

Opening Our Eyes to Our
Multiethnic Future



*Embracing
the new
Samaria*

ALEJANDRO MANDES

Foreword by John M. Perkins

In his galvanizing book *Embracing the New Samaria: Opening Our Eyes to Our Multiethnic Future*, Dr. Alex Mandes enables us to see God's current work in the harvest fields of what he calls Sameria, the new Samaria of multiethnic America. He powerfully weaves Scripture, statistics, and stories to flesh out how God consistently transforms people from fear and self-preservation into a diverse, unified, and missional community. Readers will be challenged and convicted—but also excited and equipped—to get in on what God is doing in our neighborhoods around the world. A must-read for any who wonder what God has been up to lately.

WALTER KIM, president of the National Association of Evangelicals

Embracing the New Samaria is a Gospel-centered, transformational invitation to see differently. Alex calls us beyond myopic, homogeneous visions of the Kingdom of God to a glorious multiethnic revival rooted in the *missio Christi* which embraces the modern-day Samaritans beyond preference, privilege, or prejudice. It is a journey the church in America should boldly embrace anew.

REV. DR. GABRIEL SALGUERO, pastor at The Gathering Place, president of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition

In *Embracing the New Samaria*, Dr. Mandes casts a vision for the body of Christ to hold the Great Commission and Great Commandment in a healthy tension by intentionally leaning into discipling inclusive of justice and compassion, yielding a transformed community of believers. The prophetic instruction applies to a broad swarth of believers: those curious about engaging the “other” in their communities, those with firmly held convictions of God's call into the uncomfortable, unfamiliar, and those currently engaged and seeking an alternative viewpoint. *Embracing the New Samaria* is a call for Christians to open their hearts to the humbling work of pursuing biblical justice, racial reconciliation, and the diversity of God's Kingdom. And to open their eyes, see the opportunities around them, and offer strategic next steps toward living on earth as it is in heaven.

APRIL WARFIELD, director of multicultural ministries for the Evangelical Free Church in America

In the Gospel of Luke, the disciple John eagerly suggests calling down fire on a village of the geographically proximate but ethnically and religiously different Samaritans, a suggestion Jesus firmly rebukes. Apparently John eventually learned to emulate Jesus' love for those on the margins because in the book of Acts, John prays for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit. In *Embracing the New Samaria*, my friend Dr. Alejandro Mandes challenges and exhorts the church to follow Jesus' call to love, seek justice for, disciple, and be disciplined by those on the margins of our society. I pray that many will read this engaging, biblically rooted book and, like John, embrace the vision of Christ's beautifully multiethnic Kingdom.

MATTHEW SOERENS, US director of church mobilization and advocacy
at World Relief

This is a book long overdue from one of evangelicalism's most ardent, credible, and proven champions of equitable inclusion of the marginalized in the full life and expression of the local church. My good friend and colleague, Dr. Alejandro Mandes, herein provides a personal, pastoral, and practical guide for twenty-first-century ministry leaders determined to advance a credible witness by establishing churches that embody the good news of God's love and hope for all people—not just some—in an increasingly diverse society. To get beyond rhetoric to results in this regard, I commend to you this work and encourage a passionate pursuit of its aim.

DR. MARK DEYMAZ, founding pastor/directional leader of Mosaic Church
of Central Arkansas, cofounder and president of Mosaix Global Network, author
of *Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church* and *The Coming Revolution in Church
Economics*

In *Embracing the New Samaria*, Alex Mandes gives a clarion call for us to see our communities through the eyes of missionaries. For the church to effectively live out the Lord's mission, we must intentionally look for the unreached, the unengaged, and the unnoticed people around us and then consider how we can effectively share with them the good news of the gospel in both word and deed. As we do, the Lord will be glorified through the multiplication of transformational churches among all people!

KEVIN KOMPENIEN, president of EFCA

Amid the great demographic shifts happening before our eyes, Dr. Mandes gives us a nuanced take on what it means to make disciples among a diverse group of people to build what he calls the *Great Community*. This book will help both majority- and minority-culture leaders reimagine who is in their Samaria and how to make disciples more effectively among them.

DANIEL YANG, director of the Send Institute

I love this gift Alex is bringing to the body of Christ in the form of *Embracing the New Samaria*. Alex's vision of a future that will more fully reflect God's intended design (Revelation 7:9) and of the opportunity we have to live and see the Kingdom of God manifest through his people is compelling and challenging. I commit to Alex's call for us to move forward as learners, with the humility of Christ, to ask the Lord to open our eyes as his people, so we can join him in seeing this beautiful, multicolored, multicultural tapestry come into being. The future and fate of the church depends on it.

