



Embrace the Spirit

The Caribbean Initiative

Go Out in the Name of the Lord

By: Betania Figueroa

Group Prayer

(inspired by Deuteronomy 10:19)

God, help us welcome those who have come to dwell among us.

For all those who have come fleeing oppression and persecution —

black, white, brown, and yellow —

God, help us welcome those who have come to dwell among us.

For those who have come fleeing hardship and hunger,

God, help us welcome those who have come to dwell among us.

For those who have come to join loved ones already here,

God, help us welcome those who have come to dwell among us.

For those who have come seeking freedom and opportunity,

God, help us welcome those who have come to dwell among us.

Let us remember the words of Christ, who said,

“I was hungry and you gave me food,

I was thirsty and you gave me a drink,

I was a stranger and you welcomed me.”

When, Lord, were you a stranger that we welcomed among us?



“Truly, as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me.”

**When we welcomed the stranger,
we welcomed you, Christ Jesus, in our midst!**

Loving God, you call us to create hospitable communities.

Help us to overcome any fear and anxiety we may have of those
who come from other lands to live among us.

Give us the courage and wisdom

to create compassionate and just immigration policies.

Grant that we may all live together in peace and love. Amen.¹

Questions to Begin the Discussion

- Do you come from another country or another city?
- Have you left your family and friends? How did you feel?
- If there are any migrants in your group, invite them to tell their story briefly.

Recommendations for the Leader

Highlight in the discussion that human beings migrate for different reasons. It does not always go well on their journey. The circumstances that led them to decide to leave their country or region of origin may be: personal, like having a spirit of adventure; economic reasons, the search for better income; political, differences with the government and persecution; and violence. Some experience many of those reasons. We will see migration from people who are forced to leave their country or region for political and social situations. We will also talk about the country or region where the migrant arrives, which often has very different customs and culture. How should Christians respond?

Definition of Key Terms

Migration – The transfer or displacement of people or groups of people from one region to another within their country or from one country to another, with the intent of establishing permanent residence.

Depending on the destination, migration can be internal (within the same country) or external (moving from one country to another).

Emigrant – A person or group of people who leave a region or a country and reside in another.

Migrants are called immigrants by the country that welcomes them; and emigrants by the country that they leave.

¹ Adapted from Interfaith Worker Justice, “Immigration Litany,” www.iwj.org/pdf/imm-litany.pdf Posted on **Acts of Faith**. http://actsofffaith.org/resources/downloads/Year_A/09%20Immigration_final.pdf.

Welcome – Provide protection or shelter, or admit a person into a group or a place.

Refugee – According to the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.

Scripture

Genesis 12:1-5

12 Then GOD said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.

² “I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;

I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.^[a]

³ I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”^[b]

⁴ So Abram went, as God had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran. ⁵ He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Harran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there.

Biblical Reflection

Verse 1 - **God’s Mandate:** Abram has heard the voice of God that told him go, leave your land and your relatives. It’s a divine order which he abides by, to find something new, a land of promise of well-being.

Verses 2 and 3 - The **Promise and Blessing:** God has promised to make a great nation and to make it a blessing for Abram and all the family of the land.

Verse 4 - **Obedience:** Abram left with a small group, his wife Sara, his nephew Lot, and servants.

In this text we find two key words: **Land and Blessing**

- **The Land:** In the Old Testament it has a physical and spiritual sense. In the physical sense, it is soil. In Hebrew, *Lertz* means geographical territory or country or entire land (Gen. 28:15, Gen. 13:10.). Also *Adamah* is used which means the richness of the land; cultivated land that has an economic and political dimension. In the spiritual sense, the land is more than soil and territory. It’s the sign of God’s promise. The Hebrews knew that God was present in their lives through the land.
- **Blessing:** In Hebrew, *Barak* means to bless. *Beraka* means blessing and comes from the root *brk* which relates to the word *knee*. To bless means that God provides material goods and earthly fertility to the people. When we bless, we pray for someone’s happiness, care and protection. (Psalm 33:12, Num.6:22-27, 2nd Cor.13:14.)

This text is the second part of the book of Genesis and the beginning of the people of Israel. It is also the beginning of the history of the patriarchs. The invitation that Abram has received from God is to leave his land, his territory, his country, which has been his home for 75 years. It is to leave his relatives – his uncles, cousins, neighbors – who, in some way, are the network of support that in difficult moments and in the moments of joy and celebration are with him.

