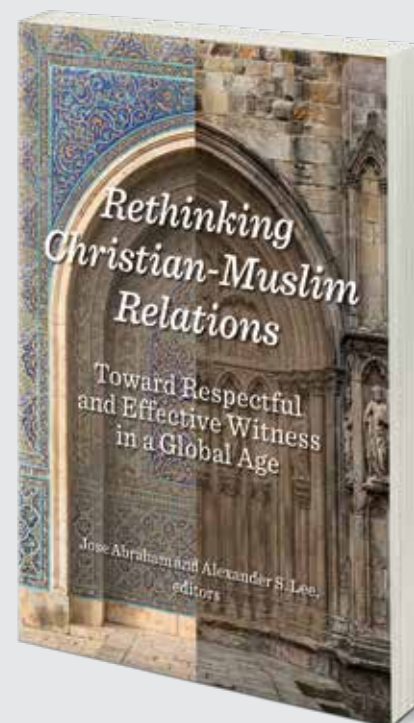
Toward Respectful and Effective Witness in a Global Age

Jose Abraham and Alexander S. Lee

Rethinking Christian-Muslim Relations gathers leading global voices to reflect on Christian engagement with Islam and Muslim communities in our interconnected world. Building on Fuller Seminary's legacy of pioneering Islamic Studies—shaped by the scholarship of J. Dudley Woodberry and Evelyn Reisacher—the contributors explore themes ranging from peacemaking and contextualization to attachment theory and reciprocal hospitality. Contributors assess post-Orientalist approaches to Islamic studies, explore models of contextualization in Muslim-majority societies, and examine the theological implications of Muslim-background believers for mission. Together, the authors offer fresh pathways for understanding and collaboration while affirming the lordship of Jesus.



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A Barnabas-Style Alongsider Ministry

Edited transcript of interview with **TRENT T** (Pseudonym) by **DUKE DILLARD** on Zoom, June 29, 2026.

Trent T (pseudonym) is an American who has served with his family as a field ministry team leader in two formerly Soviet countries in Central Asia since 1993.

DD Tell us your story as to how you came to the place of doing what we would call *alongsider work*. Explain what happened to get you to where you are now from where you began.

TT First, let me explain my paradigm, and then I will add a few nuances to that. I would say the first 13 years, from 1993 to 2006, when we were in Country A, we were doing more of a classic Pauline ministry. We were measuring out the field and starting to take out the rocks. Basically, as the apostolic kind of people in a place where there were no local Muslim-background believers (MBBs). And then we left Country A with most other expats in 2006.

Twelve years later, when we returned to Country A, there were around 7,500 MBBs. Significantly fewer expats were ministering there than in 2006. Certainly, all the experienced expats were gone. At that point in 2018, there was already a first-generation MBB church with leaders of some sort, meaning we returned to a very different situation.

And so, I'd say we came back to a completely Barnabas-style ministry instead of a Pauline ministry. And some of the distinctions for me were that I was not trying to get people to join me, and I was not trying to lead

them in a certain direction. I was not trying to sell them a particular model or pattern or vision. I was assuming that God had already raised up the leaders and given them vision and means.

So, for example, I'm working with AW, who's a very strong leader, a gifted guy who's pursuing a particular movement approach. I'm really glad he has a vision, and he's pushing in this direction. I don't think this particular approach is the most appropriate for Country A, but I think it's more important that I work with him where he is, than that I try to do something that I think is more appropriate. That way, the new church is built around locals. If expats are "pillars" in the new church, the church will be stable as long as expats remain. But when the "pillar" expats leave, the local church doesn't last long.

With regard to which MBBs I work with, I'm not looking at whether they have been to seminary, or who did they work with before? What is their church affiliation? Instead, I'm asking, are they committed, faithful, envisioned, and being used of God? Are they seeking Jesus and his kingdom and wanting to make a difference? Another big thing I consider is, are they culturally engaged, are they still a part of their birth *oikos* (community)? If so, I pursue relationship with them.

DD Yes, that's helpful. What does community look like for you?

TT I think most of them would see me as a mentor. Like AW says, "Your main ministry to me is asking questions." So, I'm saying, "Why would you choose this brother and not this brother?" Or I'm thinking, if they're initiating it and wanting to pray together, I'm going to happily join them. I'm not initiating it, but I'm just one of the participants. Mostly, I just sit in their leadership meetings and participate. And after an hour or two, usually, they might ask me a few things, or I'll reflect and say, "So, why are you spending so much time talking about this, but you haven't even talked about that?"

They don't view me as an authority figure in that sense. Though, at one point, AW asked me if I would just be on the team, like, in the organizational chart, and I declined. It feels like it's healthier for me to be an outsider at that level, even though I participate sometimes like a team member. For instance, when we do a training, I'm one of the planners, and I'm one of the trainers. I fulfill that little piece. I'm not officially part of their team in an ongoing way, so when they have a couples team event, or an all-family event, they don't invite me. I'm not one of the team people. I'm in a little different category.

Two of the main guys, AW, and his second, BM, have a lot of conflict with each other. They're both talking to me about their conflict with the other one. And they both know that the other one is also talking to me, and they're okay with it. So, I'm thinking this is about as healthy as I could imagine. They both trust me to be helpful and neutral.

DD Good. Here is what I'm hearing you say. You have ideas. You're curious and making judgments or assessments about what they are doing. You are thinking one thing would be better than another or are uncertain why they are not doing what seems obvious to you. But instead of saying that, you're asking questions and influencing their thinking. How often are they saying, "Oh, okay, well, I guess I should do something different, because Trent seems to think I should"?

TT It depends on the person. Sometimes I'll be talking with AW, and mid-sentence, he'll stop and pick up his phone and start sending voice texts, because he decided about something based on our conversation.

DD Meaning he changed his mind, or...

TT Yes. For example, I said, "Well, why are you trying to get sponsors? Why don't you just ask all the participants to pay? I mean, that's what they'd be paying for something like this somewhere else. Ask all the participants to kick in this much money." He texted his team and said this. But he didn't say to me, "I think you're right. Thanks for saying that." Let me give some examples with other guys. AH comes over, and I feel like I'm the safe "insider-outsider." He can talk about issues in his marriage or sticky relational issues in the church, and just kind of throw it all out there. And I listen and care for him. Maybe I have some ideas and suggestions, maybe I don't, but at least I am a person who understands the challenges he faces and am "safe" for him to talk to. So, I sense I have helped him, sometimes more as a listener than an adviser.

Another guy, KJ, calls me his soul caregiver. He comes and confesses his sins to me, and we pray together, but I have almost no influence with him in ministry tactics. He is quite open to sharing where he's at personally and relationally and wanting perspective, help, and encouragement.

DD Okay, this is great, but going back a little bit, you were there for 13 years, you're gone for 12 years, you come back, and you're fluent in the language. What was the process of getting to this place you're at now because they didn't know you, necessarily, or did they know you? How long did it take? What did you have to do to earn their trust?

TT That's a great question. Many people I had met, or they had heard of me. We just started inviting them to our house as couples. Or I would meet them for lunch, and I would just start to build a relationship with them. I would explain. "You know, we were here in the early years. God sent us here to see the first stages of the church get started, and the church got started. And then God decided that was enough, and he moved all the expats on, and he gave the baton to you as the leaders. We haven't returned to take back the baton. God gave it to you. We're here to hold up your arms, to encourage you, to pray with you. You're the ones God has put in leadership. And some people believed me the first time I said it, some people believed me the third time, some people still aren't interested. Like, I was eager to come alongside

one particular guy I knew and speak into his life. To this day, he's not interested in meeting with me. No openness. So, I haven't pursued him.

DD Fascinating! The picture you gave is like an Aaron and Hur holding Moses' arms. That's literally the picture of someone standing alongside someone. Now you've been back in the country eight years. How has the progression been from new returnee to trusted Alongsider?

TT Yeah. It's just slowly increasing. I didn't know AW very well, but at the beginning he was the one saying, "Hey, can you come and help me? Can you do this? Can you teach this? Can you advise me about this?" That opened other things, and because we do trainings on topics like marriage and spiritual formation, we were exposed to other leaders. And because of our former experience in a different region of the country, we connected with a few people from that region. So, there are different streams; it wasn't all through one stream. Here's an example. This last year, DS, who I hadn't worked with before but had met a few times, came to me and asked if we could meet. He said, "Hey, we're trying to do marriage ministry, but these husbands are still thinking like Muslims. Can you help me? BM said you could help me." So, in this instance you can see that one relationship led to another. In this case, I said, "Yeah, I think I can help you. You get the guys, and you organize it, and I'll put together a program." I like when it's their initiative. They're the promoter. They're organizing it, and I'm just coming in as the servant-teacher.

DD It sounds like the process was that you initiated initially. You set some stuff up, invited them in, and then it was up to them if they wanted to continue.

TT Well, let me give one example that can serve as a kind of case study. There were two MBBs that worked for another foreigner, PD. They were leaders, and PD had me do a team-building thing with them. Afterwards, TB asked me if I would do kind of a mentoring leadership for these two guys. So, I met with them once and kind of went over some material. The one guy, AM, is really a cultural insider in a certain region of the country. I thought he'd be the one I would invest in, while the other guy worked in a foreign-culture church, and I wasn't sure about him. Well, AM never had any interest in coming to

meet with me again. However, the second guy did, so I started meeting with him and going through Stephen Covey's *7 Habits* book slowly. He was reading the book, and we were discussing the habits. Every time he said, "Meeting with you is the best part of my month." I was thinking, "Really?" I was just caring about him, asking questions, and praying for him. I think he never had someone like that. But to the other part of your question, it's not that I wait for them to initiate. Young people usually don't initiate with older people. I must navigate that a little bit. It does help that I'm older than almost all of them.

DD There's a sense in which they trust you relationally, and they trust your wisdom or experience, and thus are willing to connect with you?

TT Well, there's a few dimensions to that. First, they feel like I get them. And particularly in Country B, I heard this. But I have other examples in Country A, too, where the locals would tell me I was not like the kind of expats with an agenda. So, I don't have an agenda for their lives, and second, that when they say their relative came, and his daughter-in-law is da-da-da, I get it. I get the detail and the nuance of what's happening. That makes it easy for them to just throw everything out there.

In addition, they trust that I'm really for them and for what God wants to do in and through them. So, if that's important to them, then they'll want to meet with me. Whereas, some guys that are more, I don't know, it feels like there's more ego in their motivations and aspirations, then they don't want to meet with me.

DD Yeah, I hear you saying the relationships are less formal but understood. I mean, if I were to ask any of these guys about their relationship with you, what would they say?

TT The idea of a formal meeting or being their official mentor does not seem relevant. It's much more organic. Like this one guy, UB, who ran a lot with a different group of expats. He said to me, "I've learned so much from you. And you never tried to teach me anything. I appreciate that."

DD This has been fascinating, TT. Thank you for your time and sharing your story with us.

TT Happy to do it. Come see us in Central Asia. MF

The background image features two figures standing on a reflective surface, looking at two large framed panels. The left panel shows a figure facing a sky of intense fire and orange flames. The right panel shows a figure facing a sky with soft white clouds and a blue horizon. The title 'Alongsiding Reframing Discipleship' is centered over the panels in a large, white, sans-serif font.

