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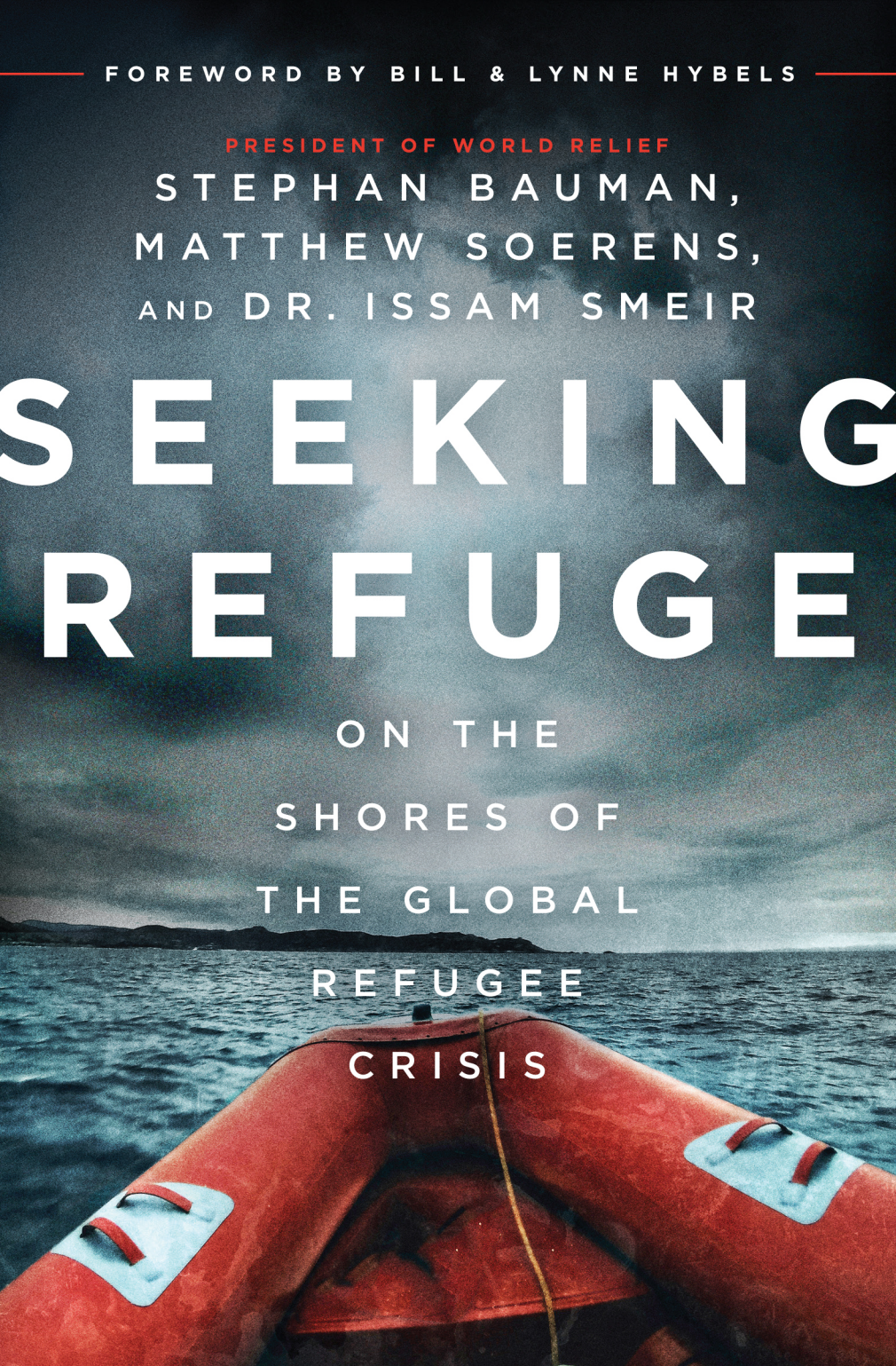
SEEKING REFUGE

ON THE SHORES OF THE GLOBAL REFUGEE CRISIS



CHAPTER 1

AN UNPRECEDENTED GLOBAL CRISIS

Today, an estimated sixty million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced from their homes, a number larger than at any time in recorded history.[1] While many remain within the borders of their country, about twenty million individuals have been forced by persecution to escape, seeking refuge in a neighboring land. More than half of those refugees are children.[2]

Our minds can only scarcely comprehend these statistics. Individual stories and images are what have ignited unprecedented global attention to the plight of refugees. In September 2015, nearly five years into a deadly civil war, the world's attention dramatically focused upon the conflict in Syria and the displacement it has engendered. With one photograph that hit newspapers and social media, millions witnessed the lifeless body of a three-year-old boy, Alan Kurdi, washed up on a Turkish beach after a failed attempt to reach safety in Europe. Filmmaker Ken Burns, reflecting on that photograph, observed: "The power of the single image to convey complex information is still there. It has that power to shock and arrest us. To make us stop for just a second and interrupt the flow."[3]

Wincing as we glanced at the little boy, still wearing tiny shoes and

a red T-shirt, we could not help but think of our own children. We grieve the loss of innocent life. We shudder to imagine the horror that would inspire a parent to embark upon such a dangerous journey, and, in a subconscious pivot from compassion to fear, wonder if such terror could reach our shores—our children—as well. We ask God why He allows such horrific injustice and suffering. And in response, we might hear the still, small voice of God asking His church, *How will you respond?*

In recent years, about 105,000 refugees have been resettled annually to developed countries. Nearly one million more have made their way to Europe to seek asylum. Yet these numbers account for only a small fraction of the world's displaced people.

This book is designed to be a tool for the church—followers of Jesus in every part of the world—to answer that question in ways informed both by the Bible and by the facts of the current crisis. While we hope what's written here will be useful to those of any faith or of no faith, our focus is particularly informed by our shared Christian worldview and by our conviction that, to quote pastor Bill Hybels, "The local church is the hope of the world."[4] We believe that the church, in its many local incarnations throughout the world, must be at the center of the response to the global refugee crisis. That includes those, like the three of us, who form the church in the West: as columnist Michael Gerson, writing from Lebanon, a nation where nearly one in four residents is now a refugee, observes, "If American churches . . . are not relevant here, they are irrelevant."[5]

As American citizens (two of us by birth, one by naturalization),

our focus in *Seeking Refuge* is primarily on how local churches and individual Christ followers in the West—in the United States, in particular, but also in Canada, Europe, and beyond—might best respond to the refugee crisis. In recent years, about 105,000 refugees (from all countries, not just Syria) have been resettled annually to developed countries, including around 70,000 that the United States accepted in 2015. Nearly one million more have made their own way to Europe in 2015 to seek asylum.[6] Yet these numbers account for only a small fraction of the world's displaced people.[7] The vast majority of refugees live *outside* of the West, generally in developing countries adjacent to the homelands they have been forced to flee. Most of those people find shelter in refugee camps or urban settings where basic needs such as food and water are often in short supply, and where most are barred from working to support themselves. As Christians in the West, our primary focus must be to support our brothers and sisters in these countries bearing the most significant weight of the refugee crisis.

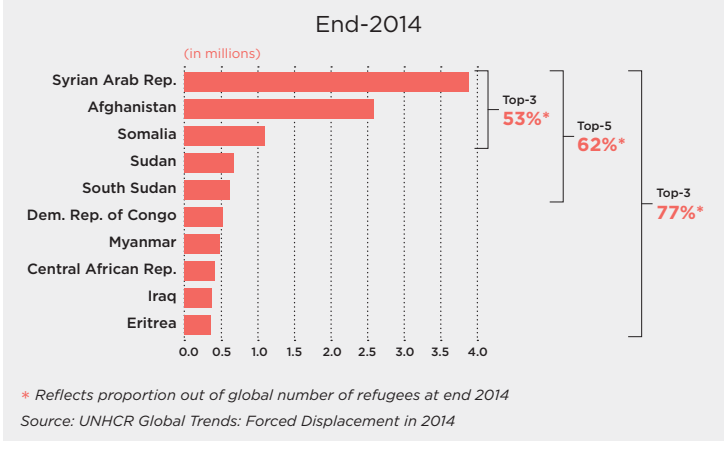
Nevertheless, while the number of refugees who arrive on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay or Lake Michigan (near to our respective homes) or elsewhere in North America account for just a small fraction of all displaced people globally, they present the most proximate opportunity to respond with compassion. We need not and ought not choose between caring for refugees locally and caring for refugees overseas, because how we respond *here* directly impacts what happens *there*. The world is watching how we in the United States respond to the relatively few refugees who reach our shores, and our government's encouragement to other nations to protect those fleeing persecution lacks credibility if we do not do our part.

