

# A **THIRD** OF US

What It Takes To Reach The Unreached



**Marvin J. Newell**

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*A Third of Us: What It Takes to Reach the Unreached*

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# CHAPTER 1

## ***Who Are “A Third of Us”?***

*“A third of anything is significant.”*

—Marvin J. Newell

## A THIRD OF US

**F**orty-two-year-old Mrs. Taufik is the mother of two teenagers, and one wife of her husband's two. He splits his time between his younger wife in the coastal city of Padang, on the west coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, but less and less time with her in the mountainous interior town of Bukittinggi ("High Mountain").

As an ethnic Minangkabau, Mrs. Taufik is a staunch Muslim, along with 99.72 percent of her people. The Minangkabau people have a saying: "To be Minangkabau is to be Muslim." Scanning every direction from her home she can see dozens of mosques that, at 5:00 a.m. every morning, vie for her attention with loud calls from their minarets by piercing the dawn, declaring that God is Great. That masculine blare gets her up each morning for the first of five prayers that she will offer to Allah throughout the day.

Life is rather monotonous for Mrs. Taufik, but with her husband seldom present she wraps her life around the needs of her growing children. Thankfully, her husband sends her enough rupiah each month (although he often misses a month) to meet her minimal needs, though she can barely squeak by. To make up for the lack, she harvests the kangkong (spinach-like plants) that grows in abundance in the ditch running behind her small house. She cuts some each morning and takes it to the market to sell at her twelve-feet by twelve-feet wooden stall. With the meager profit, she purchases fresh foods at the market before heading home at noon.

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After the village-wide two-hour siesta, she spends the rest of the afternoon caring for her two daughters, and then makes certain that the three of them are at the mosque by seven o'clock for final prayers.

Once home, she goes to bed, only to start the same routine the following day. Only Friday, the day of corporate worship at the mosque, is different.

As an unreached person, Mrs. Taufik has no opportunity to access three life-giving essentials so common to us who know Jesus as Savior and Lord. Although portions of the Bible have been translated into her language, she is not aware of that, and there is no one in the vicinity to tell her. She lives in an area where there are no churches—all she sees around her are myriads of mosques. Finally, there are no Jesus-followers for her to meet, even if she had reason to do so.

Mrs. Taufik lives in what those in mission circles call an unreached “frontier people group”—living out her existence on the frontier beyond gospel awareness, together with the estimated 6,815,000 other members of her “people group.”

## The Unfinished Task

Ever since the Day of Pentecost, devoted followers of Christ have avidly taken the good news of Jesus across continents, countries, and cultures. Yet after two thousand years, the reaching of all peoples, like the Minangkabau of Sumatra, with this good news is still incomplete. This is true even though no other effort in the history of humankind compares in scope and expenditure to this undertaking. Literally hundreds of thousands of message-bearers have been sent, billions of dollars have been expended, and innumerable prayers have been offered on behalf of the quest to give every human being an opportunity to hear the gospel.

Over the centuries, dozens of vibrant regional sending centers have sent out message-bearers, and they continue to do so. Although the propagation of the gospel has continued unbroken and unabated for centuries, the task remains unfinished.

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

This is not to say that believers have ignored the spiritual plight of the lost. Throughout history, message-bearers have been sent to many places and peoples to proclaim the good news. Some have had remarkable and distinguished ministries. Others, comprising the vast majority of those who have gone out, have served quietly and inconspicuously. Most have given up much, through self-denial, only to see little response. Nevertheless, this much can be said of all: They served in the past and are serving in the present in obedience to the call of God on their lives to reach the unreached.

# A THIRD OF US

Even with all these efforts, the task remains unfinished for the third who have yet to be exposed to the good news of salvation. So who and where is this remaining third of us?

## The Three “Nos”

**Unreached people have little or no significant contact with three life-giving essentials that are common to followers of Christ. These essentials can be summed up as “the three nos”: no Bible, no church, and no known believers.**

Although remarkable progress has been made on some fronts, the fact remains that a third of humanity has no contact with the gospel and remains unreached. What exactly is meant by this term unreached? Put simply, the term refers to large swaths of humanity who have no access to the gospel. Unreached people have little or no significant contact with

three life-giving essentials that are common to followers of Christ. These essentials can be summed up as “the three nos”: no Bible,<sup>4</sup> no church, and no known believers.<sup>5</sup>

The designation, or description, of these three nos is not new. Frank Severn, the former executive director of SEND International, mentioned them in an article he wrote in 1997 when he stated, “It would be good if every church would focus some of its mission resources on a people group ‘which has no church, no Bible, and no believers.’”<sup>6</sup> More recently, Rick Warren, in the context of the Finishing the Task movement, has popularized “the three nos” correspondingly as “the three Bs.” He frequently refers to unreached people groups as having “No Believers, No Bible, and No Body of Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

4 Thanks to the untiring efforts of Bible translators over recent years, portions of the Bible, if not the entire Bible, have been translated into many of the languages of these unreached groups. But the awareness and distribution of these Scriptures is woefully wanting. The majority of people within these groups don’t know that a Bible translation exists; or if they do know, they don’t care.

5 Some people groups have such a minuscule number of believers that it is as if there were none at all. The category of “no known believers” technically refers to people groups in which less than 2 percent of the population are believers, but in most cases it is even less. Most of these people groups have zero believers. A close approximation of “no known believers” are “frontier people groups” on Joshua Project lists: <https://joshuaproject.net/frontier>.

6 Frank Severn, “Some Thoughts on the Meaning of All Nations,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1997).

7 See the Finishing the Task website: [finishingthetask.com](http://finishingthetask.com).

## *Who Are “A Third of Us”?*

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

Secondly, imagine having no access to the Bible. Without the availability of Scripture, God’s written revelation intended for all of humankind would not be obtainable. God’s prescribed way for living would be absent. God’s moral standards would be ignorantly violated. God’s message of hope would not be known. God’s requirement of belief and repentance could not be read. Worst of all, the story of the Savior Jesus could not be understood and appreciated.

Lastly, imagine if there were no church. This doesn’t necessarily refer to a church building, but more importantly to a body of Christ-followers who display communion with Jesus and each other. Without a community of Christ-followers, there would be no gathering together with others of like precious faith for encouragement. There would be no fellowship with like-minded believers, bringing health to the soul and strength to godly commitment. For lack of social interaction, there would be no possibility of being built up in the faith. There would be no disciple-making. This would be a place of lonely, spiritual barrenness. There would be no ability to start and sustain a movement for Christ.

These three together is what is meant by having no access to the gospel. No believers. No Bible. No church. And this is indeed the current plight of over a third of humanity—*A Third of Us*.

## **Where Are the Nos?**

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

### **Imbedded in Unreached People Groups**

Those of us who live in modern globalized, urbanized, and high-tech nations often miss or ignore the fact that smaller “nations,” known as

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