

Welcome to the 2019 *Hindu World Prayer Guide!*

WE BELIEVE in the power of prayer to bring breakthroughs because our wonderful Heavenly Father is good, gracious, merciful and relentlessly pursuing the lost. We are not professional writers or editors; we are merely Christians who love our Hindu friends and neighbors and long for them to encounter the love of Christ. With this passion to see hard hearts opened, broken lives restored, families transformed, and the culture of the kingdom of heaven come, we humbly present this prayer guide. We hope to give you a window into the lives of Hindus to understand them better, to pray effectively and to reach out in love.

In this year's guide, we have provided articles to encourage informed prayer for various spheres of Hindu society, including family life, media, the Arts, business, government, religion, and celebration. Ultimately, we long to see God's love incarnated in each area of society.

This year, we are also concentrating on major Hindu pilgrimage sites in India called the Char Dham ("four places"). Many Hindus believe that they are important in attaining salvation. By prayerfully focusing on them, we are strategically covering spiritually important locations in each of the four directions: Puri on the east coast, Rameshwaram in the south, Dwarka on the west coast, and Badrinath in the north.

As a public and global platform, this guide is both a reflection of what God is doing around the world and a tool to help the Church unite globally and respond to Jesus' heart for Hindu peoples. Together, let's pray that Hindus will encounter and understand the matchless love of Christ—the Light of the world—and turn to Him as their Savior.

Thank you for joining us! May we all be transformed more into His likeness as we seek Him.

The Editors
15 Days of Prayer International

Together, let's pray that
Hindus will encounter
and understand the
matchless love of Christ

Frequently asked questions about Hinduism

Is Hinduism a religion?

Hinduism is too complex to describe as a single religion. Within Hinduism, there is no central orthodoxy, creed or set of beliefs that can be used to determine who is a Hindu. The word “Hinduism” actually describes a diverse group of many smaller religions or belief systems. Each of these sects might have their own separate set of creeds, beliefs, etc. It might be better to speak of many Hinduisms rather than one Hinduism. However, it is useful to recognize that the word “Hinduism” is in such extensive use today, even by Hindus themselves, that we will find its use almost unavoidable.

Who is a Hindu?

Hindus comprise about 15 percent of the world’s population. Being Hindu is primarily based on being born into a Hindu family, not on any particular set of beliefs, worship of any specific god, or act of conversion.

What are the origins of Hinduism?

Many saints, gurus, authors and famous personalities have contributed to the development of Hinduism. However, no single founding event or founder is given credit for starting Hinduism. While most Hindus will agree that certain sacred Hindu scriptures are valuable, no holy text is held to be fully and equally authoritative by all Hindus. Complex and diverse Hindu traditions have been in existence in South Asia since before recorded history. Further complicating the matter, the Hindu community’s perception of itself has continually evolved. How this self-perception develops in years to come will have far-reaching implications for both Hindus and the world as a whole.

What is 15 Days of Prayer for the Hindu World ?

How did 15 Days start?

In the late 1990s, many people around the world felt God prompting them to produce a prayer guide, calling and encouraging the Global Church to pray for the blessing of Hindu peoples. Produced four times, the last edition of that guide, called the *30 Days Hindu Prayer Focus*, rolled off the press in 2004. Twelve years later, in 2016, the Lord began stirring the hearts of people globally to unite again in prayer for our Hindu neighbors. This annual guide is a response to that prompting. It is, in essence, an expression of the love of followers of Christ for Hindu peoples; that they would prosper and discover eternal salvation in Jesus.

Who writes the articles and produces the guide?

The team that produces the *Hindu World Prayer Guide* is a diverse group of Christ-followers spread all over the world. Many of them have lived among, worked with, and loved Hindu peoples for many years. Some contribute articles, others edit and proofread, and others volunteer each year to translate, design or distribute the guide. It's a massive team effort, and we are enormously grateful for all who have contributed to this and previous years' prayer guides.

How do you decide what to pray for?

We accept submissions from all over the world, usually following a suggested theme each year. We produce a writing guide for anyone interested in mobilizing prayer for a particular need by contributing an article or testimony. Please contact us using the contact form on our website (www.pray15days.org) if you are interested in submitting material to 15 Days!

{ A special note on prayer }

Samuel Zwemer wrote, "The history of missions is the history of answered prayer." Some leaders even believe that committed intercessors can impact mission work equally as much as those who go in person.

Let's describe a pattern to you.

When church planters forge their way into new regions, they go in as an arrowhead, and this arrowhead will break the ground for the gospel. Those who are praying from abroad go in spiritually by holding firm the shaft of that arrow. The passionate prayers of intercessors, like yourself, have a huge impact on the ministry of church planters. The more the tip of the arrow (church planters on the field) and the shaft of the arrow (intercessors at home) are connected, then the more focused the prayer and the more significant the results.

"There is nothing that intercessory prayer cannot do. Believer, you have a mighty engine in your hand—use it well, use it constantly, use it now with faith, and you shall surely prevail." Charles Spurgeon

Welcome to the 2019 *Hindu World Prayer Guide, 15 Days of Prayer!*

An invitation to relate with Hindus as friends by Alan W.

The story is told of a person who made three extended visits to South Asia. Returning from his first visit, he confidently *wrote a book* entitled, *All about Hinduism*. After a second trip, he *penned one chapter* indicating, "Some common thoughts about Hinduism." The third excursion led him to tentatively *write one paragraph* saying, "these thoughts may reflect some things about the Hindu worldview."