DOUG NUENKE, US president of The Navigators

In this penetrating and challenging book, Alex Mandes shows us how to appreciate what a special gift those who are different from us racially or culturally are. Alex's book is the fruit of a lifetime of living and ministering as a "minority in a majority world." This book has literally opened my eyes to the many ways I've looked past my dear neighbors like Alex and have therefore not only done them deep disservice but also missed out on the treasure that they would have been to me if I could've only seen them and allowed them to come alongside of me in my daily life and ministry. His book is not only about ministering *to* "Samerica," as he calls it, but being blessed to minister *with* our brothers and sisters of different races and cultures. If you're looking for a caustic and judgmental blast at most of us, you'll not find it here. Instead, what Alex provides is a winsome, but provocative, challenge of our preferences and prejudices—and an invitation to the many possibilities of a far more beautiful, fruitful life and ministry through living and working alongside those we might have previously overlooked or even looked down on.

DAVID V. MARTIN, DD, director of EDA Move for GATEWAY Theological Institute

Mandes calls majority-culture Christians and churches to engage the new Samaria that is this country. Passionate, practical, informed by personal experience, and grounded in biblical texts, this work exhorts its readers to embrace “orthodance,” the confluence of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The American church needs to revitalize its mission by doing compassionate justice, making disciples, planting multiethnic churches, and providing relevant leadership training. A timely word by an eminent practitioner!

DANIEL CARROLL, Scripture Press Ministries professor of biblical studies and pedagogy, Wheaton College

Alex Mandes is a visionary leader helping churches minister to immigrants. He has instilled the passion and provided the tools to do so in his own denomination, where he serves as executive director of ethnic, immigrant, and justice programs. And he’s built effective, replicable systems now used by many churches outside his denomination. In this book, Alex clearly explains why the Great Commission requires that we make disciples beyond those who are “just like us.” And—most importantly—he provides specifics on how to do so. It’s an easy, insightful read for church leaders and a great resource for small groups and individuals who want to reach their neighbors in the margins and fulfill the Great Commission.

LARRY ROBERTS, chief operating officer (ret.) of the Free Methodist Church—USA

An excellent book from Dr. Alex Mandes! In this deeply personal, transparent book, he causes us (in a healthy way) to stop, think, examine, and see things differently, to gain a better glimpse of God’s perspective concerning the diverse communities that make up America. Mandes helps the reader understand how God wants to use us and his church to reach the people surrounding us. You will be far richer for having read this book!

BOB ROWLEY, superintendent of EFCA Texas–Oklahoma



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ALEJANDRO MANDES

With Deborah Sáenz Gonzalez

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FOREWORD

IN JANUARY 2010, I went to speak at a gathering in Phoenix to bring attention to the humiliating way immigrants were being treated by the authorities. They were being housed in tents in the desert and dressed in pink. It was intended to be humiliating. For me, those were men made in the image of God. I loved and cared for them as if they were my brothers. It was not a funny matter.

Many may have wondered what an African American Bible teacher and civil rights worker was doing in Phoenix caring about Latin American men being toyed with for the amusement of the legal authorities detaining them—people using their power to humiliate because they could. The plight of these immigrants took me back to a similar time in my life where people would abuse their authority because they could.

In Phoenix I wasn't looking for a platform for myself. I was there to help the evangelical church wake up. An evangelical myself, I had a right to speak to them, to help them understand that we are all one family—one people, one church, and one faith.

We need to love one another. If my brown family suffers, I suffer. All that we learned in the civil rights struggle is not just for black people. We are *one* people. Unbeknown to me, my son Alex Mandes told me later, those words were fresh water on his head.

He had never heard a Bible teacher speak of justice for all people. Those words of concern from a black man drove home the point that we are one family. Since then the relationship between myself and Alex has grown in many ways outside of the view of many.

In 2018, Alex encouraged me to speak at a conference in San Antonio on justice and the gospel. I agreed to the opportunity under one condition: that he spend one extra day just with me, walking me through the Alamo and the history of the immigrant experience.

As we walked through the city, we discovered our similar spiritual formation and values rooted in the Word and for discipleship, which ran even deeper than our color and cultural differences. We both share the deep desire to tear down walls of division. We see justice and reconciliation as only possible for a committed disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. We share the commitment to elevate love for our neighbor as the greatest commandment (Galatians 5:14).

