

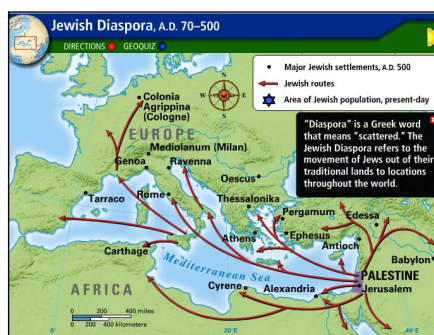
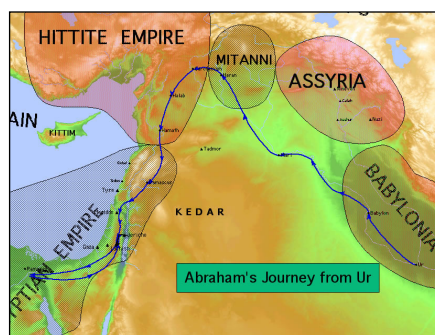
Global Impact Alabama: Acts 17 Strategy



Global Impact Alabama: Acts 17 Strategy (Alan Cross)

Alabama has approximately 165,000 foreign born residents. That means that there are more first generation immigrants living in Alabama than the populations of Tuscaloosa and Auburn combined. When immigrants come from another country to America, they are reorienting to a new world, new cultures, new customs, new opportunities, and new challenges. What if Baptist churches in Alabama worked together to ensure that no immigrant would ever come to Alabama without hearing and encountering the Good News of Jesus Christ and having a relationship with a local church in some way?

Throughout history, God has moved people from one place to another to position them to know God and worship Him. In Genesis 12:1-3, God told Abram to leave his father's house and go to the land that He would show him. There, he would be blessed and be a blessing to all the people's of the



earth. Abram left the place that he lived and knew and went to the place that God wanted him to go to so that he could obey God. Why here? Was it an accident that God placed Abram where He did so that his descendants could live on a land bridge between 3 continents where the trade routes between Africa, Europe, and Asia all intersected? Could it be that God wanted to display His glory to Israel and placed Abram where He did so the nations could see and hear about God?

When the Jews were then dispersed across the known world in the centuries before Christ, it prepared the way for synagogues to be established all over the Roman Empire. When evangelists such as Paul and Peter traveled throughout the world, God had already placed His people in Roman cities to receive and be a launching point for the gospel throughout the Empire.

Another story that we celebrate every Christmas involves God bringing the Wise Men from what was likely Persia to worship Jesus at the occasion of his birth (Matthew 2). They were pagan astrologers who were likely followers of Zoroaster that God spoke to and called to come and present gifts of worship to Jesus. God moved people from one part of the world to another to recognize Him and worship Him.

Keelan Cook, a former missionary to West Africa with the IMB, co-pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, NC, and Ph.D. candidate with the Center for Great Commission Studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary says this about what God has done in the past and what He is doing today:

"In Acts 17, Paul is preaching the gospel in Athens and makes a beautiful statement about the God of this gospel. He says, "And he [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him" (Acts 17:26-27). God is not just the creator of the nations, he is their director as well. It is God who decides when and where people live.

"For the last 20-30 years, global migrations have hit a fever pitch. People are moving all over the globe and resettling in other countries. And above all the other countries, the United States stands ahead of the pack as a recipient of migration. At last count, there are over 42 million migrants living in the US. Many of them from these same countries with no access to the gospel. Regardless of your stance on immigration policy, God is the one behind the movements of humanity and we need to realize that he is at work.

"It is no accident that God is plucking up peoples from the toughest to reach places and sprinkling them into the heartland of evangelical Christianity."

Disapora Missions

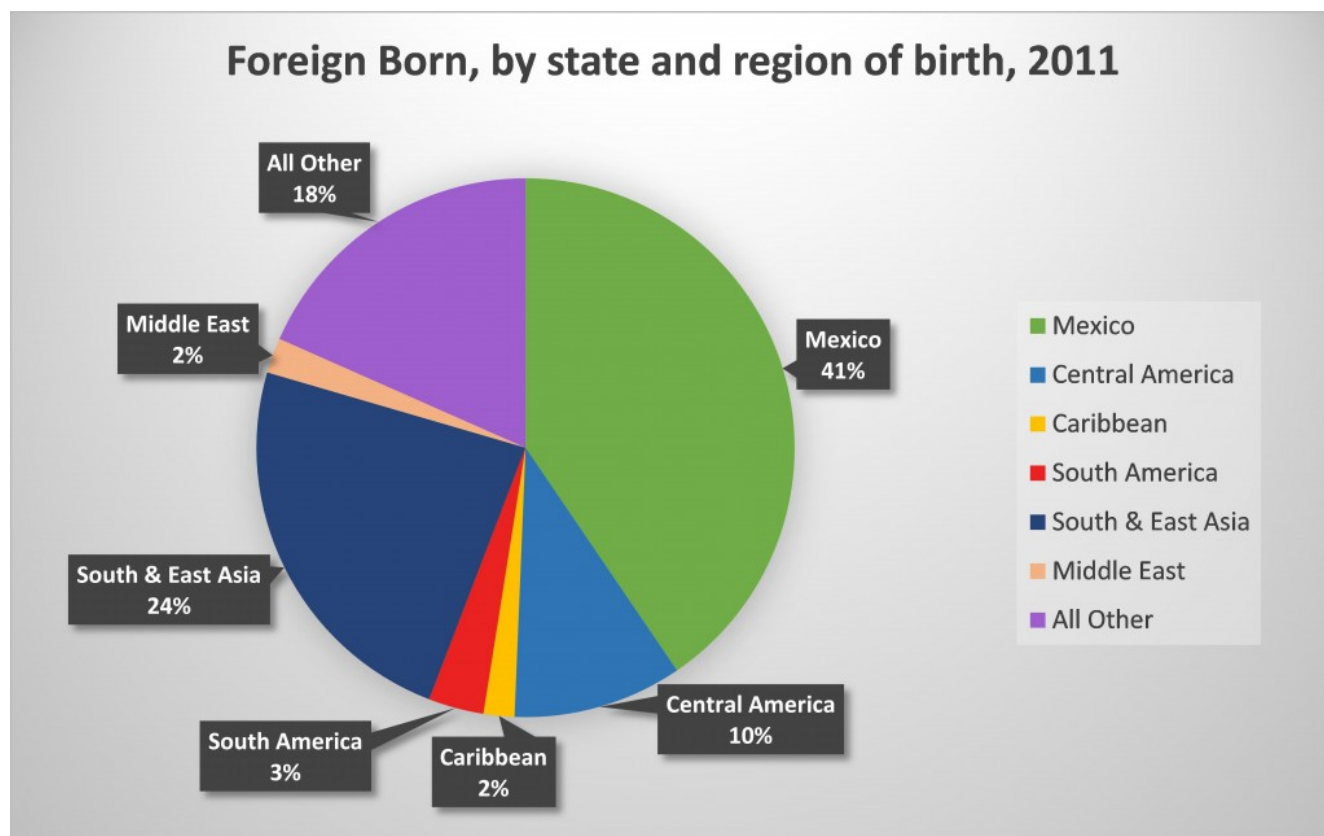
Missiologists are recognizing that God is at work in bringing the nations to us. As Evangelical and Southern Baptist churches in the Southeast age and lose their cultural power, could it be that the renewal and revival that we have prayed for will partially be found in the immigrants that God is allowing to come to our nation and our region? The Southern states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama are now home to approximately 2 million first generation immigrants from the nations of the world. What if the churches in those states mobilized and pivoted toward those newcomers in gospel ministry? What if churches began working together to minister to immigrants and to support one another in this needed work of planting new churches and making disciples? And, what if churches and Christians in the South advocated for immigrants by bearing their burdens, considering their needs above their own, and loving them sacrificially? What would the next generation of church leaders and churches in the South look like? What if we rethought how we did ministry, seized the opportunity before us, and recast the make up of the church in the South in 2030 and 2040 by engaging in full-blown missions to the nations who have come to us right now?