HINDUISM IS A COMPLEX, whole-life worldview that expresses as much about life in general and orderliness in society as it says about religion and deity. It is nearly impossible to describe Hinduism as a fixed set of beliefs and behaviors.

So, an apologetic approach to engaging with Hindus has marginal impact. Three decades of engaging with Hindus shows a relational approach to be far more beneficial. Three keys stand out in relating to Hindus in meaningful and respectful ways.

Sincerity

Hindus have a genuine desire to understand the nature and character of God and to see the practical manifestations of God's

Many Hindus, in fact, believe their standards exceed those of Christians.

attributes in daily life. Many see God as creator, sustainer and protector—the same things Christians believe.

Deuteronomy 6:4–5 says, “The Lord your God is **ONE**,” which literally means God is fully integrated and all divine inquiry is satisfied in him. The statement explains why God calls people to love him as fully integrated people.

A Hindu’s desire to know more about God is like the teacher in Mark 12:28–34. Jesus saw how he answered wisely and said, “you are not far from the kingdom of God.” That could be said about many Hindus.

How could a relationship with Hindus be built around encouraging them to discover for themselves the fullness of God in the person of Jesus through guided study of the Scriptures?

Morality

Personal dialogue with Hindus leads to understanding their high standards of morality in many areas of life—respect for parents, family loyalty, modesty, decency, truthfulness, high work ethic, hospitality, daily thanksgiving and care for the needy. Many Hindus, in fact, believe their standards exceed those of Christians.

Hindus could be described with the statement made about Cornelius in Acts 10:2, that he and his family were devout and God-fearing and gave generously to the needy. Too often, dialogue with Hindus begins with negative attitudes and assumptions about their moral and religious lives and results in condemning presentations of the gospel.

How could relationships with Hindus be built and strengthened

by identifying and recognizing their moral standards and how the same standards are revealed in the Scriptures?

Uncertainty

Countless dialogues and newspaper reports reveal Hindus’ uncertainty about the future, their unfulfilled expectations and unmet needs. They sometimes explain their faithfulness to rituals and diverse practices as connected to the absence of hope and certainty in the future.

Their greatest needs are typically hidden on the inside, not visible on the outside. Many have expressed hidden doubts, uncertainties and questions about the beliefs and practices passed on to them through their families. Furthermore, increasingly, many live in a high-pressure world, expected to compete and succeed in school and secure best positions in the professional world.

Only through getting close to them and building genuine relationships is it possible to know how to help them discover who Jesus is and how He can satisfy their every need and give them hope for the future.



Hindu population statistics

Globally, the number of Hindus is around 1.1 billion or 15 percent of the world population of 7.7 billion (compared to Christians 2.3 billion, and Muslims 1.8 billion).



The five countries with most Hindus

INDIA is the world's second most populous country and is expected to surpass China within the next decade. Of India's population of 1.4 billion, 80 percent is Hindu. Muslims, who number over 190 million, make up 14 percent, and thus India is the world's second-ranking Muslim country.

NEPAL is the only other country in the world with a majority Hindu population. About 81 percent (or 22 million) of Nepal's total population of 29 million is Hindu.

BANGLADESH has a Hindu population of about 16 million (10 percent of the total population of 163 million).

INDONESIA, with more Muslims than any other country, also has a Hindu population of about 4.5 million or 1.7 percent of the total population of 270 million; most of the Hindus live on the island of Bali.

PAKISTAN, which ranks 3rd in the list of countries with the most Muslims, has a Hindu population of about 3.4 million (1.6% of the total population of 216 million)

Countries with a noteworthy percentage of Hindus

48%	Mauritius	22%	Bhutan
30%	Fiji	22%	Trinidad & Tobago
28%	Guyana	20%	Suriname

Hindus in the workplace

Hindus who fear the evil eye protect their children by putting black marks on their face and avoiding compliments.

BIR HAD SOMETIMES gone to church with friends in Nepal, but these friends were also trouble-makers. His family moved to the United States when he was a teen. Bir struggled with addictions and violence. It was in prison when he first heard about salvation through Jesus from a cell-mate.

For a fresh start, an American friend of the family, Chris, gave Bir a job at his restaurant. Chris and several employees of various ethnic backgrounds were Christ-followers who intentionally tried to share the good news with Bir and other co-workers. Chris pointed

doing in Bir's life.

After a year, two nights in a row Bir had a dream about himself and Chris in the restaurant. In this dream there were coffee beans all over the floor. Bir started to sweep the floor. Then Chris said to him, "Your heart is dirty like this floor. Let me show you how to wash it clean."

When Bir woke up, he understood the dream's meaning very clearly. When he found Chris, Bir prayed to entrust his life to the Lord Jesus. He knew it would not be an easy journey, but Bir said God had been calling him for a long time and he was finally answering. Wherever Bir's journey takes him, Psalm 139:10 says, "Even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me."

"I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth ... For we are God's fellow workers."

1 Corinthians 3:6, 9a
English Standard Version

out bridges between Hindu traditions and following Jesus. Others shared Bible stories or principles as they worked, invited Bir to go with them to church, and offered to read the Bible with him.

When these Christ-following employees gathered to pray, they would pray for their co-workers, like Bir, by name. They texted prayer requests back and forth; together they looked for what God might be

there were coffee beans
all over the floor



{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY THAT** Christ-followers would be inspired to bless their Hindu co-workers through prayer and other Holy-Spirit-inspired actions. (Ruth 2:4)
- **ASK GOD** to send dreams and visions to Hindus that will warn them away from evil and guide them to abundant life. Pray that they will find help from Christ-followers. (Daniel 2, especially vv 28–30)
- **PRAY FOR** unity among Christ-followers who work alongside Hindus. (John 17:20–21)

Removing barriers

Hindus believe in a circular rather than a linear concept of time.



