

# Great Commission Prioritization of Countries: Helping to Make Completing the Great Commission More Meaningful for All Believers

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## ABSTRACT

Where are the people who have not heard about Jesus? This article seeks to answer this question and address the great need to prioritize the Great Commission. Because most Christians can more easily locate countries rather than people groups, readily available missions information was used to prioritize the nations using ten criteria. Data for 15,893 people groups and 222 countries were used to evaluate the status of Christianity in the nations. The results have many possible applications about world evangelization efforts. People in nations with little access to the gospel especially need prayer, gospel tools, and new missionaries. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on bringing the awesome truth of Jesus to the least reached.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In areas where there are no hospitals or schools, most people would agree that it should be a priority to provide medical help or education to the people who live there. In a similar way, where very few people have heard the Gospel, most Christians would agree that we should prioritize bringing the truth about Jesus. As Paul said, “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation. Rather, as it is written ‘Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand.’” (Romans 15:20, 21)

David Bryant said, “Today five out of six non-Christians in our world have no hope unless missionaries come to them and plant the church among them.”<sup>1</sup> If this is true, perhaps we should do something about it.

## II. WHERE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT HEARD ABOUT JESUS?

Where are the people who have not heard about Jesus? This is a critical question that will be addressed in this article since there is a great need to prioritize and strategize. Because many Christians and churches cannot locate unreached people groups on a map or target them with their missions giving, this article focuses on a country-by-country approach. Thus we will look at the status of the Great Commission in the nations of the world to answer the question, “Where do people have the least opportunity to hear the Gospel?” The nations will then be prioritized using available data. Such findings can be helpful for praying, for churches regarding their missions program, for individual

giving towards the Great Commission, etc. Possible next steps are offered. It is hoped that a country prioritization approach will provide a more concrete, understandable way for more Christians to emphasize the least reached in their Great Commission involvement.

### **III. GREAT COMMISSION PRIORITIZATION OF COUNTRIES**

Excellent missions-related information is available today. For example, the Joshua Project<sup>2</sup> (JP) has large amounts of data available freely to churches, organizations, and individuals who can apply it to their specific applications as was done in this paper. Similarly, information from the World Christian Trends AD 30 – AD 2200<sup>3</sup> (WCT) book was also used in this country prioritization.

There are numerous parameters that could be used to evaluate the state of the Great Commission in the nations of the world. The weighting of the final ten criteria used here to evaluate countries and produce an overall score out of 100 possible points is shown in Figure A1 and explained in the appendix.

For 15,893 people groups, the Joshua Project has scores for progress, ministry tools, and location (identified as “Country Indices” in Table A1). The JP article MFPrioritizationArticle.doc<sup>4</sup> provides a description of these three criteria. Using a simple computer program, these three scores were separately multiplied by the respective populations of all the people groups in a given country and then added together. These country totals were then divided by the total population of the people groups in each country to provide an average score for these three categories in each nation.

The JP web site<sup>5</sup> also provides information about each country regarding the percentage of people living in a least reached people group, the population in least reached people groups, the number of least reached people groups, and the total population. Barrett and Johnson<sup>1</sup> provide data regarding the number of disciple offers per person per year, the number of Christian workers per million population, and the cost (to lead to the baptism) of each new convert.

Table 1 shows the resulting total scores for 222 countries in common between the JP and WCT using the previously mentioned weighting. The highest scores indicate the poorest Great Commission status and the highest priority, starting with rank / priority #1. Scores for selected countries are shown in Figure 1.

These scores are not intended to show minute differences that can distinguish between consecutive countries in the list. Rather, one could possibly say that countries within 20 places or ten points may have a similar priority.

### **IV. HELPING TO MAKE COMPLETING THE GREAT COMMISSION MORE MEANINGFUL FOR ALL BELIEVERS**

This study is based on statistics. While it is certainly very important to be led by the Holy Spirit, the data here most likely reflect on the truth of the status of the Great Commission. Thus, such information can be used to help make prayerful and objective decisions regarding world evangelization efforts.

