



# SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2022

## *LOVE THE STRANGER*



## INTRODUCTION

During this season we will be looking at what the Bible has to say about relating to people who are different to us whether that is someone from the other side of York, another part of the UK, a country that has a similar culture to ours or one that is very different.

Many of the people in the Bible were migrants for many different reasons and with different outcomes. We will look at some of their stories, starting with the patriarchs.

The Bible sometimes refers to Christians as sojourners. We will look at how that identity might change how we live as well as how we read the Bible.

We will look at some of the fear that surrounds the topic of migration – both for the migrant themselves and for the established community to which they are going.

A study on Ruth will allow us to consider the possibility of life-giving encounters with outsiders.

Our last study will give us an opportunity to consider what the Bible has to say about the future of the church and to consider what impact that may have on the way that we 'do' church now.

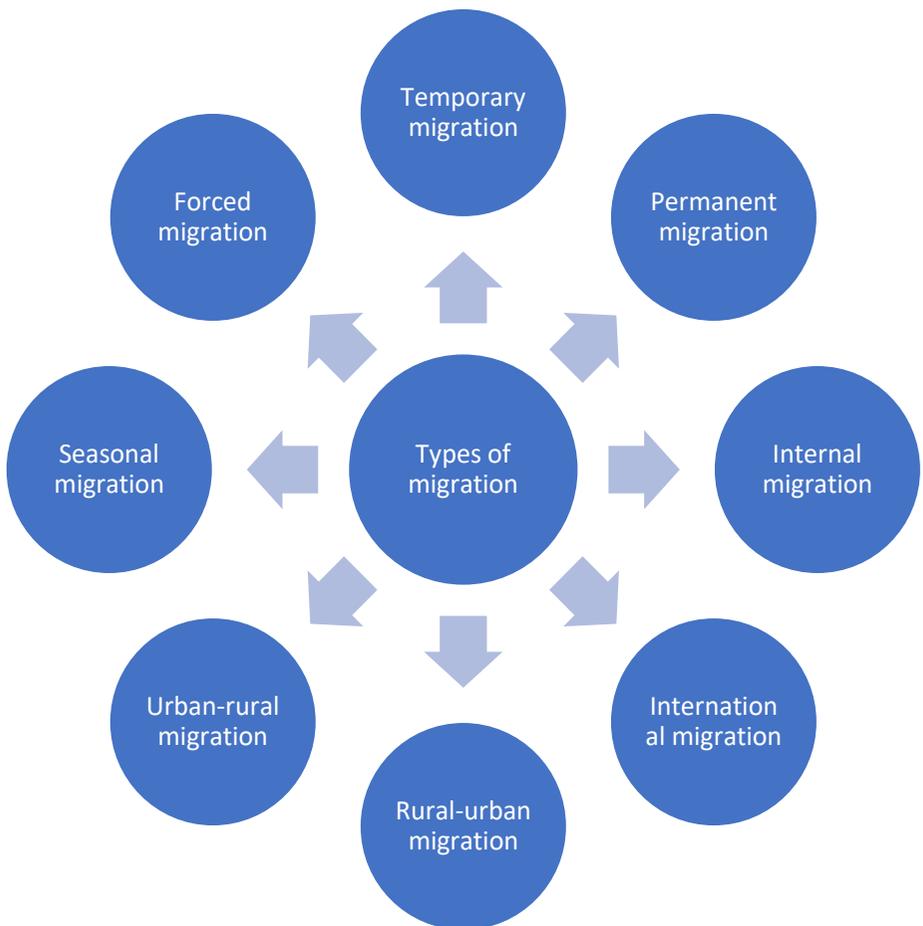
My prayer for you is that these studies will help you to walk more closely with God as you learn how much he loves and cares 'for the stranger', including you and me.

We are fortunate to have people in our midst who have migrated from places near and far. Let us listen to each other's stories and grow together, learning to love 'the stranger' as Jesus does.

If you are interested in exploring the topic further, I have copies of the books listed at the end which you are welcome to borrow. There are, of course, many online resources too.

So then, you Gentiles are not foreigners or **strangers** any longer; you are now citizens together with God's people and members of the family of God.  
Ephesians 2:19

According to the Population Division of the United Nations, the global number of international migrants (defined as people living outside their native country for at least a year) has grown from about 93 million in 1960 to 170 million in 2000 and from there further to an estimated 358 million in 2017. This represents a remarkably stable level of around 3% of the world population. However, there is an increase in the average distance that people are travelling.



## WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION TO MIGRATION AND THE BIBLE: THE PATRIARCHS

By faith he made his home in the promised land like a **stranger** in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. Hebrews 11:9

I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them **all** these lands, and through your offspring **all nations** on earth will be blessed, Genesis 26:4

1. How did you get to be here in York? Share your story of the journey that you (or your family) have taken over the years to be here today.
2. What reasons are there for people to migrate – whether within their country or abroad?

Read together: Genesis 26

3. What struck you as you read this passage?
4. Who is the 'alien/foreigner/stranger' and who is the 'host' in this story?
5. What effect did the 'alien/foreigner/stranger' have on his 'host'? What effect did they have on him?
6. How did God keep his promise to Isaac?
7. What difference might this study make to you this week?

Do not deprive the **foreigner** or the fatherless of justice or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Deuteronomy 24:17

## Taking it further:

a) Adam and Eve are the first characters in the Bible that migrate when they are forced to leave the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2: 23).

What other characters in the Bible do you know of that were migrants – either voluntary or forced? What were their reasons for migrating?

You may want to use the following verses to help you get started:

Genesis 12; 27:42-44; Genesis 39; Exodus 2:15; 1 Samuel 21:10; 27:1.

b) Do some research on current migration.

Look at information from reliable sources. Be very careful with media sites.

- Migration is an intrinsic – and therefore inevitable - part of broader processes of global change and development;
- Labour demand in destination societies is often the main driver of international migration;
- While states play a key role in initiating migration, once set in motion, migration processes tend to gain their own momentum;
- Migration is a partly autonomous process that will almost inevitably go along with some degree of permanent settlement;
- Migration is neither the cause of, nor a panacea for, structural socioeconomic problems in destination and origin societies;
- While governments have a legitimate desire to control migration, ill-considered migration policies often have counterproductive effects.

Politicians use people's fear of the other and those who are different in order to gain more votes and power. Many policy makers have lost their compassion for the undocumented.



## WEEK 2: BIBLICAL EXPERIENCE OF BEING A SOJOURNER

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and **strangers** on earth.  
Hebrews 11:13

The Bible has a lot to say about how to treat refugees and other immigrants. The Hebrew word *ger* – translated variously into English as *foreigner*, *resident alien*, *stranger*, *sojourner*, or *immigrant* – appears 92 times in the Old Testament. Many of those references mention God’s particular concern for the foreigner alongside two other vulnerable groups: orphans and widows. Israel’s obligation is to be motivated by the memory that they had been aliens in Egypt. Welcoming the stranger is the most often repeated commandment in the Hebrew Scriptures with the exception of the imperative to worship only the one God.

Read together: Exodus 23:9; Deuteronomy 10:19; Psalm 39:12; Matthew 7:12; 1 Peter 1:17; Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 2:19

1. What struck you as you read these passages?
2. The church is described as a community of sojourners. Some Christians will experience this literally and others will experience it metaphorically.
  - a) What difference might identifying yourself as a sojourner make to how you live?
  - b) What difference might this make to how you read the Bible?
  - c) What difference might it make to how you relate to those who have come from a different place?
3. What difference might this study make to you this week? Are there any ways in which you would like to follow it up?

## Taking it further:

1. Read these passages about Jesus' experience:  
Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23; Luke 9:58.

How does that affect the way that you view:

- Jesus as a person?
- his teaching?



2. Read through 1 Peter. Peter is writing to Christians who have had to leave their homes due to persecution of the church. This is 'the diaspora'. How does knowing that affect the way in which you read the letter?

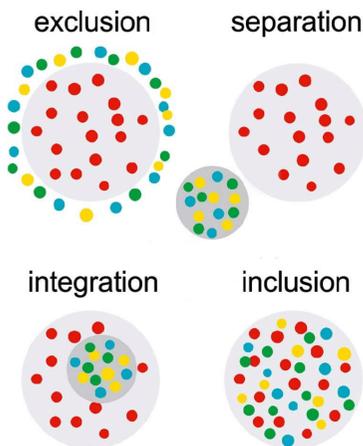


## WEEK 3: EXILE AND FEAR IN THE BIBLE

Jeremiah and Ezekiel were both prophets to the Israelites exiled in Babylon.