ONE EXCITING DEVELOPMENT taking place in some parts of the Hindu world is that Christ-followers are growing in biblical understanding of how to communicate the gospel in ways that resonate in the hearts of lost Hindus as good news.

Despite Christianity's likely existence in India among Hindu peoples since the arrival of the Apostle Thomas, Christians still make up only a small minority of the population (estimates range from 2.35–5.8 percent). One reason is that, historically, many cultural barriers have accompanied the presentation of the gospel to Hindu peoples.

However, around the world, Christ-followers are learning from the Scriptures that "the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7b) Traditionally, Christians living among Hindu peoples have rejected even the marriage symbols that many

married Hindu women apply on their foreheads as not permissible for followers of Christ. Many are now shifting away from such overt legalism, though, towards an approach to Hindus that seeks to remove unnecessary barriers to the communication and understanding of the gospel.

The situation in the Hindu world is parallel to the issues between Jews and Gentiles depicted in Acts 13–15 and the book of Galatians. Acts 15:28–29 reveals that community change (in that case, Gentiles getting circumcised and adhering to Jewish culture) was not required, but rather repentance of sin and forsaking idols. As the Church is learning and applying the lesson about removing unnecessary barriers, many more Hindus, drawn by the Holy Spirit, comprehend and accept the good news and are devoting their lives to following Christ.

- {Ways to pray}**
- **PRAY THAT** the Church will continue to develop a compassionate, welcoming heart towards lost people while at the same time holding fast to the truths of the gospel.
 - **PRAY THAT** the Holy Spirit will help Christ-followers develop the capacity to communicate the Word of Truth to Hindus without creating unnecessary barriers. (Colossians 4:3)
 - **PRAY THAT** more Christ-followers would be drawn to study the Bible to discern biblical patterns of witness that uncompromisingly glorify God.



"To the weak, I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means, I might save some."

1 Corinthians 9:22

Char Dham: Puri

Hinduism is the third largest religion in the world, after Christianity and Islam.

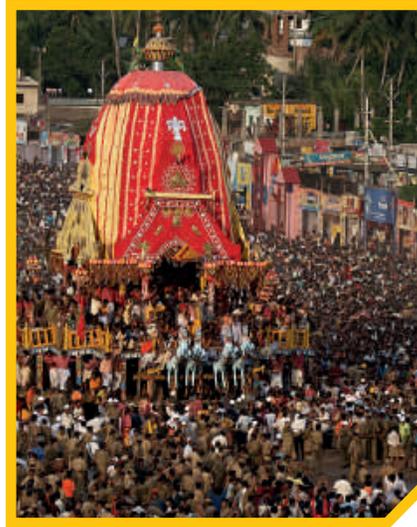


LOCATED ON THE EAST coast of India, Puri is one of the four destinations of the Char Dham (the most revered Hindu pilgrimage sites in India). Completing a pilgrimage to all four Char Dham temples, starting with the Jagannath Temple in Puri, is considered by Hindus to be an important step to achieve *moksha* (salvation, or liberation).

The Jagannath Temple is one of the most famous and sacred temples for Hindus in India. Each year in June or July, Lord Jagannath's devotees participate in a festival called Rath Yatra (the Chariot Festival). During this festival, a 45-foot-tall, 65-ton chariot is built for the deity and pulled by rope throughout the city by thousands of devotees. The English word "juggernaut" has its roots in this festival!

Priyanka and her mother traveled to Puri to participate in this pilgrimage. In the months leading up to their journey, Priyanka had met some Christ-followers in her hometown and had been exposed to Jesus' stories and teachings. She had been learning a lot about Christ but was not sure what to believe. Was Jesus any different from the dozens of other gods she had grown up worshipping?

As Priyanka and her mother entered the temple and saw crowds of people prostrating before the deity, Priyanka had a revelation from Jesus. Instantly, the words of Psalm 86:8 came alive in her heart: "There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours." Priyanka became convinced that Jesus is the One True God and that apart from him, all other worship is futile. She realized that people could never be reconciled to God by going on pilgrimages, giving money to the temple priests, or prostrating in front of the deity. She knew that only through Christ can we experience reconciliation with God. Priyanka returned home from the pilgrimage with a new fondness for Christ in her heart.



{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY THAT** more Hindus would have life-changing encounters with Christ as they set out on pilgrimage and search for God.
- **PRAY THAT** Christ would make His light shine in Hindu people's hearts to give them the knowledge of God. (2 Corinthians 4:6)
- **PRAY THAT** Hindus would realize that we cannot attain peace with God through our own efforts; we can only accept God's gift of eternal life. (Ephesians 2:9)

She became convinced that Jesus is the One True God

The power of media

In Hinduism 108 is a sacred number and is considered auspicious.

GLOBALLY, THE INFLUENCE of digital media is growing rapidly. The impact of media among Hindus is no exception. The Hindu consumers of media come with many different faces but their worldview is being shaped one video, one post, one advertisement at a time.

Like 95 percent of South Indian households, Rita's family has a TV. It is on almost all day. Rita most enjoys the soap opera depicting the plight of a young daughter-in-law, much like herself, and her struggles in the home and society. Inspired by the blessings that the TV characters receive when celebrating the Hindu festivals, Rita aspires to also celebrate all the festivals enthusiastically.