Perhaps in this, we will find our own revitalization, we will see the historic racial divide between black and white healed, and we will be able to proclaim with one voice the gospel of Christ to a world in desperate need of a Savior.

The Plan: Global Impact Alabama - Acts 17 Strategy

*Goal: That Every Immigrant to Alabama Encounter a Local Church,
Hear the Gospel, Experience the Love of Christ, and Become a Disciple of Jesus.*

Alabama's Foreign Born Population: Percentages are of 165,000



Education/Awareness of Acts 17 Strategy

Through denominational publications, social media, conferences, existing ministries, and meetings with pastors/leaders in associations, we will tell the story of what God is doing in bringing the nations to us and in positioning us to share the love of Christ with immigrants. We will highlight pastors, theologians, and ministry leaders in our state who are engaging in this work already and we will give them platforms to speak about the Acts 17:26-28 approach to local/state missions. We have explored Acts 1:8 as a strategy that tells us to "go" to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the nations. What

happens when Acts 17:26-28 goes into effect and the nations come to us? We need to help equip our churches in this awareness.

In Education/Awareness, we will also train the trainers. As we identify pastors, leaders, and missionaries who "get this," we work with them and equip them to train others in regions of the state. Every people group is different and poses new challenges. There is no "one size fits all" approach to engaging in this kind of ministry. We will raise up dozens of mobilizers throughout the state who will be trained in local assessment and who can help train churches/leaders in how to engage in immigrant ministry.

Part of this approach also involves prayer. Calling upon people to pray for the immigrants in our midst is a huge need. Because of what Paul said in Acts 17, God puts people where they are so they will reach out to Him and find Him. We need to be praying that that happens by the power of the Holy Spirit. Every meeting should conclude with prayer for the nations that have come to us.

Assessment/Mapping

As we get the word out, work through existing ministries and relationships, and raise awareness, we are also asking pastors, church leaders, and DOMs about what is already happening along two lines:

1. What are our churches/associations already doing? This work is already happening. Where? How much? What is already taking place? Where are the existing connection points with immigrant communities? ESL classes? Tutoring programs? Ministry centers? Ethnic and 1st Generation Immigrant churches? We need to create a database and begin tracking those ministries and learning from them because they are the experts and we need them to help others. One major flaw in denominational life is that the experts are often considered to be the denominational leaders. They have much to offer, to be sure, but what if we turned that around and recognized that the experts were those already doing the work? What if the state convention facilitates them telling their story? What if we overwhelmed our people, not with convention programs, but with access to the work that they were already doing by having roundtable discussions and strategy sessions with the people on the ground already doing the work? And, what if we then told that story through social media, our own publications, and every media outlet that we could identify?
2. Who/where are the immigrant groups that live in our communities? Census data is helpful and mapping programs give us some idea of broad swaths of certain population types. But, they do not give us the information needed to actually help us develop ministries. Where are the ethnic/immigrant neighborhoods? How many people from different people groups live in certain areas? Where do they gather? Shop? Celebrate cultural events? Play sports? What churches are already engaged? What can learn about these people locally? Who are their leaders? Who are the believers among them? How open are they to churches being planted?

Mapping both the immigrants in our communities by telling real stories with real data from on the ground sources as well as mapping the work of the churches/ministries that are already engaged will give us a good foundation of resources, manpower, expertise, passion, and people groups to partner with others in gospel advance among the nations who have come to us.

In Mapping, we should employ existing tools like the peoplegroups.info site managed by the IMB and NAMB as well as resources provided by the People's Next Door work from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Another tool that we should access throughout all of this work are retired IMB missionaries who have returned from the field and who reside in our state - especially if they have worked among a people group that we are working with. We would want these missionaries to be trainers and facilitators, but not the only ones doing the work. We want to equip our churches in this.

Prayer

Prayer should be foundational in every aspect of this approach and I do not want to treat it as a given. We should pray at the beginning before we start. We should pray when we are raising awareness. We should pray when we are engaged in mapping. But, there should be a special emphasis here because once we really know who is doing what and we know where immigrants are throughout the state, we can pray with insight and specific requests for the immigrant people groups in our midst. We should call associations to pray for the immigrants that are co-located with them. We should call churches to pray for the immigrants in their neighborhoods and towns. And, we should pray without ceasing.

Mobilization/Training

Having raised awareness among Alabama Baptists and other denominations of what God is doing, having mapped our state, and while praying throughout this process, we will see hearts change and God calling people to engage with what He is doing. His Spirit will call people as we pray and labor with Him in this. But, we must identify churches and pastors and leaders who are answering God's call to engage the immigrant communities in their midst with the gospel.

- **Hub Churches**

We must find key churches in every association who will serve as "hub churches" in this strategy. They will carry the burden for this in their association and will be repositories of information, research, relationships, and training. They can be a help to other churches and should have a heart of cooperation. They will aid the Director of Mission and will meet and pray together.

- **Mission/Ministry Teams**

Hub churches will help identify and form teams of at least 5 people who will seek to engage the immigrant communities intentionally in relationship and with the gospel. Each church will have its own ministry, but there will be an associational strategy to support these teams and help them work together. Each team will work with their church, but will also be connected in a greater Kingdom perspective and will be resourced from the state convention and local association as well.