Read together: [Jeremiah 29: 1-14](#) and [Ezekiel 44: 4 – 9](#)

1. What struck you as you read these passages?
2. What fears and challenges might people face on their migration journey and when they arrive at their destination?
3. What fears do people have about migrants?
  - a) What is the basis for these fears? What sources are we using to inform us? Are these sources reliable?
  - b) What might be underlying causes of these fears?
4. What can we do as a community to allay unfounded fears of those who are different, including migrants?
5. What are your expectations for migrants who come to the UK or come into our community? Why? Consider the following models:



Berry's Acculturation Typology	
<b>Assimilation</b> + accepts new culture - rejects old culture	<b>Integration</b> + accepts new culture + maintains old culture
<b>Segregation</b> - rejects new culture + maintains old culture	<b>Marginalization</b> - rejects new culture - rejects old culture

Migration holds the possibility and the promise that the church can rediscover its identity as envisioned in the Bible.

6. The picture of the church in the new creation is described in Revelation 7:9. How does this affect your expectations for migrants in the UK?

7. What difference might this study make to you this week?  
Are there any ways in which you would like to follow it up?

Take time as you pray to lament. Bring before God:

- your fears relating to those who are different
- your repentance for the hostility shown in our country/community/ourselves to those who are different, including the migrant
- ask for transformation by God's spirit.

You may like to use the following sung refrain as part of your prayers.

*Kindle a flame, to lighten the dark and take all our fear away.*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doNNr\\_n2A1A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doNNr_n2A1A)

### **Taking it further:**

'Nation and nationality is a myth; nations are simply 'imagined communities'. Britain was only formed in 1707 and has always had 'fuzzy' frontiers and a strong Nonconformist tradition. It also has a long history of division and dissent around gender, class, region and indeed religion.'

'Fear has become a defining feature of our times.'

The most common commandment in the Bible is 'Do not be afraid..'  
What difference might being a Christian make to our attitude to the 'stranger/foreigner/immigrant'?

I was hungry but you would not feed me, thirsty but you would not give me a drink; <sup>43</sup>I was a stranger but you would not welcome me in your homes, naked but you would not clothe me; I was sick and in prison but you would not take care of me.' <sup>44</sup>Then they will answer him, 'When, Lord, did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and we would not help you?' Matthew 25: 42-44

## WEEK 4: ENCOUNTERS WITH LIFE-GIVING STRANGERS

“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the **foreigner** residing among you. I am the LORD your God.”  
Leviticus 23:22

Read together: Ruth

1. What struck you as you read this story?
2. In what ways is Ruth an outsider?
3. How is Ruth portrayed as a source of new life?
4. What difference might this study make to the way in which you relate to those who are different to you?

### Taking it further:

- a) Read the following passages to see the attitudes of the average Jewish listener, the disciples and Jesus to the Samaritans: Luke 17:18; John 4:22; Luke 9:51-55; John 4:4-42; Luke 17:11-19; Luke 10:29, 37.

Now read the story of the Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37.

In what way is the Samaritan an outsider?

In what way is he portrayed as a source of new life?

- b) ‘Every day, millions of Christians risk their lives to follow Jesus. In more than 60 countries, Open Doors supports them by supplying Bibles, providing emergency relief and helping persecuted believers stand strong for the long-term. In the UK and Ireland, Open Doors helps the church to pray, give and speak out for those who share our faith but not our freedom.’

Explore the Open Doors UK website. <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/>

## WEEK 5: AN INTERCULTURAL CHURCH

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from **every** nation, **tribe**, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. Revelation 7:9

**All** the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and **all** the families of the **nations** will bow down before him, Psalm 22:27

Read together: Acts 10

1. What struck you as you read this passage?
2. In what ways are Peter and Cornelius different?
3. In what ways does Cornelius change as a result of his interaction with Peter?
4. In what ways does Peter change as a result of his interaction with Cornelius?
5. Who is at the central character/authority of this story?
6. How might Acts 10 show us a model for an intercultural church?
7. How can this story help us learn to become a more intercultural church?

**Monocultural:** Melting pot model – assumes that unique cultural identities dissolve to form a new collective identity.

**Multicultural:** Salad-bowl model – assumes that the ingredients keep their distinct character and coexist side by side. A multicultural church celebrates racial, ethnic, theological and cultural differences.

**Intercultural:** respects difference but creates a space for the interaction of diverse cultural groups within a society. An intercultural church brings people of various cultures together to learn from one another, giving equal value and power to each culture, preserving cultural differences and celebrating the variety of cultural traditions.

## Taking it further:

- a) What have you learnt over the past few weeks?
- b) How has it changed your attitude to 'the stranger'?
- c) How are you going to develop your understanding of this topic further?



## References and further reading:

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