Alongsiding Reframing Discipleship

By **ELIE KAYOBE** All Scripture references are from the ESV Bible translation.

Elie Kayobe is a Campus Staff Minister with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA. Currently, he is pursuing his MDiv with an emphasis on Church planting at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Understanding the Problem

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19a). This sentence ought to resonate in the heart of every believer and lover of Jesus Christ. Yet for many Christians, this command isn’t met with much enthusiasm. It is either done purely out of duty or simply left for pastors and spiritual leaders. Now, as a spiritual leader in college ministry, and an introvert who finds more comfort in solitude, I confess I often feel temptations of this nature.

However, I am convinced that with a simpler understanding of what Jesus has asked us to do, we can overcome our challenges and engage in fruitful discipleship. I summarize this simpler understanding as being Alongsiders.

To be an Alongsider is to have the joy of journeying with others, not for our sake, but theirs. It is to move with hope and a goal, yet at their pace, and it is to partner with the Holy Spirit as he shapes their understanding of God to behold the beauty and majesty of Christ. This is the heartbeat of an Alongsider and a disciple-maker. But before we dismiss it as just

another rebranding of the same daunting task, allow me to share how the Scriptures helped me grasp this understanding of discipleship, and what it entails.

With a genuine desire to see students impacted by the gospel, I often found myself in two unpleasant predicaments in my ministry: either frozen from the personal inner turmoil to give in to my introverted tendencies or overcoming them only to fall into awkward conversations and one-sided lectures about the gospel. So, I find great comfort in the Scriptures, which taught me what I believe to be the heart of an Alongsider through the lens of Christ. On the road to Emmaus, in Luke 24:13–35, our Lord demonstrates the three most basic yet fundamental marks of an Alongsider: curiosity, patience, and fellowship.

Curiosity

Our modern culture trained us to mind our own business. This has led many not to expect anyone to be interested in their lives. While some might find comfort in it, most people are actually suffering from it given that we were not made to live such isolated lives. Curiosity, then, becomes a blessed gift for both

parties—restoring pathways for fellowship with one another as God intended. I am convinced curiosity is our entry way to discipleship, to actually see people and be interested in their whole existence.

The Lord Jesus truly saw people and was always curious about their context. In the account of the road to Emmaus after his resurrection, Luke records that, “While they [disciples] were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them... And he said to them, ‘What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?’” (24:16–17). Though he knew the answer very personally, the Lord still demonstrated genuine curiosity. This led his disciples to tell him all that was in their hearts, their hopes and confusions, “But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel,” they said (24:21).

Following in the footsteps of the Lord, we, too, must demonstrate curiosity toward those we choose to walk alongside. Heart-reaching curiosity often leads to the place of hopes, hurts, fears, disappointments, and ambitions. It is there that the Alongsider finds fertile grounds to sow the seeds of trust and life-changing discipleship.

Unpacking Patiently

When curiosity has found the ground of trust, then it is time for the long and patient work of clearing and planting. “Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (24:27). It is hard to imagine how long it must have taken for Jesus to interpret the entire Old Testament Scripture to his disciples. Furthermore, considering the Gospel accounts’ clear portrayal of the disciples’ difficulty understanding the Lord’s teachings, we can safely conclude that it took a lot of patience.

As Christians, we might know more about God than the people we seek to disciple, at least I hope we do. But an Alongsider seeks to enter people’s lives with patience, keeping in mind that the journey is theirs and not ours. For many, initial misconceptions must be corrected before considering new information. A mentor of mine often says, “The gospel takes time to unpack.” To be an Alongsider forces one to slow

down and offer people what they can receive. As Jesus himself said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). Without curiosity, a discipler fires into the dark, but without patience, the discipler can suffocate his or her listener.

It is easy to disguise impatience under the pretext of care and a desire to see others grow. But the Alongsider framework reminds the discipler that it is the journey of the disciple. This mindset moves the Alongsider from the driver’s seat to the passenger seat, albeit with the map. An effective discipleship is one that finds its hearer in his or her context and enlightens the eyes of the heart to behold the beauty of Christ by the work of the Spirit.

Fellowship

Fellowship flows naturally from curiosity and patience. It calls for more meaningful and intentional times spent with one another characterized by presence and space. It has become clear to me that people are more likely to remember those who made space for them to wrestle with things, ask questions, and just be an encouraging presence. By drawing near the disciples, Jesus walked with them at their pace, Jesus made space for his disciples to wrestle with their current understanding of the Messiah. This may include some steps backward or lagging in progress, but it fosters love and genuine care. The apostle Paul writes about his discipleship to the Thessalonians, “being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thess 2:8).

Fellowship reminds us that people are not just a project but people we love and with whom we long to spend eternity. So, we begin down here on earth.

By way of summary, I believe that to rekindle the passion of making disciples and overcome our initial barriers and challenges, we must adopt and own our positions—we are Alongsiders. This means that we are sojourners, alongside other people, who demonstrate a heart-reaching curiosity, patience in unpacking the truths of the gospel, and an earnest desire to fellowship with those we seek to disciple. 

Book Reviews: Decolonization, Evangelism, and the Other: Thoughts for Prospective Alongsiders

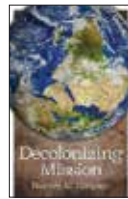
Three Books by Woodley, Kwiyani, and Hunter

Review by **ANDY BETTENCOURT**

Andy Bettencourt is the Managing Editor of the *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* and co-host of the *Missions Drop Podcast*. Andy's passion is to research deeply to better understand the challenges of demonstrating the gospel.

There has yet to be a definitive account on alongsiding as the posture and approach for ministry among least reached peoples. Books like *Subversive Mission* are helpful, as it rearticulates the APEST model of ministry in a foreign cultural context.¹ However, this review will bring insights from three different books: *Decolonizing Mission* by Harvey Kwiyani, *Mission and the Cultural Other* by Randy Woodley, and *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* by George G. Hunter III. The first book excellently presents the historical relationship of mission to power and colonial institutions as well as challenges in finding a new way forward.² The second book is rooted in the experience of a Native American leader who began ministry in a traditional way while slowly moving towards an embrace of local traditions and practices through "The Harmony Way."³ The final and oldest book presents a way forward and an example of something close to "alongsiding," as well as a critique of missionaries who carried their cultural forms of worship, church, and faith practice into new lands.⁴ These selections provide a critical view of the modern missions movement and may discourage many while also providing a helpful alternative space to (re)consider one's approach to mission and its potential ramifications. Kwiyani and Woodley speak from the space of the missionized: communities where whether by direct intent, accident, or forces beyond the missionary's control, much damage was done to local cultures and communities. One wonders whether an

alongsider posture might have mitigated some of these mistakes and injustices.



Decolonizing Mission

Kwiyani begins with a critique of the mission movement's connection to power, empire, and colonialism.⁵ He admits in the first sentence that not every missionary from the West was a colonialist, and his critique is more historical, systemic, and structural than individual.⁶ He even mentions the connection of Western missionaries to the euro, dollar, and pound, pointing out structures that often exist beyond our view.⁷ After presenting a searing account of the Livingstone legacy,⁸ Kwiyani elucidates the relationship of the Messiah, the apostles, and the early church to empires and colonial powers.⁹ The church has always negotiated these relationships and at times stood against and critiqued these powers.

Kwiyani gives a long history of the European powers' pursuit of expansion and the modern Western missions movement.¹⁰ This lengthy critique may discourage many in the missions community; however, it presents an important side of history that is often under-considered. Kwiyani suggests a way forward not from the centers of power but from the Global South just like the initial Galilean movement.¹¹ He also declares the need for more black and brown voices in the fields of theology, missiology, and World Christianity.¹² Kwiyani critiques William Carey's model of mission to heathendom and how some contemporary Africans put this model forward.¹³ His critique focuses on mission models that rely on power more so than individual missionaries or their communities of origin.

1 Greenfield, Craig. *Subversive Mission: Serving as Outsiders in a World of Need* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2022). Note: APEST stands for Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, Teacher.

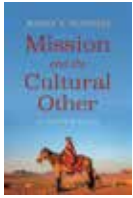
2 Kwiyani, Harvey C. *Decolonizing Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2025).

3 Woodley, Randy. *Mission and the Cultural Other: A Closer Look* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022).

4 Hunter III, George G. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010).

5 Kwiyani, *Decolonizing Mission*, 1-5; 6 Ibid, 1; 7 Ibid, 123; 8 Ibid, 20-37; 9 Ibid, 41-75; 10 Ibid, 76-136; 11 Ibid, 137-9; 12 Ibid, 143-52; 13 Ibid, 155-7.

Kwiyani emphasizes that Western communication places talking over listening while also sharing the reflections on Western “mission” of novelists, theologians, and African church leaders.¹⁴ He further states that missionaries did not bring God to the rest of the world, instead God’s people must go as co-labourers with no armies or empires behind them.¹⁵ This resonates with the need for Alongsiders. However, much like the description of an Alongsider, Kwiyani needs to further elucidate his next steps for a viable approach to mission in the present.



Mission and the Cultural Other

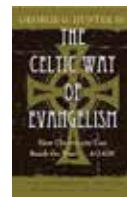
Woodley argues that the “Harmony Way,” core values of most Native North Americans, often parallels biblical values and creates a theological foundation for mission.¹⁶ Similar to Kwiyani, we find a critique of Western values in Woodley’s work while maintaining a high value for Scripture. Woodley shares of his early life where he practiced many different forms of Western evangelism and critiques the emphasis on the “sent” aspect of mission to the objectification of to whom we have been sent.¹⁷ Like Kwiyani, Woodley discloses a horrifying account of Christian “mission” in which a young Cherokee man and his white wife were hung and burned.¹⁸ Both authors insist upon disclosing the stories of pain and violence that come from narratives of supremacy and superiority.

Woodley also notes how paternalism produces little fruit as some studies estimate that only 3% of Native Americans nationwide are Christians.¹⁹ He then shares how his ministry approach changed through a conversation with an Ojibwe elder.²⁰ This elder’s following of Jesus was rooted more in dreams and stories than Western structures and the texts that we commonly emphasize. Woodley’s emphasis on learning from elders and local wisdom can be connected to Paul’s approach of raising up local leaders in the early church (Titus 1:5–9).

Similar to Kwiyani, Woodley chronicles the connections between mission and political power followed by an emphasis on missionary learning, hospitality, and the vulnerability of Christ.²¹ He argues for a shift in one’s theological framework to encourage a more creation-based theology with a positive or at least more neutral

view of culture.²² Woodley’s argument attempts to relevel the playing field and see “Western Christianity” as one depiction of how Christ may be followed in community.²³ He then compares 18th-century European and Native American values to show that things like disease, bathing standards, and approaches to alcohol heavily impacted these early encounters.²⁴ Quite simply, Europeans brought their problems and struggles with them, as well as their tools and technological improvements.

