



I was strolling through Wal-mart recently when a man dressed in a large turban caught my eye. It appeared as though he had just stepped out of India. Feeling a compulsion to not simply move on without trying to talk to the man, I slipped over into a side aisle. There I turned my heart to the Lord: “But Father, I don’t know what to say—he seems so different!” After a few moments I finally swallowed the lump in my throat, headed over to the produce section where they were shopping, and tried to greet the Sikh gentleman and his wife in a friendly manner. We managed to make several sentences of some small talk in spite of his severely limited English. Through broken sentences they mentioned the address and location of their home. Some time later I stopped by for a few moments and talked mostly to their son. Unlike his parents, his English was good, and he informed me that they’ve now been here for four years. Just sitting in their house was an experience as I looked around at the many pictures of dignified Sikhs wearing halos.

Have you ever seen some foreign-looking people and felt as though you should speak to them? Maybe you have met some of them and been a wit-

ness to them of Jesus. What is your first response when you see someone from another country? Are you drawn toward them? Or do you tend to avoid them a little fearfully because they are different and you don’t know what to say? Although you may hesitate at the thought of meeting such a stranger, I want to assure you that you can learn. By God’s help, you will no longer perceive them as foreigners. Instead, they will be familiar as you learn where they are from and the characteristics of those places.

Establishing contacts and friendships with internationals as you share the Gospel can be a most enjoyable ministry. I hope reading this can be an encouragement, and that the Lord will birth a vision in your heart.

“In His sovereignty God has taken people from places where few if any missionaries have gone ... He has brought them here and set them right in front of us



## THE WORLD AT OUR DOORSTEP

Easy international travel has made the world a smaller place than in times past. Although there are still many areas untouched by the Gospel, you may even find people from some of these areas in other lands. This is especially true in industrialized countries like the United States and Canada where immigrants of many nationalities pour in by the thousands daily. God is doing an amazing thing in our day! Do you realize that there are thousands of people here in our country now, who likely would never have had an opportunity to respond to the Gospel in their own land? In His sovereignty God has taken people from places where few if any missionaries have gone, and brought them within the reach of His church. We have not gone to them, or not been able to go, so He has brought them here and set them right in front of us.

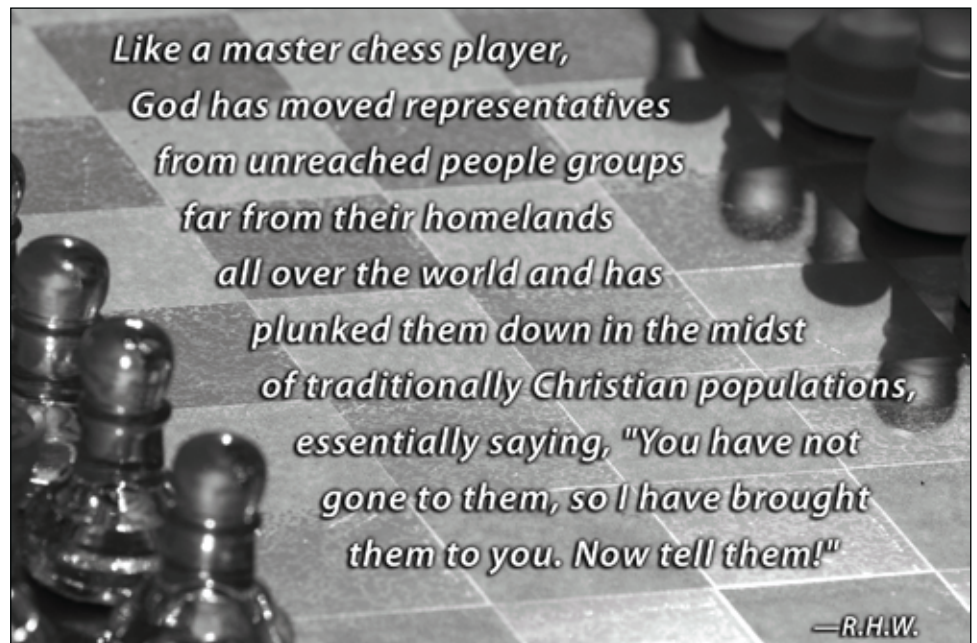
For example, consider Somalia in East Africa: An inaccessible, war-torn, unstable country that is 99.95% Muslim, with very few Christians. The doors appear to be defiantly closed to mission work. But not far away in the city of Minneapolis, there are at least 15,000 Somalians! You and I probably cannot go to Somalia. But if we care about them, we can reach them right here. In cases like these God has moved representatives of unreached people groups to places where they can be reached with the Gospel. Unlike the unreached far away in difficult or closed places, there isn't much hindering us from preaching God's Word to these people. There are few government restrictions on evangelism holding us back. We can share freely without fear of being thrown in jail. Some may speak English, and thus language and cultural barriers are lessened. There is only one obstacle hindering these immigrants or unreached representatives from hearing the Gospel: our own lack of effort to reach out to them.

