

POSTINGS

articles for missions mobilizers



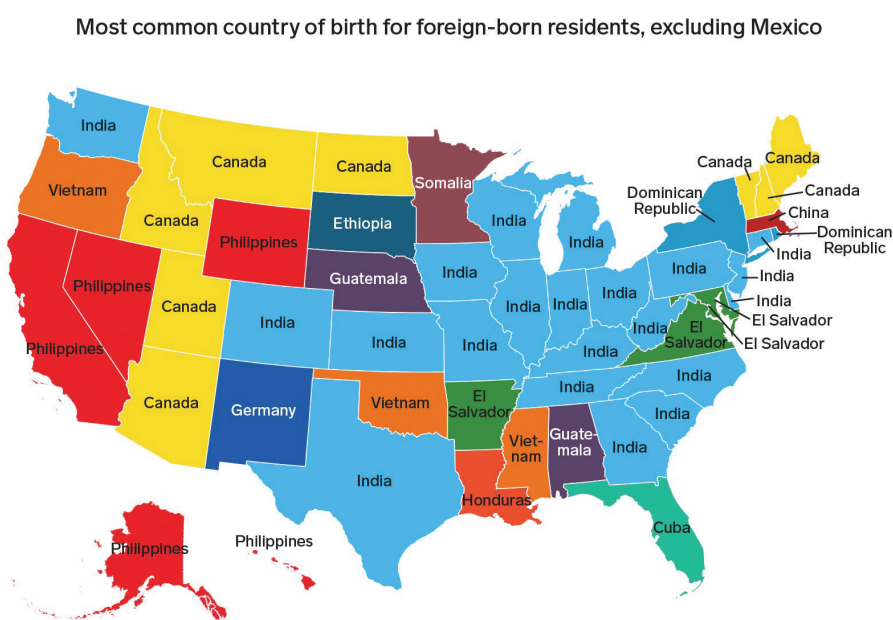
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Hindus

**Has God put an
unreached people
group literally
next door?**

While a number of churches are intentionally reaching out to Muslim immigrants, many have failed to recognize another huge, unreached people bloc with whom their congregation may have much greater daily contact. Who are these people hidden among us? Hindus. The US alone is home to 2.6 million Hindus, the vast majority of whom come from Indian people groups largely unpenetrated by the gospel.

The number of South Asian immigrants, most of them Hindu, has grown steadily since the 1960s. As a group, these newcomers are the wealthiest and best educated of foreign-born Americans. Ninety percent represent socially advantaged groups, the traditional upper castes that are some of India's least-reached people groups. A similar story prevails in Canada, and other Western countries also have large Hindu immigrant populations.



Source: US Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey

BUSINESS INSIDER

Few evangelical churches have seriously considered how to reach this major people-group bloc whom God has been integrating into their neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools.

When the map above surfaced recently on the internet, many Christians were shocked. Excluding Mexicans, who make up by far the largest percentage of US immigrants, the swath of bright blue on this map reveals that Indians are the second largest foreign-born group in many states, especially in the East and Midwest. In the years from 1995-2017, an average of 65,000 Indians immigrated to the US each year.¹

Despite these statistics, few evangelical churches have seriously considered how to reach this major people-group bloc whom God has been integrating into their neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools.

WHY AREN'T WE REACHING THEM?

While many other immigrant communities tend to cluster in urban areas, because of their upper-middle-class economic level and professional status, Indians have gravitated to suburban communities that are also home to large numbers of evangelical believers and churches. This means that people in your church most likely interact regularly with Hindus who are medical professionals or IT specialists, or businesspeople. Hindus may literally live next door. Yet sadly, at least in the US, Hindus are the least likely religious group to say that they personally know a Christian.²



One reason we aren't reaching them is because most Hindus don't have practical needs that are often a doorway to reach other groups. Few Indian-Americans need housing, food, or clothing. Many (although not all) speak excellent English and are successful in academic and professional spheres.

However, Christians are awakening to the cultural differences and spiritual needs of Hindus as they discover that a large Hindu temple is being built nearby, their neighbors are stringing lights for Diwali, or their colleague announces that he is returning to India to marry the woman his parents have chosen for him. These reminders nudge Christians to realize that, to a significant degree, their Hindu neighbors live in a different

culture, and many have little or no understanding of the good news proclaimed by Christian churches.