We also shared many pains and disappointments together. Our greatest lament was the church's inability to see that our God-given differences of diversity are a gift. That gift of diversity is given to reach the whole world; diversity is not something to divide us. Diversity is not even the objective in life. But if we can't learn to love people different than ourselves, then the main objective, bringing the whole world to him, will never be accomplished.

As we walked and talked over meals in San Antonio, Alex shared a desire to write a book. At that time, I encouraged my son to write what was on our hearts. I promised to write the foreword. During the pandemic, I called him and gave him some advice but added a stiff emphasis on the urgency in light of these present days of unrest, division, and the loss of Christlike love. Alex, like an obedient son, completed the book we had talked about in 2018.

For us, reconciliation includes walking out justice and compassion as a part of making disciples. The fruit of that true

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reconciliation is that the church will grow. That fruit will remain, and that fruit will give itself to God, as it was produced by God. The result of the fruit is those lives surrendered to Christ in a walk of discipleship living such that the people around the church, even if not believers in Christ, will know that there is a God because of our love.

I hear in Alex's message the same message God has given me, that love is the greatest fruit of the Spirit. It is all, in all, over all—the greatest expression of God, the greatest gift of God.

With a full heart I recommend this work—a different accent between us on how to say things but the prophetic call is clearly the same. I am proud to add this son, this book to the Perkins library of kindred spirits.

John M. Perkins

INTRODUCTION

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. had a dream—one that he so eloquently delivered on August 28, 1963: a hope for freedom, equality, and justice in the United States. Almost sixty years later, I also have a dream—my *sueño*—that I will spend my life’s work trying to achieve. My *sueño* is to someday see all people living together in unity here on earth as it is in heaven.

Two biblical passages ground my dream in prophetic reality. One is the vision of all people around the throne of God described in Revelation 7. It reads:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

REVELATION 7:9-10

This is a prophetic view of what the Kingdom of God will be like—with all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues worshiping God together around his throne. What a heavenly vision! The other biblical passage that grips me is from Matthew 6, when Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray. He gave us these words:

Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.

MATTHEW 6:9-10

When we pray these words, we are asking God to help us live out his heavenly vision *now*—alongside people of all nations, tribes, and tongues—not just when we die and join him in his presence, but here on earth, today.

How We've Missed the Mark

Disappointingly, some of our churches and ministries do not reflect the earthly prayer that God prophetically laid out for us in the Scriptures. When we envision “making disciples” in our local contexts, we tend to think about reaching people who are just like us, and our churches tend to reflect that reality. In the United States, 86 percent of Protestant congregations are made up of one predominant racial group, making Sunday mornings one of the most segregated times of the week. Even more telling is that 53 percent of churchgoers think their church is diverse enough.¹

It is painfully obvious that we have failed to see, love, and reach our neighbors who are different from us. Furthermore, many of us have made peace with tepid complacency, believing that this is as good as it can get. Some of us compensate for such saltless

obedience with man-made panache, “excellence,” bling, and beautiful branding, but the fact remains that a mediocre approach to disciplinemaking is not getting us to the Kingdom vision of Revelation 7. It is killing us. We miss the true transformation that awaits us. Let God be God! We can’t out-wow God!

Brothers and sisters, I do not believe that God called us to do something that can’t be done. I do believe we can have heaven on earth. I am not speaking of a future dispensation. My hope and dream is that we fully realize the Lord’s visionary prayer now. What we see now in the form of national ethnic and immigrant tensions does not have to define our future. It doesn’t have to be that way.

In this book I will have fun exploring the fictitious life of Ebenezer Scrooge, who lived a dreary life of selfishness. Three ghosts assist him to see how he has lived a wasted life of selfishness. The final ghost, the ghost of Christmas future, ends by showing Scrooge the results of his selfish, lonely life. Scrooge, now fully grasping the missed opportunity of doing good to his fellow man, asks the third ghost if the things that were shown to him are the things that must be, or might be if he doesn’t repent. This is the point where Scrooge wakes up from his night visions.

Dear ones, it is not too late for us to live transformed lives. I call for us to walk the walk of God with our eyes wide open. Mankind is our business! The Holy Spirit will give us the power. May my call to the GC3 (Great Commandment, Great Commission, and Great Community) be as effective as Ebenezer’s three spirits in rousing us to see that we should live every day doing good to all mankind! Maranatha!