- **Multi-Housing Ministry (Missional Communities)**

We will work with the existing Multi-Housing Ministry that now exists in the 13 largest population areas of Alabama. This focus on immigrants will build off of the work already happening in this dynamic ministry and will add to it in a similar fashion. The *People's Next Door, NC* workbook recommend this kind of strategy in identifying the Person of Peace and then moving toward having

indigenous missional small groups in homes and neighborhoods among immigrants. We will use the same approach with this that the Multi-Housing Ministry is already using.

- Conversational English/ESL/Adult Literacy/Language Missions

Language and Literacy work is happening among Alabama Baptists and is well established. Connecting with this existing work with teams who are mobilized and trained to engage with immigrant groups allows us to maximize what we are already doing and continue to use it as a platform for gospel impact through relational connections.

- Training

Training for teams should occur up front but should also continue as they go. Once people groups are identified, there should be investigation into these cultures and training regarding the barriers and bridges to the gospel that exist. This type of training will be people group specific, but will also consist of general training in missiological principles as well as basic ministry training for missional communities seeking to reproduce themselves through disciple-making. This training can happen through hub churches, local associations, online networking, and through web-based curriculum.

Web-Based Platforming/Network Theory

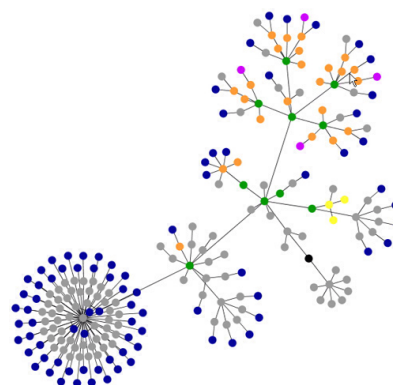
While we want to build on the existing work of our ministries and institutions to make the pivot to immigrant ministry, we also want to see an expanding, organic network of churches and ministries of all kinds emerge that carries this emphasis all over our state. One way to do that is to develop an interactive website that serves as an information and networking hub for the facilitation and rapid reproduction of best practices for immigrant ministries. This website would host all pertinent curriculum and information needed to start and resource on-going immigrant ministries. It would also contain a way to gather information about new and existing work that is growing in our state. There would be a way for those engaged in ministry to immigrant people-groups to contribute articles and best practices through an online journal/blog so that content is created by users of the site instead of just by site administrators. The site would be a living, dynamic expression of *Global Impact Alabama* and would grow as its user base grew and as they continued to provide content and share best practices. Regional training sessions would develop out of ideas and discussions shared on the site and relationships would grow. The site itself would also be tailored for anyone using a smartphone, tablet, or laptop to use it in making presentations or engaging in training meetings. The site itself would be the resource and the informational hub of the movement and would contain discipleship and training resources for churches, team leaders, and new believers to employ.

From the information and interaction generated on the site, an emerging network will grow and spread rapidly. Rather than just being a place where content is posted by a few gatekeepers, there will be an opportunity for anyone to participate in creating content in a "message board" format. This site will serve the ministry network. The following is from a paper that I submitted in 2003 at the founding of the Military Missions Network, which began in Montgomery but is now led from Norfolk, Virginia.

Implications of Ministry Networks in the 21st Century: Networks exist as platforms for interaction, communication, and best practices to rise to the surface among groups who are moving in the same direction with the same core values and purpose. The establishment of the network serves to facilitate greater effectiveness and innovation among the participants. It expands by empowering all of its members to spread the idea around their own edges, thus inviting others to connect with them. It is not controlled as much as it is influenced by the flow of information, vision, and ideas as directed by the influential “gatekeepers” or “switchers” of the network. These “gatekeepers” are the hubs of relationships within the network, around which participants seem to gather.

Practical Keys to Establish and Lead a Ministry Network:

1. Lead through ideas, words, and vision.
2. Create interactive experiences where network participants are able to share their story and shape the future of the network.
3. Instead of “one to many” communication, create “many to many” conversational environments where best practices are discussed and adopted.
4. Use the internet through interactive web sites that create community and participation, such as blogs.
5. Use regional conferences / get togethers for the purpose of sharing information, building relationships, and learning about what others are doing that is successful.
6. Create a community of like-minded travelers that is reciprocal. Once interdependence is created, the bonds within the network are strong enough to provide for greater innovation and growth.
7. Connect people relationally and spiritually through prayer, communication, and ministry partnering. Much of this globally can be done through the web site if it is interactive and constantly renewing itself through the creation of feedback loops.
8. Ideally, you want to enable each participant to become an expert who is fully empowered and equipped to take the concept of the network to another likeminded person or organization. In a sense, the network is not controlled from the center, but rather it is moving among the edges by the push and flow of ideas, energy, and relationships. It morphs and changes and is constantly innovating as new participants take it further than before as they bring their own experiences to bear. Remember, it is about movement, not management.
9. Embodiment of the idea: the network stays true to it’s original DNA because the idea that brought people together in the first place is embodied in the relationships that are formed. What are we about? Why are we in relationship? The mission stays central and thus drives innovation and experimentation. The network exists to facilitate this process through coaching, encouragement, relationship building, and through creating learning and sharing environments where people can come together and grow.



Applying these concepts to immigrant ministry along the lines of the People's Next Door approach, means that we will use existing ministries, institutions, and interested parties to identify hubs and to encourage movement and growth of a network of immigrant ministries around our state. Eventually,

we will completely change the conversation regarding how Evangelical Christians see immigrants to our state from one of suspicion to one of sacrificial love for neighbor.

Advocacy

The more that I interact with first generation immigrants and their children, the more that I become aware of the fact that their challenges, burdens, and struggles are opportunities for Christians of all kinds around the state to build relationships and assist in bearing the burdens of others with the sacrificial love of Christ. When I speak to Latino congregations and tell them that their burdens are my burdens and that when one part of the Body suffers, we all suffer, their response is incredible and overwhelmingly supportive. Their desire to work together increases exponentially. Recognizing that each person is made in God's image and has inherent worth and value given by our Creator moves each of us into the position of speaking on behalf of others who are in weaker social positions so that they have every chance to participate in the behaviors that lead to human flourishing. We should love our neighbor enough to speak on his behalf when he cannot speak for himself.

This approach will help bring justice and set right the things that have gone wrong. It will also provide an opportunity to build relationships and gain trust that will lead to new platforms emerging for gospel partnership and advance. Lostness is increasing in Alabama and so many of our established churches are struggling to even reach their own children, much less new people and families for Christ. Perhaps God is putting us in position to "love our neighbors" in ways that do not tangibly benefit us so that we can give witness to our Crucified Savior who loved us and gave His life for us? When we enter into the lives of immigrants, we discover that there are massive issues that they are facing in our communities and our state and we find that we have opportunities to help them. Enabling Christians to step into this ministry of advocacy could open a door to the gospel going into new territory. It could also be what brings us healing (Isaiah 58; Zechariah 7).

