



FOREWORD BY STEPHAN BAUMAN

PATRICK JOHNSTONE
WITH DEAN MERRILL

**SERVING
GOD IN A
MIGRANT
CRISIS**

Taken from *Serving God in a Migrant Crisis* by Patrick Johnstone.

Copyright © 2018 by Patrick Johnstone.

Originally published by Global Mapping International in 2016.

Published by InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.

www.ivpress.com

A HUMAN TIDE

The distressing headlines and photos assault our senses almost daily:

*DEADLY TRIP ACROSS MEDITERRANEAN*²

*RAZOR WIRE NOW GREET'S MIGRANTS*³

*60 MILLION PEOPLE FLEEING CHAOTIC LANDS, U.N. SAYS*⁴

*DEATH BY SEA, LAND IN EUROPE—Migrant crisis grows as 71 people suffocate in abandoned truck*⁵

*HUNGARY CLOSES BORDER TO MIGRANTS—Refugees seeking asylum pile up on the Serbian side*⁶

*IMMIGRATION TALK STRAINS SOLIDARITY*⁷

*BALKANS: MIGRANT SURGE CONTINUES*⁸

SPECIAL REPORT: EXODUS—The epic migration to Europe & what lies ahead (a 56-page array of articles, maps, photos, and charts in *TIME* magazine's October 19, 2015, issue)

At the end of 2015, the Geneva-based International Organization for Migration (IOM) tallied 1,005,504 migrants who had entered Europe during the year—more than quadruple the number of the year before. A million people. That's the population of the entire city of Birmingham (UK), or San Jose (USA), or Calgary (Canada).

Of the million, about half were Syrians; 20 percent were Afghans; 7 percent were Iraqis.

Drownings while trying to cross the seas came to 3,692, says the IOM (which is one-fourth *more* than all who died on 9/11).⁹ Most memorable, of course, was little three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, whose red-shirted body washed up on a Turkish beach in early September. Pictures immediately went viral around the world.

Believe it or not, some 4,000 asylum seekers have even trekked through Russia instead, all the way to the Arctic frontier, to cross over into Norway for shelter. It means buying a bicycle and riding the last few kilometers in the frigid weather, since Russia does not allow buses or taxis to carry them—or even let them walk along the road. Still, “The road is safer,” said one young engineering student from Syria trying to warm up in a Norwegian arrival center. “You don’t have to cross the sea.”¹⁰

WHAT’S AN IMMIGRANT? WHAT’S A REFUGEE?

Definitions to keep in mind . . .

Immigrant: Someone who has relocated (for whatever reason) to a new country.

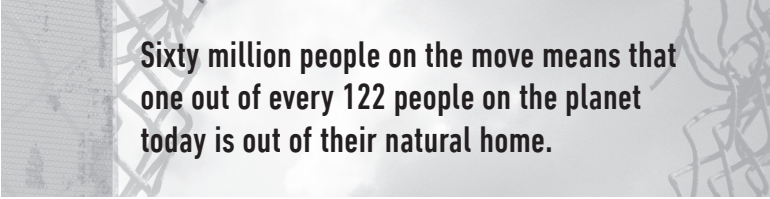
Emigrant: Same as above, only viewed from the opposite end—someone who has left for a new country. In 1933, Albert Einstein *emigrated from* Nazi Germany. He *immigrated to* the United States.

Internally displaced person (IDP): Someone who has fled their home but is still inside their country’s borders. (IDPs account for two-thirds of today’s 60 million on the move, in fact.)

Refugee: Someone who has left their home country to escape war, natural disaster, or the fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, or political opinion—AND has been registered as such in a receiving country.

Asylum seeker: Someone who has claimed asylum under the 1951 United Nations Convention on the Status of Refugees on the ground that if they are returned to their country of origin, they have a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, political belief, or membership of a particular social group.

At the same time, as Europe struggles with the incoming tide from the Middle East—as well as Africans fleeing political chaos and terror—other parts of the globe are seeing their own waves of refugees. Rohingyas, a persecuted minority in Myanmar (Burma), paid unscrupulous people-smugglers to sail them to safety in Indonesia or Australia until that door largely closed, but by 2017 they were flooding into neighboring Bangladesh. Central Americans keep streaming northward to escape the cruel drug lords and ruthless gangs who abuse their homelands. These migrations don't garner as much news coverage, but for the individuals involved, each new day—and each dark night—is just as perilous and frightening.



Sixty million people on the move means that one out of every 122 people on the planet today is out of their natural home.

National Geographic provided an enlightening global perspective in its set of graphics, “The World’s Congested Human Migration Routes in 5 Maps.”¹¹ These migration routes crisscross every continent except South America (and, obviously, Antarctica).

“We are witnessing a paradigm change, an unchecked slide into an era in which the scale of global forced displacement as well as the response required is now clearly dwarfing anything seen before,” said António Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Sixty million people on the move—that number is almost too big to comprehend. If so, then try this instead: One out of every 122 people on the planet today is out of their natural home.

Break it down even further: A staggering 42,500 people are uprooted *every day*. That’s one person *every two seconds*. Half of them are children. Half are women and girls.

Just who are these individuals? Where are they coming from? And where are they hoping to land?

MY FRIEND REZA

Let me put a human face on the refugee crisis by introducing you to someone who has lived in my country since 2012, after being displaced not once but twice. Originally from Iran, he and his wife now work with a ministry called ELAM, discipling leaders for the rapidly growing Iranian congregations across the Middle East, the UK, and the rest of Europe. His name is Reza Jaffari. His story shows how God often sees more potential in refugees than we do.