As Christians, our faith compels us to respond with welcome even as we support those helping the much larger numbers of displaced

people elsewhere in the world. Reacting to this crisis will require much more from the Western church than simply sending a check overseas: while we can and should help financially, we must also emulate our brothers and sisters throughout the world who are responding with generous hospitality.

It is also important to note that, while much of the recent media coverage on refugees has been focused on the shores of the Mediterranean—on the refugee crisis emanating from Syria's civil war in particular, which has driven hundreds of thousands to seek safety in Europe and ignited fiery debates over whether Syrian refugees should be welcomed into the United States—this refugee crisis is much broader. This crisis is indeed global, affecting people on the shores of Africa's Lake Kivu and Lake Tanganyika, of the Andaman and South China Seas in Southeast Asia, and of the Pacific Ocean in Central America, among others.

Major Source Countries of Refugees



* *Reflects proportion out of global number of refugees at end 2014*

Source: UNHCR Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2014

Until recently, the response of most Westerners to refugees was generally one of sympathy. The US refugee resettlement program,

though perhaps not widely understood, enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress and drew criticism only from a small segment of Americans. While broader immigration issues, including border security and how to respond to those in the country unlawfully, have long been controversial, refugees—who all enter the United States with full legal status, and who, by definition, have fled persecution and thus almost always have compelling stories—have not been particularly controversial.[8]

By late 2015, however, the question of refugee resettlement had become contentious, particularly as the refugee crisis fueled by the Syrian conflict and the arrival of hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers into Europe dominated news headlines. Anti-refugee sentiment further intensified after the horrific terrorist attacks in Paris and then in California, which led many to speculate that the US refugee resettlement program could be infiltrated by terrorists. The US House of Representatives, where refugee resettlement had long enjoyed broad bipartisan support, voted in November 2015 to dramatically halt resettlement of refugees from Syria and Iraq, while another bill proposed a moratorium on refugee resettlement altogether. Governors of more than thirty states announced their opposition to Syrian refugees being resettled within their states. A Bloomberg News poll found that a slim majority of Americans (53 percent) now wanted the United States to abandon an announced plan to resettle ten thousand Syrian refugees in the upcoming year.[9]

The question of refugees—and refugee resettlement, in particular—has divided the church as well. Many Christians feel torn between the natural desire to protect themselves and their families and the desire to minister compassionately to the vulnerable. Given the scope of this crisis, how Christ followers respond to this tension could define the church for a generation or more.

OUR PERSPECTIVE

Our perspective on the refugee crisis is closely informed by our many years of experience in serving and resettling refugees in partnership with local churches through World Relief, the organization we serve. World Relief was formed in 1944, in response to the devastation and displacement of millions of refugees caused by World War II. The people of Park Street Church in Boston resolved to forego meals and send the money they would have spent on food to what they called the "War Relief Fund." When other churches, linked through the National Association of Evangelicals, joined the effort, they collectively raised $600,000—in today's dollars, nearly $8 million—to help rebuild Europe. Over time, as that sacrificial compassion extended to serve other regions plagued by poverty and conflict, the War Relief Fund became World Relief.

Since the late 1970s, World Relief has been one of fewer than a dozen national agencies—and the only distinctly evangelical organization—authorized by the US State Department to resettle refugees within the United States. Our resettlement program began when a couple named Grady and Evelyn Mangham, who had served for many years as missionaries in Vietnam with The Christian and Missionary Alliance, wanted to help churches in the United States welcome Vietnamese refugees. The Manghams worked with the US State Department, as well as their denomination and World Relief, to find local churches throughout the country to welcome refugees. From those origins, World Relief has helped to welcome more than 275,000 refugees into our nation, partnering alongside thousands of local churches and tens of thousands of church-based volunteers.

While we are committed to presenting fairly the diverging views on this complex and now controversial topic, we do not come to the question of how to respond to refugees as dispassionate observ-

ers: in our work with World Relief, each of us, from different vantage points, has been a practitioner deeply involved in serving refugees, driven by our belief that doing so is an important way that we can live out Jesus' command to love our neighbors (Matt. 22:39). Though we each work toward the same mission of empowering local churches to serve the vulnerable, we bring different experiences and perspectives to this topic.

Stephan's Story

In our early twenties, my wife, Belinda, and I left our rural hometown in Wisconsin for what was meant to be a six-month stint in West Africa, working with Mercy Ships. I took a leave of absence from my career in business and Belinda from hers as a schoolteacher. Having barely traveled, we were inexperienced and naïve. Within months the directors asked us to colead a medical team among two warring tribes in Northern Ghana. It was here, in the bush, where we first experienced how violence devastates people, often destroying their homes and tearing families apart.

It was several years later, though, while working in the Balkans near the end of the Bosnian war, that I began to seriously grapple with forced migration. I met refugees in the process of fleeing—Bosnians, mainly, but also Croatians and Serbians—who were forced to escape their homes because of the conflict. Some were nearly killed; many had lost family members. All wished they could return home. But they couldn't.

One man had fled his home in Bosnia with his wife and his accordion. Although he had lost everything else, including family members, he remained hopeful that someday he could rebuild his life. His accordion became his means to earn a living.

Today, two decades later, I serve as president of World Relief.

Helping refugees, both internationally and domestically, is a major area of focus for us. It's an honor to work alongside my colleagues on the front lines in the United States and in countries where people are displaced, such as Jordan, Iraq, Turkey, South Sudan, Congo, and many others.

I recently returned from Jordan where I met a pastor who opened his church to Syrian refugee children and their mothers to learn life skills and participate in activities to overcome their trauma. When he did, however, many people from his congregation left for good. Even kids from the community taunted Syrian children as they walked to the church.

"They come to us bleeding," he said. But he told me how his church has changed for the better. "For so many years we tried to share God's love to the people in Syria but we were stopped. Now Syria has come to us and to our church." It is a privilege to work with churches like this one and others throughout the globe who are responding to the crisis in profound ways.

Issam's Story

I was born in Mafraq, Jordan, a city that is known today for hosting the largest Syrian refugee camp in the world. At that time, however, Mafraq was a small Bedouin town on the edge of the desert that hardly anyone had heard of.

While growing up in Jordan, I became accustomed to wars, crises, and refugees. Over the years Jordan became an oasis of peace in a troubled region, hosting millions of refugees (Palestinians, Lebanese, Iraqis, Libyans, and finally Syrians). When I was seven years old, our local church welcomed several Lebanese families who had fled civil war in their country. At that time, the idea of refugees did not mean much to me. The children whom I befriended from Lebanon were just like other friends who came to live in our town and attended

school with us. They moved with their families after a year or two, to settle in a faraway country called the USA. I never heard from my friends again, but often wondered what had become of them.

My first encounter with the word *refugee* was quite personal. One day as a child I opened the door to an old woman whom I did not recognize. The woman was wearing a colorful dress and carried many bags. She knew my name, so I ran deeper into the house to call my mom. My mom was very excited: this old woman was my grandmother. She had come to visit us from the West Bank/Palestine. I later learned that my parents had left their small town of Nisf Jubeil in the West Bank and moved to live in Jordan after the second Arab-Israeli war. They could not go back. That day *refugee* became personal. I was a refugee's son.

Twenty-five years after that incident, in 2000, I came to the United States to study clinical psychology at Wheaton College. The peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians had just collapsed. The news from the region was bad. I recalled spending most of my day reading and listening to disturbing reports that left me angry and resentful. During that time one of my professors asked another international student, who I discovered later was an Israeli, to open the class with a prayer for peace in the Middle East.

A few days later, the Israeli student approached me and invited me to his house for dinner. I was surprised by his invitation, but more stunned that I accepted. I walked to his house that evening with many questions ruminating in my mind. What if we ended up arguing about politics? What if he was rude or insensitive to me?

Fortunately, none of that happened, and the evening turned out to be pleasant. While playing with his children after dinner, for the first time it hit me that this man was just like me. We were experiencing opportunities that our fathers never had. We were both told things

about each other that were not true.

Over the years our friendship deepened. Whenever I heard news that made me angry and resentful, I remembered my friend and his family. I needed him, as much as he needed me, to give me the right perspective, that we are all created in God's image. Today as I look back at that encounter, I have come to believe that God was preparing me for the next chapter of my life. I needed to find inner peace before I could help others find it.

As I was finishing my studies in the United States, I received a call from the director of the counseling center at a World Relief office, asking me to help a newly resettled Iraqi refugee who was struggling to adjust to his new life in this country. The refugee was a military officer in the Iraqi army. He was having such a difficult time adjusting to his new entry-level job that he had threatened to go on a hunger strike until World Relief would find him different work. Later I joined World Relief as a full-time counselor, and for the last fifteen years, I have counseled traumatized refugees who are dealing with a haunting past and a challenging present.