Woodley encourages a faith rooted in the everyday, which sees human beings as part of the created order involved in the work of shalom, wholeness, and healing.²⁵ He sees the Harmony Way as honoring ancient Israelite systems of well-being, upsetting hierarchy, and restoring community.²⁶ Woodley is speaking against practices of mission that seem to upset local dynamics, establish hierarchies between the missionary and missionized, and divide communities. For him, the good news is about honoring where God is already at work and hearing from the local traditions who may already have some knowledge of Christ and his path. For Woodley, the gospel is living our lives in the same way that Jesus lived his life and not simply cognitive assent to truth claims.²⁷ Woodley also beautifully connects the first Testament’s shalom, sabbath, and Jubilee constructs with Christ’s message and life in the second Testament.²⁸ He closes with an impassioned plea for white Westerners to listen, listen, and listen some more and then join as a junior partner, not a senior partner, and as time passes, given the right attitude, potentially a co-partner.²⁹ He ends the book at the beginning, which may leave many of us linear thinkers in a lurch.³⁰ By finishing the book, we hope to have graduated to a new status, but we now must walk out its suggestions and insistently hold on to the role of junior partner until much begging from insiders, experience, and learning allows us to serve as co-partners.



The Celtic Way of Evangelism

Hunter claims that an early Christian movement shows us the way forward in the third millennium.³¹ He starts with the story of Patrick, who initially came

14 Kwiyani, *Decolonizing Mission*, 184-97; 15 Ibid, 207.

16 Woodley, Randy. *Mission and the Cultural Other: A Closer Look* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2022), 8-12; 17 Ibid, 21, 31; 18 Ibid, 33-4; 19 Ibid, 36; 20 Ibid, 35-40; 21 Ibid, 47-75.

22 Woodley, 78-86.

23 This reviewer and presumably Woodley both acknowledge that Western Christianity is not just one thing, while also agreeing that it has had a disproportionate influence on how others follow Christ. This argument attempts to find a way forward where a Christ-following path can be adjudicated by a local community.

24 Woodley, 110-25; 25 Ibid, 127-44; 26 Ibid, 146-71; 27 Ibid, 173; 28 Ibid, 173-82; 29 Ibid, 187; 30 Ibid, 188; 31 Ibid, x

to Ireland as a slave.³² Patrick returned to Ireland with an apostolic band that prayed for the sick, counseled, mediated conflicts, engaged in open-air speaking, and employed the arts.³³ He carried out this work for 28 years and slowly devoted more time to administration and ordaining priests.³⁴ This launched the first indigenous Christian movement in Ireland with at least 30 Irish tribes becoming substantially Christian.³⁵ Irish Christianity spread after Patrick's death and became distinctively Celtic, including lay monastic movements and communal orientation, which helped people navigate past, present, and future anxieties.³⁶ Quite simply, individual and communal needs were addressed at a deep level, and prayers were generated for daily concerns and celebrations.³⁷

This movement spread into Scotland, England, Wales, and continental Europe in the coming centuries.³⁸ However, the Roman church was not happy with this form of Celtic faith—from its different hairstyles to its embrace of change to its refusals to use Latin language, worship, or organization.³⁹ Hunter advocates for local rather than imported forms of church similar to Alongsiders who encourage and support meaningful local ways of gathering and demonstrating faith in Christ.⁴⁰ This will likely bring the Alongsider questions and criticisms from their community of origin.

Hunter summarizes Celtic Christianity as fellowship, ministry, conversation, belief, and invitation.⁴¹ This approach requires patience in understanding both a culture and a people, as they steadily reflect upon the way of the Lord.⁴² Patrick was later identified as an Irishman because of his deep care for the people, both spiritually and physically.⁴³ Like an Alongsider, he began to see things as the community did, while raising up leaders to support the growing church. Celtic Christianity effectively spoke to the right brain, which invited people's imaginations to contribute to what a community of Christ-followers could look like, as opposed to more left-brain Roman Christianity, which brought a ready-made form of church.⁴⁴ Some of my

alongsider friends have noted how local "Christianity" will always seem weird to outsiders, because the locals have been able to imagine gathering and worship from the perspective of their community rather than embodying something from elsewhere.

Furthermore, Celtic leaders blessed the good they saw in other religious traditions while combating the evil with prayer; power encounters were few, leading to a more indigenous and creative expression of faith.⁴⁵ Celtic Christianity became a more religion- and culture-friendly movement, as it utilized the sacred sites of primal religions, as well as many of the relics, holy days, festivals, and ceremonies in a manner that honored Christ.⁴⁶ This gentler approach embodies the learning posture of an Alongsider maintaining deference to tradition while processing it alongside the message of Christ.

Celtic Christianity emphasizes the lived text over the written text, harnesses our imaginations in devotion to God, and pursues deeper community and ministry through soul friends and small groups.⁴⁷ This requires credibility, clearance, contact, communication, conversation, and consistency.⁴⁸ Celtic leaders understood that people find faith by being brought into conversation with other Christ followers.⁴⁹ Woodley and Kwiyani submit that this conversation is often one-sided. Oftentimes, missionaries endeavor to do great things for God and share what they have experienced with him; however, wise Alongsiders temper these ambitions and urge listening to the other and to God. This produces anxiety and frustration, as well as the opportunity for creativity, imagination, and indigeneity. We desire to see Christ heard and demonstrated in ways that all people can understand; however, that work takes patience, deep relationship, listening, and a move of the Spirit in local hearts and minds.

Alongsiders must keenly listen to the successes and failures of the historic missions movement. They also must hear from the local people among whom they live. They must be listeners before doers, critical of their own understanding of the local context, and be patient. From here, like the Celts, they can fan into flame and bless the good that they already see rather than create from their own understanding. Alongsiding is not easy and requires great focus and dependence upon others. ■■

32 Hunter III, George G. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 1-3 33 Ibid, 9-10; 34 Ibid, 10-1; 35 Ibid, 11; 36 Ibid, 14-21; 37 Ibid, 21-4; 38 Ibid, 25-9; 39 Ibid, 29-33; 40 Ibid, 34-5; 41 Ibid, 43.

42 From a common phrasing of Dr. Dan Shaw's (Fuller Seminary): God had something to say to the Samo, but I often didn't know what, so I listened and observed, so I might understand.

43 Hunter III. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 58.

44 Hunter III. *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 67; 45 86-7;

46 Ibid, 88-9; 47 Ibid, 95-9; 48 Ibid, 104-6; 49 Ibid, 107.



24:14—"Pursuing movements in every unreached people and place."

God Chose the Lowly

By **ROBIN SMITH**

Robin Smith and her family serve with Beyond (beyond.org). Their application of DMM strategies in India has resulted in over 1 million house churches birthed from Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh background peoples.

God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are (1 Cor 1:27-28).

In the early days of our ministry, we went to the town of D and did three or four days of training in the disciple making movement (DMM) model of ministry. The roughly 20 attendees included people from a wide variety of backgrounds, ranging from well-educated and well-dressed to much less educated and humbly clothed.

A few weeks later, we returned to do a follow-up training with these believers. During the first two days of the second training, we noted a pattern of self-selection in the trainees' seating. The educated and traditionally-trained pastors sat in the front, nicely dressed and interactive, raising their hands in response to our questions. Another distinct group, less well-dressed, always sat quietly in the back and never raised their hands to respond to questions. We recognized them as low-caste people and later learned that these trainees picked through trash for their livelihood.

We didn't sense any animosity or negative feelings between the groups. Their self-selection and behavior matched the norms in this caste-oriented society. Those in each group knew their assumed place and played their expected role.

However, as we began asking trainees to tell us what God was doing in their ministry, we noticed a pattern in the stories. Both in one-on-one conversations and when we asked from the front for any ministry testimony from previous weeks, we saw a stark contrast. We recognized that the poorly dressed trainees in back were the only ones reporting ministry fruit that reflected application of the DMM principles we had taught.

The nicely-dressed ones in the front, who had been very interactive and answered our questions, didn't have any

stories to share that showed they had applied the DMM pattern for making disciples. Meanwhile, the group of trash-pickers had some exciting stories to share.

On the third day, my husband said, "We need to honor them; we need to bring them out of the back row to the front." We brought them up to the front, and he and I, along with many of the Indians in the room, washed their feet. It was a very precious moment.

So, the cultural norms were suddenly turned on their heads, based on the kingdom value of fruitful obedience. The illiterate trash-pickers felt honored—both as fellow-members of God's family and as God's servants, faithfully bearing witness to the gospel and seeing God work through them. The Indians who had been seated in the front row also honored them, acknowledging that these brothers had the most notable fruit in ministry. That event had a huge impact on all of us—touching social, cultural, political, and religious values with a stunning kingdom perspective.

A 12-minute documentary, "Ordinary People,"¹ describes the early growth of this movement and features some of these "ordinary" people. These low-caste, illiterate trash-pickers became more fruitful than any of the most educated people in the room. These folks obeyed and experienced multiplying fruit—lots of fruit. God loves to use anyone who obeys, even those we might consider the least. Over time, they also learned how to read. The Lord taught them how to read, and improved their lives physically, even as they have continued to grow in Christ and serve him fruitfully. ■■

¹ beyond.org/ordinary-people-extraordinary-gospel-video/.

The Church

By GREG H. PARSONS

Greg H. Parsons and his wife have been on staff with Frontier Ventures since 1982. They live in Southern California.

What do you think of when you think of **church**? Be sure to ponder the Bible's meaning... Were you thinking about a building you go to on Sunday? Or people meeting in a home with others from the neighborhood somewhere in Indonesia or Thailand or Europe? Whatever we think about, we don't want to miss the richness, relationships, unified witness, and simplicity of what it means to be an Acts 2 fellowship.

Since we are sending out Alongsiders to serve cross-culturally to see Jesus build his ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia* or assembly),¹ we want to be sure and understand this well. The word is translated church in Romans 16 and is used five times in that chapter: "Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae" (16:1). Paul gives thanks to "all the churches of the Gentiles" (16:4) and asks them to greet the church that meets in the house of Prisca and Aquila (16:3). He says in v. 16, "Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you." Gaius greets "the whole church" (16:23). Yet ἐκκλησία is not the only New Testament (NT) word. The word used in 16:5 οἶκος (house, household) is used several times in the NT in relation to the church.²

It seems clear that at least some of the ways specific local churches operate is not set in stone. As we pray, the Lord of the harvest to thrust out laborers into the cultural context of unreached and frontier people groups, and people turn to Christ for the first time, the church may look different. Churches on the sending and receiving end need to be clear and yet flexible about expectations. Remember, even though there may be a

local church near FPGs, they are not from the same culture. By definition, UPGs have no viable church, which complicates the situation. They can be seen as oppressors of any Christians and often view them as following a foreign religion.

Significant research has been done regarding the differences between Sodalities (mission structures) and Modalities (church structures).³ A short summary: Acts 13 points to a mission band sent out (released, loosed) by the Spirit's miraculous word, to do a **different** task than the ἐκκλησία in Antioch. That fellowship acknowledged the calling of the Spirit on Paul and Barnabas and released them to God's work. The advance of the gospel among the unreached requires that we continue to examine the word and the work of the Spirit. I have found it helpful to ponder the fact that in pioneering fields, *first establishing a church* (what the missionary band does) is fundamentally different than *running a church* (what the pastor and elders do from then on).