I will let him tell the turning, twisting saga in his own words:

I grew up in a Muslim family. I was born prematurely in 1983 on the birthday of the eighth Imam of the Shia branch of Islam, and was therefore given his name, Reza. In my first ten years, my mother took me 15 times to his shrine in the large city of Mashad to thank God for the miracle that I survived. We were encouraged to pray and fast and to seek God, but my sister and I were not forced to practice our religion.

When I was 16, however, I had much earnestness for God. I started to pray and fast and had a passion for reading the Qur'an, gaining a measure of peace from doing this. My devotion did not last long, though; by the time I was 18, I started to smoke hashish and indulge in wrong sexual relationships. I was living a double life in which I was the "best" child at home, but with friends I was lying, drinking, and using drugs.

At university I studied computer programming for three-and-a-half years, but my life went further downhill into addiction and darkness. I tried to pray five times a day, but things got only worse. Then came a bad road accident, during which I had a strange out-of-body experience. I saw myself going down into a pitch-dark pit. I could see nothing, but just heard shouting and screaming. It was a terrible feeling. Then I looked back and seemed to be floating above the scene of the accident, where I saw myself lying on the ground. Then someone slapped my face, and I returned to consciousness.

About this time, my mother and sister became Christians in a house church in Iran. They tried to explain the gospel to me. But it all seemed crazy; I accused them of apostasy.

In 2005, just five months after completing my university degree, I went with my mother and sister to the UK to join my grandparents, uncles, and aunts who had emigrated there some 40 years before. We wanted to escape the harsh realities of life in Iran. To get residence as asylum seekers, we invented a story to give to the UK Immigration.

My mother and sister soon settled into an Iranian church in West London, but I would not go with them. I managed to get a job. But after six months I was fired. Three days later, the church held a youth party organized by a friend of my sister, and she persuaded me to go along.

At the end someone said, “We know so little about Reza. Let’s put him on a ‘hot seat’ and ask him some questions.” It was really their way of communicating the gospel to me. They challenged me about statements in the Qur’an and fed me truths from the Bible.

Then one girl looked me straight in the eye and said, “Do you love God?” I said I did. She then followed up with another question, “Tell me one part of your life that you have sacrificed to show that you love God!”

I hung my head in shame, for I had given nothing. All I could see was my sinfulness, my lying and drugs. I began having trouble sleeping and had constant flashbacks to my dissolute past. The Holy Spirit was convicting me of my sin, and it was most unpleasant.

By the following Sunday, I was more than ready to go to the church service. The sermon that day was on the precious blood of Jesus that can cleanse from sin. It was a message for me. At the end of the service, a heavy weight seemed to crush me, making it hard even to breathe. I cried to the Lord, “God, I don’t know you. I want to meet with you; show me!”

God spoke to me in that moment. “This heaviness is your sin,” He seemed to say. I went to a friend and said, “I want this burden to be lifted. I need to repent.”

He then asked me to repeat a prayer after him. This included the words “I accept you as Lord of my life.” For a moment, this seemed to be going too far . . . but then the burden lifted, and I felt as if my whole body was burning from head to toe. I realized that He is God.

I had such joy over the following three days, hardly sleeping as I read and read the Bible. Amazingly all my addictions to swearing, lying, cigarettes, and drugs ended instantly, without any hankering after them again. I found out later that the Christians had been praying for my conversion all the previous week. So that day—11 December 2005—is very special to me.

For three years I became involved in the ministry of two churches in Blackburn and Liverpool. Then one day in a prayer meeting, God brought such conviction to me (and then to my mother and sister) about our deception of the UK Home Office that processed our asylum papers. I felt awful about living in the country on the basis of lies.

So we went to an attorney to confess what we had done and ask for help. It ended up with us being arrested on 11 December 2008 and sent to a detention center for 18 days—and then being deported back to Iran. Many Christians protested and made demonstrations to get the deportation quashed. It was well reported in the media, but to no avail.

On arrival in Tehran, the Holy Spirit showed me that I was now an ambassador for Jesus in Iran! Apparently He wanted us back in this place. Soon I got involved in Christian ministry. But when the Muslim authorities heard of it, I was given a stark choice: Either leave the country or go to prison. They did not want active Christians preaching the gospel.

So after just a three-month stay, I departed for Turkey (this being quite easy because Iranians can enter Turkey without a visa). There I was granted refugee status by the UN. I lived in Turkey for three and a half years and became involved in the ministry of ELAM. During that time, I met a young British Iranian lady named Shieva, who had come to minister in Turkey. She became my wife.

This created a new opportunity for re-application to the British Home Office, telling the truth this time. We settled in the UK. My mother and sister re-applied as well but were rejected; however, Canada accepted them, and they now live in Vancouver.

When I listen to Reza tell his amazing odyssey, I am filled with gladness. He and his wife are living illustrations of how “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). He is an asset to my country—and to the kingdom of God.

How many others in today’s human tide are destined for genuine achievement? How many others will, like Reza, find eternal peace through Christ in the new places where they land?

“The migration of people, whether forced or voluntary, should be viewed not as accidental but part of God’s sovereign plan,” says Jenny Yang, a World Relief vice-president. “With immigration, the nations show up on our doorstep. The mission field has crossed our borders and settled into our communities as our co-workers and neighbors.”¹² Can we see the powerful potential—and not just the problems—in this unprecedented human flood?

ASK YOURSELF

- *What are your feelings as you watch the news of massive migrations today?*
- *How do you think Christ is feeling about all this?*

BUY THE BOOK!

ivpress.com/serving-god-in-a-migrant-crisis