If I had one word with which to summarize my work with refugees, it would be *stories*. Most whom I have spent time with have had one thing in common: a horrific story of trauma and loss. Day in and day out, young moms have shared with me about being forced to abandon their babies. Men have told me about being raped repeatedly in prison, and boys have recalled walking for months in jungles, seeking safety and witnessing friends eaten alive by wild animals.

Stories of triumph against all odds are common as well. I always enjoy working with new groups of people. The Somali Bantu population, an ethnic group systematically enslaved for decades in Africa, was particularly interesting. They came to the United States after living for many years in tents in Kenya. When they arrived in this

country, they had to catch up on hundreds of years of technology. I witnessed Somali Bantu children on their first day in the United States stand in the shower and squeal with delight at the sight of water sprinkles, which they had never seen before. Today some of those children are in college.

Between the tears, I have also heard many funny stories of cultural misunderstandings that, though perhaps frustrating at the time, we could eventually all laugh at. Once, a refugee who was not aware of the "daylight savings time" concept went to work one hour early for several days before finally understanding the time change. It actually ended up helping him with his reputation for tardiness at work!

While I continued to serve refugees resettled to suburban Chicago, in 2011, I also began to spend three months each year in countries such as Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon. As one of a few Arabic-speaking experts in trauma therapy, I train local mental health professionals and supervise their work from a distance via the Internet. While this experience has been extremely rewarding, it has not involved the local church in these afflicted nations. I have prayed for an opportunity to help the church shine as a city on a hill, serving as an oasis for healing.

In 2015, my prayers were answered when a local Syrian church leader, whom I had never met, called and asked me to train Syrian Christian leaders in the area of trauma therapy. Two months later, I spent four days with fifteen Syrian church leaders—Jesuit priests, nuns, doctors, and others from the provinces of Aleppo, Homs, and Damascus—at a monastery in Lebanon. Every morning, I awoke to the sound of hymns, eager to meet with these brothers and sisters who were filled with a joy and peace that "transcends all understanding" (Phil. 4:7).

In the last day of training, I noticed a shift in the mood among

the group. The road between Damascus and Beirut had been captured by rebel groups, which meant that the nine church leaders from Aleppo would not be able to go home. I had to leave the next day. On my way back to the States, I remembered God's promise to those among us who have suffered most: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:4). It is that promise that I hold dear to my heart. I pray that you and I will be part of God's work as we yearn for that day when He makes all things right.

Matthew's Story

Quite in contrast to Issam, for most of my life, I had little to no awareness of immigration issues. I grew up in a small city in northeastern Wisconsin where, though a small Hmong population lived nearby, I do not ever recall personally interacting with a refugee.

My first exposure to these issues came as a senior at Wheaton College in suburban Chicago. A friend, Anna Ruth, had signed up to volunteer with the local World Relief office and had been paired with a family of seven from Rwanda. Anna Ruth had spent a lot of time with the four daughters in this family, but she thought that their adolescent son, Denis, would benefit from a male mentor, so she invited me to come with her.

Denis and his family quickly became my close friends. When I graduated from college, I rented an apartment in their apartment complex, a remarkably vibrant neighborhood where World Relief had resettled refugees from more than a dozen countries. I lived there for about eight years and, in that time, many of my refugee and other immigrant neighbors became my close friends.

I also began working for World Relief's local Immigrant Legal Services program, where a major component of my job was to help

refugees apply for their green cards (one year after their arrival, per US law) and then for citizenship (five years after arrival). Becoming acquainted with US immigration law gave me a much deeper understanding of the barriers refugees must overcome to make it to the United States, and of the need for governmental policy changes.

For the past several years, the focus of my work with World Relief has been to equip local churches throughout the country to think about refugees and other immigrants from a distinctly biblical perspective and then to apply the teachings of Scripture to welcome and serve these vulnerable populations. Much of my work has focused on the long-controversial question of how both the church and our government ought to respond to the complex question of immigrants who are present unlawfully in the United States. By contrast, refugees, who enter the States with full legal status, have always been relatively uncontroversial. In the past year, though, that has changed, with refugee resettlement becoming a politically charged issue. More than ever, my passion is to see the church respond well, in biblically informed, missionally minded ways, to these complex issues.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Our personal experiences have convinced us that Christ followers ought to be at the center of the global refugee crisis solution—which is where we hope your story intersects with ours. In the chapters that follow, we have sought to provide a biblically grounded perspective and orientation to the topic of refugees. As we consider what the Bible has to say about these displaced people, we become better able to engage this complex issue. With that foundation, we will unpack who these vulnerable individuals are and how refugee resettlement works, addressing many of the most common concerns and, by conveying stories, seek to put human faces on these displaced people so

often described merely as statistics. We will also explore the situations that refugees are fleeing, provide practical guidance on how to minister to them effectively, and explore the policy issues that impact their lives and well-being. Finally, we will cast a vision for how local churches might respond, applying our faith to one of the most urgent yet complicated issues of our time.

Our core conviction is that the church is God's solution to this unprecedented global crisis, and it requires us to rise up to respond in mission-driven, fact-based ways to this tremendous crisis. While we would not attempt to explain why God has allowed the persecution and violence that has compelled so many people to flee, we believe that He has purposes even in the midst of horrendous suffering, and that He is already working to build His church and expand His kingdom through the global refugee crisis. We hope and pray that you will join in what God is doing in the midst of this unique time in history.

CHAPTER 2

JESUS WAS A REFUGEE:

THINKING BIBLICALLY ABOUT MIGRATION

For those who profess to follow Jesus, our top authority on any topic—but particularly on a complex one—ought to be the Bible. For many evangelical Christians, though, refugees and immigration are thought of as political, economic, and cultural issues, rather than as a biblical concern. A recent LifeWay Research survey of American evangelical Christians found that just 12 percent said that they think about immigration issues primarily from the perspective of the Bible.[1] In fact, when asked what most influenced their thinking on this topic, the Bible, the local church, and national Christian leaders *combined* were reported less often than the media.

The problem is not merely that many Christians are paying more attention to the television, radio, and Facebook status updates than they are to their pastors—it's also that relatively few of those who *are* in church on a regular basis have ever been encouraged to think about the plight of refugees from a biblical perspective. Only about one in five evangelical Christians report that they have ever been

challenged by their local church to reach out to refugees or other immigrants in their community.[2]

Obviously some contemporary social or political issues are not typically discussed in a church context since they are not addressed directly in Scripture. For example, while we can certainly apply biblical principles in one direction or another, debates over marginal income tax rates or the appropriateness of gun control are not mentioned directly in the Bible, so at best we can make prudential judgments informed by biblical values.

But as we examine the question of how to treat refugees and other immigrants, the Bible actually has *a lot* to say. The Hebrew word *ger*—translated variously into English as *foreigner*, *resident alien*, *stranger*, *sojourner*, or *immigrant*—appears ninety-two times in the Old Testament.[3] Many of those references mention God's particular concern for the foreigner alongside two other vulnerable groups: orphans and widows. Scholar Walter Kaiser notes that the Old Testament warns "no fewer than thirty-six times of Israel's obligations to aliens, widows, and orphans. Most important here, Israel's obligation is to be motivated by the memory that they had been aliens in Egypt."[4] By the count of theologian Orlando Espín, "Welcoming the stranger . . . is the most often repeated commandment in the Hebrew Scriptures, with the exception of the imperative to worship only the one God."[5]

For whatever reason, though, we do not often discuss God's commandments to love and welcome foreigners in our local churches, which is likely why only about half of American evangelicals say that they are very familiar with what the Bible says about how immigrants should be treated.[6]

The question of how we respond to refugees is not *only* a biblical question—there are valid and important questions of foreign policy,

economics, security, and cultural cohesion that we can and, in subsequent chapters, will address. But for those of us who profess that the Scriptures are authoritative, that is where we ought to begin the conversation about how we interact with those who come as foreigners into our country and our communities.

JESUS WAS A REFUGEE . . . AND SO WERE MANY OTHER BIBLICAL HEROES

In December 2015, as Canada was receiving the first of twenty-five thousand Syrian refugees that the country resettled over the course of three months, an Anglican church in Newfoundland posted this sign: "Christmas: A Story about a Middle East Family Seeking Refuge."[7]

The account of Christ's incarnation is certainly about much more than *just* a family's flight as refugees, of course, but that our Lord and Savior, as He took on human flesh, stepped personally into the refugee experience is not inconsequential. Our nativity scenes and Christmas pageants usually include the gift-bearing magi, but often stop the story there, just before Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were forced as refugees to flee a tyrannical government:

> *When [the magi] had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."*
>
> *So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod.* (Matt. 2:13–15)

The biblical text provides very few details about either the journey to Egypt—which, from Bethlehem to the border with Egypt at that time, outside of Herod's dominion, would have been several days' journey—or about how Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were treated once they arrived. If human history is any indicator, though, it is likely that some would have responded with compassion and hospitality, and likely others would have treated them as a nuisance or even a threat. We can only speculate: Were they able to find shelter? Were they welcomed or harassed?[8] Did local carpenters gripe that Joseph was driving down their wages? Was Jesus suspected of carrying a disease?