As we send out Alongsiders to labor in his harvest fields, those who come to believe may decide to live out their faith differently—while still holding to biblical truth. That is why we must keep learning from the Word and the context in which we serve. ❏

1 The root idea of ἐκκλησία is as a town hall or assembly, or a "duly summoned assembly" for some purpose. It is the word used about 114 times in the New Testament and only in the Gospels in two passages, both by Jesus (Matt 16:18 and 18:17 [2x]). It is interesting that Jesus uses these long before his work is done and before the full coming of the Spirit. He is setting out his plans!

2 The idea is a bit different than our typical idea of a home in the West. It could be something smaller, but when the people involved are mentioned in relationship to the word, it seems to refer to what we might call an extended family and includes those who work in the home. (See Acts 10-11 [6x], 16:34, 18:8). Other references to check are 1 Cor 16:19, Col 4:15, and Phlm 2.

3 Bob Blincoe labored on a very significant work on this issue in: Blincoe, Bob. *A New Social Contract Relating Mission Societies to Ecclesiastical Structures*, (Pasadena: William Carey International University, 2014). I wrote one chapter about the beginnings of this topic in my dissertation: Parsons, Greg H. *Ralph Winter: Early Life and Core Missiology*, (Pasadena, WCIU Press, 2012). bit.ly/4eCNpyc



An Unfiltered Look at Marriage on the Field

By **IRENE SPRINGFIELD** (Pseudonym)

Irene Springfield and her husband have been field workers in North Africa for seven years and team leaders for three years. Their ministry is focused on sharing the gospel with high-identity Muslims. They have three children.

When you picture married couples on the mission field, maybe you picture the wife staying home to teach the kids and manage the household while the husband does ministry or tentmaking work. Maybe you picture them shoulder-to-shoulder, leading a team or running a nonprofit together. Or maybe you imagine something in between.

There are as many ways to have a successful marriage on the field as there are married people on the field. I don't have a prescription for a happy, healthy marriage on the field. What I can offer you is a description of one very real marriage on the field and some of the joys and challenges we've faced.

The Gift and Challenges of Time Together

Before we moved overseas, my husband worked full time in youth ministry, and I worked full time in public relations while volunteering with the youth ministry. We had two small children and very little margin. I didn't expect it to be much different when we moved overseas, but I hoped we'd have a stronger sense of working towards a unified vision.

When we moved to North Africa in 2018, we were part of an eight-month "intensive" internship program. We were pleasantly surprised to discover we had more time together than we'd known in years! On Sundays, instead

of serving at church from dawn to dusk, we took our kids on excursions to get to know our new home. During the week, we did almost everything together. We went to Arabic classes and training sessions, and since we didn't have a car yet, we walked everywhere. Even with the stress of moving our family overseas, we had less conflict than any of the previous seasons of our lives, because we simply had more time to talk.

Of course, as the years went on and our responsibilities increased, our margin decreased. But even now, our relatively flexible work schedules allow us the freedom to grab an afternoon coffee together, if we need to catch up. We try to avoid scheduling lots of evening meetings, both so we have time to relax and connect in the evening, and so we can go out for dates occasionally.

One of the biggest challenges we face as a couple on the field is finding opportunities for extended times alone together. While it's easy to grab a quick mid-week coffee, it's difficult to get a weekend away. With our families living an ocean away and our teammates busy with their own work and families, it's difficult to leave our kids for more than just a night out while we're in-country. We have taken the opportunity to get away together while we're on home ministry assignment, but even then, it's hard to take time away from our packed schedule of supporter meetings and

traveling to visit family.

Reassessing Gender Roles

Going to the field as a married couple also gave us a unique opportunity to reassess our assumptions about gender roles—and probably not in the way you expect. As children of the '90s with two working parents each, my husband and I never assumed my role would be stay-at-home mom. And as people who launched into adulthood as the U.S. economy was crashing, we also assumed we would both *have* to work. But moving to the field and living on support gave us more flexibility to think about what kind of life made the most sense—for our family, our personalities, our vision, and for the culture.

Before our third child was born, I wrote blog posts and managed social media accounts for our tourism company. But when our third child came along, it felt like more than I could manage, so I stopped. Even though I'd only been working part-time, I really wrestled with the idea of my identity being just “mom,” not “mom and public relations specialist.” But I also recognized I'd been given a unique opportunity to embrace a season of focusing primarily on my home and my kids, a privilege not many women today have.

Both working mom and stay-at-home mom are accepted roles in the country where we live. However, women are still expected to do most of the cooking, cleaning, and hospitality work. This is an area of our life where we have both accepted cultural norms and pushed back a bit. When local friends come over for dinner, I do my best to go into hostess mode, even though I'm a terrible multitasker and struggle to do things like make tea and have a conversation at the same time! But while I manage most of the cleaning and meal planning in our home, my husband has taken over a lot of the cooking since our third child was born. We realized he was both more skilled and more efficient in this area—it just made sense!

Shared Vision and Mission

Going to the field together indeed gave my husband and me a shared sense of vision and purpose. We share a vision for what we want to see happen in our city. We share a desire to see our team using their gifts to share the gospel and thrive in our context. We share a love for our friends and neighbors and a longing to see

them enter the kingdom of God. These shared values and desires are like a torch in the night—something we can focus on and walk toward when life feels chaotic, or we feel pulled in many directions.

I think one of our most important tasks is helping each other keep our eyes on that torch. We've each walked through seasons of discouragement, weariness, and doubt. We don't always feel the same about our life and calling here—we ebb and flow in our positivity and passion. We've had to learn how to lean on each other when we're the one who's low on faith or optimism and how to encourage each other when we're the one with a surplus.

And while our calling to North Africa is shared, our skills, abilities, and some responsibilities are unique. That means sometimes we feel more like passing ships in the night than crewmembers rowing in the same boat. On any given day, my husband might be in meetings for his tourism business and driving to different government offices to secure our visas while I'm attending Arabic lessons and meeting a teammate for coffee. Some days it feels like we communicate only via text messages!

At times, we've struggled with a sense of unfairness or inadequacy. Sometimes one of us feels like we're spending more time doing the kinds of things that keep us alive, healthy, and legal—planning meals, taking kids to doctors' appointments, muddling through government bureaucracy—than doing the ministry work that brought us here in the first place! Sometimes it feels impossible to do both things well. In those times, we must remind each other that there is a season for everything—and there are two of us for a reason. The phase of life or work or ministry we're in might require one of us to do more of the behind-the-scenes support while the other focuses on outreach or team leadership, and that's okay.

Going to the field as a married couple has provided both challenges and opportunities—many of them unexpected—to grow closer to each other, to develop as individuals, and to rely on God. I hope you'll join me in praying for couples on the field around the world, that God would strengthen them, encourage them, and fill them with his love and grace. 🙏

Living Among the Bengali Hindu Community

By **HADASSAH PINKERTON**

My name is **Hadassah Pinkerton** and I love worshipping the Lord. I am partnered with a ministry organization in NYC where I share the Gospel among Bengali Hindus.

I'm a Gen Z tentmaker living in New York City (NYC) who has been walking alongside the Bengali Hindu community for the last three years. Prior to moving into my neighborhood, after doing an internship in cross-cultural evangelism, I told everyone that I was not interested in Hindu ministry because it felt too complicated. Growing up in an environment where theology and rationality was important to my faith experience, the lack of rationality, replaced with an emphasis on spiritual experience in the Hindu worldview, felt impossible to navigate. However, several months later, I found myself surrounded by a wonderful Bengali Hindu community.

The Lord showed me that Hindus were so very precious to him and that he desired to redeem the brokenness in the culture and somehow use me in their lives even though I didn't understand their worldview and religious system.

Getting to know the families in the neighborhood meant going to cultural events, dance and musical performances, baby-naming and rice-feeding ceremonies, among many others. In time, families started confiding in me their frustrations that came with being immigrants here in NYC—problems they experienced at their children's school, issues with getting a job, and frustrations with race.

Hindu parents expected me to be a role model for their children. Following the right life path and making correct decisions are of immense importance for Hindu families. Similarly, poor friendship choices and low grades can cause great stress to both Hindu and

Western families alike. The difference, however, is that many Hindu families are willing to have community influences outside the immediate family unit speak to the child. They long to know that their children are making wise life choices. As an Alongsider in the Bengali Hindu community that the families respected, parents often asked me to speak to their children about making good friendship choices and forming strong academic habits.

In my Western friendships, if I enjoyed a conversation with someone and wanted to spend more time with them, I would exchange numbers and we would meet up in a coffee shop or "hang out," to get more quality time. However, for Hindus, hospitality is a joy and a gift. On several occasions after meeting a new Hindu family through existing connections, I was invited into their home after a few moments because they wanted to have the privilege of hosting me. Hosting is always a group activity. I have never had a Hindu friend invite me to a cafe with them or to hang out outside their home. New friends felt comfortable inviting me into their home, even after hardly knowing me.

I learned to appreciate that the Hindu community I was surrounded by valued experience and relationships more than reason, professionalism, and credentials. Rather than this being a barrier as I had previously assumed, it turned out to be an open door. My Hindu friends experienced the goodness of Jesus as gospel conversations sprang up in each of these encounters, leading to answered prayers and moments where they felt Jesus' peace through worship. They even told me that Jesus sent me to them.

Day in the Life of an Alongsider

Every day is different in ministry, but evenings with Laaysa's family are a staple. Everyone is home from work and school, and the day seems to be winding down, but not for me. This is the fun moment when I get to meet my Hindu friends and have genuine conversations with them. Around 8pm, I make my way to Laaysa's home. We share a wall in our building. I knock, and eight-year-old Aryan opens the door showing me his latest drawing, eagerly welcoming me in. I walk down the hallway of the little apartment, and the grandparents greet me in Bengali. I greet them back and they chuckle with me at my awkward pronunciation of their native tongue. On my way to the kitchen, I pass the first bedroom with the mandir on the shelf and hear the very loud television playing news in Bengali.

Finally, I enter the kitchen where Laaysa is. She is serving up a plate for her children's dinner. On the stove, there is dal, rice, beans, carrots, squash, zucchini, fish, and cucumber. Laaysa smiles wide when she sees me and asks if I want to eat, too. I definitely want to! I saved my appetite for this. Laaysa also proceeds to boil water with bay leaves, ginger, cardamom, and cloves on the stove for me to drink with honey. Her incredible hospitality is unparalleled, and she knows my preferences so well that she no longer offers me milk tea.



We make our way to the second bedroom, which is where the mom, dad, and kids sleep on the family bed.

Aryan's older sister is already there, fighting to complete her homework. Laaysa's husband pops in and chats with us for a while but doesn't stay long enough to eat with us. We all sit cross-legged on the floor, and Laaysa feeds her eight- and 12-year-old children with her fingers. I've also become an expert at eating with my right hand, without allowing my dominant left hand to get in the way, lest I create an unnecessary cultural offense.

At this point, I announce that I have a story to share, and our oral Discovery Bible Study begins. Sometimes I tell a story by simply talking. Other times, we try to read a story together, still other times I draw the story out on my miniature whiteboard. Bible reading often lulls Laaysa to sleep, but her daughter loves reading Jesus stories the best. The drawn-out Bible story is a favorite of Aryan's. He loves to draw with me and laugh at my incredibly poor drawing skills. But simply telling a story is the most natural option for me with the easiest prep. I must consider what the best method for the story is that we will cover that day.