There are many possible applications for data like these. For example, the overall prioritization of the U.S. is 123 and of Afghanistan is 1. Table 2 emphasizes the severe lack of Christian resources in Afghanistan and the excessive amount in America. 27.8% of the world's full-time Christian workers and 34.1% of all Christian personal or church income are in the USA while 0.0013% and 0.00002% of these resources, respectively, are in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> Considering the overabundance of Christian resources in the United States, perhaps we should consider minimizing our Great Commission investment in this country where most people have many opportunities to hear the truth about Jesus while there are so many people around the world who have heard little or nothing. For instance, of the 1,533,000 Christian workers in the U.S.,<sup>3</sup> 1.28 million or 83.4% of these Christian workers could perhaps be missionaries in another country in order to achieve global equity.<sup>6</sup>

People living in the countries with the highest scores typically have little or no exposure to the Gospel or opportunity to hear about Jesus. For this reason, the people in these countries really need prayer especially since there are few Christians there to pray for all the lost people. It could also be strategic to send new missionaries and focus more outreach on the higher priority nations because many of the people groups in these nations have little or no evangelical activity.

There is a great need to prioritize the Great Commission and strategize. There are many ways that this information can be practically applied to prioritize participation in the Great Commission based on need. For example, we can all maximize our investment in high priority nations. Churches and individuals can evaluate the missionaries / organizations they support and consider focusing more on countries near the top 1/3 of the priority list. Churches could especially think about adding more new missionaries in high priority nations. Churches can establish goals to increase the percentage of their support in the top nations. Scripture / gospel literature support could be earmarked for high priority countries. Lastly, greater emphasis could be placed on international student ministry, in particular seeking to reach people from high priority nations. It can be very easy and strategic to befriend and reach out to future international leaders who are studying in universities away from home.

As agreed upon by more than 2,300 evangelicals from more than 150 nations in the Lausanne Covenant of 1974,<sup>7</sup>

*“We are convinced that this is the time for churches and para-church agencies to pray earnestly for the salvation of the unreached and to launch new efforts to achieve world evangelization. A reduction of foreign missionaries and money in an evangelized country may sometimes be necessary to facilitate the national church's growth in self-reliance and to release resources for unevangelized areas. . . . The goal should be, by all available means and at the earliest possible time, that every person will have the opportunity to hear, understand, and receive the good news.”<sup>8</sup>*

## V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, in order to more quickly complete the task Jesus left the church to do, there is a great need to prioritize reaching people who have little or no access to the Gospel. Country prioritization like that done in this article can be used to help churches, ministries, and individuals prioritize their participation in the Great Commission. Many follow-up actions like more focused prayer and new missionaries or gospel resources targeted for countries with many least reached people can be pursued.

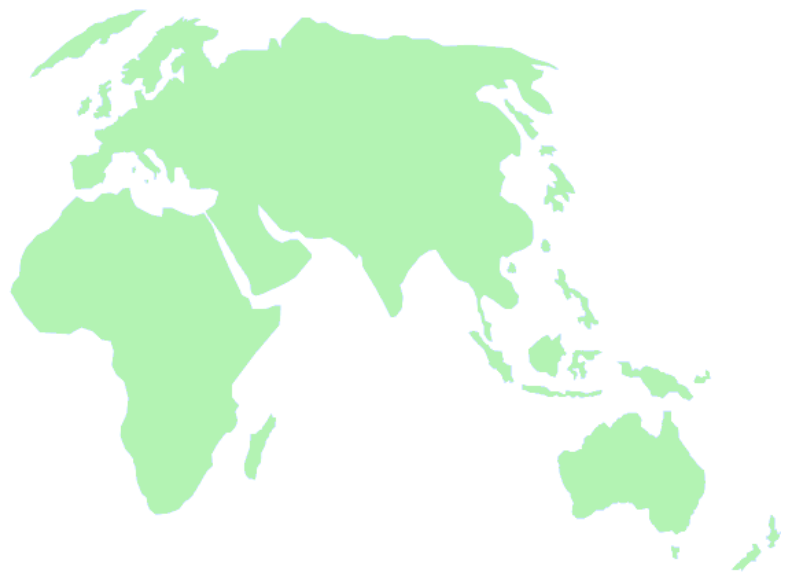
## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>“100 World Christian Quotes.” March 2007.  
<http://thetravelingteam.org/?q=node/196>.
- <sup>2</sup>“Joshua Project – Downloads.” April 2006.  
<http://www.joshuaproject.net/download.php>.
- <sup>3</sup>Barrett, David, and Todd Johnson. World Christian Trends AD 30 – AD 2200.  
Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2001, pp. 416-425.
- <sup>4</sup>“MFPrioritizationArticle.doc.” March 2007.  
<http://www.joshuaproject.net/assets/MFPrioritizationArticle.doc>.
- <sup>5</sup>“Global Countries Listing.” May 2006. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/globalctry.php>.
- <sup>6</sup>“Great Commission Priorities.” March 2007, slide 9.  
[http://www.geocities.com/AdvocatesForTheUnreached/Great\\_Commission\\_Priorities.pps](http://www.geocities.com/AdvocatesForTheUnreached/Great_Commission_Priorities.pps).
- <sup>7</sup>“The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.” March 2007.  
<http://www.lausanne.org/Brix?pageID=12891>.
- <sup>8</sup>“The Lausanne Covenant.” March 2007.  
<http://www.perspectives.org/about/lausanne.html>.

