

M ISSIONS HAS TRADITIONALLY

been focused on strangers in another land. But this begs the question: “What about the strangers who are *among* us?” In Exodus 22:21, God says, “You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him,” (NKJV) and in 12:48-49, “And when a stranger dwells with you and wants to keep the Passover to the Lord,...then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land.” This teaches us that if a stranger wants to worship the Lord with us, we should welcome them with open arms.

Leviticus 19:33-34 states: “The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself.” We think of this as a New Testament teaching, but from the very beginning, God wanted His people to love their neighbor as themselves. Deuteronomy 10:17-19 says, “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger...”

In the New Testament, Acts 1:8 states that the Holy Spirit will give us power to be witnesses for Christ “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” How does this relate to us? I suggest that our *Jerusalem* are those who are culturally like us and geographically close to us. Our *Judea* are those who are culturally like us but geographically farther away. Our *Samaria* are those who are culturally different but geographically close, and *the ends of the earth* are culturally different and geographically far.

As the body of Christ, we need to recognize that we are not only called to reach out to those who are geographically far and culturally different, but also to those who are culturally different and geographically close. These could be immigrants or students from another country, migrants who have come to work, or even refugees fleeing war or persecution. These are our Samaria. Let’s not neglect this aspect of ministry.

But reaching out to people outside our own culture isn’t easy. In the time of the New Testament church, Jews avoided Samaria. For example, instead of traveling on the west side of the Jordan River through Samaria, which would be more direct, there was such prejudice that many Jews crossed over to the east side and took the long way around to avoid what they perceived as those who were undesirable.

Christ set a different example. He took advantage of every opportunity to minister to those with spiritual and physical needs, as in
John 4

Are You Taking the Long Way Around?

when He did what was socially unacceptable and talked with a woman of ill repute from another culture. Because of that interaction, many Samaritans came to believe in Him.

Missions is more about crossing cultural boundaries rather than geographical borders. Christ ministered to those who were culturally different from Himself but were geographically close. His apostles had this vision as well; Peter and John made a special trip to Samaria to confirm the Samaritans that had been baptized under Phillip’s ministry (Acts 8:14-17).

Christ promised to enable us, by the power of the Spirit, to be witnesses for Him, even to those who are culturally different but geographically close. Who is your Samaria? You see, “It is not the person from the radically different culture on the other side of the world that is hardest to love, but the nearby neighbor whose skin color, language, rituals, values, ancestry, history, and customs are different from one’s own” (“Hatred between Jews and Samaritans,” **Bible.org**). Let’s follow Christ’s example and partner together to minister on the west side of Jordan!



ACT

Christ has called each of us, as Christians, to minister, to help the oppressed, and to preach the gospel—essentially to be a missionary wherever we are.

Not sure where to start? Check out the *World Go! Manual*, a Bible study for missions. Learn more and purchase a copy at www.wgm.org/worldgo.



JULY 17-23:

Pray for Brian Kushman as he trains and equips Hispanic pastors in the United States.



Brian, Paula, Wesley,
and Madison Kushman