Church Planting

Finally, any approach to reaching first generation immigrant communities through mobilizing and informing existing churches to love and minister, through mapping and engaging their communities, through prayer and forming missional teams that would go to immigrants, through developing networks, and through advocacy, must result in church planting among immigrant communities. These churches might look like stand alone, established churches, or they might look like house church movements that meet in neighborhoods and multi-housing complexes. These house churches might network together with other house churches throughout a city or region among that particular immigrant people group. However, in such an approach, there are a few things to consider:

1. Leadership is really important. The gospel is shared with people who do not know Christ by people who do. We are called to be witnesses to others who do not know Jesus (Acts 1:8). There is a call to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18-20). The Christian worker is called to engage in the 4-fold Kingdom movement of devotion, intercession, proclamation, and demonstration (Matthew 4-6). This is the role of an ambassador of Christ. We must identify and equip missionaries who will go to the nations who have come to us in gospel work. Why not identify and appoint hundreds of state missionaries who work jobs to support themselves to officially network with ALSBOM and local associations to bring a gospel witness to the

immigrants in our midst while living out the truths of Acts 17:24-28? The IMB is adopting this approach internationally. What if we did this here in Alabama? These missionaries would form missional teams that would then go to immigrants with the gospel to make disciples and form missional communities all over the state that will come together to grow in Christ in every way. These missional communities would be our house churches.

2. House Churches rarely stand up and proliferate alone, especially in the American context. They need support, guidance, and some kind of institutional structure that they are connected with that is bigger than themselves. I know that this seems to disagree with much of the Church Planting Movement (CPM) literature that has grown over the past 15-20 years, but I am convinced that CPM movement theory is incomplete without the establishment of hubs that can help facilitate the movement. This brings us back to Network Theory. "Hub" churches or ministries are needed to facilitate house church movements.
3. Mother Church (Hub Church) Approach. Through 10 trips to North India over the past decade, I have been able to observe what works well and what struggles. Having an established church (either native born or first generation immigrant) that serves as a Hub Church in the establishment of House Churches that will encourage, give oversight, and help with strategy, seems to be the best approach. I believe that this works well in the American context as well, especially among immigrant groups. There is a need for some kind of identifiable structure for people to know that they are a part of for movements to grow. Accountability is needed as is leadership.
4. With Hub Churches and connected House Churches, the leadership and missional strategists working with them will identify clusters of House Churches that are ready to form together into new stand-alone churches to repeat the process over again and to raise up new leaders and missionaries that will develop new expressions of disciple-making churches.
5. Cultural Celebrations. One missing ingredient in reaching immigrant and ethnic groups is that we often seek to bring people from other cultures into OUR culture before they can connect with churches and grow in Christ. What if we took advantage of neutral cultural celebrations as vehicles for the gospel and story-telling? What if we affirmed the good things in these cultures and helped provide opportunities for these expressions here? Hub Churches could assist in this with use of facilities, grounds, and some finances - and also through partnering. These celebrations could be relationship and community building experiences.

Summary

What if every Immigrant to Alabama encounters a Local Church, hears the Gospel, experiences the Love of Christ, and then has the opportunity to become a Disciple of Jesus? What if we made this our response to the presence of immigrants in Alabama? What if God moving people around the earth for them to know Him and reach out to Him found tangible expression in Alabama so that we could be a witness to the world of what Jesus can do in healing the past and creating a new, gospel-formed future? *Global Impact Alabama* takes those questions seriously and seeks to change the future of our state by planting the gospel among immigrant peoples now.

In the pages that follow, we will explore a Biblical basis for Immigrant and Refugee ministry and then delve more deeply into how local churches can engage in this ministry and to proclaim the Gospel to the whole Creation that He has brought right to our doorstep.

Biblical Perspective: God's Heart for the Immigrant

Could it be that the movement of people around the earth for a variety of reasons, both good and evil, is something that God uses and redeems to accomplish His purposes? Acts 17:24-28 seems to say so. But, the rest of Scripture is not silent on this either. We can see this rising tide of people movement from Genesis to Revelation as Creation begins in a garden and ends in the city of New Jerusalem as people from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue gather around the throne to worship God (Rev. 7:9-12). What if these stories of migration, refugees, sojourning, and pilgrimage are not just footnotes? What if they are a primary way that God spreads the knowledge of Himself across the planet? What if what many fear is actually a way that God both sends people with the gospel to those who do not know Him and sends people from areas where He is unknown to places where His people reside? What if what some mean for evil, God turns it and uses it for good, as we see in Joseph's life after he was sold into slavery by his brothers and sent off to Egypt (Gen. 50:20)?

Another aspect that should be considered is that God is perhaps telling us something about Himself through the presence of immigrants and refugees in our midst. Could it be that, along with the poor, the widow, and the orphan, the presence of the sojourner both demonstrates God's heart and also enables us to know God and represent Him if we would only see them all as people made in God's image with God-given dignity and worth as people whom Jesus died for?

Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang in *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, and Truth in Immigration Debate* (2009) say,

Since so many of the characters of the biblical story were migrants of one sort or another, it is not surprising that God gives us a great deal of guidance about interacting with immigrants. God reminds the Israelites early on of their own history as aliens in a foreign land, commanding them that, given their own experience, they should welcome the immigrant among them. In Leviticus 19:33-34, God commands the Israelites, "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." In fact, Israel's very identity was tied to how they treated the foreign born, as it reflected Israel's trust in God to provide and their willingness to follow his commandments. The words of Exodus 12:49, repeated throughout the Pentateuch many times, make clear: "The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you."

At the same time, immigrants are recognized as being particularly vulnerable, and God therefore commands the Israelites to take special concern for them. The term usually translated as alien or sojourner appears repeatedly in conjunction with two other categories of people of special concern to God: the fatherless and the widow. For example, Deuteronomy 10:18 says that God "defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing." Psalm 146:9 echoes this concern: "The Lord watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked." The same linkage extends throughout the Old Testament, such as in Ezekiel, where the evil rulers of Israel are condemned for having "oppressed the alien and mistreated the fatherless and the

widow," and in Zechariah, where we are commanded, "Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor" (Zechariah 7:9-10).

The flow of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation reveals God's heart for the stranger and the alien - the immigrant, the sojourner, and the refugee. Could it be that the picture of a person cast out and separated from home and wandering between his home and a future destination contains a picture of our own spiritual journey through this world from death to life? Just as Israel's Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land was a picture of God's deliverance and salvation ultimately fulfilled in Christ, could it be that the millions of immigrants and refugees that traverse the earth today.

A Theological, Missiological, Ecclesiological, and Eschatological View of why we must join with what God is doing in the world in relation to immigrants/refugees.