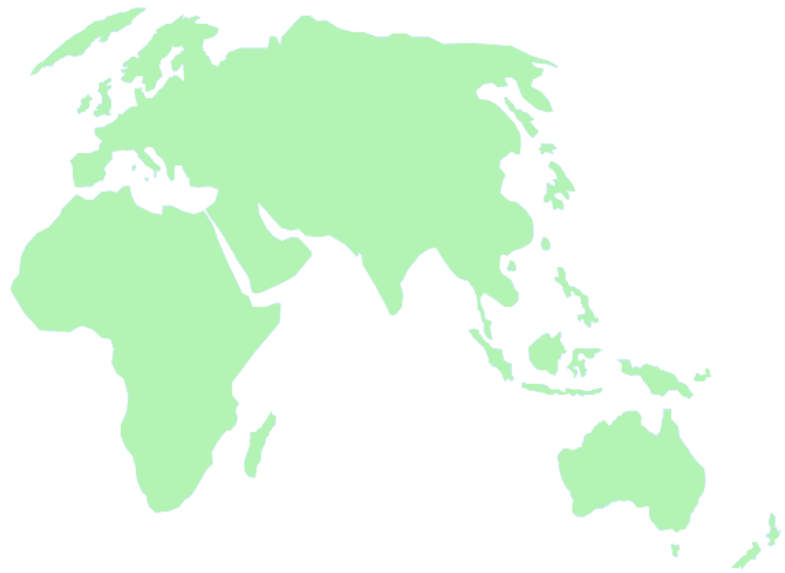
Table 1 – Country Great Commission Status Scores and Prioritization Ranks

Total Score	Country	Rank Priority
96.38	Afghanistan	1
94.11	Algeria	2
94.00	Iran	3
91.94	Bangladesh	4
91.07	Tunisia	5
90.62	Pakistan	6
89.53	Turkey	7
89.03	Morocco	8
88.57	Yemen	9
87.88	Maldives	10
86.55	Nepal	11
86.28	Azerbaijan	12
	Western Sahara	
85.73	Sahara	13
85.01	Korea North	14
84.66	Cambodia	15
84.33	Comoros	16
84.26	Mongolia	17
84.08	Iraq	18
83.72	Saudi Arabia	19
82.81	Laos	20
82.60	Niger	21
81.91	Guinea	22
81.90	Kyrgyzstan	23
81.83	Mauritania	24
81.53	Bhutan	25
81.52	Mali	26