Deepak and his family live outside of South

Asia, but they still gather weekly with their friends for a time of devotion, which includes watching a video recording of their guru (spiritual instructor), who lives in India and gives his sermons in Hindi.

Seven-year-old Chotu indulges in hours of watching cartoons each day. He has many shows woven around Hindu deities and mythology to choose from. His favorite is the child version of Krishna.

Between her smartphone, laptop and TV, Asha spends at least five hours a day glued to one screen or another. She recently watched a Bollywood film in which the lead character faces many setbacks. At the climax of the film he resolves all the problems by taking his own life. Asha wonders to herself if she should do the same.

Vijay, at a critical crossroad in his life, happened to be surfing channels on the TV and came across a Christian message. He had tried many different religious paths, but not this one. He listened intently and heard of God's love and grace. He called the helpline and requested prayer and immediately saw the Living God answer those prayers. Now Vijay and his whole family follow Jesus and call many others in their community to do the same.

{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY THAT** the Creator of the universe would be creatively represented in the Hindu world by Christ-following actors, directors, writers and influencers. (Mark 16:15)
- **PRAY THAT** the Hindu world will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God through TV, YouTube, Facebook, websites, etc. (Habakkuk 2:14)

Globally, the influence of digital media is growing rapidly.



Hindu nationalists

INDIA IS A BEAUTIFULLY diverse nation in which people constitutionally have the freedom to choose their faith and spread it. The general attitude towards other faiths or ways of life is very accommodating.

However, a Hindu nationalist movement of social and political groups exists in India with the core ideology to create a Hindu nation-state. These fundamentalists often accuse Christ-followers of trying to gain control of India by exploiting the poor and vulnerable through financial help, education, promises of well-being, and healings. Some of this mistrust comes from hurt passed down from the time of the British colonization of India.

Adding to the offense, many Christ-followers label Indian traditions as demonic and even discard traditions that are biblically permissible. Other ministers model a Western form of Christianity that new Christ-followers innocently adopt. For this reason, the nationalists accuse foreigners of destroying the local culture to assert a Western lifestyle.

Those who strictly adhere to this ideology emphasize that “Hindu” refers to those who call India both “their homeland and their holy land”, implying that people of faiths founded outside of

India do not belong. When this ideology is taken to extremes it results in hate, imprisonments, beatings, riots and even killings.

Recently, in North India, pastors from a thriving fellowship were arrested after false accusations of coercing people to convert. News crews visited the villages nearby to interview church attendees. Interview after interview revealed stories of sick, tormented, paralyzed people who had spent everything going to different temples, witchdoctors and hospitals. As a last resort, they came to the church and found healing, love and true peace.

Let us remember the example of Saul, who persecuted the new followers of Christ, throwing them in jail, having them beaten and condemning them to death. But suddenly, Jesus Himself encountered him on the road to Damascus. Let us remember the example of God calling Ananias to go pray for Paul to receive his sight and how later he became one of the greatest apostles of Christ. (Acts 9:1–31)

As a last resort, they came to the church and found healing, love and true peace.

{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY THAT** *Christ-followers who live among Hindu peoples will be strong in faith and walk in radical love in the face of persecution. (Acts 4:29–30)*
- **PRAY FOR** *God to open the hearts of Hindu nationalists to see Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life. (John 14:6)*
- **PRAY THAT** *genuine indigenous expressions of devotion to Jesus will blossom.*

Special prayers during Diwali

Learning about and praying strategically through the five-day Hindu festival of Diwali.

Over the next five days, alongside our normal articles, we will also spend some time learning about and praying strategically through the five-day Hindu festival of Diwali. Diwali's size and popularity stand out among the almost constant festivals and rituals that make up living Hinduism, easily making it the largest and most recognized Hindu festival. Before the festival of Diwali begins, Hindu families thoroughly clean their homes in preparation for the worship activities and celebrations. Pray that Hindus would be preparing their hearts in hunger for an encounter with the Living God.



Interacting with the Word: Bible storytelling

ONE OF THE MOST famous stories from the Hindu scriptures is the Ramayana. It's a heroic story of the exiled king, Ram, and his wife, Sita, who are incarnations of the gods. One day, the demon king Ravan kidnaps Sita. Then Ram and his brother courageously battle Ravan to rescue Sita. Upon their victorious return, people of the kingdom leave lamps on their doorsteps to light the path and welcome home their king. This lighting of the lamps is still practiced today during the festival of Diwali. Hindus love these epic stories and learn them from a young age.

Followers of Jesus love stories too, and the Bible is one great story of a sacrificial King, keeping His promises to rescue His beloved people from the grips of the evil one and to bring them home to His kingdom of eternal life. If we learn to retell stories from the Bible, we will have a powerful tool to communicate the Word of God with our Hindu friends and neighbors.

Manju, an Indian man, started coming to church functions but found it difficult to connect with the Bible. One day, two believers visited his home and shared with him the story of the Prodigal Son. Manju then effortlessly retold the story in his own words. The believers asked a few simple questions, and he naturally reflected on what people are like, and the loving God who longs for His children to come back to Him. One of the believers continued to meet with him and learned that in Manju's dreams, a dark figure would come and sit on his chest. The believer shared the story of Jesus freeing the demon-possessed man (Mark 5). Manju came to see Jesus as the One who had power over demons and could give him freedom.



DIWALI HIGHLIGHT

Dhanteras

Hindus celebrate Dhanteras, the first official day of the Diwali festival, by buying some metal object, especially gold or silver. Many believe that buying something metal on this day is lucky and will help to bring more wealth into their home. Pray for people to break free from searching for earthly treasures that will not satisfy and instead seek the eternal treasure above.