At the same time, the house of his parents is the most immediate household; where you go in moments of sickness, economic limitations, or conflicts. Abram is leaving everything to go to a new place that God has prepared. It's an invitation to leave everything that is familiar and go out in God's name. Upon leaving, God does not tell them where the land is, trusting only in God. Abram's obedience translates into the faith that guides him.

In this invitation, God made him two promises and a blessing. The blessing was for him and for those who bless him. It is a blessing that comes to us, the whole family of the land. The promises are fulfilled as the nation of the people of Israel. The promise is to exalt Abram's name. We must take into account that a name in the Hebrew culture is linked to any quality of the person, it may be the character, identity or purpose of the person. The name of Abram means "Exalted Father." Later, the name of Abram was changed to Abraham, "Father of a Multitude." Abram was obedient and faithful to the call of God.

Being obedient, Abram leaves Ur with a group of people and God's promises to him were fulfilled.

Contextualization

We can ask the question, what relationship does the history of Abram have with today's migrants that leave their countries or regions?

When impoverished migrants leave their land, many leave in the name of God. They leave their land, relatives, and the house of their parents without knowing where they are going, just as we saw with Abram. Abram followed a divine call, but it meant leaving everything. The situation of leaving and leaving everything familiar is what the impoverished migrants face. It is a parting with their history, since they are forced to leave everything they are. They become vulnerable, fearful, and full of anxiety while knowing that they leave with the hope to arrive in the promise land.

In the region or country where they arrive, they encounter other customs, norms, laws, and cultural forms that are challenging. The migrant is forced to survive in the informal sectors of the economy, performing the lowest paid jobs. They are frequently discriminated against and often their human dignity is violated.

It's important to emphasize that migration has two faces: the one who leaves their country and the one who arrives in a different country. The people of Israel, in their history of pilgrimage, went to Egypt. Eventually they were taken as slaves and they were forced to cry to God, as told in the book of Exodus 3:6-9, the same God that called Abram. God saw the suffering of the people and took the initiative to break into human history when he saw the persecution. In hearing the cry and anguish of the people, God becomes present and calls Moses.

Today, we are called as Christians to see the suffering of migrants because God sees their suffering over the world. It does not matter from what corner of the earth you – Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, the United States, or the Caribbean – the blessing received through Abram reaches all.

The people of Israel held onto the memory of when they were foreigners in Egypt (Leviticus 19:33-34). They were foreigners, but not tourists. Their condition was of slavery and impoverishment. Today, migrants arrive to the U.S. in a state of desolation, exhausted, and disappointed by the shortcomings of their country of origin. When people arrive in that condition, they deserve to be treated with dignity. We

must ask ourselves, are we welcoming migrants?

Jesus teaches us that we must be new people. That implies that sometimes we must approach or welcome the other regardless of their national or foreign status. Jesus gives us the example, when he met foreign people with whom he could break the prejudices and the cultural boundaries that separated them. For example, the Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:21-28); the Samaritan Woman at the well (John 4:6-9), the Centurion who showed great faith (Luke 7:6-9), and the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), all challenge us to see our relation to foreigners in new ways. To welcome the migrant is part of the essence of Christianity, gathered in the practice of Jesus and in the history of the people of Israel.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do we know of migrants who are in legal, economic, or social difficulty?
2. Have we considered as a church how we could be welcoming?
3. How would we feel if we faced the situations of migrants? What comfort and help might we seek?

Ideas for Welcoming the Migrant

- Form a committee to study the situation of migrants in your community
- Conduct conversations on the situation of the migrants to educate the church to the reality
- Organize a committee to guide migrants on the issues they may face and offer assistance.

About the Author

Betania Figueroa is an ordained minister of the Dominican Evangelical Church. She has a Bachelor's Degree in Economy from the Dominican Republic Autonomous University (UASD) and Graduate Studies in Theology from the Evangelical Dominican Seminary. She has been the Executive Director of Alfalit Dominicano, a faith-based literacy program that is based in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. They work to serve students through literacy and basic education, preschool, and job skills programs. With approximately 900,000 individuals who remain illiterate in the Dominican Republic, their work is a valuable resource to individuals and communities. For more than 50 years, Alfalit Dominicano has pursued its mission and primary objectives related to promoting social development through education.