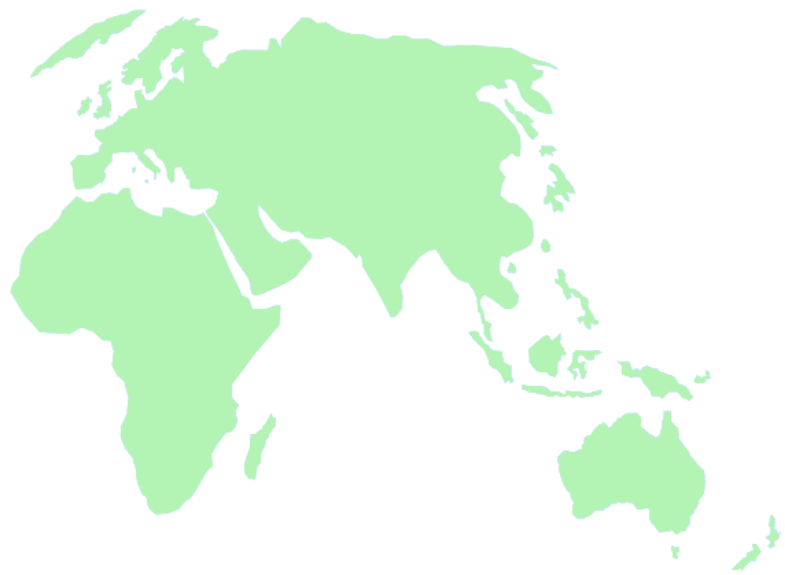
81.23	Libya	27
80.58	India	28
78.29	Senegal	29
78.12	Oman	30
77.51	Syria	31
77.28	Uzbekistan	32
76.59	Japan	33
76.40	Somalia	34
76.03	Jordan	35
75.95	Turkmenistan	36
75.80	Chad	37
75.72	Kuwait	38
75.25	Thailand	39
75.14	Bahrain	40
75.09	Tajikistan	41
74.64	Israel	42
74.56	Viet Nam	43
74.02	Gambia	44
73.83	Egypt	45
73.82	Mayotte	46
72.84	Sudan	47
	United Arab	
71.42	Emirates	48
71.38	Kazakhstan	49
70.43	Myanmar	50
69.24	Djibouti	51
69.09	Indonesia	52
	Guinea-	
69.04	Bissau	53
68.72	Qatar	54
68.26	Sri Lanka	55
67.84	Eritrea	56
	Serbia and	
67.36	Montenegro	57
65.74	China	58
65.26	Sierra Leone	59
64.93	Taiwan	60
64.63	Georgia	61
64.42	Brunei	62
64.09	Malaysia	63
63.52	Tanzania	64
62.44	Ivory Coast	65
61.80	Benin	66
61.45	Nigeria	67
61.00	Russia	68
60.36	Mozambique	69
60.12	Burkina Faso	70
	Bosnia-	
59.96	Herzegovina	71
59.60	Central	72



	African Rep	
58.67	Liberia	73
57.16	Ethiopia	74
56.82	Togo	75
56.46	Palestine	76
55.37	France	77
54.70	Belarus	78
54.64	Singapore	79
54.37	Guyana	80
53.52	Ghana	81
52.80	Lebanon	82
52.71	Cameroon	83
52.54	Macedonia	84
52.17	Kenya	85
51.84	Netherlands	86
50.02	Gibraltar	87
49.49	Estonia	88
49.43	Zambia	89
48.78	Liechtenstein	90
48.36	Bulgaria	91
48.22	Moldavia	92
48.07	Ukraine	93
	Equatorial	
47.74	Guinea	94
	Trinidad &	
47.33	Tobago	95
46.96	Austria	96
46.60	Armenia	97
46.40	Gabon	98
46.28	Albania	99
46.03	Madagascar	100
45.83	Germany	101
45.21	Italy	102
45.15	Cyprus	103
44.80	Cuba	104
44.75	Spain	105
44.71	East Timor	106
43.76	Philippines	107
43.68	Lithuania	108
43.07	Britain	109
43.03	Belgium	110
42.87	Namibia	111
41.49	Reunion	112
41.29	Malawi	113
	Congo-	
41.28	Brazzaville	114
41.25	Latvia	115
40.48	South Africa	116
40.27	Australia	117
39.73	Suriname	118