I've been told that Coldwater, Michigan is home to over 3,000 Muslims from Yemen. The Boston area has 6,000 Bengalis. Over 4,000 Polynesians have made Salt Lake City their home. There are so many Iranians (114,000) in Los Angeles that some fondly refer to it as the city of "Tehran-geles." Some 36,000 African-born reside in Atlanta. Chicago has more Polish than any other city in the world except Warsaw. Detroit is home to at least 30,000 Iraqis and many other Middle Eastern and Arab immigrants. These are just a few figures out of so many that could be given. And it is not limited only to large metropolitan cities. Many smaller towns and cities have a visible ethnic presence as well. We need to be alert to the great opportunities nearby. Much information on the presence of ethnic groups in specific areas can be gathered from census data. (See the "Resources" box on page 16.)

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The likelihood of some of them hearing the Gospel in this country could be many times greater. And they would be much more effective in taking it back and to their own countries—not to mention that they can go where we cannot. Also con-



sider that in our modern world where communication and travel are easy, some of these immigrants travel regularly back to their own countries for a visit. Many West Africans I know try to go back and visit their families every one to three years. The same could be said about other people I know personally from Burma, Indonesia, India, Senegal, and Sri Lanka. Just today I read an article on the BBC about one of the “lost boys of Sudan,” who is now an adult and made a trip to visit his family in that war-torn country where he grew up. At times a few go back to their lands to stay.

International students are another very strategic opportunity that God has brought to the church in our land. Each year the rest of the world sends more than half a million of their brightest young people here to study. Over half of them come from the 56 countries in the 10/40 window. Many of these 565,000 students will return home to become leaders in politics, education, and society in general. It’s possible even that such a future leader is studying not too far away if you live near a sizeable university.

### A KEEN AWARENESS

Several years ago I needed to buy a car. I considered what model I might want. For months before and after the purchase of the vehicle, my attention was drawn to the different kinds of cars. I would always scrutinize them while driving. I looked to see the make, model, guess the approximate year, and so on. A couple times I even saw one I couldn’t recognize. All I noticed when driving was cars, cars, cars. Why? Because I had such a keen interest in them that it became habitual.

And oh, may it be the same way with people from other countries! Let’s be so interested in each nationality and culture. If we can be so knowledgeable about certain subjects, how much more should we be familiar with that which is closest to God’s heart: all varieties of people! How exciting to begin to be able to tell



what country or area of the world a person is from just by observing him. Does your heart just start to beat faster when you notice that Middle Eastern or Southeast Asian man?



Oh, let us simply open our eyes to the opportunities! May the Lord help us to have a sharp awareness of the different ethnic groups around us. No, maybe there isn’t a settlement of 15,000 in one spot right before our eyes. But as was mentioned earlier, there are many individuals around us. We may notice them in daily life e.g., when going about the job, shopping at Wal-mart, or even filling up at the gas station. So, are we aware of who is brushing past us each day, and even around us in our neighborhoods?