{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY THAT** *Christ-followers who love and treasure the stories in the Bible (Psalm 19:8–10) will learn to share them intentionally and naturally with Hindu peoples.*
- **PRAY THAT** *Hindus will come to know God the Father of our Lord Jesus, as HiStory (His Story) of salvation.*
- **PRAY THAT** *through these stories many will become wise for salvation through faith in Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:15)*

The Bible is one great story of a sacrificial King

Char Dham: Rameshwaram

ON AN ISLAND off the coast of the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu sits the Ramanathaswamy Temple, the second of the four Char Dham sites. According to the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, the god Ram established the temple by setting up idols of the god Shiva here. Ram then prayed to Shiva to be cleansed of any sins he might have committed during his war against a demon king.

A pilgrimage to Rameshwaram is not complete without having a “holy dip” in the 22 main holy bodies of water called *teerthams*. The first and foremost bathing point is a beach near the temple where huge crowds gather to dip in the ocean, hoping that, like Ram, their sins will be washed away. After this initial bath, pilgrims often hire a guide to assure that they visit the remaining *teerthams* (ponds, wells, etc) in the correct sequence and with the proper rituals. Finally, they visit the temple itself and worship the idol of Shiva, again seeking forgiveness for their sins.

So, after all these baths and rituals, do they feel liberated of sin and assured of salvation? For most, a doubt remains. “What if I didn’t do the rituals just right?” And, “What if I sin again?” It’s an endless cycle requiring another ritual bath at every auspicious destination, at each festival, each new moon, each new day ... and yet the uncertainty is never washed away.

Writing of his need to have his sins washed away, King David cried out, “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!” (Psalm 51:1–2)

The good news is that Christ’s final sacrifice destroyed the power of sin, “by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.” (Hebrews 10:14, New Living Translation)

{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY FOR** *Hindus who already have an awareness of sin and who are searching for someone who can cleanse them of their sin. (1 John 1:7)*
- **PRAY FOR** *Hindus who are unconvinced that they have any sin that needs to be washed away—that the Holy Spirit would convict them and that they meet and turn to Jesus.*
- **PRAY FOR** *Hindus everywhere—that they would learn that they also can experience the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Savior. (Titus 3:5–6)*

For most,
a doubt
remains

DIWALI HIGHLIGHT

Naraka Chaturdashi

In most years, Hindus of South India will celebrate Naraka Chaturdashi today, the second day of Diwali. Also called Chota Diwali (literally “small Diwali”), today many Hindus will celebrate when Krishna defeated the demon Narakasura, who had taken control of all the kingdoms on earth. People will rise early in the morning, apply fragrant oil, take a ritual bath and—after putting on new clothes—perform the ritual worship (*puja*). The families then enjoy a plentiful breakfast together. Later they will light clay lamps (*diyas*) and explode firecrackers. Pray that during this time Hindus will contemplate sin, and seek a mighty Deliverer to free them from their own sin.

Diwali: Festival of Lights

NEW CLOTHES, HOMES lit up by oil lamps and strings of sparkling lights, delicious food, sweets, firecrackers, and time with family and friends all come together in perhaps the most significant festival for Hindus, Diwali.

Diwali takes place in either October or November each year. The word *Diwali* is a shortened form of *Deepavali*, which means “row of lamps”. The third day (today) is the pinnacle of the festival—and the grandest, with Hindus all over the world joyfully celebrating the victory of good over evil, light over darkness.

As the sun sets, families complete the ritual worship of their god and then light hundreds of small clay oil lamps (*diyas*) from the main lamp used in the worship. Together, the family lights up the darkness by placing the lit *diyas* inside and outside of the home. Hindus around the world will tell stories behind the celebration, with many variations. Some light *diyas* to light the path for the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi, to enter their home. Others light the lamps in remembrance of when the people of Ayodhya lit the city with rows of *diyas* to welcome their king, Ram, back into his kingdom after saving his wife Sita from the demon king Ravan. Families then share a delicious meal, give sweets to family and friends, and light firecrackers late into the night.

Now, many followers of Jesus also choose to celebrate this beautiful festival by lighting lamps in remembrance of King Jesus entering this dark world as the Light. They joyfully worship as they celebrate His victory over the powers of darkness and God’s plan to spread this glorious light throughout the world.

{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY THAT** *Christ-followers would seek ways to join in the warmth of this festival and be lamps set on a lampstand, giving light to all those around them. (Matthew 5:15)*
- **PRAY FOR** *Christ-followers from Hindu families to joyfully celebrate their victorious King Jesus and to walk in their identity as a royal priesthood, to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)*
- **ON THIS** *very important day for Hindus, let us pray that Hindus worldwide would encounter the One who came into the world as the light of life, the One who achieved the complete victory over evil. (Colossians 1:13–14)*



Hindus in Germany

Most Hindu marriages are arranged and involve people from the same caste and community.

THE IDOL OF LORD MURUGAN sits enthroned on a colorful chariot decorated with many flowers. Around the chariot, Hindu priests smash hundreds of coconuts on the wet streets of Berlin, Germany. The chanting of the devotional songs and the loud bangs of the bursting coconuts mesmerize the crowd of worshipers and tourists. It's the annual temple festival of the Hindu Tamils (a people group from South India and Sri Lanka) celebrated in the Kreuzberg borough of Berlin. The statue of the main god of the temple circulates through the streets surrounding the temple. Hindus believe it is a blessing for the people who see it, and for the city and its citizens.

