

Global Migration and the People of God

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

Outline

1. **Introduction:** We're going to spend time today looking first at how the story of scripture is both a story of migrants — some by choice, some by force, some by economic necessity, and some by God's command — *and* the story of God's faithfulness in protecting his migratory people and establishing a home for them. With God's word telling us how the people of God should both understand their—our—own experience as migrants belonging to God *and* how that experience compels our hospitality towards other "strangers" and migrants, we will look at contemporary experiences of migration around the world. Finally, here locally, those of us who are already "at home" get the opportunity to support refugees and other immigrant neighbors as they seek to cultivate home in a new place.

2. God's Migrants

a. Text: [Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16](#)

- ❖ From Adam and Eve's exile from Eden because of their disobedience
 - to Abraham uprooting his family and traveling to a new land at God's command;
- ❖ from Jacob and his sons becoming economic migrants in Egypt
 - to the Hebrew people fleeing slavery and seeking the Promised Land;
- ❖ from Naomi's family becoming economic migrants in Moab
 - to Ruth the foreigner becoming an ancestress of King David (and ultimately, Jesus);
- ❖ the cycles of exile and return Israel and Judah experience in judgment and mercy;
- ❖ Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt with the infant Jesus to escape genocide;
- ❖ the diaspora of the early church ...

It is hard to read Scripture without recognizing that migration is a recurring experience of God's people.

- b. The lessons God expects his people to remember throughout are:
1. Remain faithful to God, because he is faithful to you.
 2. God is the architect of your true home.
 3. Love and show hospitality to others who are strangers and exiles in your land because God has shown mercy to you.

c. Texts: [Leviticus 19:34](#) and [Deuteronomy 24:17-18](#)

- d. As Christians, whether we are "at home" or in a strange place, we are united in the body of Christ. And in the now and not-yet, we look forward to eternal life in the fullness of Christ's kingdom.
- e. *"Only Christ's table can offer the sojourner, the migrant, and the refugee the ultimate rest and homecoming they long for. The same holds true for those who identify themselves as "natives," "citizens," and "hosts"; the table challenges their relentless drive to preserve their sense of home from the perceived threats of outsiders. Once again, the table of Christ reminds us that no earthly home is ultimate, that no earthly home will fully satisfy our yearning to belong."*

- Alberto La Rosa Rojas, "A Migrant at the Lord's Table: A Reformed Theology of Home" *Reformed Public Theology: A Global Vision for Life in the World* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids: 2021)

3. Global Migration Today

- a. **"Voluntary" migration:** when migration feels like a choice. I can take X job and move there or take Y job and stay here.
 - But even these "choices" are constrained: e.g. medical residents' match process; a transfer within your company; downsizing; etc.
 - **Economic migration:** leaving one place and taking up residence as a laborer in another to improve one's economic well-being. Sometimes whole families move, but more often husbands/fathers or adult children leave in the hope of sending remittances back to their families.
 - Nepali laborers in Dubai, Qatar, Kuwait. 600,000+ work permits approved in 2022.
 - Unaccompanied minors (often from Central America) in the U.S. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>)
 - While *choice* might propel migration and seeking work, migrants are more vulnerable to exploitation in all labor sectors. (https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---ipec/documents/publication/wcms_854733.pdf)
 - **Economic value for the receiving country:** in 2021, the more than 45 million foreign-born people residing in the U.S. paid **over \$524 billion in taxes** and represented about \$1.4 trillion in spending power. (<https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/national/>)
- b. **Involuntary Migration:** migration that doesn't look like a choice because "home" is destroyed or staying at "home" would lead to death or imprisonment.
 - **Climate migration:** leaving one's home because it has become hostile or uninhabitable due to natural disasters and climate change. Internal displacement most common, but also forces people across borders. (<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/climate-migration-101-explainer>)
 - 500,000 displaced Indonesians after the 2004 tsunami
 - 8 million Pakistanis displaced after 2022 flooding (<https://odi.org/en/publications/multimedia/infographics-climate-change-migration-and-displacement/>)
 - **Forced displacement:** fleeing persecution, conflict, violence, human rights abuses. Internal or external displacement.
 - Most recent UNHCR numbers and demographic information

4. What is the Church Doing?

- a. *"The displaced are not guests whom we need to host; they are those through whom God is making a home in the world. In Christ, migrants and citizens share a common journey home."*
 - Alberto La Rosa Rojas, "A Migrant at the Lord's Table: A Reformed Theology of Home" *Reformed Public Theology: A Global Vision for Life in the World* (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids: 2021)

Many examples of the church caring for migrants. **But a few to specifically highlight:**

- b. **Burundi, 2015:** violence after national elections; more than 90,000 fled in the first 6 weeks of unrest:
 - o The Anglican Church in Burundi trained local parishes in disaster response to support IDPs
 - o The Diocese of Bukavu in the Anglican Church of Congo and the Diocese of Tanganyika in the Anglican Church of Tanzania hosted Burundian families and contributed food and other items.
(<https://anglicanalliance.org/anglican-churches-in-burundi-drc-and-tanzania-assist-people-displaced-by-crisis-in-burundi/>)
- c. **The U.S. border:**
 - o Churches in Arizona, Texas, and Mexico provide food, water, and shelter to migrants arriving or waiting to cross the border
(<https://theimmigrationcoalition.com/>)
- d. **European Union, 2013-2023:** migration from non-EU countries:
 - (Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe study) "The CCME surveyed 74 Protestant congregations, ranging from state-privileged or 'mainline' churches to evangelical and Pentecostal churches, that ministered to migrants in 22 countries. It found that migrants had started attending half of those churches by 2020. In about a quarter, the migrants are now a notable minority of the church. In another 20 percent, the recent migrants had become the majority."
(<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2022/october/migrant-refugee-asylum-europe-church-growth.html>)
- e. **Revitalization of the Church:** As suggested by the data in the previous point, immigrants are a source of spiritual renewal, revitalizing congregations particularly in Western Europe and the United States.
- f. When there is less protection for displaced people, there is **less protection for persecuted Christians**. (*Closed Doors* report:
https://worldrelief.org/content/uploads/2023/09/ClosedDoorsReport-September-2023_web.pdf)

5. The Global Church & World Relief:

- a. Numbers from the latest WR Annual Report
- b. Here locally, number of churches that partnered with us in giving, volunteering, and advocacy in our last annual report.
- c. WR Mission (*empower the local church*).
- d. Arrivals last FY / expected arrivals this FY.
- e. Areas of Direct Services at our local office.

6. Recommended resources:

- a. <https://worldrelief.org/> & <https://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com/>
- b. [*The God Who Sees: Immigrants, the Bible, and the Journey to Belong*](#) (2019), Karen Gonzalez
- c. [*Jesus the Refugee: Ancient Injustice and Modern Solidarity*](#) (2023), D. Glenn Butner Jr.
- d. [*Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion & Truth in the Immigration Debate*](#) (2018), Matthew Soerens & Jenny Yang

- e. [*No Longer Strangers: Transforming Evangelism with Immigrant Communities*](#) (2021), eds. Eugene Cho & Samira Izadi Page
- f. [*Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis*](#) (2016), Stephen Bauman, Matthew Soerens & Dr. Issam Smeir
- g. [*Inalienable: How Marginalized Kingdom Voices Can Help Save the American Church*](#) (2022), Eric Costanzo, Daniel Yang & Matthew Soerens

7. Q&A