Genesis 1:26-28 - Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." All people are made in God's image. All have value and worth.

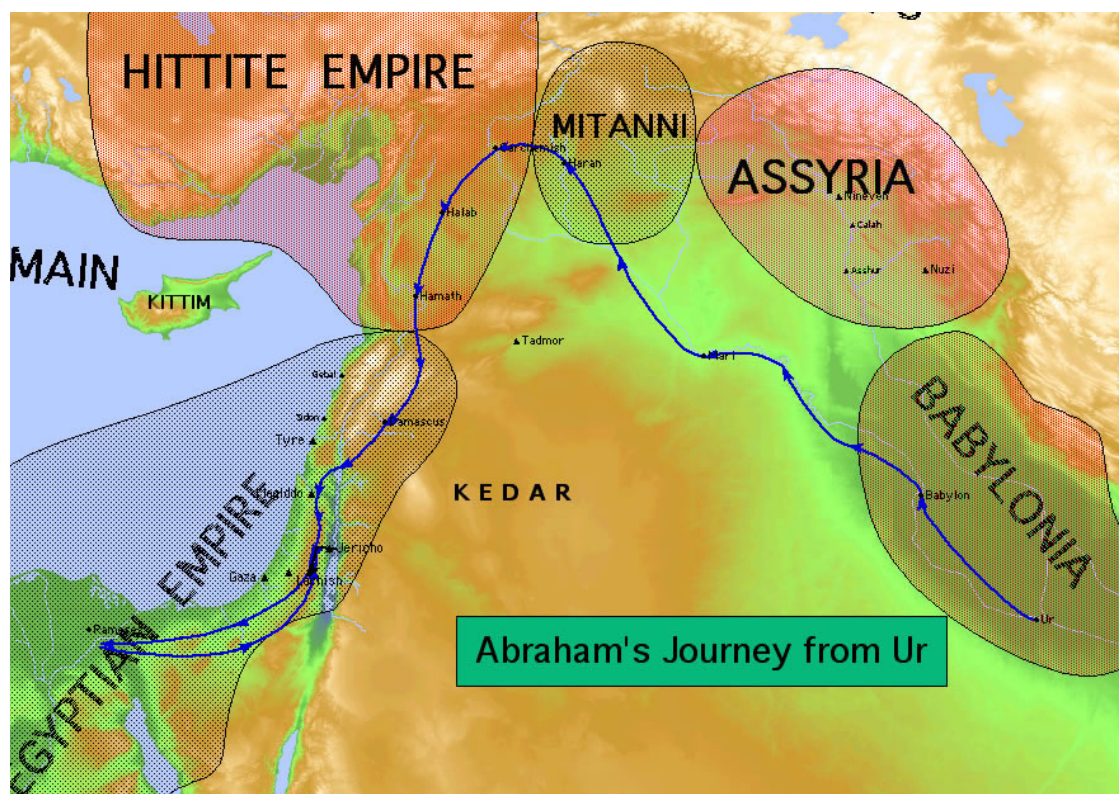
Genesis 3 - the Fall affected all people. We are all separated from God because of sin. We need a savior. We hide, compete, and fight against one another (Gen. 4; James 4:1-10).

Vs. 1-13 - Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?'" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." ... **vs. 22-24** - "Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—' therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life."

Genesis 4 - Cain and Abel - the desire to promote and defend "self" leads to rivalry, violence, and separation. Sin continues its work and we see fear and hatred grow. Broken people wandering the earth is a consequence of the division that comes from sin. Oppression and violence grows and the blood cries out from the ground. But, even in this, God promises to protect Cain in his wandering. **vs. 8-16** - Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your

brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him. Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Genesis 11:1-9 - The Tower of Babel - because of pride and self interest (make a name for ourselves - vs. 4), God spreads people all over the face of the earth. Sin brings separation. **Vs. 1-9** - Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and **let us make a name for ourselves**, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the Lord said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.



Genesis 12 - Abram told to sojourn to the land God would show him - he was an immigrant/sojourner - he would be a blessing to the nations. God placed Israel at the center of a land bringing connecting Africa, Asia, and Europe so it would be a light to the nations (Is. 49:6).

Vs. 1-9 - Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

Vs. 10 - "Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land." Even after Abram went to the land that God showed him and promised him, when famine came, he sojourned down to Egypt to survive.

Genesis 18-19 - Lot was a sojourner in Sodom (vs. 9) and he welcomed in the two angels who were strangers and visitors. He did not know who they were, but he welcomed them and protected them from harm (19:1-4). The people of Sodom were so sinful, that they attacked Lot's home and wanted to defile the men. Lot protected them. The root sins of Sodom were explained in **Exodus 16:49-50** - "Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it." - In addition to sexual immorality, homosexuality, and violence, God gets at the underlying sins beneath them all, which was pride, greed, and self-protection that caused them to turn against strangers and sojourners instead of aiding the poor and needy. They promoted themselves and their own "way of life" and desire for pleasure over caring for the needs of others, including the sojourner and the poor and needy. So, God destroyed them for their wickedness.

Hebrews 13:1-5 refers to this incident and becomes something of a commentary on what happened in Sodom and Gomorrah. It says, "Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body. Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'"

Look at the progression. "Let brotherly love continue." This is how God wants us to act toward one another - with brotherly love. Consider the needs of others. Care for them. Put others before your own needs. This is how God acts toward us. Just look at Jesus and His life and death for our behalf.

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." This refers to Lot's encounter with the angels in Sodom. You do not know who you are caring for when you show hospitality to strangers. You are dealing with people made in God's image - man, made a little lower than the angels, but with the capacity to be adopted into God's family as sons of God and co-heirs with Christ. C.S. Lewis says in *The Weight of Glory*, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit - immortal horrors or everlasting splendors." He is saying that we should take seriously the idea that the *Imago Dei* imprinted on to every person has severe meaning. The writer to the Hebrews refers to

meeting angels when we meet a stranger and we should have the same attitude that Lot had when he met the angelic messengers, sacrificing his own life for them before he saw them treated poorly.

Hebrews 13:1-5 goes on to say that we should remember those in prison and those who are mistreated (most likely talking about persecuted Christians because of the mention of being in the "body" with them, meaning the body of Christ). Then, he says that marriage should be held in honor and that the sexually immoral and adulterous will be judged by all. Then, he ties in greed and a lack of contentedness. Is it a mere coincidence that how we treat strangers and those mistreated is connected with sexual immorality, greed, and discontent? Were these not the sins of Sodom? Lack of hospitality, arrogance, pride, lack of concern for the poor and needy, and sexual immorality? Could it be that when we see a land filled with sexual immorality, we will likewise see a land filled with pride, arrogance, lack of concern for the poor, and mistreatment and rejection of strangers who visit us? The sin of Sodom seem to be a pattern for the rejection of God by a nation and a people and whether it manifests as sexual immorality or mistreatment of the poor and the sojourner, it is coming from the same place - pride, a lack of fear of God, and a lack of love for our brother.