One thing is clear: the millions of refugees in our world today have an advocate in Jesus, who was "made like them, fully human in every way" (Heb. 2:17), able "to empathize with our weaknesses" (4:15)—even with the particular experience of having to flee one's home in the middle of the night in search of refuge. "The importance of the depiction of Jesus and his family as refugees should not be underestimated," writes theologian Fleur Houston. "Jesus can empathize with refugees in their sufferings, enables endurance, and brings hope."[9]

While certainly the most important refugee in the biblical narrative, Jesus is not the only biblical figure to have been forcibly displaced. Jacob fled his homeland under the threat of violence from his brother, Esau (Gen. 27:42–44). Moses fled from Egypt to Midian, initially, because Pharaoh sought to kill him (Ex. 2:15). When being persecuted unjustly by King Saul, David escaped on multiple occasions to the land of the Philistines, where he sought asylum under King Achish (1 Sam. 21:10; 27:1). Similarly, the prophet Elijah evaded the persecution of the evil King Ahab and Queen Jezebel by traveling out into the wilderness; so desperate was his situation that he "prayed that he might die" (1 Kings 19:1–4). In the New Testament, we see how persecution in Jerusalem forced the earliest

followers of Jesus to scatter—and also how God ultimately used this evil for good, as these apostles took the gospel with them and planted some of the earliest churches (Acts 8:1, 4–5). Then, as now, God can work through even the most brutal and unjust situations to advance His purposes.

THE GREAT COMMANDMENT: "GO AND DO LIKEWISE . . ."

Jesus not only *was* a refugee; He also taught His disciples in many ways that inform how *we* can respond to refugees.

In a commandment that Jesus said summed up the entirety of the Law and the Prophets, Jesus told His disciples to "do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt. 7:12). Our local World Relief offices in the United States offer refugee simulations to help people experience in a small way the difficult decisions refugees face. Suppose, for example, that at some distant point in the future it became unsafe to be a Christian in your country. After your pastor has been arrested, rumors circulate that government agents will be at your house soon, ready to torture, rape, or kill you. You have no choice but to gather a few vital possessions and leave in the middle of the night. What would you take with you? Where would you go? And most important, how would you hope to be treated once you arrived? The Golden Rule guides us to use that question as the standard for how we should treat those who come as refugees to our land.

Another of Jesus' teachings that the Bible describes as encompassing the entirety of the law (Gal. 5:14) is the second half of the Great Commandment. Questioned by a legal scholar, Jesus affirmed that the most important commandments, essential to inheriting eternal life, are, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and,

'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27).

We suspect that, if He had left it there, most of us would be inclined to define "neighbor" as narrowly as possible, to limit our own responsibilities. But the lawyer in the story asked a clarifying question: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus' response makes clear that our "neighbor" includes anyone who is in need, not just those who share our ethnicity, our religion, or our zip code.

To make His point, Jesus told the story of a man who was beaten and left alongside the road to Jericho. The religious leaders of his day, a priest and a Levite, walked by on the other side of the road. They were important people and likely had important places to be. They may also have been thinking of their *own* safety. But a Samaritan saw the beaten man, stopped what he was doing, recognized his humanity, and, moved with compassion, treated his wounds and took him to an inn where he could recover.

That Jesus made a Samaritan the hero of this story is notable. Samaritans were not "good" in the minds of the average Jewish listener: they were considered foreigners (Luke 17:18) and were viewed as heretics for their theological beliefs, which Jesus elsewhere acknowledged as errant (John 4:22). So despised were the Samaritans that a couple of Jesus' disciples proposed that Jesus destroy one of their villages with fire, but He rebuked that suggestion (Luke 9:51–55). Indeed, Jesus' approach to these marginalized foreigners was entirely countercultural: He "had to go through Samaria" (John 4:4), even though there were other, less direct routes that some Jews may have preferred in order to avoid contact with Samaritans.[10] When He did, He interacted compassionately with a Samaritan woman, revealing Himself to her as the Messiah and equipping her to be among the first evangelists (John 4:4–42). Elsewhere, Jesus praised a Samaritan as a model of gratitude (Luke 17:11–19). And here, in response to a

lawyer's efforts "to justify himself" (Luke 10:29), Jesus offered a Samaritan as the model of neighborly love who extended compassion for a stranger in need—and told us to "go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37).

If this legal scholar knew the law well, he would have realized that God's original command to the Israelites to love their neighbors, recorded for us in Leviticus 19:18, was followed almost immediately by a specific command to love the foreigner, as if anticipating the human inclination to narrowly limit our neighborly responsibilities to those who share our nationality: "When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 19:33–34).

Notably, the Samaritan probably could tell very little about the man beaten along the side of the road: he was stripped of his clothes, which might have provided some indication of his social status or ethnic group, and he likely could not speak, so there was no accent to give away his origins. The Samaritan could not have known any of these details, and he did not need to: he merely needed to observe that the man needed help.

The application to the current refugee crisis is clear: by Jesus' standard, the refugee—whether from Syria, Somalia, or Burma, whether living one mile or ten thousand miles from us, whether Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, or an atheist, and whatever else might distinguish them—is our neighbor. The command of Jesus is to love them. That there may be risk or cost involved is not relevant to the mandate to love.[11]

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

We ought to love refugees because they are our neighbors, but also because the Bible teaches us to value them since, like us, they are made in the image of God. Old Testament scholar Daniel Carroll argues that, as we apply Scripture to our thinking about immigration, we should start "in the beginning," in the book of Genesis.[12] Even before we encounter any specific biblical injunctions of how to treat the refugee or other foreigners, we find that each human being—refugees certainly included—is made by God and in His image (Gen. 1:27).

Each human being, regardless of ethnicity, gender, legal status, disability, or any other qualifier, is "fearfully and wonderfully made" by the creator God (Ps. 139:14), and as such has inherent dignity. We value and protect human life because we believe it is precious to God. That commitment to life compels us to do all we can to shelter and protect refugees, who in many cases have been forced to flee to preserve their lives.

The sacredness of human life is amplified by the incarnation: that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, became fully human. Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, observes, "Jesus identified himself with humanity—in all of our weakness and fragility."[13] He adds:

> If Jesus shares humanity with us, and if the goal of the kingdom is humanity in Christ, then life must matter to the church. The church must proclaim in its teaching and embody in its practices love and justice for those the outside world would wish to silence or kill. And the mission of the church must be to proclaim everlasting life, and to work to honor every life made in the image of God, whether inside or outside of the people of God.[14]

That each person is made in the likeness of the creator God also suggests that, beyond inherent dignity, human beings have remarkable creative potential. Some of those most opposed to admitting more refugees or other immigrants into a given country are, fundamentally, concerned about more *people*, whom they see as a potential drain on limited resources, based on a repeatedly disproven Malthusian philosophy, which presumes that more people necessarily means *less* for the rest of us.[15] Groups opposed to refugee resettlement add up all the *costs* associated with refugees or other migrants as evidence of why they (or most of them, at least) should be kept out; but the economists who actually study migration issues, who perform not *cost analyses* but cost-*benefit* analyses, consistently find that immigrants actually contribute more, overall, to the economy of the receiving country than they receive from it.[16] That is because, as columnist Michael Gerson notes, "human beings are not just mouths but hands and brains."[17] Refugees do not merely consume; they are not mere "takers." As resilient and entrepreneurial people made in the image of their Creator, they also have remarkable capacity to produce, and we deny the image of God within them when we speak of refugees (or anyone) as a burden.

STANDING WITH THE PERSECUTED CHURCH

Refugees are our neighbors and have inherent human dignity regardless of their religious background. As Christians, we also have a particular concern for the many refugees who are our brothers and sisters in Christ persecuted for their faith. The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Galatia that we should "do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10). The church is composed of many distinct but interdependent members, he said, just like a human body, and "if one part suffers, every part

Of approximately 125,000 Iraqi refugees admitted since 2007, more than 35 percent have been Christians—many times more than the Christian share of the Iraqi population—because Christians have been uniquely persecuted.

suffers with it" (1 Cor. 12:26).