### LOOKING IN YOUR BACKYARD

Often when we think of missions, there is a misunderstanding of thinking primarily in terms of



geography. Matthew 28:19 tells us to go teach all nations (Gk. *ethnos*). Go: to the *ethnos*. The emphasis here is *who* we are to teach, not necessarily *where* to go. So in the truly Biblical sense, missions is people, not geography. Sometimes we can get this wrong idea that if God has not opened up a door for us to serve Him overseas, it is because we

are not spiritual enough. And then we look at overseas missionaries and feel bad that we aren't good enough to make the grade. But really, the difference between servants of God who are there or here, is that His servants over there are over there. God can use every one of us to touch the nations of the world. As we listen to the Lord and keep in step with Him every day even through the mundane activities, He has promised that the ripple effect of our lives can affect even places far away (Genesis 22:18). These thoughts are in no way intended to take away any emphasis on, or urgency from, foreign missions. If anything, through this ministry our hearts will be enlarged and drawn all the more into the purpose to extend God's Kingdom among other lands. But in being missions minded, let us not miss what the Lord also wants to do here.



Consider the man in the sketch looking through some binoculars. He wants the Lord to use him as a missionary, and narrows out of his sight everything else except his main focus: souls in a far-off land. With vision he prioritizes his life, carries those souls on his heart, and learns about their culture and the obstacles to the Gospel. Desiring to preach to, e.g., the Pakistani people, he is unaware that just a few short miles from his house there is a Pakistani, or possibly hundreds of them, who need to hear the Message.

Now set aside the binoculars for a minute and open your eyes to see a wider picture. Can you see the harvest field of internationals not far from your door? Are there people standing next to you as in the picture but thus far they have been an oversight? Have you thought about reaching them? As a Christian in this land, what an opportunity you have! Are you a young person with a heart for missions? You need to be actively doing something. Here is a chance for you to start right away and get a burden for people of another country. Yes, it will take some effort to look up people and connect with them, but it is very worthwhile. Just think how much effort

you would put into making a missions trip to another country. Think about all the time you would put into preparing yourself to go, studying, getting a passport, a visa, shots to prevent disease, etc.—and earning enough money to pay for the expenses of the trip! What if you would set aside just a fraction of that time and money to search out ways to reach people from those countries right here? I think doors would open and the Lord would direct. Along the way you will also gain valuable cross-cultural experience that will help you should you go overseas in the future. I know of people sensing the Lord calling them to Middle Eastern countries who focus on ministering to people from those same countries here before they go. That way they are ahead when they get there because they already know some of the culture and language, and have some experience reaching them.



### *FROM WARM CULTURE TO COLD CULTURE*

Many of the countries where immigrants come from hold hospitality as one of their highest values. And hospitality to foreigners is essential! They are from relational cultures. Imagine their surprise when they come here, and move into communities where their presence may not be appreciated. Or worse yet, they are just ignored. The coldness of the

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*“It has often been said that all Christians can have a part in foreign missions by praying, most by giving, but that only a few could do the going. However, God has now made it possible for virtually every Christian in the United States to actually be a foreign missionary.”*

—Mark Hanna

culture shocks them, and like all humans, they tend to stay closer to that which is familiar, often living with their own people. Some cities have little cultural enclaves of people from the same countries living in a section of town.

Americans in general tend to be mono-cultural and independent. Their perception of the rest of the world may be limited. They may not know the names of their neighbors, let alone have a friendship with them. On the other hand those from other cultures might know the names of most people in town. There is also susceptibility, although often unknowingly, to ethnocentric attitudes (thought patterns of superiority to other peoples). But the biggest factor is that most Americans are running around constantly doing their own business, and they don't have time to pay attention to these newcomers. Immigrants from relational cultures sense these things, and it makes it more difficult for them to adjust.

Last week I read an article about lady who found herself to be a minority in a California suburb where most of her neighbors were from other countries. She resented their differences and always tried to avoid them and make life hard for them. It especially irked her to be awakened by the neighbor's rooster every morning at 5:00 a.m.!