"I have no idea how to share my faith with my Hindu colleague," many Christians admit. "I don't say anything because I'm afraid of offending them," others explain a bit defensively. "They seem to stick with their own friends," yet others offer by way of explanation for their lack of contact.

Should your church challenge and resource your people to build friendship bridges to these unreached people? How **do** you reach Hindus for Christ?

HINDUISM'S OPEN DOOR

Hinduism has no founder, no hierarchy, no authoritative book, and no single path to salvation. Some Hindus worship idols; others do not. Some, but not all, believe in reincarnation. Some follow human gurus; some are even atheists or agnostics.

While culture and community values are fixed, individual spiritual beliefs are flexible. Hindus are seldom seeking dogmatic or logical "truth," but many are hungry to experience a relationship with God that addresses the needs in their hearts. Hindus need to get to know believers who express the power of their own experience with Jesus and connect that life transformation with the gospel story.

Hindus often come to understand Jesus in progressive steps (see chart next page). Christians discipling Hindus toward faith need to be loving, gracious, and patient as their Indian friends develop a deeper understanding of the exclusive place of Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Please take time to read [this link](#) of important barriers to overcome.

PRACTICAL HOW-TOS

In general, invitations to activities should be reciprocal—with the Christian and the Hindu friends alternating invitations. Christians should be honored if their Hindu friends invite them to participate in their life events—such as festivals, birthdays, weddings, 'poojas,' etc. When possible, Christians'

Hindus are seldom seeking logical "truth," but many are hungry to experience a relationship that addresses the needs in their hearts.

invitation to activities should include the extended family rather than just an individual—including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. When Christians host their Hindu friends, it is important to ask about and accommodate whatever dietary restrictions they may observe.

Storytelling Bible stories, sharing a personal testimony of how God demonstrated His power in a personal crisis, and praying with Hindus about needs in their lives are all great ways to introduce them to an experience of Jesus and His ability to change personal circumstances. These usually are most natural if they happen in a home setting or when sharing activities together, rather than inviting a Hindu to a church service as a first introduction.

CHURCH-INITIATED MINISTRY

Here are four examples of how churches can assist their people to share a transformational Jesus with the Hindus around them.

An Association of Churches Works Together

A group of local churches in New Jersey set up a year-long friendship program to build relationships with Hindus in their area. Indian families were mailed

Countries with Most Unreached People Groups

COUNTRY	PEOPLE GROUPS	UNREACHED PGS	POPULATION IN UPGS	PRIMARY RELIGION
India	2,560	2,292	1,277,866,000	Hinduism
China	543	444	146,228,000	Non-religious
Pakistan	422	414	198,454,000	Islam
Bangladesh	326	294	163,630,000	Islam
Nepal	274	266	28,640,000	Hinduism

Source: Joshua Project 2019

a letter describing the church's desire to develop cross-cultural friendships. The letter also explained that someone would visit their home, though they were given an option to decline the contact. During the visits, the Christians explained that they were followers of Jesus and wanted to be open about their faith. They assured the Hindu family that they were not there to pressure them into Christianity but to get to know them and develop a respectful friendship.

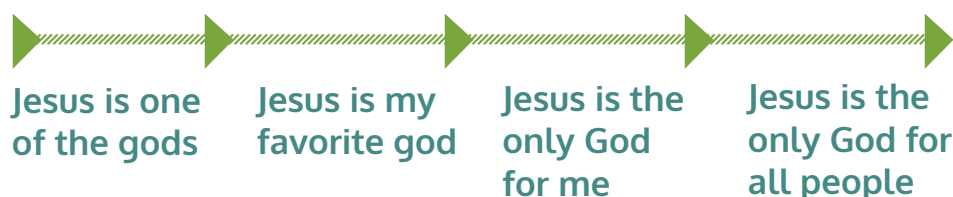
Many Hindus responded to the opportunity to ask genuine questions about Jesus and build friendships. Each relationship developed in its own unique way.

Hindu neighbors appreciated the respectful, honest behavior of the church members.

