



052: Unreached People Groups – The Faces – David Joannes

David Joannes is the co-founder and president of [Within Reach Global](#), an organization that serves to advance the Gospel in some of Southeast Asia's most difficult places. He is a writer – both a blogger and an author. David has written a book called [The Space Between Memories: Recollections from a 21st Century Missionary](#). He, along with his wife, Lorna, live in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Tell us a little bit about yourself and your work with Within Reach Global.

- Whether or not, I'm qualified to talk about unreached people groups is another conversation – don't you love how God uses unassuming misfits?
- When I was 3 years old I said to my mom while looking at a National Geographic magazine, "I want to bring bread to children in China." When I was 16, I found myself on a mission trip smuggling Bibles into China and we used code words and the code word for the Bibles was bread.
- Suddenly, as I walked from Hong Kong to China, I heard the Holy Spirit say to me, "You are bringing bread to the people of China." Since then I have dedicated my life to bringing the Gospel to China.
- I met the woman that would become my wife shortly thereafter and God has just been faithful in providing quality, local Chinese missionaries who have partnered with us to evangelize, disciple and church plant among the unreached and unengaged in Southeast Asia.

For our regular listeners, they'll understand what we mean by unreached people groups, but for clarity's sake, tell us, when you use the term unreached people, who are you talking about?

- I think Duane Frasier did a wonderful job last episode in describing the statistical data, but think of people who have little to no access to go the gospel whatsoever. They have no Christian radio station, no Christian bookstores, no pastors, no missionaries.
- They have no chance at all to hear the Gospel in their region or in their setting.
- They are unreached.



You work with unreached people groups – why are they important to you?

- I knew the statistical data – I’d taken Perspectives – it changed my life but that was the macro picture. When I went to China and I began to see the faces and hear the names, all these tribes in China who are unreached, I suddenly knew their names, their addresses, what kind of tea they like.
- Many, many of my friends are from unreached people themselves.

How does it differ doing missions in this environment as opposed to working with a reached people group?

- I would say the differences are quite drastic.
- When we do ministry here in China with unreached people groups, we’ll often walk into a village and ask the people, “Have you heard the name Jesus?” Often, I’ve heard a reply like, “Is that a brand of soap?”
- They literally have no idea who Jesus is.
- Unreached places are quite difficult, there’s government and religious hostility and getting a foot in the door and seeing a breakthrough can be a very difficult thing.
- I believe the heart of Jesus is still the same, that he would leave the 99 safely tucked away and go to find the one, and in this case the hundred millions of ones who don’t know Him yet.

With your experience, will you take us with you to share some of how God is at work in SE Asia?

- Deep in the mountains of Southeast Asia along the China-Vietnam border looking for villages of an unreached people group. After driving for 3 days, we came across a village and I leaned my head out the door and called out, “Is this a Yao village?” They said yes, and so we pulled over and got out.
- About five minutes later, a man came around the corner and he said, “I saw you five years ago. On the other side of the province, you once came with a group of foreigners, you closed your eyes and said some things and then said Amen. And that had sparked something in him. Now, five years later, I’m there in his village, and God gave me the words of knowledge over him that he had left his wife and children in the village and as I spoke that over him he began to weep. He gave his life to the Lord then and there. We took him back to the city, 15 hours away, with us and for the next two months we disciple him and then sent him out to make disciples. He led his brother and 21 of his friends to the Lord and we realized that there was shaking in the mountains of the Yao people.
- Now this village is one of our outreach centers with Within Reach Global.

What are some of the challenges that Christ followers face when engaging with UPGs?

- UPGs are unreached for a reason. They live in difficult, hard to reach places. They live in places that are hostile to Christianity.
- So often, you are sowing these seeds, and yet you’re wondering if you’re even making a difference.



- Working with UPGs calls for a true commitment, a strong formidable faithfulness to the call that Jesus' heart beats for these people. He knows each one of them!
- It takes a willingness to learn a difficult and new language. If you want to make a difference among a tribe that has no gospel witness, you need to take the time to lay the groundwork – language, cultural, etc.

Talk to us about the living conditions reaching unreached people groups?

