

# The Least-reached in Our Backyard



Who shall I send to the refugees on the doorstep of each believer in the US?

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Late in the hot Pennsylvania summer, about 20 people gathered in our backyard to give our new Arabic friend an authentic American birthday party! We invited our family and friends from church, put balloons on the deck and set up lawn chairs. We cooked food on the grill, kids ran around the yard and played on the swings. Everyone brought a dish to share, we opened presents, ate cake, and sang “Happy Birthday,” enjoying great conversation and laughter together. Our friend said this was the first time he had ever publicly celebrated his birthday. We were shocked. In Islam, it’s *haram* (forbidden) to have birthday parties. This was his first birthday party ever!

*And his first birthday as a new Christian!*

Last summer my family and I had the opportunity to host a Muslim family from the Middle East for almost a month. They lived on the lower floor of our house, but we shared the kitchen and enjoyed many meals together. It was a first for us, and for them. They were very nervous about living with us. They said, “We are afraid our children will break something or bother you.” We said, “Our home belongs to God and we are not worried about things breaking; you are welcome here.”

When we think about least-reached people—those without the Gospel of Jesus—many of us often picture a person living in a hut in a remote

African or Asian village with no running water, no electricity, and no Bible. But what if for a moment, we think of the least-reached as a Muslim family living in an apartment here in the United States working for minimum wage with no car, no Christian friends, and again, no Bible? The environment and culture are different, and their country of residence is different, but some things remain the same: primarily their need to hear the Good News of Jesus!

As Global Disciples, we use the term “least-reached” as a way of identifying the people we are focused on reaching with the Gospel. Typically, least-reached means there are less than 3% Christians in a country or people group, and little to no discernible church movement. In many cases, the Gospel is also highly restricted by their government.

Often when immigrants—including those from least-reached peoples—come to the U.S., they do not speak much English, they have never gone to “church”, do not own a Bible, and do not know any Christians.

Why don’t they know any Christians, or have Christian friends? They’re living in America now! Often the answer is simply fear. Fear from both sides. For any immigrant, and especially for Muslims, there is fear because it’s a new culture and they do not know what to expect or how to

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behave. How many of us can relate to that feeling when we walk into a new job, new school, or new church?

Likewise, many Christians are afraid to get to know their Muslim neighbors because they also do not know what to expect, how to behave, or how their neighbor will respond to their offer of friendship. Imagine trying to integrate into a new nation, new language, new school, and with people very different from your background?

Thus, the cycle of fear continues, and my friends, that is exactly what the enemy wants! If he can keep us paralyzed in fear, then he can keep Muslims and others from hearing the Gospel and experiencing the love of Christ.

However, God calls us as believers to live out 2 Timothy 1:7 which reminds us that the Lord “has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind.” What

if we choose to step out of our fear and walk in boldness as children of Light, extending the hand of hospitality and friendship to our immigrant neighbors?

Maybe you wonder if these communities are still considered “least-reached” now that they are living in a country with a high percentage of Christians and the freedom to go to a church or ask questions about Christ. Unfortunately, terminology is not always as cut and dry as we would like; and it can be quite confusing at times. We know the Gospel may be all around them, but without a living example, will they be able

to connect the dots to know what an abundant life looks like, or that it is Jesus who offers it? Just because they live near the Gospel does not mean that they are “reached.” May I suggest that rather than focusing on where a person falls in the spectrum of reached or unreached, let’s focus on the things that are clear:

**1. Language:** Many immigrants come to the United States with minimal knowledge of the English language. This makes it difficult for them to hear the Gospel in a way they can understand and respond.

**2. Fear:** Muslims specifically are taught that if they pick up a Bible or go to a church, they are in danger of going to hell. So even though they are in a free country, they are still imprisoned by the fear they’ve been taught.

**3. Isolation:** Immigrants are often isolated because they do not have language, cultural understanding, or nec-

essary skills to assimilate into mainstream American society. This creates a huge obstacle to making friends and ultimately hearing the Good News.

**4. Scripture:** Even if they understand English, immigrants need a Bible in their own language because their mother language speaks to their hearts. We can help with this!

**5. Calling:** We are called to make disciples of all people, regardless of where they live, what demographic they fit into, or where they are placed on the least-reached spectrum.