Genesis 24:1-4 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." - Abraham sent a servant back to his homeland to find a wife for his son, Isaac, and to bring her back to him. Migration involved again in developing marriage and families. The wife was Rebekah.

Genesis 27:41-45 - Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob." But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away— until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?" - Jacob was a deceiver, but he had to flee for his life as a refugee running from certain death by the hands of his brother. So, he goes to Haran.

Genesis 41:56-57 - "So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth." - God put Joseph, son of Jacob, in Egypt to be a blessing for the world in the midst of famine. People were allowed to come from all over the earth to Egypt to buy grain so they could survive. Travel and migration was allowed because of famine and economic hardship. Joseph was God's man to care for those in need.

Genesis 42:1-5 - When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan. - Trade, travel, and migration was allowed so that people could survive. There was economic benefit for Egypt and the people of Canaan - Jacob's family - were able to survive in the midst of hardship. Resources spread as people were allowed to leave places of lack and go to places of plenty to secure resources and survival for themselves and their families.

Genesis 46:5-7 - Then Jacob set out from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters. All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt. - Because of the famine and Joseph's high position, he brought his whole family to Egypt from Canaan where they would be cared for and survive. Family reunification is at work here.

Genesis 47:1-12 - So Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan. They are now in the land of Goshen." And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were." They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen." Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them settle in the land of Goshen, and if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my livestock." Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the days of the years of your life?" And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning." And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents. - Jacob was a sojourner all his life, as his fathers were before him. He is brought to Egypt for God's purposes in preserving his family and his line. He is given a place to dwell and to settle in a foreign land.



Exodus 1:8-14 - Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, "Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves."

Fear leads to oppression and injustice and caused this Pharaoh to turn against the people of Israel and to afflict them with hard labor while they took advantage of them. Fear of losing status, power, and

prosperity can cause the dominant culture to turn against the minority people in ways that wrecks lives and afflicts generations. Are you a part of the power structure? This was not just Pharaoh and the power-elites. It says "the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel." When we fear another people and want to oppress them and take advantage of them, it is possible that we are acting like Pharaoh and the Egyptians toward the Israelites. Fear causes us to strive to promote, protect, and defend our own "way of life" over and above others. These activities and attitudes push people away from God's purpose for people made in His image and drives justice and shalom far away from all of us.

Exodus 2:23-25 - "During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew." - The boys born to Hebrew women were being killed. There was a plan to eradicate the people of Israel through oppressive work and unjust conditions of slavery and hardship. But, the people cried out to God and their cry went up to the Lord God and He heard them and remembered His promises and saw their plight and knew what they were going through. When people are oppressed and cry out to God, He hears them and He delivers them. He makes wrongs right and He sets the captive free. He gives the poor wanderer shelter and He cares for the poor and needy.

Exodus 6:2-8 - God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.'" - God hears the cries of His people and He delivers from slavery and oppression and takes them to the land that He has for them so they can know Him and follow Him free from fear and from burdens. The deliverance of Israel from oppression and to the Promised Land is the basic story of our salvation narrative. It is our story of God's care and salvation. Through Jesus, it is a story that is for all people everywhere.

Exodus 12 - vs. 29-32 - At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, "Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the Lord, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!" **vs. 40-42** - The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. It was a night of watching by the Lord, to bring them out of the land of Egypt; so this same night is a night of watching kept to the Lord by all the people of Israel throughout their generations. - The story of the Passover and Exodus was a story of God delivering His people from the oppression of slavery by Pharaoh and the Egyptians to a land that He had promised them. The homes that had the blood of the Passover lamb on the door posts were spared. Those without the blood lost the first born son of every family. God delivered His people from a land of oppression to a land of freedom and blessing so they could worship Him freely (Exodus 5:1-3).

Exodus 22:21-24 - "You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless." - In the giving of the Law, God reminds the Hebrew people who they once were. They were once "sojourners in the land of Egypt." They were in bondage and were oppressed and God delivered them. So, when they encounter a sojourners (immigrant, migrant, refugee), they are to treat them well and not wrong them. To wrong or oppress them is to disregard their own salvation. Likewise, they are to care for the widow and the fatherless child and not mistreat them. If they fail at this, the widow and fatherless will cry out to God just like they groaned and cried out against the Egyptians and God will hear their cry and will kill them and their own wives and children will be widowed and will be fatherless. Here, we see the concern and deliverance that God expressed to Israel being shared with others in their distress. How they care for the sojourner is directly related to how they experience the results of their own salvation. In as clear of terms as possible, God threatens them with physical death if they miss this truth.

Exodus 23:9 "You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt." - God reminds them again. Do not oppress sojourners. You know their heart. They were you. You were them. Here, God calls His people to *identification* with the plight of those who will come to them for refuge and aid, perhaps fleeing persecution and destitution. Remember where I found you. Remember the situation that you were in when you were called out of Egypt. Now, treat others with similar care and compassion. This is a foundation for what Paul said to the Corinthian believers in 1 Cor. 1:26-31 when he said that not many were wise or impressive according to the world's standards - "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong." 1 Peter 2:11 says that we are sojourners and exiles in this world. Christians, of all people, should know what it is like to be aliens and strangers in this world that we are just passing through. Humility before the Lord requires us to remember, just as it did the Hebrew people, and to extend love and concern for those who are poor, widowed, fatherless, and sojourners in the land. The celebration of the Passover each year, the reading of the Law, and the remembering of the Exodus caused the Hebrew people to consider the plight of the sojourner in their midst.

Could it be that God allowed immigrants to come to them so that they would remember their own deliverance and they would have a chance to extend God's mercy to those who had not yet received it the way that they had?

Exodus 23:10-12 "For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard. Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed." Inherent in the very observance of the Sabbath is a command to let the land rest so that the poor would be cared for and that the servants and aliens may rest and be refreshed. The Sabbath is not just for the Hebrew people. It is also for the servants, the sojourners, and everyone who is under their care. You cannot talk about the Sabbath rest without also considering the needs of the poor and the sojourner among you.