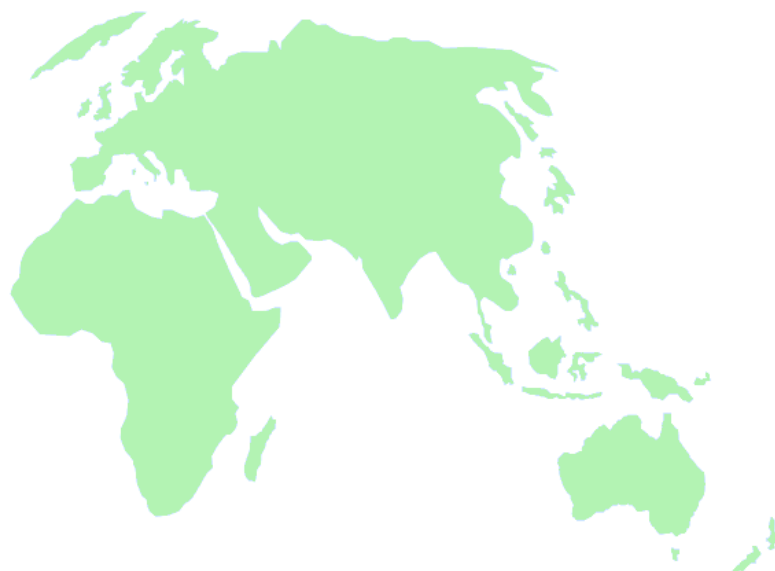


39.51	Canada	119
39.14	Fiji	120
38.72	Monaco	121
	Northern	
38.56	Mariana Is	122
38.14	United States	123
37.64	Luxembourg	124
37.54	Argentina	125
37.53	Uganda	126
37.07	Sweden	127
36.71	Greece	128
36.66	Mauritius	129
36.16	Andorra	130
35.85	Jamaica	131
35.25	Finland	132
	Czech	
34.98	Republic	133
34.97	Chile	134
34.31	Zimbabwe	135
33.69	Venezuela	136
33.61	Congo-Zaire	137
33.33	Uruguay	138
33.33	Slovenia	139
32.81	Saint Vincent	140
	Cayman	
32.42	Islands	141
	Sao Tome &	
32.25	Principe	142
32.17	Romania	143
32.04	Croatia	144
	French	
31.85	Guiana	145
31.62	Hungary	146
31.32	Switzerland	147
31.02	Isle of Man	148
30.93	Belize	149
30.90	Paraguay	150
	American	
30.65	Samoa	151
30.20	Colombia	152
29.83	Botswana	153
29.74	Denmark	154
29.33	Guatemala	155
28.94	New Zealand	156
28.64	Mexico	157
28.60	Peru	158
	Papua New	
28.37	Guinea	159
	New	
27.57	Caledonia	160



