

No Longer Strangers: Missional Living as the Family of God

by Amber Díaz Pearson for World Relief Durham, presentation for local churches

Outline

1. **Introduction:** I'm here to share with you how we at World Relief Durham view our work as the natural outgrowth of the greatest commandment (love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself) and the great commission (go into all the world and make disciples). While I'll share more later about the specific work we do, to start out you need to know that World Relief is a Christian humanitarian organization whose mission is to empower the local church to serve the most vulnerable. In the U.S., the primary way we do this is through work with refugees and other immigrants in vulnerable situations. I'm going to start with God's call throughout scripture to welcome the stranger, how our work is a direct response to that call, and how we invite our churches and communities to respond with us in ways that respect the image-bearing dignity of others.
2. **God's heart for the stranger**
 - a. Ephesians: Gentile believers used to be "[strangers to the covenants of promise](#)" [and with "no hope ... far away"](#) (Eph. 2:12-13) but in Christ they are no longer strangers, but "[fellow citizens with the saints.](#)" (Eph. 2:19)
 - b. Prefigured in the Old Testament: care for strangers and foreigners, along with the poor, the widows, and orphans. These groups held little social power / God's people were to serve & uplift them
 - c. (Non-exhaustive list of relevant OT texts: Exodus 22, 23; Leviticus 19; Deuteronomy 1, 10, 24; Psalm 146; Isaiah 56; Ezekiel 47; Zechariah 7.)
 - d. *Not* proof-texts free of context, but core ethical principle rooted in covenant. **Leviticus 19:34**, "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God."
 - e. Emphasized in the New Covenant: writer of Hebrews looks back to Abraham (Gen. 18), "[do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.](#)" (Heb. 13:2).
 - f. Covenant of promise → the church (already & not-yet) → resurrection & eternity in the multiethnic, multinational, multilingual kingdom of God.
3. **World Relief's Work**
 - a. Motivation for World Relief's work. The local church is God's "plan A" for his work in the world! Nearly 80 years of history.
 - b. **Who is a refugee?** Legal definition
 - c. **Forced displacement statistics:** most recent figures and demographic information
 - d. **Resettlement Ceiling:** overview of admissions and ceiling numbers
 - e. **Placement Process:** complicated!

- f. **World Relief Durham:** Opened in 2007. Direct services and programs. Support for other immigrants in vulnerable situations. Arrival numbers this FY.
- g. We aim to mobilize the local church and community to welcome and build mutually transformative relationships with our newest neighbors. Pathways = giving, volunteering, advocacy.

4. So how do we live missionally?

- a. [*When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself*](#) (Corbett & Fikkert) – clash between marred identity and God-complex (or savior mentality). Solution: center the *person*, not the *need*. We are made for relationship.
- b. 4 Models of Engagement from [*Living Without Enemies: Being Present in the Midst of Violence*](#) (Wells & Owens). Want our community to move from *working for* to *being with*. “*working for*” = relationship of someone with resources giving to/rendering assistance to someone without resources; “*working with*” = recognizes both parties have skills & abilities, but still need-focused; “*being with*” = person-focused, time spent with the other is valuable for its own sake; “*being for*” = advocacy, but needs foundation of *being with*.
- c. [*No Longer Strangers: Transforming Evangelism with Immigrant Communities*](#) (Cho & Izadi Page) – must act with care not only in material & relational contexts, but in evangelism as well. Proclaim the gospel in genuine relationship: trauma-informed and sensitive to cultural and socio-economic differences.

5. Independence/Dependence Scenarios for small-group discussion

- a. Choose from: 1) Medical form; 2) No food; 3) Soccer game.

6. Conclusion

- a. Regardless of where we reside in the world, Christians are obligated to follow God’s call both to defend the vulnerable (loving our neighbor), and to invite those who are “far-off” spiritually into faith in Jesus, moving from death to life, and from alienation to citizenship in God’s kingdom (the great commission).
- b. God honors our faithfulness with the level of authority and responsibility that he has given to each of us (cf. the parable of the talents). You can speak truth about God’s compassion and mercy within your spheres of influence. Who can you pray for? Who can you invite into your life as a friend?

7. Questions