The horrific reality is that many of our brothers and sisters around the globe today are suffering as they are persecuted for the name of Jesus. At the hands of governments hostile to the Christian faith and, increasingly, nonstate terrorists, Christ followers have been martyred. In fact, Open Doors USA's analysis suggests that 2015 may have been the most violent year for Christians in modern history.[18] In a single month, reports *Christianity Today*,

> ISIS beheaded a Christian journalist in Syria. On the eastern edge of Africa, a group of Somali militants named al-Shabaab targeted Christians in an attack on a Kenyan college in April that killed as many as 150. The same month, ISIS executed dozens of Ethiopian Christians.[19]

Many believers have been given a stark non-option: flee, renounce your Christian faith, or die.[20] As ISIS (also known as ISIL or Daesh) targets ancient Christian communities in Iraq and Syria—a situation US Secretary of State John Kerry has characterized as genocide[21]—it has forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes and, in many cases, their countries. Similarly, but largely out of the media spotlight, Baptist, Catholic, and Anglican Christ followers from among various ethnic minorities in Burma have, for many years, had to escape to Thailand, Malaysia, or India, where they live either in refu-

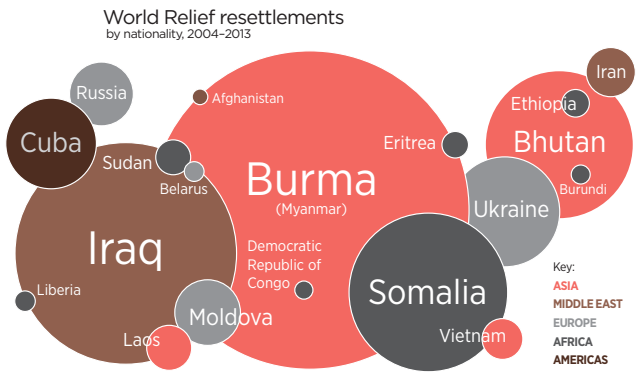
gee camps or without legal protections in urban areas.[22] Hundreds of Christian children have been kidnapped, thousands of people killed, and thousands of others displaced from their homes by Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria.[23]

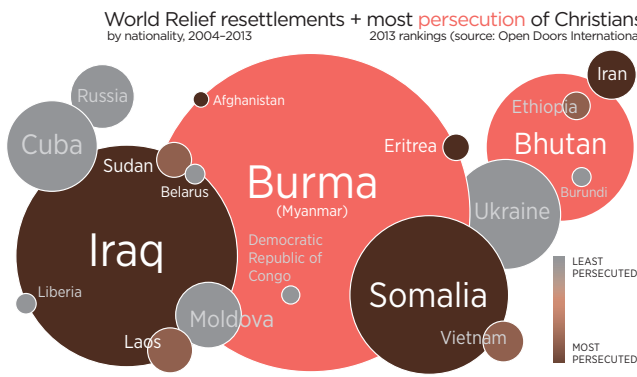
To stand in solidarity with the persecuted church, we ought to do all we can to stop these horrific situations of persecution. Whenever possible, we should strive and pray for circumstances such that Christians would not be forced to leave. When they make the decision that fleeing is their only option, though, local churches in receiving countries also must do everything possible to welcome them.

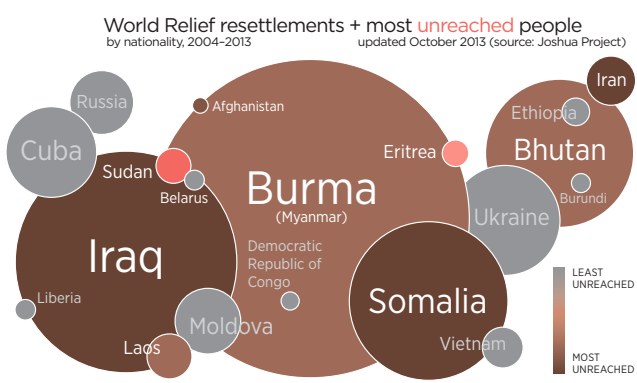
We have many opportunities to support our persecuted brothers and sisters through the US refugee resettlement program as well: about 340,000 professing Christians of one tradition or another have been admitted into the United States as refugees between 2003 and 2015, more than of any other religious tradition.[24] Many of those individuals and families were persecuted particularly because of their Christian faith. Of approximately 125,000 Iraqi refugees admitted since 2007, for example, more than 35 percent have been Christians—many times more than the Christian share of the Iraqi population—because Christians have been uniquely persecuted.[25] Similarly, more than 100,000 persecuted Christians from Burma have been admitted to the United States as refugees in the past decade: though Christians make up less than 5 percent of the total population of Burma, they compose more than 70 percent of the refugees from that country.[26]

If we were forced to flee our country, we would hope that a Christian brother or sister in the country to which we fled would be there to welcome us, to help us adjust, and to lament with us what we had lost. We have the opportunity to stand with the persecuted church as many come into our country each year. At World Relief, our hope

Where Do Refugees Resettled by World Relief Come From?







is to have a Good Neighbor Team from a local church at the airport to greet each refugee who arrives, who will then walk alongside them through the first several months of their adjustment, and who will hopefully build a friendship that lasts far beyond the initial resettlement period, right into eternity.

The church in the West—where few of us have ever faced any sort of real persecution—actually has a great deal to learn from our refugee brothers and sisters, many of whom have a deep, vibrant faith, refined by oppression. The body of Christ is composed of different but all vital parts: our persecuted brothers and sisters need our solidarity, advocacy, and (for those admitted as refugees to our home countries) welcome, but *we also need them*—they can teach us what it means to follow Jesus even when that decision is costly.

In the end, this is not just about standing with our brothers and sisters. It is about standing with Jesus Himself. Jesus takes personally the persecution of the church. When He confronted Saul on the road to Damascus, He asked him, who had zealously persecuted the early church, "Why do you persecute *me*?" (Acts 9:4, italics added). And He explained to His disciples that at the final judgment,

> *All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*
>
> *Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you*

> *looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."*
>
> *Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?"*
>
> *The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."* (Matt. 25:32–40)

When we welcome a stranger who is among "the least of these" brothers and sisters, we welcome Jesus Himself. If we fail to do so, Jesus continued in a sobering passage, we fail to welcome Him (Matt. 25:41–46).

THE GREAT COMMISSION: "GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS"

While we have a particular concern for persecuted Christians, our Christian faith compels us to be concerned with the plight of refugees of other faiths as well. Those who are not Christians are made in God's image, so their lives are precious, and they are our neighbors, whom we are called to love.

Shortly before ascending into heaven, Jesus left His disciples with this final charge: "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19–20). As recorded in the book of Acts, Jesus commanded His disciples to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). While the church can and must go "to the ends of the earth," we also can and must live out

the Great Commission locally.[27] The reality that many refugees who arrive in our country are *not yet* Christ followers presents a remarkable opportunity to live out the Great Commission right within our communities.

That opportunity is not an accident: Scripture tells us that God "makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them" (Job 12:23), and Paul taught in Acts that God does this "so that [people] would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him" (Acts 17:27). God has a sovereign purpose in the migration of people, and He invites His church—here in the United States and throughout the world—to join Him in that work.

More unreached people groups live *within the boundaries of the United States*—361—than in any other country besides India and China.

Just as was the case with the scattering of the apostles in the early church and has been true throughout church history, God uses migration as a tool to advance His purposes. As described by missiologist Enoch Wan, "diaspora mission"—the redemptive work of God through the migration of people—occurs in at least three ways:[28]

(1) Mission *to* the diaspora: Christ followers in the host country share the hope of the gospel with refugees or other immigrants who are not yet believers.

(2) Mission *through* the diaspora: immigrant believers reach out to those in their own ethnic group, both in the host country and sometimes beyond, by returning as missionaries.

(3) Mission *by* and *beyond* the diaspora: immigrant believers share the gospel cross-culturally, with those in the host country or in other contexts.

In our work with World Relief, empowering local churches to serve resettled refugees, we have seen each of these dynamics at play. The arrival of non-Christian (or nominally Christian) refugees is actually an invitation for local churches to love, welcome, and as we build relationships, share the hope of the gospel. By one analysis, more unreached people groups live *within the boundaries of the United States*—361—than in any other country besides India and China.[29] Many of those groups come to the United States as refugees.

In Somalia, for example, 99.8 percent of the population is Muslims; less than 0.1 percent is Christian, making it one of the least-reached countries.[30] But in recent years, an average of six thousand Somali refugees annually have been admitted to the United States. One man, who had resettled to suburban Chicago, recently visited his neighbor and English teacher, Josh, with a request. In his refugee camp in Ethiopia, he had heard about a movie called *The Jesus Film.* He wondered if Josh could help him locate it in his language. In response to his questions, Josh got to share the good news: that God so loved the world that He sent His Son, Jesus, to take the sins of all who choose to believe in Him, reconciling us to God, and giving us the hope of eternal life (John 3:16).