As God's Word always does, it stirs up spiritual conversation about areas in our lives where we want to see God move. Laaysa shares a family struggle that came to mind, or something that is similar in the religious stories that she grew up with, or something that she didn't quite understand. When appropriate, I like to share a testimony in my life related to the story and talk more about the issues that the family is facing. This leads us into a time of prayer. By now the kids are done eating and a little restless. Laaysa tells the kids to settle down because now we will pray. Laaysa takes prayer very seriously. Gone are the days when she just asks for prayer for health and peace. She understands she can ask for prayer to Jesus about the troubles that keep her up at night. We all clasp our hands and pray, and she knows the prayer is up when I end with *tathastu*. Laaysa takes our dishes back to the kitchen and pours out tea for us and hot milk for the children. I pray that Laaysa will soon lead her kids in quiet time with Lord Jesus and that they will grow in their devotion to him. 🙏

Color the World: Alongsiders

Kody Friesen, is an artist who especially enjoys using Middle Eastern and Persian art forms to highlight the beauty of Jesus. For this page, he went for a feel of, "When Alongsiders come to lift others up, everyone wins." He and his wife Amy are creators who have spent 20 years among Middle Eastern communities. They now live in Canada with their four children. You can find their work at www.akfriesen.com.



My Situation Didn't Change ... But My Heart Did

By **HANNAH**

Hannah is a 25-year-old Cuban worker serving in the Middle East alongside her husband. She was born into a Christian family, but at 13 she made a personal decision to follow Jesus, after which she was discipled and baptized. After getting married, she and her husband sensed a clear calling to cross-cultural work and prepared through biblical training, discipleship, and service in their local church.

If you had to describe how your heart feels today in one word... what would it be?

A while ago, mine would've been, "Exhausted."

I'm a young Cuban woman, and together with my husband, we said "Yes" to something we knew came from God: serving in another country, another culture, another reality. It sounds inspiring when you say it quickly, but the process... was a different story.

Seven months before leaving, everything started falling apart.

We had no money.

No visas.

No clarity.

And I didn't have the emotional support I expected.

My family didn't understand. My siblings questioned everything. My parents just couldn't see what I saw.

My mind was constant noise.

My heart... heavier every day.

I entered a season of deep sadness, anxiety, and frustration. And in the middle of all that, something happened that I never thought I'd admit:

I forgot how to pray.

When you don't have words anymore...

[Hannah's beautiful story continues online. To read the full poem, see the online version of this issue at missionfrontiers.org.]

SEPTEMBER Images are AI generated by magnific.com.

■ 1 Badhik in India

Badhiks once hunted animals and trapped birds but now work as farmers and butchers, offering ceremonial slaughter services. A low status Sudra caste, they remain largely illiterate and unreached. Living mainly in Uttar Pradesh, where very few know Christ, Badhiks have almost no access to the gospel unless someone goes to them.

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. Malachi 4:2

- Pray that this people group will fear the name of the Lord and experience His healing.
- Please pray for improved health care facilities throughout the state.
- Pray for Christ followers to fill the role of health care.
- Pray for Badhiks to experience God's blessings in such a way they cannot deny His true identity.
- Pray that soon there will be Badhik disciples making more disciples.

■ 2 Barua in Bangladesh, India, and Myanmar

Barua is a Bengali speaking group known for cooking, farming, fishing, and hunting. Education has improved in recent decades, enabling many to enter professional work. Though historically Buddhist, they are now being drawn toward Hindu practices rather than the gospel. Without intentional outreach, they may embrace Hinduism instead of Christ.

But he answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. Matthew 4:4

- Pray that today's people group will learn and understand that the Bible comes from the mouth and mind of the one, true God.
- Pray for God to show Himself powerful and loving by providing for their needs.
- Pray that Baruas will have a spiritual hunger that will open their hearts to the King of kings.
- Pray for workers who are driven by the love and boldness of the Holy Spirit to go to them.
- Pray for a movement to Christ among them.

■ 3 Yagnob in Tajikistan

Yagnobs were forcibly relocated from their cool mountain valley to lowland cotton fields by the Soviet regime, causing deaths and erasing their ethnic identity. Some families have since returned. They are Sunni Muslims who view Allah as distant. They are dependent on spirits for daily needs. Their language lacks Christian resources, limiting gospel access.

The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned. Matthew 4:16

- Pray for this people group to see the light of Jesus Christ.
- Pray for them to find and embrace Tajiki language Christian resources, leading to transformed lives as many of the Yagnob, especially the younger ones, speak this language and there are no known materials in the Yagnobi language.

■ 4 Fanda in Sudan

Fandas live in nine remote villages in Sudan's Nuba Mountains, speaking Nding and Sudanese Arabic. They farm sorghum and corn, as well as raise livestock, enjoying fresh milk in rainy seasons. With no schools or health facilities and entirely Muslim communities, very few Fandas have ever met a Christian or heard the gospel.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:3

- Pray that this people group to recognize their own spiritual bankruptcy and come to Christ for the riches of His forgiveness.
- Pray for the Lord to send dreams and visions to Fanda family leaders.
- Pray for loving workers to be thrust out into each of the Fanda villages.
- Pray that soon there will come a day when Fanda Christ followers will disciple others.
- Pray for them to encounter Christians who demonstrate the love and mercy of the Lord in practical ways.

■ 5 Aluo in China

Aluos celebrate the “Paying Tribute to Ah-luo Festival” every 12 years, honoring a hero they revere as a god. This deep cultural identity, combined with little historical missionary presence, leaves them with no known Christians and little awareness of the gospel. Their devotion to Ah-luo makes accepting Christ very difficult.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Matthew 5:14

- Pray for this people group to become a light to the world reflecting the goodness and grace of Jesus Christ.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to move among Aluos in such a way that they will cling to the cross.
- Pray for the Lord to provide for their physical and spiritual needs as a testimony of His power and love.
- Pray for Aluo family leaders to lead their families to Jesus Christ and teach them to follow Him.
- Pray that the Aluo will have a spiritual hunger that will open their hearts to the King of kings.

■ 6 Southeast Pashtun in Afghanistan

Southeast Pashtuns join or oppose other Pashtun groups depending on their interests. Disputes are judged by a jinga council. A strict honor requirement is to protect someone who seeks asylum even at personal risk. Revenge, bravery, justice, and loyalty define their culture. The gospel is virtually absent among them.

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Matthew 7:15–16

- Pray that the Lord gives this people group the discernment to recognize false prophets and the grace to know the true Prophet, Priest and King, Jesus Christ.
- Pray for Southeastern Pashtun leaders to hear from the Lord that “vengeance is mine, I will repay,” instead of taking matters into their own hands.
- Pray for Christ to radically transform Pashtun culture and worldview.
- Pray for the gospel to make its way into every Southeastern Pashtun family and village.



■ 7 Pashtun in Afghanistan and the UAE

Southern Pashtuns live mainly in Afghanistan, with many migrating to the UAE and other countries for work. Known for business skill and mobility, they remain firmly Islamic, even abroad. Social pressure from fellow Muslims keeps them resistant to the gospel. Though seeds have been planted, strong cultural barriers persist.

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28

- Pray for today's people group to fear God, not men.
- Pray for accuracy in Bible translations in progress.
- Pray for more workers to serve among Pashtuns in the UAE—in education, business, healthcare, development, and other professional areas.
- Pray for God's Spirit to strengthen and protect new believers and empower them to be witnesses.

■ 8 Kalabaz in India

The Kalabaz historically worked as acrobats and were once a migrant community but are now settled and extremely poor. Many women undergo sterilization due to hardship. They worship several Hindu deities and have very low literacy, making the gospel difficult to understand without oral teaching.

At that time Jesus declared, I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Matthew 11:25

- Pray for this people group to humble themselves and come to trust in Christ as little children.
- Ask God to help this poor, low caste people group escape the stigma of their inherited low status by sending workers to not only teach them about Jesus, but also teach job skills, reading and writing, and to disciple them.
- Ask God to open Kalabaz hearts and grant them a deep understanding so they can receive the saving knowledge of His son, Jesus Christ through faith.

■ 9 Kaledupa Wakatobi in Indonesia

Kaledupa Wakatobis live on remote islands with fertile volcanic soil, allowing good harvests. Many also fish or build boats. Limited local employment pushes youth to migrate elsewhere. Families encourage education, and newly married couples live with the bride's family. Their isolation makes gospel access difficult.

Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Matthew 13:8

- Pray that today's people group will become fertile soil and produce much fruit for God and His kingdom.
- Ask God to send workers to the Kaledupa Wakatobi.
- Pray that tribal leaders will become interested in hearing about Jesus.
- Pray for efforts to translate the Bible into the Tukangbesi language for the benefit of Kaledupa Wakatobis' current and future generations.
- Pray that the Lord raises up a growing, biblical church among Kaledupa Wakatobis.

■ 10 Jakun in Malaysia

Jakuns are one of Malaysia's oldest peoples, traditionally living by hunting, gathering, and bartering. Many now are farmers. They have intermarried widely, blurring tribal lines. Their witchdoctor holds great spiritual influence. As communities transition toward agriculture, they need support, yet very few Christians are present to help or share the gospel.

'Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. Matthew 22:9-10

- Pray for many in today's people group to accept the Lord's invitation to become part of His kingdom and join His great feast at the end of the age.
- Pray for the Jakun culture to be renewed and enhanced by a work of the Holy Spirit, shaped into a God-centered and God-honoring mold.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to move among Jakun family and community leaders to seek His face and enjoy His blessings.
- Pray that soon Jakuns will have faith that will lead them to live honorable lives that will draw others to the Savior.

■ 11 Northeast Pashayi in Afghanistan

Northeast Pashayis are a fiercely honor driven people who value masculinity, loyalty, and vengeance. Feuds are common, and every man carries a weapon. Living in an area with virtually no Christians, they practice a harsh form of Islam and have no concept of a loving God, leaving them spiritually impoverished.

His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' Matthew 25:21

- Pray that many in this people group become good and faithful servants of the Master and celebrate with Him in the coming kingdom.
- Pray for God to intervene in miraculous ways, perhaps through dreams and visions of the victorious, risen Christ.
- Pray that Pashayis will have a spiritual hunger that will open their hearts to the King of kings.
- Pray Northeast Pashayi disciples will make more disciples in Afghanistan.

■ 12 Bungku in Indonesia

Bungkus, once isolated in inland areas, are now more connected due to new roads. Their society was traditionally class based, and they need training to manage coconut, resin, and rattan resources. Medical care is scarce. Though Muslim, they retain animistic beliefs, practicing rituals to appease spirits. Scripture is not yet available in their language.

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.' Mark 1:14-15

- Pray that this people group will get the opportunity to hear a clear presentation of the good news.
- Pray for the completion of the Bible translation that has begun in the Bungku language.
- Ask Jesus to appear in dreams and visions to family and village leaders, showing them that He is more than a great prophet.
- Ask God to send gospel workers to Bungkus to make disciples and help meet their needs regarding infrastructure, agriculture, training, and medical care.
- Pray for a movement to Christ among Bungkus that will bless them in every way.

