

# VISION FOR A REFUGEE KINGDOM MOVEMENT

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KINGDOM KERNELS

God is moving in unprecedented ways in our generation in the Muslim world. Too often Western believers are filled with fear at the pictures of refugees crossing the borders of Western nations. Such a view fails to look at this migration from an eternal perspective.

The current migrations are consistent with the ways God has moved throughout history to bring people groups to the knowledge of Christ.

*And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. (Acts 17:26-27, ESV, emphasis added)*

God has consistently changed the allotted periods and boundaries to bring people to know Him. We should praise the God of heaven in giving a myriad of Muslim people groups open hearts and greater access to the gospel, while at the same time weeping with them at the suffering they endure.

God’s heart is for a kingdom movement to flow through hundreds of refugee locations and then back into the

home countries from which they have been thrust—some places difficult or impossible for missionaries to access.

Thousands of evangelists have descended upon Europe the last two years to purposefully bring the gospel to refugees resulting in many salvations. In the excitement of good evangelism, however, what emerges as the dust settles will determine if this becomes a lasting kingdom movement. God’s desire is for disciples and churches, not simply decisions, to multiply throughout the refugee populations, to the surrounding majority populations (e.g. Germans and Greeks) and back into home countries. Will we settle for good evangelism or press into enduring Church-Planting Movements (CPMs)? The latter is God’s heart.

## A CASE STUDY

My interactions with the refugee outreach have been to promote the latter (CPM) rather than the former (abundant evangelism). In one country, the Great Commission partners are doing an amazing job of reaching out to refugees with the gospel. They have hosted hundreds of short-term volunteers and the gospel has been shared thousands of times. They have been so busy hosting

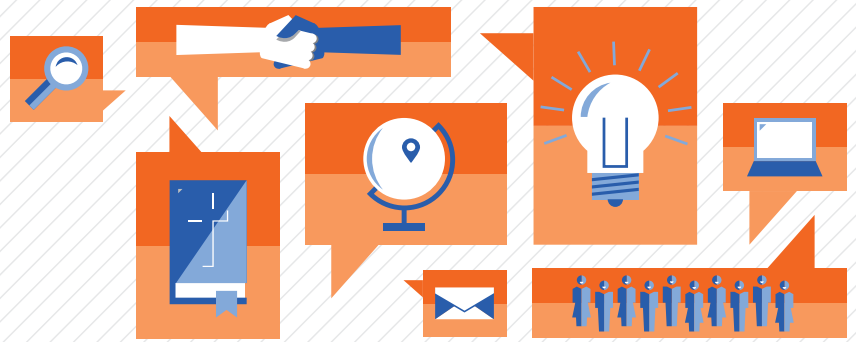
each team to do evangelism efforts that they have had little time to catalyze the next stages of a CPM—on-going discipleship training, church formation and leadership development. Their effectiveness in doing a good thing (evangelism) threatens the needed shift into the next stage (making disciples who can make disciples, resulting in multiplying churches.)

For three days we worked together on how to translate evangelistic fruit into a kingdom movement. Two weeks later, one Muslim-background believer immediately baptized 18 people and formed two groups into churches. He is making the shift to give enough time to the new disciples, churches and leaders.

What changed in him and others was a sense of the larger vision of what God is doing. Refugee believers have been particularly envisioned by the Joseph account (Gen. 37-50) and find almost exact parallels between Joseph’s journey and theirs. These new disciples stand on the edge of the refugee outreach becoming a Joseph movement.

## THE JOSEPH MOVEMENT

We may fail to recognize how much of the Genesis account the Joseph narrative



takes up. Genesis is painted as follows in broad strokes:

Creation	2 chapters
Fall/Cain	2 chapters
Genealogies	4 chapters
Noah	4 chapters
Abraham	12 chapters
Isaac	2 chapters
Jacob	9-10 chapters
Joseph	14 chapters

In sheer proportion the Joseph story occupies the largest amount of text—14 out of 50 chapters. We rightly accord huge emphasis to the critical stories of

Creation/Fall, Noah and Abraham (the father of all who live by faith). But how often do we contemplate the message of the Joseph movement?

Refugee believers are drawn to Joseph because his story gives meaning to their story. It helps to explain what God is doing according to Acts 17:26-27.

## THE JOSEPH MOVEMENT PARALLELS

Joseph appears as a prophet in the Quran; Muslims are familiar with his name. But as Muslim-background believers learn the true story from the

Old Testament, they find a number of parallels with their situation:

**The salvation of many:** The theme verse of the Joseph account is Genesis 50:20:

*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.* (Gen. 50:20, ESV, emphasis added)

From the comforts of Western Christianity, we quote “what was meant for evil, God meant for good.” But can we quote the verse’s purpose statement? The operative word is “to”. God has a purpose in turning evil to good—to save

many people. In Western Christianity, we fear the invasion of our way of life in the refugee situation. Refugee believers see the overarching vision—God’s purpose is to save multitudes of people for eternity. The grand purpose of God is sovereignly moving people groups to bring His kingdom fully to them. God is answering the Lord’s prayer we pray regularly.

**Embracing the uncontrollables:** Joseph chose to embrace the goodness of God despite having no control over his situation and being moved against his will. Rather than bemoan his situation, Joseph embraced the uncontrollable as signs of God’s goodness and sovereign orchestration. Refugee believers are learning to celebrate the uncontrollables as God’s sovereign goodness to bring about the salvation of many.

**Suffering:** The uncontrollables included intense suffering for Joseph, even being blamed for things he didn’t do. Often refugees are lumped into the same category as terrorists. Often they are mistreated simply because they belong to a disdained group. Refugee believers see in Joseph an example about how to bear up under suffering and mistreatment in the midst of knowing God has a grander plan.