- When we talk about the 10/40 window, we talk about the poorest of the poor.
- However, in today's world, you'll also see the richest of the rich in the 10/40 window as well.
- In a city that I lived in in China you'll see on the road, both a horse cart and a Lamborghini driving alongside each other.

What are some of the joys of working with UPGs? What do you enjoy about it?

- Well, in China I have undergone many police interrogations, I've been hiding under bamboo from local authorities, I've eaten with head hunters and stumbled into villages of child soldiers with AK-47s.
- The funny thing is that we have this tendency to put too much of a preference on safety and yet true joy comes from ministering alongside the Lord, seeing where he is at work and joining him there.
- Some of my greatest joys have been the long hard trek up a mountain and seeing breakthrough, salvation, baptisms in these villages – this has brought joy to my life over the years.

What are some of the ways that western churches and Christ followers can help engage unreached people groups?

- There has often been a call to adopt unreached people groups. With today's shifting, we can adopt regions where you can impact multiple people groups.
- Connect through an agency or missionary you know.
- Narrow your focus – sponsor fewer missionaries to focus the attention on your overall goal – what would you like to do to impact that region and see a grand scale revival among them?
- There is a church in Northern California who has partnered with us who initially adopted a people group and they learned about the people, they sent short term teams and we began to see breakthrough in the surrounding villages and it shifted my mind to adopting regions as it can impact the people you're trying to target and the surrounding peoples.

Do you have any cautions for people who are hearing this and who want to get involved in unreached people group ministry?

- It can be a glamorous call and you need to realize that there is an element of danger.



- Also, don't think that we have all the answers – the world is not waiting for us to save them. God is already at work among them and he wants to use us as a small part in what he's doing.
- Come as a learner. We need to look for relevant ways to share the Gospel in a way they can understand within their culture.

If someone is thinking about going to a UPG, what type of qualities are you looking for?

- One of the major things I have found the most valuable, is that of a heart of a servant. Before I looked at different talents and giftings, but if there isn't an underlying servant heart in that person, but they aren't going to be as essential to the big picture of what God is doing.
- Jesus was the greatest servant of all. He was the paramount picture of a cross-cultural missionary and we find him washing the feet of his disciples.
- I'd love to see this attitude in long-term and short-term mission workers.

What about the senders? How can they participate in this?

- There are wonderful resources out there – start learning about unreached people groups but also try to picture them as people with plans for the weekend, with a mother and father they care about – they are not just a mass conglomerate of people but they are individuals who each have value in the eyes of God.
- Use the Joshua Project app.
- Take the Perspectives course.
- Reach out to missionaries who are serving in these unreached areas and ask them what their greatest need is.
- Contact an agency and ask them “What is your approach to unreached people groups?” If you're considering supporting someone or an agency, ask this question.

Do you have a story that would draw together some of these principles and ideas?

- The first story that comes to mind is of a girl we call Bright Eyes in China. We run many English corners in China that draw in about 250-300 university students each week. Bright Eyes was 20 when she first came to find this community to learn English.
- You could see her battle with depression – she had scars on her wrists from trying to kill herself 3 or 4 times.
- One night she has this dream where she's holding hands with 30 children. To her left, Jesus is standing there and he reaches out his right hand and squeezes hers. He says to her, “I am calling you to these children. You are going to be my light to them in the darkness.”
- That week she gave her life to Jesus and then she returned to her home town and realized that there were over 300 orphaned children in the streets of her hometown. Today, she overseas 300-350 orphaned or marginalized children in 74 villages in and around her hometown.



- This young lady is now ministering to the ‘least of these.’ If that’s not humanity on the statistical data, I’m not sure what is!

Do you have any resources you’d like to recommend?

- [Joshua Project](#) – this is an incredible resource!
- [Perspectives on the World Christian Movement](#) – if you haven’t taken this course, you need to! It will transform your life!
- [Insanity of God – Nik Ripken](#)
- [Dangerous Territory – Amy Peterson](#)

If our listeners want to learn more from us, how might they do that?

- Visit my website – [Davidjoannes.com](#)
- Visit our organization’s website – [Within Reach Global](#)
- [The Space Between Memories](#)

“No one has the right to hear the Gospel twice, while there remains someone who has not heard it once.” – Oswald J. Smith