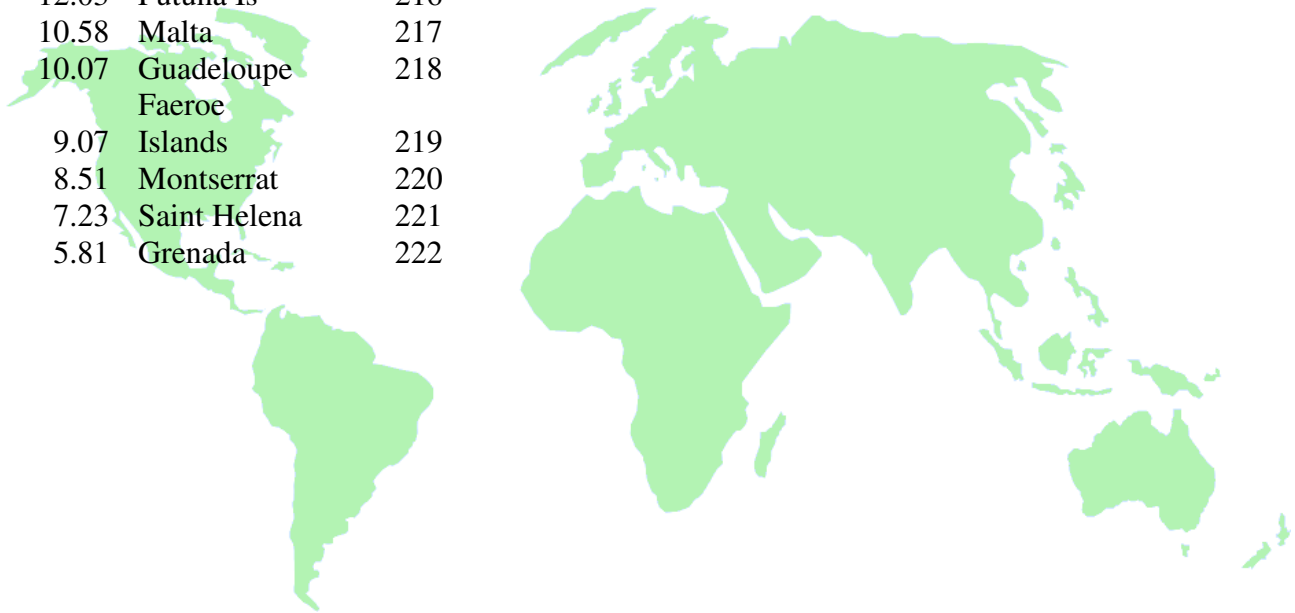


27.51	Haiti	161
27.36	Ireland	162
27.26	Rwanda	163
27.06	Seychelles	164
27.06	Angola	165
26.92	Slovakia	166
26.83	Norway	167
26.58	Bahamas	168
26.55	Iceland	169
26.50	Burundi	170
26.50	Virgin Is of the US	171
26.46	Puerto Rico Marshall Islands	172
25.71	Bermuda	173
25.67	Nauru	174
25.42	Ecuador	175
24.81	El Salvador	176
24.76	Netherlands Antilles	177
24.11	Barbados	178
24.05	Saint Lucia	179
23.75	Portugal	180
23.63	Brazil	181
23.60	Honduras	182
23.55	Turks & Caicos Is	183
23.45	Vanuatu	184
23.13	Aruba	185
22.73	Antigua	186
21.95	San Marino	187
21.54	Martinique	188
21.52	Poland	189
21.44	Bolivia	190
21.44	Greenland	191
21.21	Dominican Republic	192
21.20	Micronesia	193
21.19	Korea South	194
20.51	French Polynesia	195
20.17	Nicaragua	196
19.96	Panama	197
19.68	Solomon Islands	198
19.09	Tonga	199
18.67	Samoa	200
17.67	Lesotho	201
17.42	Costa Rica	202
17.38		203





	British	
17.37	Virgin Is	204
16.99	Dominica	205
16.59	Kiribati	206
	Saint Kitts &	
15.99	Nevis	207
15.61	Swaziland	208
15.27	Cape Verde	209
14.40	Guam	210
13.75	Palau	211
13.15	Anguilla	212
12.95	Cook Islands	213
12.50	Tuvalu	214
	Saint Pierre	
12.25	& Miquelon	215
	Wallis &	
12.03	Futuna Is	216
10.58	Malta	217
10.07	Guadeloupe	218
	Faeroe	
9.07	Islands	219
8.51	Montserrat	220
7.23	Saint Helena	221
5.81	Grenada	222