The biggest of such events in Europe takes place in Hamm, a town in North Rhine Westphalia, Germany, where every year around 15,000 Hindu devotees attend the public procession of the goddess Sri Kamadchi.

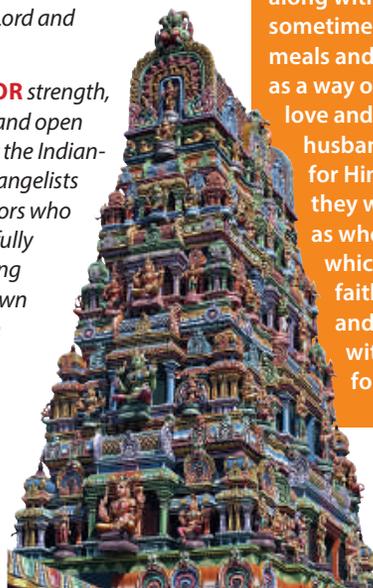
Germany is home to about 60,000 Tamils, roughly three-fourths of whom are Hindus. Tamils from Sri Lanka have come to Germany since the late 1970s. Their number rose significantly during the violent civil war in Sri Lanka in the mid-1980s.

In addition to the Tamil Hindus, since the 1950s around 40,000 Hindus have come from the Indian states of Kerala, Bengal and Gujarat; many are businessmen, doctors or engineers.

Most Hindus in Germany are still unengaged by the followers of Christ. Fear of the unknown, and lack of information on how to engage with Hindus and people of other world religions, have kept the Body of Christ from reaching out. When the Church will step out boldly in love and humbly embrace their nation's guests and neighbors, the Lord will surely work in mighty ways.

Ways to pray

- **PRAY FOR** the Church in Germany to receive a vision for their unreached neighbors who often live right across the street or next door.
- **PRAY THAT** Jesus would reveal Himself to the very devoted Tamil Hindus in dreams and visions about the true Lord and Master.
- **PRAY FOR** strength, wisdom and open doors for the Indian-origin evangelists and pastors who are faithfully ministering to their own people in Europe.



DIWALI HIGHLIGHT

Family

On the fourth day of Diwali, many Hindus will visit friends, family and neighbors, and share sweets. Brothers will often be sent to fetch their sisters from their in-laws and bring them home to spend time with family on this day. Newly-married daughters, along with their husbands, are sometimes invited for special meals and given presents, as a way of celebrating the love and devotion between husbands and wives. Pray for Hindu families, that they will turn to Christ as whole family units, which strengthens the faith of each member and provides a strong witness of God's heart for family.

Char Dham: Dwarka



DIWALI HIGHLIGHT

PERCHED ON THE WESTERN tip of India is the small, but spiritually significant, city of Dwarka. Despite having a population of fewer than 50,000, it is both one of the four Char Dham and one of the Sapta Puri (seven most sacred pilgrimage centers for Hindus). Early every morning, people gather along the *ghats* (stairs) leading down to the meeting point of the Gomti River and the Arabian Ocean. There they seek to wash away their sins or to perform elaborate rituals guided by Hindu priests to find peace for the souls of deceased relatives.

At the center of the city, rising seven stories high and dominating the skyline, is the beautifully-ornate, hand-carved Dwarkadish Temple. Dedicated to Krishna, Hindus believe that this was the center of his earthly kingdom. Every year, tens of thousands of people make a pilgrimage to this temple. Many will travel for days and nights to catch a glimpse of the idol, hoping to have their prayers heard or their vows fulfilled.

There is a clear calling on the city as a place of divine encounter and worship, but at this point that calling has been twisted and obscured. We believe that one day people will travel to the city prepared to meet not with Krishna, but with the God who is alive, who is real and who loves them; and that the blessings they receive in Dwarka will be carried home with them, bringing transformation throughout the country and new life to many.

Also, because of its spiritual significance, there is a high percentage of Brahmins (the priestly caste) living in the city. We hope and pray that these priests will experience God calling out to them, just as He did to Samuel, and that they would respond to His voice, and rise up into their true destiny and calling as people who hear from God and lead others into freedom and joy.

{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY THAT** this western-most corner of India will be a gateway for a movement of God's grace to flow deep and wide.
- **PRAY FOR** more laborers to be sent to this region, to sow seeds and reap the great harvest awaiting. (Matthew 9:37-38)
- **PRAY THAT** Dwarka and its many priests will be hosts of God's presence and love, leading many pilgrims into an encounter with the living God.

Brothers and sisters

Today is the last day of Diwali. Traditionally, brothers and sisters will meet on this day to express love and affection for one another. Sisters pray for their brothers' long life and protection over the coming year. Brothers give their sisters gifts and sweets in return. Pray for siblings of Hindus who know Christ, that this would be a chance for them to share their love for Christ and to pray in His name for their salvation and protection.

We hope and pray that these priests will experience God

Reflections from a diaspora Hindu

“The God who made the world ... does not live in temples made by man ... And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.”

Acts 17:24–27a

YASH, A HINDU-BACKGROUND follower of Christ, says: “As a member of the Hindu diaspora living outside of India for several generations, this has been one of the most relevant and comforting Scriptures for my life. In an era where religious and cultural differences are acute, strained, and often highlighted through popular media, these verses remind me that I am not an outsider. I was conceived in God’s heart for such a time as this. Although my forefathers came to Canada searching for better economic opportunities and political/social stability,

the main reason I find myself in Canada in 2019 is that I would seek and find Him.