*What if we choose to step out of our fears and walk in boldness as children of Light, extending the hand of hospitality and friendship to our Muslim and immigrant neighbors?*

More than ever before, the least-reached are not only “over there” across an ocean but they are coming directly to our communities and already living in our neighborhoods.

In Pennsylvania’s Lancaster County, where I live, about 1,300 refugees were re-settled between 2013-2017 (20 times more per capita than the rest of the U.S.). They came from countries such as Somalia, Myanmar, Iraq, and Syria\* to name a few. And this number does not include all immigrants, only refugees—those coming from war zones or violent areas.

We may feel afraid when hearing about refugees coming to our communities, *but what if God*

*wants to use this season in history as a way to reach the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ?* Perhaps you did not have the ability or calling to “go” as a foreign missionary, but now you can do missions right where you are because God has brought the harvest to you. Perhaps

the news of wars, terrorism, and tragedies will be used by God for good to further His Kingdom and bring people out of darkness and into His marvelous light!

As our Global Disciples staff interacts with fellow believers among least-reached areas, they often comment on this issue. One pastor in Central Asia said, “I am not sure why Americans like to travel long distances to come here, while more than 40,000 of my people are living in New York.” In the Middle East, another pastor said, “There are more than 20,000 of my people in the Boston area, so we sent a missionary to reach them.” A Global

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Disciples staff member says, “I hear the cry from those serving among the least-reached in their own countries saying, why don’t Americans use the opportunity for mission in their backyard? As it is written in Isaiah 6, God is saying, whom shall I send to the refugees on the doorstep of each believer in the US? Who will respond to this call?”

Perhaps you know a Muslim family or have a connection to local immigrants or a refugee community. Many believers really *do* want to reach out to these people but are intimidated by the unknown. How do we start? Can we talk about Christ or will that offend and turn them away? What if we do something wrong that they find

offensive? These questions are common, natural, and are good questions to ask.

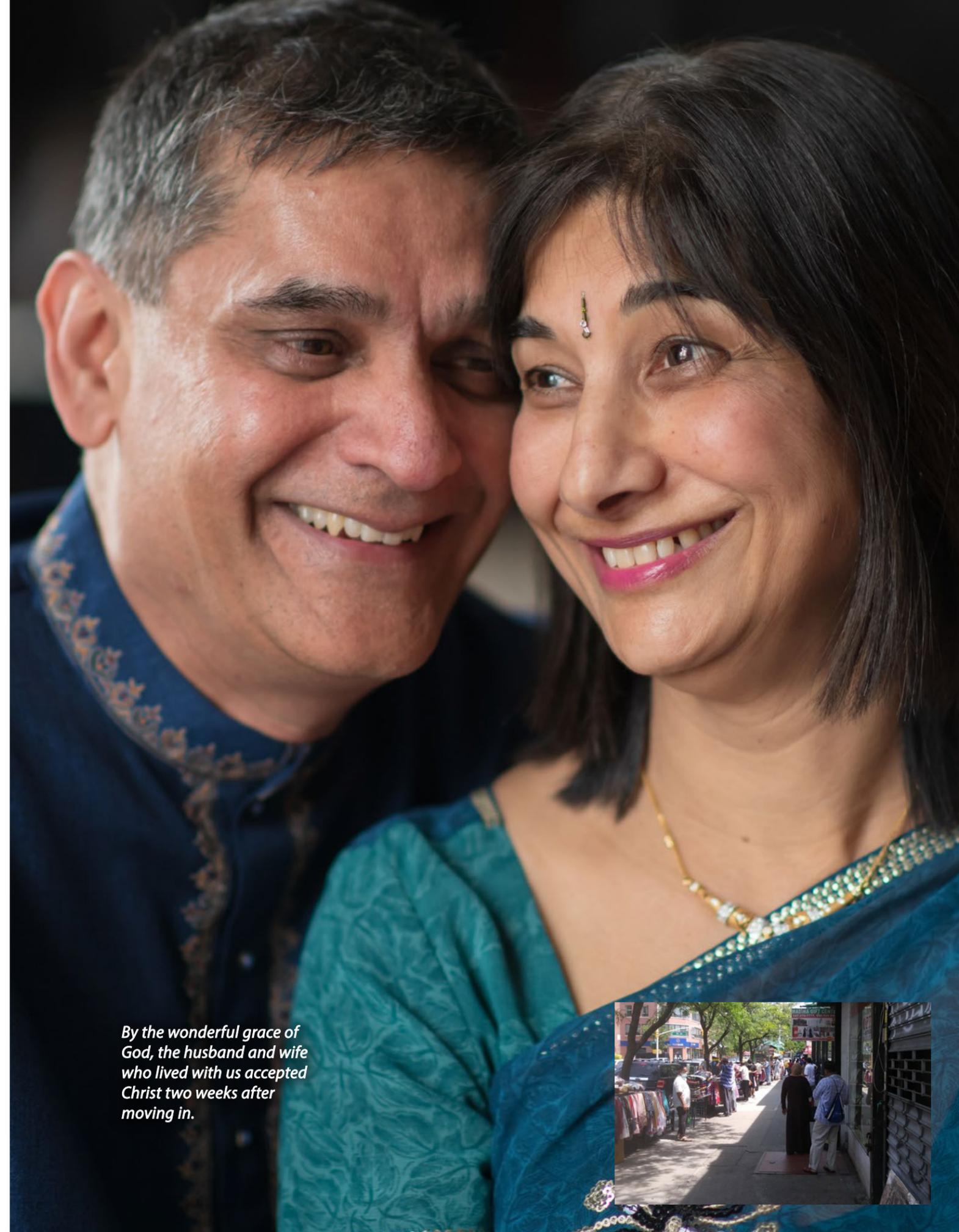
**1. Do not be intimidated or afraid!** The Lord is with you and He will give you the wisdom you need when you ask Him. Remember, the immigrant is also afraid and