Leviticus 19:33-34 - "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God." You shall love the stranger as yourself - this is the basis for the Great Commandment. This command is hardwired into the central understanding of the Law. The very idea of loving your neighbor has to do with the stranger and those who are different from you, thus causing it to be sacrificial love. It is easy to love our kinsmen and our own family and those who are like us and reinforce our status,

position, prosperity, and safety and security. That kind of love benefits us. But, when we love the sojourner the same way that we love ourselves, we are entering into a supernatural expression of love that is God-like. This kind of love was commanded when the Hebrew people were under the Law, which had no real ability to change hearts. How much more are we to love those different and alien to us, even our "enemies," as a picture of the New Birth and the supernatural love that Christ has poured into our hearts? When we love the sojourner in our midst, it demonstrates the love of God to us and through us, though we were rebels against His reign and rule and care. Loving our neighbor (19:18), including the Sojourner, demonstrates what God is like. This is why Jesus gives the Parable of the Good Samaritan in response to the question, "Who is my neighbor?" in Luke 10:25-37. It was an outsider who was a neighbor to the man in the ditch, beaten by robbers. He cared for him at his own expense and even in risk of his own life, lest he also be set upon by robbers. The love of neighbor, including sojourners, is a sacrificial love, and it is the primary mark of someone whose heart has been changed by the love of and deliverance of God through Christ. This is no side doctrine. It is core to the Law, the Passover, the salvation story, and the Greatest Commandment. As we will later see, it is also central to missiology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Could it be that God uses the movement of people around the world as a sign of His work to deliver us from darkness to light so that we will worship God and love our neighbor sacrificially? Could it be that God uses the movement of peoples to open our hearts to Him so we would seek Him and find Him and love others with God's love to the praise of His glorious grace? Acts 17:24-28, which we will discuss later, seems to indicate that.

Deuteronomy 10:17-22 - "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear. He is your praise. He is your God, who has done for you these great and terrifying things that your eyes have seen. Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven."

We do not know what God has planned through the deliverance, protection, and care of the fatherless, the widow, and the sojourner. But, when we see them, we are supposed to remember where we were when God found us. Hardwired into the DNA of every Christian is a salvation story of "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy" (1 Peter 2:10). We have all been brought from darkness to light and from being orphans into God's family. When we see these people, we are to remember and worship God and then turn around and love them because God first loved us. The Christian who turns away from the poor, the fatherless, the widow, and the sojourner has forgotten his own salvation and has placed his faith in himself or in other things to save him. He has put other gods before God because his heart is not broken in dependence before God and poured out in love for others. When we come to Christ, a change is to occur in how we see other people, especially those in need.

Deuteronomy 24:17-22 - "You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this. "When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over them again. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not strip it afterward. It shall be for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this.

Deuteronomy 26:5-13 "And you shall make response before the Lord your God, 'A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and

humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O Lord, have given me.' And you shall set it down before the Lord your God and worship before the Lord your God. And you shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you. "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year, which is the year of tithing, giving it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your towns and be filled, then you shall say before the Lord your God, 'I have removed the sacred portion out of my house, and moreover, I have given it to the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, according to all your commandment that you have commanded me. I have not transgressed any of your commandments, nor have I forgotten them.

Ruth (2:8-13) - Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now, listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Let your eyes be on the field that they are reaping, and go after them. Have I not charged the young men not to touch you? And when you are thirsty, go to the vessels and drink what the young men have drawn." Then she fell on her face, bowing to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?" But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The Lord repay you for what you have done, and a full reward be given you by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!" Then she said, "I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, though I am not one of your servants." And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers."

The Book of Ruth is a story about Elimelech and Naomi fleeing Judah to go to Moab because of famine in the land. Then, they stay and marry their sons to Moabite daughters. But, Elimelech dies as do Naomi's sons and she is left with only her daughter's in law and a recognition that she needs to return back to Judah. Ruth goes with her and promises that she will not leave her. Upon her arrival in Judah (Bethlehem, to be exact), she is allowed to glean the fields of Boaz, in obedience to the command of the law to leave the left overs of the field for the sojourners. But, Boaz does more than that. He acts as the Kinsmen Redeemer for Naomi's family and marries Ruth so that they will be taken care of. Boaz and Ruth become ancestors of King David, and thus Jesus. In this, Boaz serves as a type of Christ who redeems the widowed sojourner who is vulnerable and alone, thus giving us a picture of salvation and what God, in Christ, does for us. If Boaz is a type of Christ, then Ruth is a picture of the Bride of Christ, the Church. At the very core of this salvation message is a picture of an immigrant woman being welcomed and redeemed by a man who serves as a picture of Jesus. We cannot understand our salvation properly without seeing it through the eyes of sojourners who have been redeemed by the God who sees them.

Psalms 146:8-9 - "the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin."

Proverbs 31:8-9 - be a voice for the voiceless - defend the rights of the poor and needy. "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy." (NIV) When he have an opportunity, we should speak on behalf of those who have no voice and who are oppressed.

Jeremiah 7:5-7 "For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood

in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

Jeremiah 22:3 - Thus says the Lord : Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place.

Ezekiel 22:4-8 - You have become guilty by the blood that you have shed, and defiled by the idols that you have made, and you have brought your days near, the appointed time of your years has come. Therefore I have made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all the countries. Those who are near and those who are far from you will mock you; your name is defiled; you are full of tumult. "Behold, the princes of Israel in you, every one according to his power, have been bent on shedding blood. Father and mother are treated with contempt in you; the sojourner suffers extortion in your midst; the fatherless and the widow are wronged in you. You have despised my holy things and profaned my Sabbaths.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the other prophets foretell the Jewish Diaspora to Assyria and beyond and (722 BC) and also the Babylonian Captivity for 70 years (beginning 605-601 BC) and the return of the exiles (Nehemiah/Ezra). Through this movement, God teaches, positions, and restores His people for His purposes.

Isaiah 60:1-6 - God will cause the nations to bring their gifts in worship - All of the nations will worship Him and bring him gold and frankincense and will bring praise to the Lord - "the nations shall come to your light."

Zechariah 7:9-14 - the Quartet of the Vulnerable - widow, orphan, poor, sojourner - turn to them, lest your heart becomes diamond hard. "'Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another, do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner, or the poor, and let none of you devise evil against another in your heart.'" But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the Lord of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the Lord of hosts. "As I called, and they would not hear, so they called, and I would not hear," says the Lord of hosts, "and I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations that they had not known. Thus the land they left was desolate, so that no one went to and fro, and the pleasant land was made desolate."

New Testament

John 1; 3; Luke 19:10 - *the Incarnation*. Jesus put on flesh and made His dwelling among us to bring salvation to the world. He came to seek and save the lost (1 Cor. 15:1-8 - gospel).

Matthew 2:1-12 - Visit of the Magi from the east bringing gifts - foreshadowing of the Gentiles coming to worship God - gold, frankincense, myrrh. God brings pagan astrologers from Persia to a place they had not been before to meet Jesus and worship Him, basically following the route of Abraham along the trade routes of the Tigris/Euphrates to come to Bethlehem.