■ 13 Hindu Pasi in India

Pasis trace their origins to a heroic legend but still suffer “untouchable” status across many Indian states. Known for producing the alcoholic drink, toddy, they face social stigma from both Hindus and Muslims. Spread across several languages and regions, they require multiple church planting efforts. Most have little exposure to the gospel.

And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, ‘If you will, you can make me clean.’ Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, ‘I will; be clean.’ Mark 1:40–41

- Pray for this people group to feel the healing touch of Christ and be cleansed from their sins.
- Pray that the Pasi community will see their spiritual need to know and follow the creator God.
- Pray against spiritual forces of darkness that oppose the spread of His gospel.
- Pray for the followers of Christ who will soon emerge within the Pasi community, and that the Lord will provide them with pastors and teachers.
- Pray for new Pasi believers to become well-grounded in the faith, fully trusting in Christ.

■ 14 Pinjara in South Asia

Pinjaras, traditionally cotton cleaners and weavers, hold higher status than “unclean” castes. Though Muslim, many also participate in Hindu festivals and vows, blending belief systems. Despite access to Urdu resources, very little ministry focuses on them. Their syncretism and limited outreach leave them largely unreached by the gospel.

And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, ‘Peace! Be still!’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Mark 4:39

- Pray that the Lord brings His peace that passes all understanding into the hearts of this people group.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to stir a hunger for God in the hearts of Pinjaras in India.
- Pray for a spiritual hunger that will lead them into a movement to Christ.
- Pray for the Lord to move in the hearts of believers to sacrifice their lives to see Pinjaras blessed through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the only Savior.
- Pray that Pinjaras will be woven into God’s family through the work of Jesus Christ.

■ 15 San Chay in China

San Chays live in rural areas of Vietnam and China, maintaining strict moral codes and distinct customs. Spirit worship dominates their worldview, with each subgroup honoring different spirits. Nearly untouched by Christian witness, they live in regions long shaped by communism, leaving Christ virtually unknown among them.

And he did not permit him but said to him, ‘Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.’ Mark 5:19

- Pray for those who have been blessed among today’s people group to boldly and lovingly tell others of God’s abundant mercy.
- Pray for San Chays to submit to Jesus, so they can experience the abundant life He offers in John 10:10.
- Pray for the Lord to intervene in their families, calling people to His side.
- Pray for loving, bold workers.
- Pray for their hearts to be drawn to the Lord of lords.
- Pray for a thriving church planting movement in their communities.

■ 16 Kyerung in Nepal

Kyerungs are ethnic Tibetans in Nepal who speak their own distinct language. Historically practicing polyandry, they now mainly show openness to many beliefs, reflected in their greeting. This broad acceptance leaves them spiritually unanchored, without clear understanding of truth or exposure to the gospel.

And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’ Mark 7:37

- Pray that this people group comes to understand that the wisdom, power, and goodness of God are found only in Jesus Christ.
- Ask God to raise up Kyerungs who are more desirous to know the truth than to stay on the broad road they have been given.
- Pray that their spiritual openness will give them the willingness to hear the gospel with their hearts.
- Ask God to send loving, committed workers to the Kyerung soon.
- Pray Kyerungs will no longer be hidden away from the influence of Christ.

■ 17 Khalpa in India

Khalpas of Gujarat once skinned cattle and labored but they now work in farming, livestock, and musical-instrument repair. Each clan honors its own deity. With very few Christians in the region, Khalpas have little exposure to the gospel and will only hear it from outside workers.

And he asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Christ.' Mark 8:29

- Pray that this people will believe and proclaim, like Peter, that Jesus Christ is their Savior and Lord.
- Pray for the Lord to raise up Khalpas who crave truth and righteousness enough to embrace Christ no matter what the cost.
- Pray for hundreds to be discipled in Christ's ways and to teach others.
- Pray that soon they will be praising God with beautiful music that will inspire others.

■ 18 Upper Ta Oi in Vietnam and Laos

The Upper Ta Oi have a strong village life centered around large meeting houses decorated with animal symbols. Music and communal traditions shape daily life. Their economic improvements come from farming and fishponds. Their tight community identity makes them hesitant to consider spiritual change or the gospel.

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? Mark 8:36–37

- Pray for today's people group to come to realize that all the spiritual riches of life and true wisdom are found in Jesus Christ alone.
- Pray for Upper Ta Oi decision-makers to open their communities to Christ's ambassadors.
- Pray that a family-based movement to Christ will soon transform Upper Ta Oi society.
- Pray for the Lord to move in the hearts of believers to sacrifice their lives to see Upper Ta Ois blessed by the work of Jesus Christ, the only Savior.



■ 19 Matpa in Bhutan

Matpas practice Tibetan Buddhism with dramatic festivals and demon-mask dances celebrating Padmasambhava. Bhutan's Buddhist identity remains strong, and Christianity is seen as foreign or threatening. Although migrants introduced the faith recently, most Matpas have no gospel access and few, if any, Christian resources in their language.

For he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise.' Mark 9:31

- Pray that today's people group will soon comprehend that Jesus died for their sins and rose again demonstrating His power over sin and death.
- Please pray for all the people groups of Bhutan, that the Lord will send the knowledge of the truth about His son, Jesus, to them with great power.
- Pray for long-term workers who will produce gospel materials in their language.
- Pray for the gospel to be contextualized so that it will not be seen as foreign.

■ 20 Hindu Rajaka Dhobi in India

Rajaka Dhobis wash and iron clothes in a family trade passed down through generations. Washing machines threaten their livelihood. With few Christians nearby, most Dhobi only know Hinduism (or Islam) and have little chance to see true Christianity lived out or hear the gospel message.

But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.' Mark 10:14–15

- Pray that this people group humbles themselves and comes to God with child-like trust and thereby enter into His kingdom.
- Pray that Rajaka Dhobis will hear the gospel and discover that Jesus Christ can wash away their sins.
- Pray that the Holy Spirit will give Rajaka Dhobis such spiritual hunger that they will not be satisfied until they taste and see that the Lord is good.
- Pray that believers will tactfully and lovingly share gospel recordings and play Christian radio broadcasts for them.
- Pray for God to raise up Rajaka Dhobi Christians who will disciple others.

■ 21 Hindu Rajput in India

Rajputs honor their heritage of military bravery and noble lineage. Many now pursue education and professional careers. Their fear of Christianity disrupting family and tradition keeps them resistant to the gospel. They need humility to recognize their spiritual need despite their honored social status.

And Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' And the blind man said to him, 'Rabbi, let me recover my sight.' Mark 10:51

- Pray for the Lord to heal the spiritual blindness of today's people group.
- Pray that these people see and recognize Jesus for who He truly is, the Light and Savior of the world.
- Pray that a strong movement to Jesus will bring whole Rajput families and communities into a rich experience of God's blessings.
- Pray for the Rajput community to increasingly grow in awareness of Jesus and their need for Him.
- Pray the Lord will give Rajputs a spiritual hunger that He alone will satisfy.
- Pray that Rajputs will see the value of becoming part of God's royal family.
- Pray for a Holy Spirit-led humility for all Rajput communities to fall at the feet of the King of kings.

■ 22 Gane in Indonesia

Ganes are known for exceptional hospitality and once thrived on natural harvests before palm oil plantations replaced traditional crops. Though Muslim, they retain animistic practices alongside Islam. None have come to Christ. Their worldview remains unchallenged without a gospel witnesses.

Jesus said to them, 'Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?' Mark 12:24

- Pray that this people group will hunger for and learn the Scriptures.
- Pray that these people begin to experience the miraculous power of God.
- Pray for loving and anointed workers to go to the Ganes.
- Ask the Lord to spiritually awaken Gane elders through dreams and visions of the risen Christ.
- Pray for the Lord to intervene economically, demonstrating His power and love.

■ 23 Korama in India

Koramas work in basket-weaving, bamboo crafts, tattooing, fortune-telling, and wage labor, with growing numbers in professional jobs. Low literacy means the gospel must come through oral and visual forms. Living across Karnataka, many Koramas still lack meaningful exposure to Christ.

And he said to them, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.' Luke 10:2

- Pray for an abundance of Holy Spirit-led workers to disciple this people group.
- Pray that Indian believers will help lead Koramas into a church planting movement.
- Pray for spiritual openness that will lead many to put their faith in Christ.
- Pray for an interest in literacy and classes taught by Christ followers.

■ 24 Lao Lom in Thailand

Lao Loms, recognized as a distinct people since 2001, share cultural heritage across several regions. They maintain memories of traditional dress and complex spiritual beliefs. Fear of offending spirits drives ritual offerings, preventing them from considering Christ's authority.

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures ... Luke 24:45

- Pray that the minds of this people group will be opened to understand God's word by the Spirit Himself.
- Pray for the authority of Christ to bind hindering spiritual forces to lead them from darkness to light.
- Pray for signs and wonders among them, as well as for great breakthroughs with a rapid multiplication of disciples and house churches.
- Pray for God to send language workers so that the Lao Lom may hear and believe in Christ's saving power.



■ 25 Sikule in Indonesia

Sikules of Simeulue Island are known for Nandong singing and debus, a martial art claiming supernatural protection. Foreign surfers bring tourism but little gospel influence. Sikules still lack a Christian presence.

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:5

- Pray for the Lord to help today's people group to understand that apart from Him they can do nothing of spiritual and eternal value.
- Pray for the Lord to send out Christ's ambassadors to the Sikule community.
- Pray for visitors to take the JESUS Film and gospel recordings to the people of Simeulue Island.
- Pray for Sikules to have the spiritual hunger it takes to seek and find the only Savior.
- Pray that soon Sikule disciples will make more disciples.

■ 26 Thami in India

Thamis are hardworking but often exploited. Some hide their identity to avoid discrimination. Most struggle as farmers or stone workers, with many seeking work elsewhere. Their beliefs mix ethnic religion, shamanism, and Hindu rituals. A small number of believers exist, but not enough to reach the whole group.

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' John 1:29

- Pray that today's people group looks to the Lamb of God, Jesus, to have their sins taken away.
- Pray that the Lord will send Christians to Thamis who will share the gospel.
- Pray the Lord will soften the hearts of Thamis to the gospel.
- Pray that the Lord will encourage Christians among Thamis and will give them courage and wisdom to make disciples.

■ 27 Muslim Rajput in India and Pakistan

Muslim Rajputs value high status and contribute to agriculture, crafts, and local business. Women engage in weaving and embroidery. Though Sunni Muslim, they retain many Hindu cultural elements. Pride and social identity hinder them from seeing their need for the only one who can save them for eternity.

Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.' John 3:3

- Pray that many in this people group are born again and enter the Kingdom of God.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to supernaturally reveal Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life among the Muslim Rajput group.
- Ask God to open their eyes, hearts, and ears to the good news of the Savior.
- Pray for the Lord to raise up the right people to disciple Muslim Rajputs in His ways.
- Ask for an intervention of the Holy Spirit in each of their families.

■ 28 Sayyid in South Asia

Sayyids, tracing their lineage to Mohammad, hold high status as religious leaders and scholars across South Asia. Their identity is deeply tied to Islamic authority, making conversion costly. Following Christ will mean surrendering influence, respect, and ancestral prestige which are significant barriers to gospel openness.