World Relief is an unabashedly evangelical organization. We believe in evangelism—an open invitation to a personal relationship with Jesus—but we reject proselytism, which is not synonymous. In fact, proselytism, which is a coercive effort to convert someone, is in many ways counter to evangelism. Evangelism must never pressure or compel; it should never qualify service, acceptance, or compassion based on

anyone's response to faith. Theologian John Stott described proselytism as "unworthy witness," which occurs whenever our motives, our methods, or our message are unworthy.[31] As evangelicals, to quote the Lausanne Movement, "while the nature of our faith requires us to share the gospel with others, our practice is to make an open and honest statement of it, which leaves the hearers entirely free to make up their own minds about it. We wish to be sensitive to those of other faiths, and we reject any approach that seeks to force conversion on them."[32]

In serving refugees who have fled traumatizing situations of persecution, it is vital that we be particularly sensitive to avoid even implied expectations of religious conformity. As we welcome and serve refugees, we have many opportunities "to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have," but we must always do so "with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). Whether a refugee is a Christian or not, and whether we believe they may *ever* become a Christian or not, our firm belief at World Relief is that we should provide the same caring service. But as our staff and local church-based volunteers build relationships with those whom we serve, the refugees very often ask what motivates our kindness, and we have seen many subsequently choose to follow Jesus.

We should not presume that once non-Christian refugees have been resettled to a majority-Christian country, they will automatically encounter the gospel. At present, fully 60 percent of people of non-Christian religious traditions residing in North America—most of them foreign-born—say that they do not personally know a Christian.[33] Not that they have never read the Bible or been to church, but that they do not even *know* a Christian. That makes sense when we realize that only 27 percent of white evangelicals in the United States personally know a Muslim, and even fewer know someone who is Hindu or Buddhist.[34] As missions pastor J. D. Payne

notes, "Something is missionally malignant whenever we are willing to make great sacrifices to travel the world to reach a people group but are not willing to walk across the street."[35]

We should also recognize, as theologian Juan Martinez notes, that immigrants are not merely *objects* of mission but also *agents* of mission.[36] Many are already strong believers, and many others, who are not *yet* Christians, could, once they choose to follow Jesus and have their lives directed by the Holy Spirit, become the most effective evangelists to those of their own ethnic communities and beyond. For example, at New City Fellowship in St. Louis, Missouri, connections to refugees and other immigrants locally have revolutionized their global mission efforts, as immigrants have served as cultural brokers back to their homelands, including Togo, Burma, Pakistan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

What if the Muslim refugee entering the United States from Syria today were to become the next Billy Graham?[37] Stranger things have happened: to paraphrase the late theologian Carl F. Henry, few would have predicted that God would use Saul of Tarsus, who persecuted the church with a zeal that rivals ISIS today, to be among the greatest apostles, or agnostic academic C. S. Lewis to be among the greatest apologists of the twentieth century.[38]

As refugees and other immigrants settle throughout the United States—not just in the historic immigrant gateway cities such as New York, Miami, Los Angeles, and Chicago, but also in suburbs and small cities and towns—the missional implications for the church are significant, as scholars from a range of Christian traditions have witnessed. Southern Baptist theologian Albert Mohler argues that "we've never faced such a Great Commission responsibility."[39]

As some Christian leaders fret that younger Americans are leaving the church,[40] immigrant communities may present an antidote.

Former Reformed Church in America General Secretary Wesley Granberg-Michaelson notes: "While millennials are walking out the front door of US congregations, immigrant Christian communities are appearing right around the corner, and sometimes knocking at the back door. And they may hold the key to vitality for American Christianity."[41]

Similarly, Joseph Castleberry, a Pentecostal scholar, argues that the arrival of refugees and other immigrants represents "the most realistic hope for revival and awakening in our time."[42] Wesleyan missiologist Timothy Tennent, noting that the percentage of immigrants in North America who either *arrive as* or *become* Christians is significantly higher than the Christian share of the native-born US population, argues, "We shouldn't see [immigration] as something that threatens us."[43]

Unfortunately, while some local churches are engaging this missional moment, many others are missing it. A 2016 LifeWay Research survey found that just 8 percent of Protestant US pastors said their churches are currently involved in serving refugees locally.[44] When asked their views of immigrants arriving in the United States, a majority of evangelical Christians had something negative to say—that immigrants represented a "threat" or a "burden" in some way—but only a minority said that the arrival of immigrants represented an "opportunity to introduce them to Jesus Christ."[45] We risk ignoring a divine mandate if our sole priorities are safety, comfort, and convenience.

God is working, as He has been throughout history, through the migration of refugees and other migrants. If we are to join Him in that mission, we need to recognize that "the harvest is plentiful" (Matt. 9:37), and that will require us to commit to thinking biblically—not merely politically or economically—about the reality of refugees.

CHAPTER 3

THE HUMAN FACE OF FORCED MIGRATION:

THE POWER OF A STORY

In the first and second books of the Bible, respectively, we find two competing models of how to respond to foreigners. In contrast to the pharaoh described in Genesis, who sought and benefited from the dream-interpretation and famine-management skills of an immigrant named Joseph, the pharaoh depicted in Exodus saw foreigners distinctly as a threat. He believed that the Hebrews, the descendants of Joseph and his brothers, had "become far too numerous" and presented a risk to national security (Ex. 1:9). Eventually this pharaoh's fear led him to take drastic action to eliminate this "problem," instituting a genocide of all young Hebrew boys.

It is instructive that the first descriptor of this pharaoh is that he "did not know Joseph" (Ex. 1:8 ESV). His predecessor knew Joseph personally—his name, his face, his potential—and, as far as the text describes, was never moved by fear to act with hostility toward foreigners. To the contrary, when Joseph's father and brothers fled famine and sought to settle in Egypt, that pharaoh personally welcomed them and offered them "the best part of the land" (Gen. 47:6). But

the pharaoh in Exodus did *not* know the Hebrews' individual names, faces, and stories: he feared them as a group, without knowing their particularities. When you know someone personally, writes psychologist Mary Pipher, "that person stops being a stereotype and becomes a complex human being like oneself."[1]

Through our work with World Relief, each of us has had the privilege to know many refugees. These relationships have transformed our thinking. For us, the word *refugee* is no longer an abstract descriptor, or merely a legal designation, or a statistic: he or she is our neighbor, colleague, friend, or even family.

As refugees and other immigrants arrive into our communities, we can choose, like the pharaoh of Exodus, to see them as a potential threat. The better response, we believe, is to get to know them individually, and to remember, as we hear their distinct stories and begin to appreciate their particular personalities, that each is deeply loved by God.

Building relationships helps us to avoid lumping all refugees into one category of our understanding. As novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie observes, there is danger in hearing only "a single story."[2] For some, the single story they associate with the idea of *refugee* is that they are dangerous. Or helpless. Or terrorists. Or perhaps flag-waving Americanized successes. Whatever the single story we have heard, it cannot accurately or fairly describe the realities of the millions of individual human beings in our world who have fled their homelands. Each of them, as every human being, is both made in the image of God with inherent dignity and yet also imperfect. No one story can speak for all refugees, or for all who share their country of origin, their religion, or even their surname.

With that in mind and to give you a sense of the diversity of the refugee experience, in this chapter we introduce five individuals,

each of whom has been resettled into the United States. As you read each story, consider who they are in light of God's love for them and of our biblical responsibility toward foreigners. We hope that they will help you to put names to an often-stigmatized term and compel *you* to reach out to refugees in your community.

RAMI: A SYRIAN VETERINARIAN

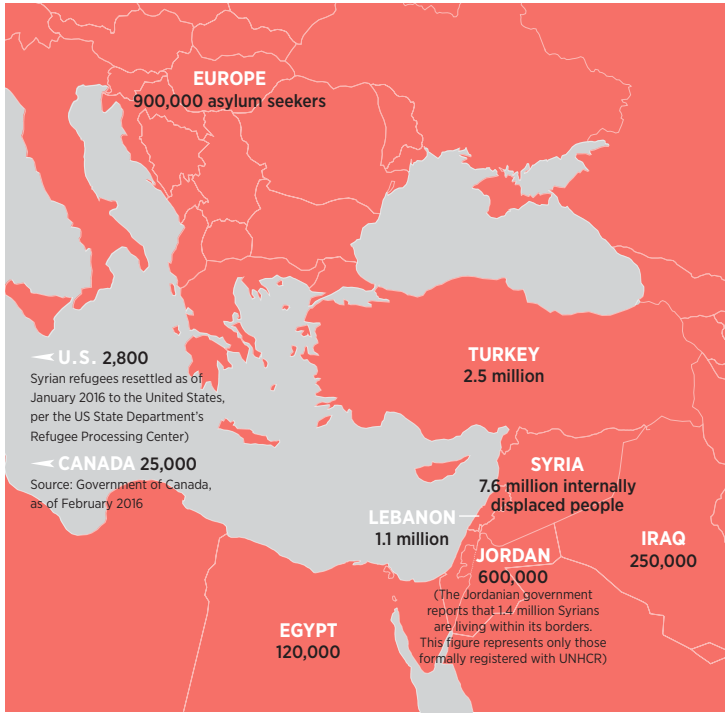
Rami and his three siblings grew up in a middle-class Sunni Muslim home in Homs, Syria, the children of a taxi driver and a stay-at-home mom. Following high school, he found work finishing granite countertops while he studied veterinary science. After earning his associate's degree, Rami found work in his field, caring for chickens. Eventually he married and started a family. He describes his life in Syria as "wonderful." It was "a very safe place," where families would go out on the street and talk to their neighbors. Their life was "beautiful," Rami remembers—until the spring of 2011, when his country erupted into civil war. "In April 2011, everything changed," he says, his voice softening somberly.