A Church Sponsors a Family Culture Exchange

One congregation sponsored a community Easter event at which they offered a meal exchange as a follow-up step. Christian and Hindu families were paired up, and each family committed to host the other for a meal in the next six weeks. The fact that the Christians accepted the hospitality of their Hindu partners instead of only providing an American meal deepened relationships by giving equal dignity to the Hindu partners.

A Hindu's Typical Progression to Faith





Everyone was encouraged to ask questions about family, cultural traditions, and faith during the shared meals, and families were encouraged to keep up the friendship after the six-week connection was finished. Many of the Hindu families admitted that they were curious about American homes and family culture, but they hadn't known how to initiate this type of contact on their own.

A Church Designs a Family-Friendly ESL Program

Yet another church has inaugurated an adult ESL class which is primarily attended by Indian wives. The class is offered at the church on a weeknight. In the middle of the class, during the break/snack time, there is an optional story time where someone tells a Bible story about Jesus followed with a short discussion.

While the ESL classes are in session, children of students can receive homework tutoring. Free wifi is provided, so the husbands who drive their wives

to the class can sit and work on their computers until the class is over. The thoughtful design of this program to include the entire Hindu family has allowed this ESL program to flourish. Each aspect is sensitive to a Hindu perspective—the food is appropriate for a variety of dietary restrictions and individuals who aren't interested in Jesus are respected, yet there is time for heartfelt spiritual discussions with those who are.

A Home-Based Worship Gathering Is Attractive

In yet another situation, two families and one single began meeting monthly for worship and a potluck supper at one of their homes. Some of the worship expressions intentionally included Hindu styles of music and prayer. Hindu neighbors were invited to join, and the group has been growing. Many who attend are not yet followers of Jesus but are deeply attracted by what they

see as a loving and authentic community of spiritual people. The Hindu style of worship and prayer touches a deep sense of identity and reverence that many Hindus are responding to.

WHAT COULD YOUR CHURCH DO TO REACH THE HINDUS AROUND YOU?

The couple who developed the content of this article serve with International Project and live in a Hindu community in order to share Christ relationally with their neighbors. They would be happy to discuss with you ways that your congregation could be trained to begin to build friendship bridges to Hindus.

Email Catalyst Services to be put in contact with these trainers.

Recommended Resources
To learn more, check out these [resources](#).





A BRIDGE-BUILDING STORY

One Pennsylvania family finds their Hindu neighbors eager for friendship

My husband and I have been touched by the reality that many of our Hindu neighbors do not know the hope of Jesus. To try to connect to them, we had done things like host a community Easter Egg hunt, and we were slowly building relationships.

Last summer we attended a Hindu outreach training here in



our area and a few weeks later, we were invited to go to the first birthday celebration of the child of an Indian family in our community. With the training we received, we knew that we should dress up for the occasion. As we arrived, the first Indian guest also appeared, and she was dressed quite casually. I was paranoid that we were over-dressed. But when everyone else came, we were relieved that we were dressed correctly!

As the Diwali holiday approached, we wanted to bless our Indian neighbors during their major gift-giving holiday, so some of the women in my Bible study group volunteered to contribute to Diwali gifts for the 19 Indian families in our neighborhood. We purchased turmeric milk spice mix and a candle that we delivered to each house, along with a card that our kids colored. One husband was so touched that he lovingly arranged the gifts and took a picture to send to his family and friends in India (see left)! Three others showed up at our door on Diwali with sweet treats. When we arrived at the festival, the kids welcomed our kids into

their groups, and the older women were touched when we greeted them in appropriate Indian style. The preteen girls taught me a few Indian dance moves! Afterwards, one Indian man gave us the dates he will be away on business and asked us to help his wife while he was gone.

At the training we learned that Hindus often first make Jesus their favorite god and later recognize Him as the only God. That insight helped me recognize that God is still working in the heart of one of my Hindu friends who has a health issue.

Remembering that the trainers encouraged us to share Bible stories rather than solely explaining the gospel, I told her a story about Jesus that related to her physical problem. The Lord was powerfully present as she recognized the heart of Jesus.

Our various contacts are building bridges for future opportunities to share Christ in culturally meaningful ways. We are eagerly praying these lovely people will see our great Savior and Lord through us.

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