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. John 4:23

- Pray that this people group soon begins to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.
- Pray for the Lord to raise up bold leaders, like modern-day Apostle Pauls, from within the Sayyid community.
- Ask that whole families and clans will encounter Christ together, finding the courage to follow Him without losing social contacts they deeply value.
- Pray for a movement in which Sayyid households embrace Jesus as Lord, transforming their respected role in society into a channel for truth, peace, and blessing.

■ 29 Baha Buyang in China

Baha Buyangs grow rice and hunt geckos for traditional medicine. They practice elaborate ancestor worship, offering food and burning paper money to help ancestors prosper in the afterlife. Their distinct language and spiritual bondage leave them with almost no knowledge of Jesus or the gospel.

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life. John 5:24

- Pray that today's people group listens to God's message and believes in the good news of their salvation.
- Ask God to send bold workers, driven by the Holy Spirit, to go to them.
- Pray for an unstoppable movement to Christ among the Baha Buyang.
- Pray for the authority of Christ to bind hindering spirits and lead them from darkness to light.
- Pray for signs and wonders, leading to the multiplication of disciples and house churches.

■ 30 Kapariya in India

Kapariyas work as farmers, basket makers, used clothing traders, and some seek alms. They worship family and village deities. They rely on their own sacred specialists for rituals. Living in spiritually dark northern India, they have little access to Christians or gospel witness.

Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.' John 6:35

- Pray that this people group hungers for God and begins to feed spiritually on the Bread of life, Jesus.
- Ask the Lord to raise up and send out a new generation of fruitful, multiplying witnesses from among the Kapariya.
- Ask God to deliver families and communities from fears that hinder them from embracing His blessings.
- Pray for movements to Jesus to sweep through Kapariya families, permeating the group from within.
- Pray the Kapariya will see God's love shown to them by genuine Christ followers.
- Pray for Christians to live victorious, abundant lives, leading to spiritual discussions with their neighbors.



OCTOBER

■ 1 Western Punjabi in Pakistan and India

Western Punjabi refers to speakers of one of the major Punjabi dialects found across Pakistan and India. Deeply tied to land, family, and honor, disputes often revolve around these areas. Islam dominates their worldview. Anyone exploring other spiritual paths faces intense persecution, leaving almost no gospel access.

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' John 7:37-38

- Pray for this people group to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit and the overflowing, gracious love of God.
- Pray for Western Punjabi speakers to have hearts that are open to the abundant blessings of Jesus Christ.
- Pray for their families to prosper financially and spiritually as they experience a relationship with Jesus.
- Pray for a movement to Christ among Western Punjabis that will spread salvation, joy, and peace.

■ 2 Tougourt Berber in Algeria

Tougourt Berbers live around Saharan oases and excel in crafts—women in weaving and pottery, men in woodworking and metalwork. Their society is organized by tribe and district. Berbers often question Islam more freely than Arabs. Some neighboring Berber groups already have Christ followers, offering potential bridges to the Tougourt.

And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him. John 8:29

- Pray for today's people group to begin to please God by trusting in and obeying His son.
- Pray for Tougourt Berbers to put their faith and hope in Christ, paving the way for a community-wide movement to Christ.
- Pray for a spiritual hunger among Tougourt Berbers that will lead them to the cross and the empty grave.
- Pray for workers to go to Tougourts and find persons of peace.



3 Toli-Toli in Indonesia

Toli-Tolis fish along the coasts and farm rice, spices, and cocoa inland. International trade and development may bring new opportunities. Almost all identify with Islam and have little exposure to Christ. With few believers nearby, the gospel has difficulty entering this community.

Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.' John 8:58

- Pray for this people group to understand that Jesus is not just another human prophet but is the eternal God.
- Pray for Christ followers in other parts of Sulawesi to be bearers of the gospel to the Toli-Toli community.
- Pray for a spiritual hunger that will lead them to the King of kings.
- Pray for the Lord to send out loving workers to the Toli-Toli.
- Pray for Toli-Toli disciples who will not rest until they make more disciples.

4 Shaikh in Bangladesh

Shaikh is a major Muslim community descending from Arab, Persian, and Turkic settlers. Deep pride in heritage and strong social unity make Christianity appear disruptive. "Conversion" is often viewed as betrayal of family and community identity, creating high resistance to the gospel.

He answered, 'Whether he is a sinner I do not know. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' John 9:25

- Pray that the Lord removes the spiritual blindness of today's people group and that they will begin to see God's truth revealed in Jesus Christ.
- Pray for Shaikh households to hear God's word and respond with open hearts.
- Ask for protection and strength for new believers.
- Pray for many laborers to plant the seeds of faith so that households and extended families experience the blessings of the gospel.

5 Qureshi Shaikh in South Asia

Qureshi Shaikhs trace their lineage to early Islamic nobility, reinforcing strong religious pride. Some high-caste Hindus adopted the Shaikh title after converting to Islam centuries ago. Pride in status makes accepting the help of a Savior difficult. Though there has been ministry among Shaikhs, many still resist Christ.

'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.' Acts 1:8

- Pray that today's people group will receive God's Spirit and become empowered to tell others about the grace of God in Jesus Christ.
- Ask the Lord to open the hearts of Qureshi Shaikhs so they will receive the good news.
- Pray for a movement to Christ that will bless Qureshi Shaikhs.
- Pray for the Lord to send workers to the Qureshi Shaikhs to tell them about Jesus (Isa).
- Pray for dreams and visions to lead them to the cross.

6 Bhurtia in India

Bhurtias traditionally graze buffalo and maintain multiple deities and sacred specialists. Child marriage and bride-price practices remain common. Based mainly in Madhya Pradesh, they face legal restrictions on conversion, making gospel outreach difficult.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Acts 2:4

- Pray for this people group to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to proclaim the greatness of God.
- Pray their hearts will be prepared as the gospel comes to them.
- Pray that the Bhurtia will have many opportunities to hear the good news of Christ in ways they understand.
- Pray for Bhurtia disciples to make many more disciples.

■ 7 Bhadela in India

Bhadelas are Muslim fishermen with seventeen clans. Marriage practices include cousin marriage and widow remarriage within the family. Though Sunni Muslim, they honor sea-related saints and local shrines. Few have encountered the gospel.

You have made known to me the paths of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’ Acts 2:28

- Pray the Lord makes known to today’s people group the true path of life.
- Pray they learn to rejoice in God’s presence.
- Pray for safety as Bhadela fishermen ply their trade.
- Ask the Lord to bless them in such a way they cannot deny His powerful and loving hands are at work.
- Pray for God to reveal the only Savior to these Muslims through dreams and visions.
- Pray that Bhadela disciples will make more disciples soon.

■ 8 Adiyan in India

The Adiyan, once semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers, now live in remote villages and face discrimination and poverty. Their polytheistic beliefs include fear of unclean spirits. They have limited education and are largely overlooked by the wider church, leaving them with little gospel exposure.

And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Acts 3:9

- Pray for the Lord to do signs and wonders among today’s people group.
- Pray they trust in God and give Him the glory.
- Pray for a movement of Jesus to heal and strengthen Adiyan communities.
- Pray for Adiyans to understand and embrace that Jesus wants to bless their families and neighborhoods.
- Pray for Holy Spirit-anointed believers from the Adiyan to change their society from within.
- Pray for a movement in which the Holy Spirit leads and empowers disciples to make more disciples.

■ 9 Tripolita’it Yudi in Israel

Yudis, formerly Jews of Libya, now live entirely in Israel after decades of persecution. Known for education, hospitality, and business success, many identify culturally—but not spiritually—as Jewish. Most lack spiritual hunger and have limited knowledge of God’s word beyond the Old Testament.

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12

- Pray for today’s people group to come to understand that salvation is found only in Jesus Christ and in no other religion.
- Pray that Yudis will open their minds and hearts to the overwhelming power of God and His grace as found in Jesus.
- Pray that they will hear of the wonderful grace of Jesus through God’s servants and radio broadcasts.
- Pray for many Yudis to make disciples of others, who in turn make even more disciples.

■ 10 Hindu Dahur in India and Pakistan

Hindu Dahurs of Gujarat and Sindh maintain a distinct cultural identity rooted in ancient traditions. They farm, trade, and live in close-knit communities. Centuries of Hindu beliefs and limited gospel presence leave them with a deep chasm between themselves and the gospel.

But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.’ Acts 4:19–20

- Pray for this people group to listen to and to obey God.
- Pray that they tell others about His marvelous works.
- Pray for Hindu Dahurs to have their medical and educational needs met in such a way that they will give thanks to the Lord.
- Pray for Dahur disciples who will make more disciples.
- Pray for loving and dedicated workers.
- Pray for a spiritual hunger that will drive them to the cross and the empty grave.

11 Siddiqi Shaikh in India and Bangladesh

Siddiqi Shaikhs claim descent from Abu Bakr, giving them high religious status. Deeply orthodox and influential in Muslim communities, they see Christianity as betrayal of family and faith. Government scrutiny of Christian activity adds to the barriers.

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus. Acts 4:29–30

- Pray for boldness and love among the workers who go to today's people group.
- Ask the Lord to open the hearts of Siddiqi Shaikhs so they will receive the good news.
- Pray for a movement to Christ that will bless Siddiqi Shaikhs.
- Pray for the Lord to send workers to the Shaikhs to share the message of Jesus (Isa).
- Pray for greater outreach penetration and trained workers.
- Pray against ostracism, harassment, and violence for new converts.

12 Hindu Sonar in India

Sonars are goldsmiths whose craftsmanship is central to Hindu weddings and dowries. Many now seek education and higher social rank. Their pride in caste and status makes humility before Christ difficult and conversion socially costly.

Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. Acts 5:41

- Pray that believers in this people group are willing to endure persecution for the name of Christ.
- Pray for Sonars to recognize their need for forgiveness and to find it in Christ.
- Ask for the gospel to reach their families and for believers among them to remain steadfast.
- Pray that their communities will see the true value of salvation, far greater than gold.

13 Yerong in China

The Yerong, a small animistic group within the Yao-Mein cluster, are rapidly shrinking due to intermarriage. Their isolation makes outreach difficult, and few have heard the gospel. Evangelism from nearby minorities or Han churches offers the best hope for reaching them.

So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' Acts 8:30

- Pray that the Lord gives today's people group a desire to hear and to understand God's words.
- Pray for the Lord to intervene in the lives of Yerong families, calling them to his side.
- Pray for loving, Holy Spirit-led workers to go to the Yerong.
- Pray for the Lord to send dreams and visions to Yerong elders.
- Pray for a church planting movement to thrive in their communities.

14 Gaaliin in Sudan

Gaaliins are known for facial scarification signifying pride and beauty. They form tightly knit communities and are now prominent in Sudan's merchant class. As strong Sunni Muslims, they show little openness towards faith in the blood of Jesus.

Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had occurred, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord. Acts 13:12

- Pray for many from this people group to be amazed at what Christ can do to bless their families and communities.
- Ask the Lord to soften the hearts of the Gaaliin so that they will be receptive to the gospel.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to grant wisdom and favor to Christ followers focusing on Gaaliins.
- Pray for Gaaliin elders to have dreams of the Savior that will open their hearts to Him.
- Pray for Gaaliin disciples to make more disciples.