Syria's civil war emerged amid a larger regional context. In 2010, a female Tunisian police officer slapped twenty-six-year-old Mohamed Bouazizi for selling vegetables without a permit, then confiscated his wooden cart. Mohamed, who was supporting his widowed mother and six siblings, set himself on fire in protest. Video of the humiliating event, captured on a cellphone, resonated with millions of people across the Middle East and North Africa, eager to find their voice and freedom. The Arab Spring had begun.

While Tunisia went through a relatively peaceful transition to democracy, the government of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad met the initially nonviolent protests in Syria with deadly force. That conflict sparked a civil war that has pitted the Assad government against

various rebel groups, most of them composed of Sunni Muslims,[3] who make up the majority of Syrians. Various other countries—including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Russia, and the United States—have backed different sides in the war, which has already claimed more than 250,000 lives, one-third or more of them civilians.[4] While responsible for only a small fraction of the overall deaths, one particular rebel group, the so-called Islamic State, or ISIS, which emerged in 2013, has used headline-grabbing brutal methods and has particularly targeted Christians and other religious minorities.[5]

The Syrian Refugee Crisis Map



Except where noted, numbers are estimates of Syrian refugees/asylum seekers from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as of December 2015 (http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php).

More than twelve million Syrians—half the total prewar population—have fled their homes to escape this violence. More than four million of those have become refugees outside of the nation's borders, most of them fleeing to neighboring Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. While several hundred thousand have continued on to seek asylum in Europe and a much smaller number have been resettled to Canada or the United States, the vast majority of Syrian refugees remain in those neighboring countries.

Among those forced to escape were Rami and his family. When violence first erupted in Homs, Rami tried to stay, in part because his father, suffering from kidney disease, needed regular dialysis. But as rocket fire intensified, once hitting very close to their house with a horrific noise, it became risky even to leave their home. Eventually, electricity was cut off and bread and water became scarce. Rami, his wife, and his children fled—first to another city within Syria, then, in 2012, to Turkey.

Shortly after arriving in Turkey, Rami learned that his father, unable to access medical care, had died. His grieving mother and Rami's three siblings, including a developmentally disabled brother, Raed, decided to make the perilous journey to Turkey as well.

While grateful to be safe from war, life in Turkey—where more than two million Syrians have sought refuge—was very difficult. Without knowing the Turkish language and without legal work authorization, Rami and his family found it almost impossible to sustain themselves. Rami found work repairing air conditioners, and his wife and sisters worked in a garment factory, but still their combined income was insufficient to cover food and rent, because they were paid poorly and mistreated. Unscrupulous employers in Turkey often pay extremely low wages and subject Syrian refugee employees to dangerous or demeaning working conditions, knowing that they cannot complain

because they are not technically authorized to work.

Rami and his family registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) shortly after arriving in Istanbul, which qualified them for some limited assistance and opened the possibility—though slim, because only a very small percentage are ultimately approved—that they could be resettled to a third country. Over the next eighteen months, they were interviewed six different times—twice by UNHCR, and then four times by various entities affiliated with the US government, which had identified Rami's family as a uniquely vulnerable case to be considered for resettlement there. The US authorities verified UNHCR's determination that Rami and his family met the legal definition of refugees *and* determined that they in no way presented a national security or public health threat to the United States.

Finally, Rami and his whole family received notice that they would be among the first Syrians—eight of 2,192 in 2015—to be resettled to the United States as refugees. Rami's sisters, brother, and mother arrived in July 2015. World Relief staff met them at O'Hare airport and took them to their new home in Aurora, Illinois. Rami and his wife and children joined them the following month.

Within a few months, with World Relief's continued help, Rami, his wife, and his sisters all found work, allowing them to cover their rent payments beyond the short window of assistance the organization could provide. Rami enrolled in English classes at the local community college, and he hopes someday to resume work using his training as a veterinarian. For now, though—while grieving all that his family has lost and ever mindful of the vast majority of Syrian people still in harm's way—he is grateful to the people of the United States for receiving him and his family. He is hopeful as he sees a safe, peaceful future for his family.

DEBORAH: PERSECUTED FOR FOLLOWING JESUS

Deborah was born in a rural farming community, without electricity, in Burma's Chin State. The Chin are one of many ethnic minorities within Burma, also known as Myanmar. Having been evangelized by American missionaries, most Chin are Baptist Christians, which make them religious minorities in their mostly Buddhist country. Their commitment to following Jesus has led to mistreatment by the Burmese government. "We, the Christians, were persecuted very badly," Deborah explains. The government expected her to produce a certain amount of food on their farm. Threatened with arrest and imprisonment if she failed to meet an unrealistic quota, Deborah, a widowed single mother, ultimately decided to flee with her nine-year-old son and six-year-old daughter, following in the footsteps of many other Chin Christian refugees. Traveling by foot and occasionally hitching a ride in a small van crammed with other refugees, they finally reached the border with Thailand. From there, Deborah used the little money she had and some jewelry to pay a guide to help them cross surreptitiously through Thailand—traveling only by night, and hiding during the day—to reach Malaysia.

Once safely in Kuala Lumpur, the largest city in Malaysia, Deborah and her kids lived with several other refugee families crammed into a small apartment with a single bathroom. Life there was also difficult: police officers would harass Chin refugees, most of whom had to work illegally to cover their basic living expenses, and threaten them if they did not pay a bribe. But Deborah found solace in a local church and a church-operated school, which provided education for her children. Having learned to speak English through her Christian college in Chin State, Deborah was able to find work as a translator with the International Rescue Committee, a global relief

organization. Through those connections, she also was registered as a refugee with UNHCR.

Four years and one month after registering, in May 2013—after four different interviews, where she explained, in detail, why she had been forced to flee Burma—Deborah and her children boarded an airplane for the first time in their lives. They were heading to their new home in the United States.

After layovers in Hong Kong and Los Angeles, they landed at Chicago's O'Hare airport. Deborah's uncle, who had been previously resettled in the area, met them there and drove them to their new apartment. When she had first learned that she would be resettled to Chicago, she thought she would once again be among high-rise buildings, as she had been in Malaysia, but instead she found herself in the more spacious suburbs. As she entered their new apartment in Carol Stream, she found flowers and mangoes waiting for them on the table. At last, Deborah felt she was at home.

More than 78,000 refugees from Burma have been admitted into the United States in the past five years, more than have been admitted from any other single country in that time frame.

The transition to the United States was not always easy, though. It took a few weeks before she would allow her children to go outside and play, the images of police harassing Chin refugees in Malaysia seared in her memory. Work is challenging, too: about three months after her arrival, Deborah found work in a warehouse, packing orders for a large supply chain company. Because the pay wasn't great, she left there and has since held two additional jobs, but most of her income goes toward covering her rent. Still, Deborah says, she is proud of

herself: "I am able to pay my rent every month."

Deborah is also very involved in her church, the Falam Christian Church of Chicago, where she teaches Sunday school and preaches on some Sundays. Her faith is really what gave her the strength to seek refuge. And in each location of her journey, she notes that the one common thread has been the importance of the local church.

Today, she is particularly passionate about investing in the next generation: she has written Sunday school curriculum for children, praying that God will use it to help them, as she states, "have the mind of Jesus."

KATIE: A CHILD WHO FLED COMMUNISM

More than seventy-eight thousand refugees from Burma—most of them, like Deborah, Christians from persecuted ethnic minorities—have been admitted into the United States in the past five years, more than have been admitted from any other single country in that time frame. Between 1975 and 1995, the largest group of refugees resettled were also from Southeast Asia: more than seven hundred thousand refugees from Vietnam were resettled into the United States during that period,[6] including Katie Le, who arrived in late 1994 at the age of twelve.

Katie's father had served as an officer in South Vietnam's air force, allied with the United States. When South Vietnam fell in 1975, the new Communist government imprisoned Katie's father for six years. Katie was born a year after her father was released, but he continued to face discrimination by the government. The family moved to an isolated rural area in the southern part of Vietnam in order to escape harassment. When Katie was twelve years old, the US government offered the family the opportunity to move to the States and resettle permanently to fully escape the Communist government.