**Fig. 1 - Great Commission Prioritization / Status of Christianity (Top 28 + Misc. Countries)**

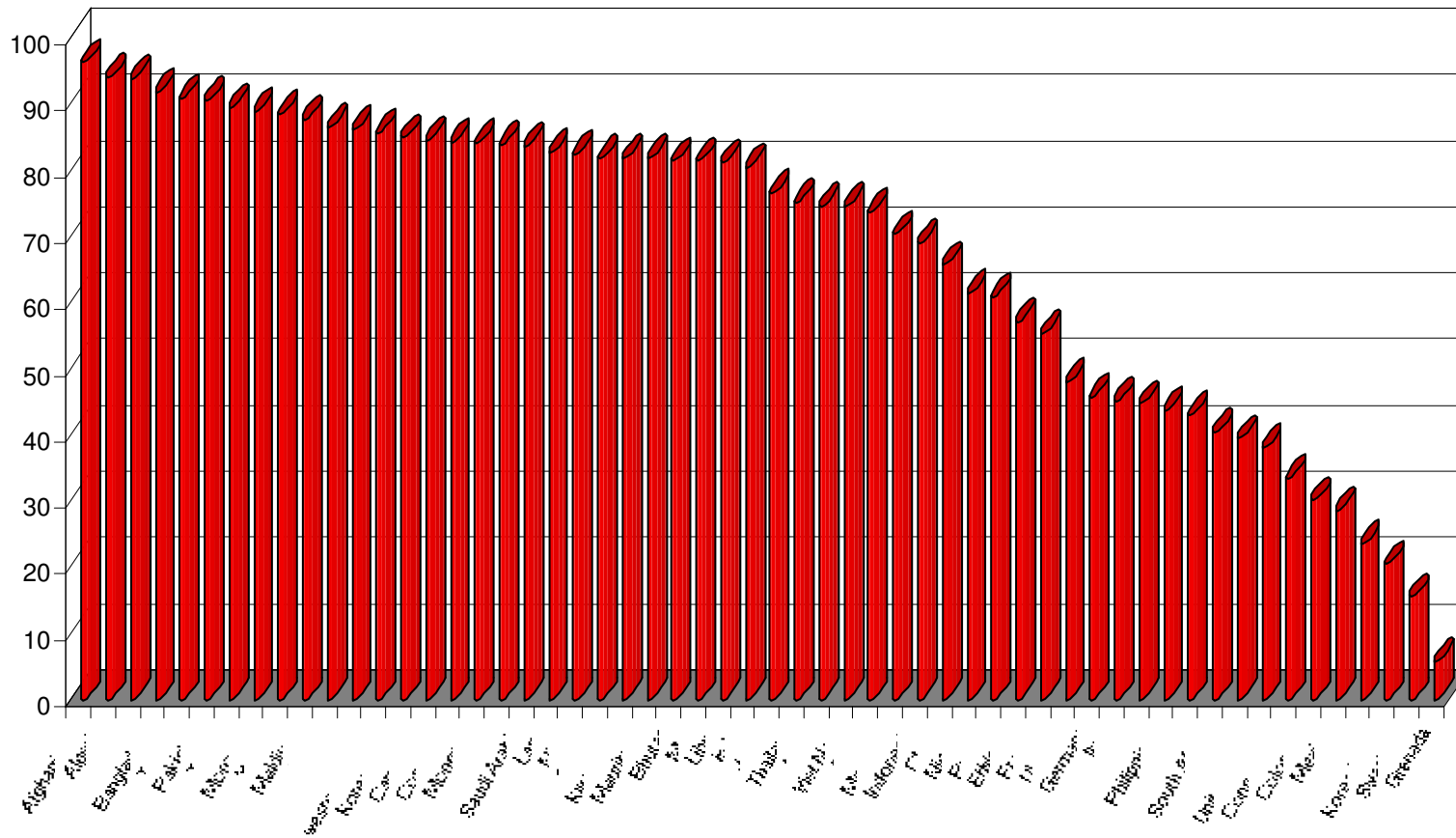


Table 2 – Comparison of Christian Resources/Criteria in the USA and Afghanistan

	<b>USA</b>	<b>Afghanistan</b>
Priority	123	1
% of World's Full-Time Christian Workers	27.8% <sup>3</sup> (6.0 x % pop.)	0.0013% <sup>3</sup> (1/292 x % pop.)
% of All Christian Personal or Church Income	34.1% <sup>3</sup> (7.4 x % pop.)	0.00002% <sup>3</sup> (1/19000 x % pop.)
% of World Population	4.6% <sup>3</sup>	0.38% <sup>3</sup>
# Discipleship Opportunities per Person per Year	368 <sup>3</sup>	Less than 1 <sup>3</sup>
% Population Least Reached in the Country	0.3% <sup>5</sup>	99.9% <sup>5</sup>
% Christian	76%	0.03%
% Evangelical Christian	32.5% <sup>5</sup>	0.0% <sup>5</sup>
Average Cost / Convert	\$1,551,000 <sup>3</sup>	\$30,000 <sup>3</sup>