■ 15 Kedah Malay in Thailand

Kedah Malays live at a cultural crossroads between Thai Buddhism and Malay Islam. Their identity is deeply tied to religion, making conversion threatening. Arabic influence and historic ties shape their dialect and worldview.

For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.' Acts 13:47

- Pray that the believers in today's people group become God's light to their own group and to the nations of the world.
- Pray for Kedah Malays to have the courage to identify themselves with Jesus Christ.
- Pray for the Lord to send dreams and visions to Kedah Malay leaders, who will lead their people to seek and find Jesus Christ.
- Pray for spiritual openness among the Kedah Malay.
- Pray for a flourishing Kedah Malay church defined by the gospel of salvation with discipleship, and obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

■ 16 Wutun in China

Wutuns descend from Tibetan soldiers who intermarried with local tribes. Though ethnically mixed, they retain Tibetan family names and practice Tibetan Buddhism intensely. Their ethnic identity is inseparable from their religion, making them resistant to the gospel.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Acts 16:9

- Pray that the Lord sends messengers to this people group to tell them the good news about Jesus.
- Pray for the spiritual blindness and bondage to the evil one to be removed so they can understand and respond to Christ.
- Pray for the Lord to provide for their physical and spiritual needs as a testimony of His power and love.
- Pray that Wutuns will have a spiritual hunger that will open their hearts to the King of kings.
- Pray for an unstoppable movement to Christ among them.

■ 17 Figig Berber in Algeria

Figigs are one of many Berber tribes maintaining their own identity amid dominant Arabic culture. Bilingual in Berber and Arabic, they remain largely unreached with almost no known believers. Gospel access must come from other Berber or external language groups.

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. Acts 17:30–31

- Pray for today's people group to repent of their sins and to believe in the God of the Bible.
- Pray for Figig Berbers to put their faith and hope in Christ, paving the way for a movement to Christ.
- Pray for a spiritual hunger among Figig Berbers that will lead them to the cross and the empty grave.
- Pray for workers with the gospel of peace to go to Figigs and find people who will welcome them into their communities.

■ 18 Muslim Sylhet in Bangladesh and India

Sylhets combine Islamic and Hindu cultural elements, practicing social divisions despite Islam's denial of caste. They face strong pressure to remain within Islam and are taught early that the Bible is unreliable. Breaking into Sylheti communities requires persevering prayer and careful preparation.

So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. Acts 19:20

- Pray that the word of the Lord spreads and prevails in this people group.
- Pray for this people group to recognize their own spiritual bankruptcy and come to Christ for the riches of His forgiveness.
- Pray that there will soon be a thriving community of believers that will multiply into a movement to Christ.
- Pray for increased availability and understanding of Sylheti-language Scripture and gospel materials.
- Pray for missionaries and local Christians to be equipped and courageous in reaching this group.
- Pray that this people group will become quick to listen to the word of the Lord and respond with joyful faith.

19 Tajik in Tajikistan

Tajiks farm in mountainous terrain using terraced irrigation and raise various livestock. Poetry permeates their culture, including sung recitations of the Koran. Many equate Christianity with oppressive Russians.

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:24

- Pray today's people group will experience God's wonderful grace and begin to tell others about Him.
- Pray that Tajik and Russian believers will live such holy lives that others would desire to have the same spiritual riches found only in Christ.
- Pray that Tajiks will not judge Christianity as a "Russian religion," but see their own need for salvation and the forgiveness of their sins.
- Ask God to raise up dedicated long-term missionaries.
- Ask the Lord to raise up a movement to Christ among Tajiks soon.
- Pray that the Psalms and Gospels be put to Tajik music.

20 Pangutaran Sama in the Philippines

The Pangutaran Sama are artistic, known for traditional music, carved grave markers. They live in coastal settlements built on stilts. Kinship-based household groupings guide village structure. Tensions with Christians from other islands create suspicion, making gospel access challenging.

To open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. Acts 26:18

- Pray for God to send spiritual light and truth to this people group.
- Pray for the Holy Spirit to give Pangutaran Samas teachable and understanding hearts.
- Pray for their local leaders to hear from the living Lord.
- Pray for a movement of the Holy Spirit to bring entire Pangutaran Sama families into a rich experience of God's truth.
- Pray for Pangutaran Sama families to be drawn by the Holy Spirit to seek forgiveness and to understand the sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross.
- Pray for family-based Bible studies.



21 Yong in Thailand

Yongs, originally from Myanmar's Shan State, practice Buddhism mixed with animism and spirit worship. Their festivals involve sacrifices to land and ancestral spirits. They are content with traditions that lead them away from truth and need discernment to seek Christ.

Therefore, let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen. Acts 28:28

- Pray for this people group to hear and to accept the message of God's salvation.
- Please pray for Yongs to be completely freed from superstition and the worship of gods that cannot help them.
- Pray for the availability of high-quality schools for children, and that people will recognize the importance of education.

22 Lubu in Indonesia

Once living in treehouses, Lubus are still tribal and isolated. They adopt Batak music but never dance. Although officially Muslim, they retain animistic beliefs tied to spirits causing sickness. Their remoteness has left them nearly untouched by missionary work.

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God and take every thought captive to obey Christ. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to give new believers among today's people group victory over their spiritual battles.
- Pray for peace and goodwill between Lubus and Bataks, so that their Christian neighbors can extend outreach to them.
- Pray for the Lord to provide an abundant harvest this season as a testimony of His lovingkindness and power.

■ 23 Sindang Kelingi in Indonesia

Sindang Kelingis farm rubber, rice, and coffee in jungle-covered regions of southern Sumatra. Some use oxen while wealthier farmers use tractors. With no known believers nearby, they have no alternative to Islam and virtually no exposure to the gospel.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places ... Ephesians 1:3

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to give His spiritual blessings to this people group.
- Pray for an abundant harvest for Sindang Kelingis as a testimony of God's loving kindness and His care for their needs.
- Pray for the Lord to thrust out dedicated workers to Sindang Kelingis.
- Pray for the people to hunger for truth and righteousness that will lead them to the cross and the empty grave.
- Pray for a movement to Christ among the Sindang Kelingi.

■ 24 Shin in Pakistan

Shins grow grain on terraced fields. They also herd goats and cattle with seasonal migrations. Historically converted by Muslim missionaries, they remain isolated in mountain regions. Spiritual change is possible but requires great sacrifice and dedicated outreach.

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints. Ephesians 1:17–18

- Pray for spiritual wisdom and light for the leaders of today's people group.
- Pray for loving Christians, with a heart for the lost, to go into the Shin community.
- Pray for a Holy Spirit-driven spiritual hunger among Shins that will only be satisfied by knowing, accepting, and following Jesus Christ.
- Pray for a family-based movement to Christ among Shins of Pakistan.

■ 25 Tamil Muslims in India

Tamil Muslims work in business, industry, and crafts, with ancestry from Arab traders who married Tamil women. To follow Christ risks severe social loss—family, status, and community. Few have meaningful gospel contact, even though there are thousands of vibrant Christians who speak Tamil.

That according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love ... Ephesians 3:16–17

- Make this your prayer for today's people group.
- Pray for spiritual hunger and discernment that will draw Tamil Muslims into the Kingdom of God no matter what the social and economic cost.
- Pray for Tamil Muslims to live in peace with their neighbors and be able to care for their families.
- Pray for employment opportunities.
- Pray for Holy Spirit-directed outreach by Tamil speaking Christ followers.

■ 26 Hindu Tanti in South Asia

Tantis are traditional weavers whose craft has been displaced by mass production. Many now survive on low-income labor with limited access to clean water or steady food. Few Christians live near them, leaving most without opportunity to hear the gospel despite Bengali resources.

That he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:26–27

- Pray for an emerging, spotless and pure church among this people group.
- Pray for Tantis to have safe, reliable access to clean water.
- Ask God to stir a deep spiritual hunger in the hearts of their leaders, opening this Hindu community to the gospel.
- Pray for Tanti believers to be raised up who will make disciples among their own people, and faithful workers who will serve them with humility and love.
- Pray that Bengali gospel resources will find their way to them and that their hearts will be ready to respond since the Tanti speak Bengali.

27 Pumi in China

Pumis celebrate festivals honoring the kitchen god and practice adult rites at age thirteen. Death rituals involve a shaman and the belief that a sheep guides the soul. With no organized church, visitors report Pumis are spiritually open and ready for the gospel.

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Ephesians 6:11

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to give His armor to the believers among today's people group.
- Ask God to send workers to share the good news of Christ with Pumis.
- Pray that God will remove their fears and fill them with the peace of Jesus.
- Ask God to give them a great spiritual hunger as they hear the gospel.

28 Matia in India and Bangladesh

Matia is a tribal farming community. They are divided into clans and lineages that regulate marriage, often preferring first cousins. Pre-literate and with low schooling, they follow village deities and local festivals. With few workers, the gospel must come in oral storytelling form.

...filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:11

- Pray for righteous character for those who find the Lord among this people group.
- Pray for the Lord to send workers who know how to tell stories from scripture.
- Pray for the youth to have better access to education and for parents to prioritize their children's schooling.
- Pray for rising literacy rates, improved medical care, and a higher standard of living for this community.

29 Gowari in India

Gowaris are low-status tribal herders now working mainly as agricultural laborers. Poverty, little education, and social marginalization leave them vulnerable and spiritually overlooked. Their folk-Hindu practices and lack of exposure to Christians keep them unaware of the gospel.

Being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy... Colossians 1:11-12

- May new believers among this people group walk in joy and love in the Holy Spirit.
- Pray for a spiritual hunger that will give Gowaris a desire to investigate the claims of Jesus Christ.
- Pray for a movement to Christ that will bless them.
- Pray for the Lord to send out workers to the Gowari and tell them the good news of Jesus Christ.
- Pray for the Lord to provide them with a record-high harvest as a testimony of His goodness and power.

30 Alxa Mongol in China

Alxa Mongols are unique among Mongols for practicing Islam. Their identity is tied to camel herding, especially the Bactrian camel. High infant mortality historically shaped cultural practices. Deeply Islamic and socially isolated, they are among China's hardest groups to reach.

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Colossians 4:5-6

- Pray for new believers in this people group to have Holy Spirit-led words to share with their elders as they explain their new faith.
- Pray for the spiritual blindness and bondage to the evil one to be removed so they can understand and respond to Christ.
- Pray for the Lord to provide for their physical and spiritual needs as a testimony of His power and love.
- Pray that Alxa Mongols will have a spiritual hunger that will open their hearts to the King of kings.

31 Dar Daju in Chad and Sudan

Dar Dajus are subsistence farmers with a low literacy rate. Women speak Daju while men often speak a related dialect. Islamic identity dominates, and leaving Islam brings severe community shame. With no Christian presence, they remain spiritually isolated.

So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thessalonians 1:12

- Pray this blessing for today's people group.
- Pray that Dar Dajus will have a spiritual hunger and open their hearts to receive the King of kings.
- Pray for the Lord to send workers who will faithfully and boldly declare the gospel to Dar Dajus.

50 FRONTIER VENTURES

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THE LEAST REACHED EXPERIENCING



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