Having only lived in areas without access to electricity, clean water, or a television, Katie had only the faintest idea of what "America" was when she learned she would be living there. After a long flight to Los Angeles, she and her family met up with her aunt at the airport. Their family of five moved into a one-bedroom apartment.

Though Katie and her parents and siblings had not been religious in Vietnam, they were embraced by the congregation at Thanh Le Baptist Church, most of whom had themselves been resettled as refugees from Vietnam. Church members helped them navigate life in a new country. In time, Katie and her family became Christians as well. They still attend the same church.

Katie enrolled in school as a seventh-grader, not knowing a word of English. With the help of sympathetic teachers and countless hours of studying a dictionary, she eventually mastered the language. After finishing high school with straight As, she went on to college and, ultimately, law school.

Today, Katie is a California-licensed attorney, specializing in immigration, personal injury, and probate law. She went to law school, at first, she says, to prove to herself that she could do it. Now, as she interacts with more recent immigrants, Katie admits, "I see my family back then. I see me. I understand their struggles." She knows that recent immigrants are often not aware of their rights, and she wants to be able to help others, just as others helped her family when they had recently arrived.

PINGALA: YEARNING FOR A HOMELAND

Pingala Dhital was born in Bhutan, a small landlocked nation between India and China, in 1973. When Pingala was a teenager, the Bhutanese government began a harsh campaign known as "One Nation, One People," forcing the Lhotshampa people—who

resided in southern Bhutan, spoke Nepali, and were largely Hindu—to adopt the language, clothing, and traditions of the government in the north. In September 1990, sixteen-year-old Pingala joined many others in a peaceful demonstration against this policy. The government cracked down on what they considered an "anti-national" protest, arresting many men and raping many women. Within a few days of the protest, Pingala's father, who had been a leader in the demonstration, feared he would be targeted, so he fled across the nearby border to India.

By November 1990, the situation was only getting worse, so Pingala and her brother crossed into India in search of refuge as well, hopeful that they would be able to return to their home within a couple of weeks. But as the Bhutanese government forced more people to flee—threatening them with incarceration if they did not "voluntarily" emigrate—Pingala and her family stayed on in that neighboring country.

In August 1991, the Indian government—influenced by its diplomatic relationship with Bhutan—expelled Pingala and the many others who had fled from their homeland. Now they were forced to live along a riverbank in Nepal. After a few months, UNHCR established several refugee camps in Nepal, which by 1992 were home to more than one hundred thousand individuals forced out of Bhutan. The refugees received basic materials to construct huts. Most would stay there for more than fifteen years—unable to work, except in "volunteer" roles that paid just a small stipend—and most always hoping to return to Bhutan.

In 1994, four years after Pingala had become a refugee, she was married in one of those camps. Her two children were born there. When her grandmother died, and Pingala realized an entire generation had passed in the camps, she was devastated, as hopes of

returning to Bhutan were repeatedly dashed. "I lost everything. My future was destroyed," Pingala says.

Desperate for a better life for her children than what she could provide in a refugee camp, Pingala began to explore the possibility of being resettled elsewhere. She advocated for her people to resettle to a third country on humanitarian grounds. Though Bhutanese refugees were technically required to stay within the camps, in 2006, Pingala managed to relocate to Kathmandu, Nepal's capital city, where she made contact with the US Embassy to plead her people's case. With time, her advocacy efforts were successful: after completing screening processes with the UNHCR and the US government, on February 27, 2008, Pingala and her family were the first of more than 100,000 Bhutanese refugees to eventually be resettled into the United States, including Pingala's parents and four siblings with their families.

When Pingala learned she would be resettled to Washington, she was excited to live in the capital city. But when Pingala and her family actually arrived, a World Relief caseworker, a Nepali translator, and a few volunteers informed her that they were not in Washington, DC. They were in Spokane, in snow-covered eastern Washington State.

Still, the welcome was warm. At the apartment World Relief had set up for them, Pingala recalls, "Somebody made a big pot of lentils for us. That was so touching." Having gone through so much and been unwanted in multiple countries over almost two decades, Pingala says, it was "like coming home."

Of course, there have been challenges: Pingala's husband, who had been active in political organizing, took the first employment he could find, a very physical job in a window factory, which was a difficult adjustment. Though they spoke English, they found many in Spokane could not understand their accents. With time, though, they have felt at home in Washington State, and in 2013 were able to naturalize. "I was a refugee," Pingala says. "Now I am a US citizen."[7]

COME: THE POTENTIAL LOCKED IN A REFUGEE CAMP

Come Nzibarega's gift for languages—he speaks five—helped land him a job, at twenty years of age, as a translator for a United Nations peacekeeping force sent to his country of Burundi. For decades Burundi has been plagued by conflicts between the nation's two largest ethnic groups. By assisting the peacekeeping force, though, the young man became a target for a rebel group.

One dark night, as Come returned from a run, a group of rebels kidnapped him and forced him into the jungle to their compound, where they beat, tortured, and interrogated him about the UN's operations. Finally, after two weeks, the UN peacekeepers raided the compound. Come was free, but not safe—and he feared that if he returned to his home, he would put his family at risk as well. Leaving behind his parents and siblings, he set out on a long journey to his uncle's house, in a different region of the country. But after he learned that the rebels had tracked him there, he decided to flee Burundi altogether.

Come ended up more than a thousand miles away in a refugee camp in Ethiopia, with a few other Burundians, but many more refugees from Somalia, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He missed his family desperately, and the living conditions in the camp were deplorable, with a roof that could not keep water out when it rained. "I was hopeless," Come says. "It was really painful, because I could not see a future in front of me."

Come was also frustrated because he was not allowed to work in the camp, and he saw stifled potential in himself and all around him. "The richest places in the world are refugee camps," Come says, "because everyone is created with a purpose, with gifts, and with talents. Refugee camps are full of people who are full of potential, but who

cannot use their potential. Maybe some of the problems that the world is facing right now, the solutions are in those people who are stuck in refugee camps."

Come spent his time running, which he found therapeutic. He also found community in a church within the camp, where his faith was deepened in the midst of his pain. "The church helped me a lot," Come reflects, "giving me hope that God would one day open the door for me to get out. The only thing that gave me hope and joy was knowing that God is in control of everything. And that made me strong."

Finally, after six years and as many interviews with both UNHCR and the US government, one day a friend told Come that his name was on a list of refugees selected for resettlement, which was posted outside the UNHCR office. At first, Come did not believe it—it was too good to be true, he said. But when he verified it, his name was there. "I was going to be able to fulfill my vision and my dream," he says.

Come was resettled to Spokane, Washington, on August 29, 2012. He was paired with a roommate—another refugee, from Eritrea—and with a volunteer, Jason, who became a good friend and running buddy. He found work at a Wal-Mart, working a night shift. He became involved in a local church, Genesis Church, which helped provide him with a sense of community, though he still struggles with the cultural differences: in Burundi, he says, you can stop by a friend's house at any time without scheduling something in advance, which is different from in the United States.

Come also joined the staff of World Relief Spokane, the agency that helped resettle him, where he now serves as a job developer, helping other refugees to find their first jobs. He enjoys interacting with refugees from around the world and seeing them find the

dignity of working and providing for themselves, which most were denied in a refugee camp.

Come speaks publicly at every opportunity, telling his story—his testimony of how God has sustained him through incredibly difficult times—and urging anyone who will listen not to forget about those still in refugee camps. He dreams to someday host a television program, where he can provide a platform for others to tell their stories.

"I want to be a voice for refugees who are in refugee camps around the world, who are suffering," he says, "and to use my story to inspire people who are going through tough times. I truly believe that the world is changed by stories. Even Jesus used to preach using stories. I believe stories are really powerful."

WHICH PHARAOH WILL YOU BE?

In this chapter you met five refugees. While every refugee story is different, a few themes generally characterize those we have had the privilege to know. Refugees are resilient. They are, in almost all cases, grateful to the country that receives them. They lament what has been lost even while eager to succeed in a new country. They love their families and their communities, and they want a better future for their children. For all their differences, they are also a lot like each of us.

Now you have a distinct choice as you hear news reports about refugees arriving to your community: Will you, like the pharaoh of Exodus, hear about masses of people and presume they are a threat? Or rather than labeling them from a distance, will you get to know them?[8] The pharaoh who saw Joseph's potential and welcomed his family ended up being blessed in return—as did the entire country of Egypt, which was spared the worst effects of a famine because God

providentially placed this particular foreigner in their land, subverting the unjust circumstances that compelled his migration.

Having served hundreds of thousands of refugees since the late 1970s, we and our colleagues at World Relief have come to the conclusion that they are a blessing—to us as individuals, to the church, and to our nation.