**Appendix – Description of Prioritization Criteria and Method**

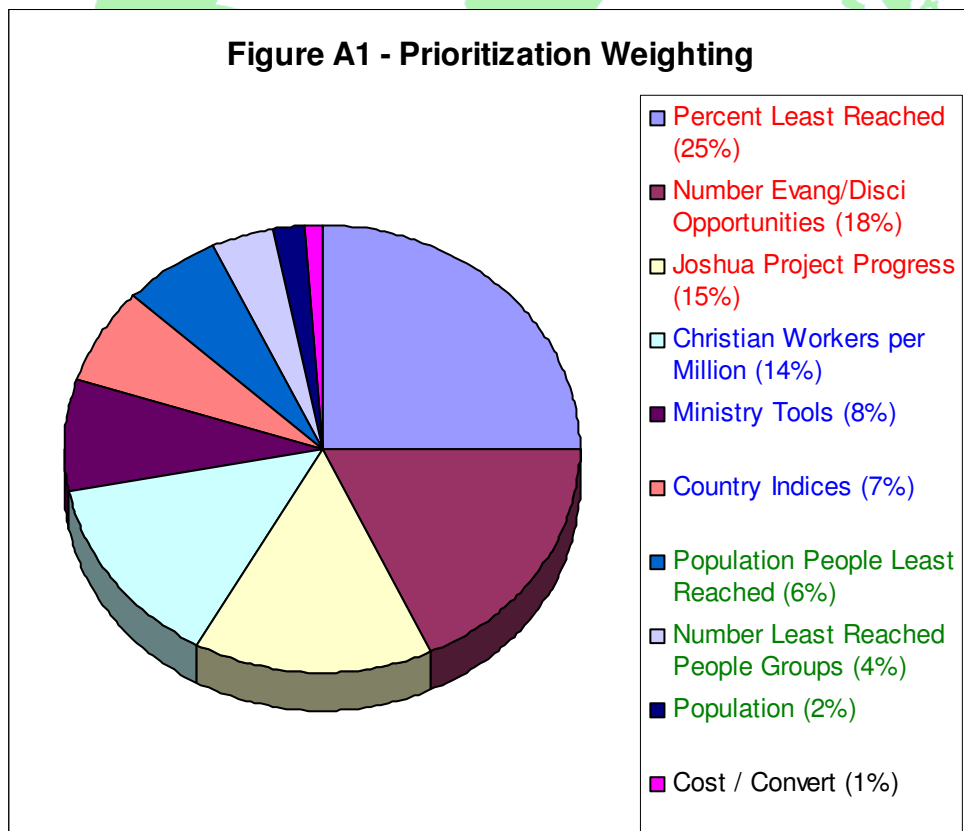


Table A1 – Prioritization Weighting Criteria and Description

<b>Criteria (Percent Weighting)</b>	<b>Description</b>
Percent Least Reached (25%)	Percent of the country's population living in a least reached people group
Number Evangelism/Discipleship Opportunities (18%)	The (average) number of discipleship offers per person per year in the country
Joshua Project Progress (15%)	Progress of or response to the Gospel
Christian Workers per Million (14%)	Number of Christian workers per million population
Ministry Tools (8%)	Bible translation status, Jesus film, audio recordings, & Christian radio broadcasting
Country Indices (7%)	Location indices (country persecution index, human development index, & percent evangelical)
Population People Least Reached (6%)	Population living in a least reached people group
Number Least Reached People Groups (4%)	Number of least reached people groups in the country
Population (2%)	Population of the country
Cost / Convert (1%)	Average cost to lead to a baptism

Numerous weighting parameters of the ten prioritization criteria were analyzed. The categories are described in Table A1. For a while, the actual numerical values of the criteria were used. However, because extreme values skewed some aspects of the relative comparison, countries were ranked and scored from 1 to 222 for each of the topics and these numbers were used to produce the final weighted scores.

The **top three criteria** provide a good indication of the current status of the Great Commission. The **percent of people living in a least reached people group** is most heavily weighted because it is an important indicator of the country's need for the Gospel. Similarly, the average **number of opportunities** a person in a given country has **to become a disciple of Jesus in a year** reveals a helpful glimpse about the status of evangelism. Originally **Joshua Project Progress** was weighted the most because it incorporates information for all people groups but the data appeared less discriminating than other parameters and thus it was reduced.

The **next group of three categories** represents **vehicles (tools or people) that can be used to share the Gospel** and also a composite score of Christian life in the country. Ministry Tools initially had the largest weight of these three topics but it was reduced because some of the data seemed to be less consistent. In general, somewhat greater emphasis was typically given to data more directly related to the Great Commission.

**Three population items** were used to add more weight for countries with more people. The total of 10% for these three criteria was selected in attempt to not excessively bias the influence of population.

Finally, the cost per baptism (i.e., convert) was included mostly because it is an interesting statistic although it could potentially be used as a tiebreaker.