intimidated, so let’s not give in to the enemy’s schemes.

**2. Hospitality speaks volumes to their hearts!**

Most immigrants, and especially Muslims, come from cultures where hospitality is highly valued! Having a family over for tea, coffee, a meal, etc. touches their hearts immediately! In response, they will probably invite you to their home next, and then a relationship has started.

**3. Love is an extremely powerful tool we have as Christians.** There is no love in



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Islam; only fear, pride, and rules that can never be followed perfectly. The love of Christ compels us as believers, and it speaks to them as a witness of who God is and who we are as His followers.

Lastly, it is important for us to know that dislocated people, or people in transition, are open to changes including receiving the Gospel, and especially those who suffered by the hands of their own so-called Muslim brothers.

By the wonderful grace of God, the couple who lived with us accepted Christ two weeks after moving in. This came after years of searching, questioning, and the testimonies of Arabic-speaking friends in the area. We were not the ones to lead them to Christ, but we had the blessing of being part of their journey and watching years of toil bring forth fruit.

After they moved into their own home, they

shared that despite the limitations of language barriers, our hospitality was such a beautiful example to them of the love of Christ. They told us that in Islam, there is no trust between people, and until they met us, they had never lived with another family in their life. They said being in our home was so peaceful and full of light compared to Muslim homes, and it only helped solidify their decision to follow Christ.

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And all we did was give them a place to sleep and broke bread together.

Hospitality is a powerful tool! Perhaps this is why Jesus said, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and

*you invited me in. . . Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:35, 40b).*



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\*<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-38776233/lancaster-pennsylvania-america-s-refugee-capital> and <https://www.newsweek.com/why-im-proud-be-mayor-americas-refugee-capital-726059>

## Conversations you can have in your small group, church, Bible study group, etc.

1. Think of a time when you were new to a community, job, school, etc. What did it feel like to be the “new kid”? Ask the Lord to help you remember that feeling as you begin to build relationships with immigrants.
2. What is my biggest fear about attempting to start a relationship with an immigrant?  
How can I move past this fear and begin to walk in boldness?
3. What people groups are living in my area that have come from least-reached parts of the world?
4. Starting an outreach to unreached refugees or immigrants is a daunting thought. What ministries currently exist in our area that we can learn from and find ways to bless? What practical things can our group do to build relationships with least-reached people in our community?
5. What does “family” mean to you? What does it mean to the refugee who is now without family?  
How can we be a family to them?



A third of our world has not yet heard the good news of Jesus. But we live in a time where many of those are within reach of a local church. Through our simple and effective strategy of training and coaching, believers share the Gospel in their own nations and cultures, multiplying disciples and locally sustainable fellowships



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