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GUEST EDITORIAL

THINKING BIBLICALLY — THE ASYLUM SEEKER CRISIS

We are in the midst of a humanitarian crisis. Plastered across news channels and front pages are alarming headlines and disturbing images portraying the mass migration of thousands fleeing Syria, Iraq, and North Africa. Behind the rhetoric is a crisis that cuts to the heart and leaves most of us feeling helpless and confused about how we should think, feel, and respond to this global tragedy.

It is interesting looking through the grand narrative of the Bible just how much migration lies at the very heart of the unfolding story of God. Adam and Eve at the very start are forced to relocate from Eden because of their sin. Noah boards a ship to escape a supernatural disaster. Migration is forced upon the people defying God at Babel. Abraham migrates from Ur of the Chaldeans in obedience to God's command. Jacob and his family are migrants for 400 years in Egypt having escaped a famine in Canaan—all by God's foreknowledge. The Exodus sees God's people become nomadic wanderers for forty years through a rugged, dangerous, and hostile environment. Once they finally receive the law and enter the land there are explicit laws given in the Torah speaking about Israel's responsibility to love the foreigner and not exploit those sojourning amongst them. David is driven to live amongst the Philistines as King Saul's vendetta against him reaches its peak. The eighth-century BC conquest of Assyria and the exile to Babylon in the sixth century sees millions of people displaced by military might. Jesus is forced to leave Nazareth and seek refuge in Egypt during his early life due to the infanticide carried out by King Herod. Priscilla and Aquila find themselves in Corinth on account of the anti-Semitic *diktat* of emperor Claudius. And Peter even describes the normal Christian as an 'exiled alien' in the opening of his first letter.

Let's also remember that at the very heart of the gospel is the story of a reverse migrant worker, Jesus Christ, who left the boundless glory of heaven to become a man in a broken and messed up world. In this world fraught with danger he laboured and toiled ceaselessly without gratitude and amidst great and growing opposition. He gave up his rights and went willingly to a cruel cross where he gave his life as a ransom for many, completing all the work that he had been sent to accomplish by His father. He did not flee or run, he came and died so that we would have a safe place to call our home forever with him, all because he left his place of comfort and prosperity to enter our war torn world.

So how should we respond? Here are my suggestions:

Pray in four directions. *Firstly*, pray for governments and authorities. Pray that they would be given wisdom from above in dealing with this crisis and finding a way forward that allows for safety and flourishing. *Secondly*, pray for the countless agencies in the midst of the crisis whether it be border controls or relief efforts, pray they would be given strength and energy, pray they would treat those in their midst with patience, grace, respect and as individuals. *Thirdly*, pray for opportunities. What an opportunity for mission is arriving on our doorstep, to be able to tell people looking for refuge and help that there is One who promises to be their refuge and help forever. People are coming from very closed and largely unengaged countries into a region of relative gospel freedom. *Fourthly*, pray for safety and justice. Safety for the thousands of people embarking on treacherous voyages: as one sees the images of people crammed onto boats that aren't sea-worthy you can't help but pray the William Whiting hymn words, 'Oh hear us when we cry to thee / for those in peril on the sea'. Pray also that those profiting from the misery of others would be halted and brought to justice.

Think in three directions: *How can I show Jesus in my attitude to this crisis?* Jesus' earthly life was characterized by his love and service towards outsiders and outcasts. How can I conform my attitude to his image? *How can I engage meaningfully with Scotland's migrants?* What if we decided that we were all going to have at least one asylum seeker/migrant friend, and that we would invest in that relationship meaningfully and deliberately—what opportunities might God open for new life and hope as the gospel is shared along with our lives? *How can I use this subject to share the gospel?* This crisis is the topic of conversation across living rooms and office blocks alike: how can I use it to shake the tree and share the gospel?

Give in two directions: Give to agencies and organizations trying to help those affected by this crisis, organizations like UNICEF and Save the Children who are on the ground and seeking to assist and care for these people's immediate needs. Also give to the agencies that are seeking to not only care for these people but also seeking to share Jesus with them organisation like Tearfund and OM.

Love in one direction: The life changing news of Jesus Christ means that we are saved from serving ourselves and freed to serve others. Therefore, as the freest people on the earth we are able, equipped, and empowered to love others unconditionally with a humble extravagant compassion.

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