“Millions of others from the Hindu world have emigrated with various motives. Very few realize that God has decided where they should live so that perhaps they would search for Him and find Him.”

About Yash

When Yash was nine years old, his family fled from the Fiji Islands to Canada. Coming from a priestly Hindu family, Yash became exceedingly religious at a young age.

When at university, Yash met a Christ-follower classmate named Mark. Though they often debated about religion, Mark’s relentless love captivated Yash’s attention. As Yash opened up about the deep traumas and hurts in his life, Mark led him to pray to Jesus. At that moment, Yash received supernatural healing and peace from God ... but he still wasn’t ready to commit his life to Jesus as the only way.

Mark persevered in prayer and asked his church to pray for Yash too. On a spiritual journey to India, Yash had another supernatural, personal encounter with Jesus that changed his life forever. Now Yash shares the love and message of Christ in culturally relevant ways to local Hindu and Sikh communities in Canada.

{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY THAT** God would grant the Hindu diaspora a hunger for Him. (Psalm 63:1)
- **PRAY THAT** Christ-followers would intentionally share the love of Christ with Hindus living around them. (Philippians 2:3–5)

Now Yash shares the love and message of Christ

Henna story book

The goal of life in Hinduism is to attain salvation, or *moksha*

ASHA WAS A 22-year-old, high-caste, Brahmin, Hindu girl. Stephany, having newly arrived in India, studied Hindi with Asha for two hours every day. About six months into their studies together, Stephany spoke Hindi confidently in general conversation but lacked the spiritual vocabulary she needed to have the deep, meaningful, God-focused conversations that she longed to have with people around her.

Stephany decided to start reading Bible stories with Asha and ask her questions about the vocabulary and meaning of the stories as they

went along. She found a book of 27 stories that covered creation through to Christ's final return. Accompanying each story was a specially-crafted, henna* design to be drawn on the hand.

After each story they would discuss what they had learned about God, what they had learned about man, and if there was any sin or positive example in the story. Somewhere around story 18, they read about Peter walking on water towards Jesus. When Stephany asked Asha about what sin she observed in this story, Asha replied that Peter sinned because he didn't put his full faith in Jesus.

Then she paused thoughtfully and pronounced, "I need to put my full faith in Jesus also." Stephany was shocked! As they continued to discuss this, it became clear that Asha was ready to live her life for Jesus and not for any other gods.

Shortly after, Asha was baptized in front of her entire high-caste Hindu family. Five years later, she continues to follow Jesus faithfully, despite persecution from family and neighbors. She has also shared with many relatives and community members about the hope she has in Christ alone. To God be the glory!

{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY FOR** women like Asha to stand firm in their faith and boldly share with their surrounding community. (Ephesians 6:10-18)
- **PRAY FOR** inspiration for believers to use other beautiful Indian art forms to share the good news and disciple new believers.
- **PRAY FOR** cross-cultural Indian ministers and evangelists, that they would learn to communicate the good news effectively. (1 Corinthians 9:22)

**Henna is a reddish-brown dye that is used to make a temporary tattoo when applied on the skin.*



Char Dham: Badrinath

Many Hindus who believe in the power of astrology make important decisions based on the position of the stars.

HIGH UP IN THE HIMALAYAN Mountains of the Indian state of Uttarakhand sits the famous Badrinath Temple. Badrinath is the final and most challenging destination of the four Char Dham pilgrimage sites.

The Badrinath Temple sits in a small town (also called Badrinath) beside the Alaknanda River, at an altitude of 10,300 feet. Heavy snowfall and treacherous roads force this temple to close for six months of the year. The temple is dedicated to the god Vishnu, and at the center of the temple is a three-foot-tall, black, stone statue of Vishnu. The head priest is traditionally a Brahmin from the state of Kerala.

The pull of this temple is so strong that Hindus are willing to take significant risks for a *darshan* (vision) of the Vishnu statue inside. Despite the looming dangers of cloudbursts and mudslides — such as the one that killed more than 6,000 people in the so-called “Himalayan Tsunami” of June 2013 — pilgrims continue to flock to the temple by the thousands in the summer/monsoon season. Approximately one million pilgrims visit the Badrinath Temple each year; this is an astounding number considering the difficult approach and remote location high in the Himalayas.

The temple is one of the main spiritual strongholds in North India, as visiting it is seen by Hindus as an important step towards *moksha* (salvation). The beliefs and powers attributed to this (and the other Char Dham temples) are heaping burdens and bondage upon desperate souls as they search for salvation where it cannot be found, and submit themselves to demonic powers as they try to reach the divine. Only Jesus can offer true salvation, and because of His journey to the cross there is no more need to venture anywhere else in a human attempt to be reunited with our Creator and be liberated from sin.



{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY FOR** the one million Hindus who go on pilgrimage to Badrinath every year between May and October.
- **PRAY THAT** believers would be filled with boldness to reach out to pilgrims journeying to Badrinath. (Ephesians 6:19)
- **PRAY THAT** God will supernaturally remove the spiritual blindness that keeps many from seeing the gospel for what it truly is, salvation from sin and death. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Only Jesus
can offer true
salvation

Family identity

Hindu scriptures say there are 330 million gods.



ALL I WANT IS TO BE a teacher," says Arpit, "but I studied computer engineering. My neighbors will tease my parents if I take a job at a school. They'll say, 'Why did you educate him in such a big field and now all he's doing is teaching?' So, I'm still looking for a job in IT."