As one who is also foreign-born (a missionary child), I remember my own experience coming to this country. That was seven and a half years ago, and was one of the hardest times of my life. I arrived from Africa as a fifteen year old, and after a few months, in my heart I badly wanted to go back. It seemed people were so cold and exclusive, making it almost impossible to make friends with the local boys on the block. They wouldn't accept me for who I was. I got over these struggles finally after our family started attending a different church group, where we are today. It was a relief not to hear the usual questions from unconcerned people wondering if there I lived on roasted grasshoppers. Instead, I made good friendships with people whose discussion reflected their genuine interest in life as I knew

it. Two weeks ago I shared my experiences with a Gambian man. He concurred, "Yeah, we have all been through that and know what it's like. But after a while we just had to get over it, accept things the way they are here, and learn to live with it."

### *THE POSSIBILITY OF LONELINESS*

The following account is based on a true story to illustrate the point:

A young student from Nigeria had just returned to his African home. There he met his friend who was preparing to soon go over to university in the US as well. It was a happy meeting, and they were glad to see one another after the many years. His friend, who was wondering what to expect for his own time in America, inquired how he had enjoyed his four years there. The student sadly confided that his years in the States were the loneliest ones ever in his life. For example: One day he was walking on the university grounds and an American student asked "Hello, how are you?" He proceeded to tell him how he was doing, but the next thing he knew, the American was far down the walkway. The Nigerian was offended because the American wasn't really interested to know, so why had he

asked anyway? Expressing his sympathy, the student's friend asked him if he had any advice to give, as he would be traveling to America to start his studies the next month. The student answered: "Yes, I have some advice for you. The first thing you must do when you get to America, is to buy yourself a good stereo system. I mean a boom box—a BIG one!! That will be your best friend for all the time you are there!"

While the story may seem humorous to us, sadly, it is at times too true. I heard about a missionary couple who spent four years in Nigeria. There they met so many former international students who were bitter after their time here. The couple got a burden, and returned home to start an effective ministry on the local state campus.

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"The ministry among internationals in the United States is one of  
the most neglected mission fields in the world."

—Mark Hanna

Some internationals may be disillusioned when they arrive in our country. They are often jolted by the glaring differences in the value systems they find in our society. When faced with the impersonal and dizzying pace of life, some simply feel ignored by the people around them. Maybe they have heard that this is a “Christian country,” but they are repulsed by the coldness, indecency, and western hostility. This can be especially true for Muslims.



“That will be your best friend for all the time you are there!”

Do we really see the open door we have with these people? As Christians we will stand out as we show genuine concern and interest for them. The values we hold are important

to them. They will notice that we are different from others, and it’s like a breath of fresh air. This will be especially true within the first few months of their arrival. We can help shape their responses and help them see through the materialism, lack of morals, nominalism of the church, etc. By the time they’ve been here two years, their reactions will have been made and their course set. Around the six month period they are still grappling with choices and forming their mindset.

If you have ever been to another country, then you know how it feels when everything is new: the language, the smells, the way people drive, the cli-

mate, and on and on it goes. You have to learn how to do simple things all over again. Imagine that you are a missionary and have just arrived in this completely new environment. How would you want to be treated? Would you want people to always see you as a foreigner? Put yourself in the shoes of a new immigrant, and think of ways that you would need others’ help. This can give you an idea how to be a blessing to a newly arrived immigrant.

Please note that the cultural and relationship adjustments immigrants face vary by culture or origin, as well as for each individual. Some cultures are not as warm as others, and probably don’t have as hard of an adjustment. Others may get into the country through relatives or friends, and move into communities of their own culture. They still can’t relate well to our culture, but probably aren’t as

lonely because friendship needs are met through their own groups. But at the same time, there is likely a desire for friendship with Americans. So not all are lonely and some may even have a number of gracious American friends. This is not an intent to generalize for all immigrants, but to make us aware of what some of their needs

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“Can we consistently claim that we are concerned about world evangelism when we are largely ignoring the transplanted foreign mission field God has brought to us?”

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—Mark Hanna

may be. Just as if we would be going to another country, internationals coming here need people willing to warm and comfort them in an otherwise cold environment. What is your attitude toward these strangers that the Lord Jesus has sent among us?