**Dreams:** The Joseph story is filled with dreams about God’s purposes. God gave Joseph the discernment to believe and interpret these dreams. When God moves in unprecedented ways, He often initiates them through dreams (even in the New Testament). Within the Muslim world, God is appearing to and speaking to people in dreams and visions. Refugee believers recognize that God is speaking clearly, tearing down defenses and giving vision for the future to them.

**Salvation of a new land:** Joseph was adopted into a new land (Egypt) and eventually became a source of blessing for that land in the midst of famine.

He was the source of salvation to the majority population though he came from a despised minority—Hebrews (Gen. 43:32). In the hard soil of European evangelism, God is going to use Muslim-background believers to bring salvation to Christian-background lost people (Germans, Italians, etc). Refugee believers are learning that this is part of their calling.

**The salvation of the old land:** The purpose of the Joseph story, however, was the salvation of the old land/people. Joseph was not preserved alone by God but seventy others from the old land were saved that they might become a people of God. A vision is growing among refugee believers that God wants to both 1) save many refugees along the refugee road and 2) bring this movement back to the home countries. We must help believers in the diaspora to become movements that bring salvation to home countries from which they emerged.

**Seasons of darkness:** Doubtless at times Joseph felt forgotten by God, his family and friends. Yet in the darkness he did not despair but continued to trust God. The situation had to get very dark before it got better. Refugee believers take encouragement from Joseph’s faith while in dark places. They know that in time God will bring about His purposes.

**A new hope:** The Joseph story is one in which a new hope emerges, one Joseph could never have imagined despite the foreshadowing of his initial dreams in Genesis 37. From the darkness, a much greater purpose came to light. How shocked Joseph must have been years later when his brothers showed up to buy grain. In that moment, the greater purpose became clear:

*5 And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has*

*been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. (Gen. 45:5-8, ESV, emphasis added)*

Three times Joseph stated: “It was God who sent me here!” The purpose became clear—a new hope emerging from darkness. For the refugee evangelism efforts to become a kingdom movement, refugee leaders must embrace this new hope—they have been sent ahead by God for the salvation of many. If we fail to call them to a bigger vision or if we shrink back from calling them to suffer for a greater purpose, then we will likely reap a few hundred or thousand new disciples but lose a potential movement to rock the Islamic world.

**Don’t compromise:** During the dark times and light times, Joseph refused to compromise. As Potiphar’s steward, he refused to sin with Potiphar’s wife. As a prisoner in darkness, he refused to use underhanded ways to escape prison. As the second-in-command of Egypt, he refused to abuse the rank and privilege accorded him. Refugee believers identify with the need to remain true to God’s Word no matter their circumstances—to refuse to compromise or use underhanded ways to better their situation or seek retribution.

**Expect helpers along the way:** Joseph’s destiny was ultimately in God’s hands, but in the earthly realm was in the hands of others. He trusted God to guide the hands and hearts of the rulers toward God’s ultimate purposes. Along the way, God provided helpers in this journey—Judah to sell Joseph rather than let him

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be killed, Potiphar purchasing Joseph, the keeper of the prison giving Joseph privileges, the cupbearer bringing Joseph to Pharaoh, Pharaoh raising Joseph to his right hand. Refugee believers have to trust that God will provide advocates along the way to move them toward the destiny God has created for them.

**Create relational networks along the way:** The challenge of the refugee road becoming a movement is that relational networks change from week to week. Families are torn apart and new living situations present themselves each week or month. Joseph was torn from his family and moved from place to place. Rather than see only his blood family as his relational network, Joseph created new relational networks along the way—Potiphar’s household, the prisoner network and eventually the palace network of Egypt. Refugee leaders with a vision for a movement realize they must help new believers create and embrace new relational networks face-to-face, by phone, and online. As they embrace these new networks and disciple each other in these various forms, the movement is growing and finding stability.

**God’s favor will be upon you:** God’s hand of favor was continually upon Joseph. The seed of saving his family

planted in the dreams of Genesis 37 was watered all along the way. God’s promise was one of favor and purpose he could hold onto in dark times. Refugee believers frequently ask: “Why did God save me first rather than my brother or my cousin (or someone else)?” They find a growing sense that God’s favor is upon them to be the channel of salvation and this favor fills their hearts with gratitude.

**God’s school of suffering:** Years ago a greatly persecuted Chinese underground leader shared with me: “Prison is God’s seminary for me. It is when He lets me stop long enough to study my Bible more deeply, write and hear His voice more clearly.” God’s school of suffering. Suffering was Joseph’s seminary. It was the crucible of shaping Joseph into the man who could be the channel of salvation. The Joseph of Genesis 37 was not ready for the throne of Egypt; the Joseph of Genesis 40 was. Refugee believers must embrace periods of suffering as God’s seminary to prepare them for the greater works Jesus promised (John 14:12).

## THE JOSEPH MOVEMENT: A VISION

The story of Joseph is one of uncanny precedent that refugee believers can learn from. It is a biblical case study for

a movement that can be repeated again today. The key will be refugee believers taking on the identity and vision of a true Joseph movement. Such a vision will be as costly to them as it was to Joseph. But if believers can identify this moment as a Joseph opportunity, then it may well become multiple kingdom movements intertwining their fingers both in the diaspora and back home in the sending countries. Will Muslim background believers take on this identity? Will they embrace the cost that comes with the promise?

And for Christian leaders around the world working with these precious brothers and sisters, will we embrace the same vision and communicate it with faith to them? Will we communicate it to our own churches? Will we reinterpret the unfolding events to demonstrate God’s amazing purposes?

If we do, then we are casting a vision of what is on our Father’s Heart.

And, in case you wondered how to cast vision in general, this article has been an example—bringing an encouraging and inspiring word to growing disciples based on Father’s heart. 