Ask nearly any Hindu young person how they chose their field of study, profession or marriage partner, and you'll uncover the advice and direction of parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Rarely is a decision made outside of family wishes. Maintaining the family reputation and honoring parental authority are the primary responsibilities of any Hindu.

Jesus affirmed the commandment to "Honor your father and mother" (Ephesians 6:2a) while also asserting that we must love Him more than our father and mother (Luke 14:26). For young people like Arpit, who are considering the claims of Jesus, the tension between these two commands of Christ raises the question, "How can you follow Jesus exclusively and not dishonor the claims on your life made by your parents and community?"

Madhu made the courageous choice to follow

Jesus, even though his high-caste Hindu family objected. They protested that Jesus is only worshiped by the poor and lower castes—not by a respected family like theirs. They worried that his future employment and marriage prospects would suffer and were angry about how his new loyalty to Jesus curtailed his involvement in religious ceremonies.

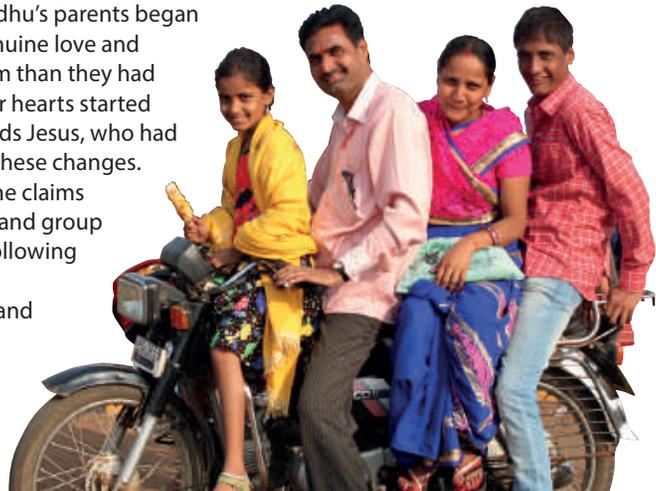
While following Jesus, Madhu worked hard to affirm his relationship with his parents. He participated in family events as much as he could and respected their desires for his education and profession. He continued to eat the vegetarian diet his parents considered pure, even though his church community taught him he was free to eat meat. Madhu's parents began to feel more genuine love and respect from him than they had in the past. Their hearts started softening towards Jesus, who had brought about these changes.

Navigating the claims of Hindu family and group identity while following Jesus requires wisdom, grace, and perseverance.

{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY FOR** new Christ-followers to respond in love and wisdom to their parents and extended families.
- **PRAY FOR** their faith to be a sweet aroma to their communities. (2 Corinthians 2:15)
- **PRAY FOR** whole communities to turn to Jesus together. (Acts 16:31–34)

Their hearts started softening



God rested: children's Bible camp

A MULTI-ETHNIC CHURCH in a half-South-Asian neighborhood in the United States decided to have a summer backyard Bible club for children. Each week featured a different Bible story. In addition to the storytelling, there were related games, crafts, activities and snacks.

The first week's story told how God created the world and everything in it. Because the children came from families with different religious traditions (a few different Hindu sects, Jain, Muslim, and Christian), the Bible club leaders were intentional in explaining that they worshiped God the Creator.

For one activity that week, the children drew pictures of each day of the creation story. For the seventh day, the Bible club leaders had simply said, "God rested." (Genesis 2:2) The children from Hindu and

Jain families drew sleeping faces. The gods these children worshiped slept every day. They had to let the gods at their homes sleep at certain times, and then wake them up by ringing bells at other times. When the families went to temples, they had to ring bells before they started their prayer ceremonies to get the gods' attention. So, these children assumed that God the Creator also slept.

The Bible club leaders had not expected this misunderstanding. They knew they had to clear things up. After a brief, prayerful discussion, they read to the children from Psalm 121: "My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth ... he who keeps you will not slumber." They explained that God the Creator is always awake to watch over us. Then they also explained that when God the Creator rested on the seventh day, He was enjoying His creation and celebrating what He had done.

This experience led to the church hosting an annual "Creation festival" at the beginning of summer—to honor God the Creator and to enjoy His work with Him.



God the Creator
is always awake to
watch over us.

{Ways to pray}

- **PRAY THAT** all Hindu families will have the opportunity to learn about the God who never sleeps. (Matthew 19:14)
- **PRAY THAT** when Christ-followers pray in the name of Jesus with their Hindu friends, neighbors, classmates, and co-workers, God will answer so that people will know He is God. (1 Kings 18:20–39)
- **PRAY THAT** Hindu children would recognize God's eternal power throughout the day. (Romans 1:20)



Staying engaged

Pray *ekballo!*

In Matthew 9:37–38, Jesus instructs His disciples, saying:

“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.”

The word used for “send” here is the Greek word *ekballo*. This word is not the normal Greek word used for “send”. Instead, it is the same word used by Jesus in Luke 11:20, when He says, “it is by the finger of God that I cast out (*ekballo*) demons ...” *Ekballo* is a spiritually violent word that means “a forceful launching forth of something”.

Hindus are the second-largest, least-reached religious group in the world, with only about 2 percent of cross-cultural ministers focused on sharing the gospel with them. The majority of Hindus still live without any meaningful access to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We encourage you to set an alarm for 9:38 (AM or PM) every day to remind you of Jesus’ command in Matthew 9:38: to pray that He will *ekballo* more workers who will go and share the good news with Hindu peoples everywhere. When Jesus *ekballos* demons, demons MUST leave. When Jesus *ekballos* laborers, they MUST go out into the plentiful harvest.

Thank you for joining us in prayer this year.