Matthew 2:13-18 - Jesus and his family flee as refugees from brutal government oppression and what amounted to terrorism. At the beginning of Jesus' life, we see how God moves people to worship and to escape persecution and death for His salvation purposes.

Matthew 5:43-48 - Love your enemies. Not just your friends, but your enemies. This is what it means to follow Jesus. We do not love our enemies because we think that we will convert them - necessarily. We love our enemies because we can imagine no other way to follow Jesus. He loved us when we were His enemies (Romans 5:8). For those who see immigrants/refugees as our enemies, we are still required to love and pray for them.

Matthew 22:36-40 - Love God (Deut. 6 - Shema) and Love Neighbor as self (Lev. 19).

Matthew 24:3-14 - the tumult of the world that will happen before the end as nations are uprooted provides context for the preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom to whole world.

"As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

Matthew 28:18-20 - After the Resurrection - Great Commission - we are called to GO and make disciples of all nations - ethnos - people groups.

Acts 1:6-8 - we will receive power from the Spirit to be witnesses to the ends of the earth - the gospel is to go everywhere and to all peoples (ethnos).

Acts 2:1-13 - the Holy Spirit is poured out on the Day of Pentecost in something of a reversal of the dispersion at the Tower of Babel as Jews from the diaspora among the nations had gathered together from all over the known world in Jerusalem to worship. They heard the good news about Jesus in their own language and 3000 believed and were saved. These migrants who came to Jerusalem to worship freely actually met God in ways they did not expect.

Gospel Movements Through Acts - different people groups encounter the gospel as the church disperses from Jerusalem throughout the world, just as Jesus told them in Acts 1:6-8. Whether the reason was persecution driving them or a movement of the Spirit, we see the Apostles and others taking the gospel to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and the Ethiopian Eunuch whom Philip led to Christ. Legend states that the Ethiopian then traveled home and the Ethiopian Church was started, which still exists to this day. Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus and then met Ananias, a disciple, who baptized him. Peter took the gospel to the Gentiles in Acts 10-11 and expansion to new people groups began there.

Acts 11:19-21 - the Church in Antioch - God uses persecution to spread the church to different lands and to new people groups. Later, Antioch sent the missionaries, Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:1-3). "Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord."

Acts 17:24-28 - God sovereignly determines times and places where people will live so they will seek Him and grope for Him - in Him we live and move and have our being (whole context of 17:16-31). The movements/habitations of people are ordained by God for His salvific purposes.

"The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring."

Ephesians 2 - salvation is by grace alone and Jesus is our peace who tears down dividing walls.

Romans 13:1-10 - Government exists to keep order and provide for common good. We should be subject to it as it is subject to God. It wields the sword to keep order and punish wrongdoing. But, vs. 8-10 speak to the greater law of love that controls us. Love your neighbor. Our influence on government is to reflect the greater law of love.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 - we are ambassadors of Christ, the church is a colony of Heaven in the country of death. We are live/pray "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

1 Peter 2:11-12 - As Christians, we are strangers and aliens in this world. Live like it.

Revelation 7:9-17 - A Great Multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue worshipping before the Throne of God. This is the end goal. Everything is moving toward this for God's glory.

Conclusion: The Local Church As a Colony of Heaven In the Country of Death

Eugene Peterson says that the local church is a Colony of Heaven in the Country of Death. What that means is that local churches are to represent what is true about God and the "Better Way of Jesus" and that we are to live out Jesus' prayer of "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." When we see God working and moving over the face of the earth to use the movement of people so that they will reach out to Him and find Him, then we must recognize that if we are Christians in a certain place and people come to us from another place, then we are to be ambassadors of Heaven to them and we are to love them sacrificially, serve them, welcome them, and share Christ with them. We have no idea what God might do through this witness in their lives and in salvation history.

The role of the local church and associations of churches is to be a welcoming center and conduit of the gospel. We are to facilitate ministry amongst immigrants and refugees in ways where they can know that they are loved by God and that Jesus died for them to know Him. How can we do this practically?

- Go to immigrants/refugees with compassion and hospitality. The vast majority of immigrants are never invited into an American home. They do not know native born Americans because we often keep to ourselves. What if we went "to" them with welcome, love, and hospitality?
- Throw Parties. People all over the world like to celebrate. What if we helped with that? What if we joined with immigrant friends and had parties and invited them? Or helped them with their own cultural celebrations that were not religious in nature?
- Offer resources. Immigrants have many needs for connection and integration into the host culture. What if the church became the go-to place to help meet those needs? Assistance with language, education, immigration resources/help, legal services, and many other things can be provided by churches who seek to serve their new neighbors. All of these things can provide opportunities for relationship building and gospel witness.
- Plant churches among people groups in their heart languages. If you are trying to reach an immigrant population, identifying a church planter that is indigenous to that group can help in making disciples and gathering them together in a church. But, we are also seeing churches planted

without an indigenous church planter present. The key is being sensitive to the Holy Spirit's guidance and empowerment, even as we go cross-culturally.

- Missional Communities/Bible Study Groups/MultiHousing Ministry - approximately half of Americans live in MultiHousing communities. These communities are host to a great number of ethnic minorities, immigrants, and their children. Alabama has MultiHousing Ministry in the thirteen largest population areas of the state and those missional catalysts can be a resource for you in expanding this ministry across the state. This is an Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions Ministry led by Eric Boykin of the Tuscaloosa Baptist Association.
- The example of other Baptist state conventions such as the North Carolina Baptist Convention and their "People's Next Door" campaign can be a great help to your work. They have a great PDF Manual on Discovery and Engagement with many good ideas: http://www.ncbaptist.org/fileadmin/home/missions/peoples-next-door-nc/resources/2015/pdfs/files/manual_web.pdf
- Learn from other churches and ministries. We need to learn how to learn from others, ask questions, and ask for help from those who are doing good work in helpful ways.
- Building a state network of immigrant ministries. If we can all share what we are doing in this area, then we can bring more people in by sharing best practices, ideas, and resources with one another. This work is too big for any one church or association to do by themselves. We need to work together and that means that we must share information with one another.
- Associations and Directors of Mission sharing information and resources with one another. If we have regional resourcing and sharing conferences, then we can celebrate the work that is happening and we can bring more people into this work across the state.
- Prayer. This is how we should start, continue, and end. We cannot do this work through planning and strategy alone. We must pray throughout. Immigrant care and ministry is God's will. He will guide and provide. But, we must ask Him and submit to His will and leadership.

What if every immigrant to the state of Alabama met Christians who cared for them and loved them?

What if they all had an encounter with a local church?

What if they all heard the gospel from someone that they had a relationship with?

What if every association and groups of local churches had ministries to immigrants?

What if through the gospel, we were able to "tell a better story" when it came to how we treated immigrants and refugees?