Who This Book Is For

I wrote this book to help my evangelical² family—specifically those who are part of the majority culture—to transcend the status

quo by loving and reaching their neighbors in the margins, as God has called us to do.

Some might read the term *majority culture* and wonder why I'm not just using the term *white*, since in the United States generally this is true. But I grew up in Laredo, Texas, a city along the US-Mexico border that is majority Hispanic, so even though I am an ethnic minority in the United States, I grew up in the majority culture for my local context. And even there, in a border town that exists in the margins of American society, I've witnessed vulnerable people of various ethnicities experiencing marginalization at the hands of their own ethnic groups. So depending on where you live, the majority culture may or may not be white—but one thing is for sure: Our sinful natures make us all capable of judging people unworthy and excluding or ignoring them as a consequence.

Some of you may have picked up this book because you sense that the church needs to change but you are unsure where to start. Others may already be taking steps outside of your comfort zone but want to know how to take it to the next level. Then, of course, some readers may be further along in the journey and interested in hearing a new perspective. I am incredibly grateful for the Christians who have worked hard to embody biblical justice, racial reconciliation, and the diversity of God's Kingdom here on earth. They are wonderful examples for us all—but there is never an end point. We all have work to do, and the purpose of this book is to be a brotherly prophetic call for us all to open our eyes, acknowledge the divine opportunity that is in front of us, and start taking steps toward the dream. I hope that my perspective as a bicultural (Mexican and American) person who has lived and worked in both majority-culture and marginal spaces will help guide us through the challenges and opportunities we face as a multiethnic body of Christ.

How did we get to the point of ignoring disciplemaking in the

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margins? I believe some of us have been so focused on either the Great Commission (spreading the Good News to the ends of the earth) *or* the Great Commandment (loving your neighbor as yourself) that we have failed to see the inextricable connection between the two, which when lived out together results in a Great Transformed Community of believers. I call this the GC3:

THE GREAT COMMISSION AND GREAT COMMANDMENT BUILD GREAT COMMUNITY.

Many Christian churches and parachurches have given more emphasis to either the love mandate or the disciplemaking mandate, so that energy spent on one seems to take away from the other. Few have been good at holding both in a healthy tension. You can find lots of books on disciplemaking and church planting, and you can find lots of books on justice and compassion, but you won't find many books that systematically and intentionally join those two great themes together. These four ideas are connected, however: Love/justice and disciplemaking/church planting combine to bring transformation in our communities. This is the essence of the GC3, which I will share more about in chapter 7 and refer to throughout the book.

When I see the ministry of Jesus, I see people being disciplined and matters of compassion and justice being addressed fluidly. I don't see Jesus wearing his justice hat one day and his disciplemaker hat the next. I see transformation at all levels. If we want a Great Community—a transformed church helping to transform the surrounding community who are not yet Christ followers—we must commit ourselves to both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Life in the Margins

I was born to see life in the margins. Raised in Laredo, Texas, a city on the Texas-Mexico border, I grew up quite literally in the margins of this country. My mother's family has lived in this region for generations, even before it was part of the United States. It surprises some people to hear that my ancestors didn't "come to this country," especially those who are not familiar with the history of the Southwest region of the United States. As the saying goes, "We didn't cross the border; the border crossed us." My parents and I were not immigrants, but if we had been born just a few miles south of where we were, our story would be very different.

When I lived in Laredo, the population was about seventy thousand people, the majority of whom were of Mexican descent, Mexican immigrants, or "Tejanos." The people I grew up around spoke English, Spanish, and Spanglish (a mixture of English and Spanish that has become its own language of sorts). The closest big city, San Antonio, is 150 miles away, making Laredo, like few cities in America, an isolated bubble with its own unique culture, language, and set of rules. While there is a border/bridge dividing Laredo and its Mexican sister city, Nuevo Laredo, the border was not a barrier. People have family on both sides and, at least in those years, crossed easily and frequently. (The key enforcement on immigration takes place at the Border Patrol station twenty miles outside of the city, so we didn't even need passports to cross between the border cities.) Gas, medicine, and tortillas were always cheaper in Mexico. Garments, gadgets, and work opportunities were always better on the Texas side. When I was young, and my friends and I wanted to play hooky from school, we would pay a nickel at the bridge and go to the theater across the border, with no worries at all that the truant officer would bother us in Mexico.

Of the largest five hundred cities in America, Laredo is at the bottom of the list in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity,

coming in at number 489.³ I tell people that when I was young I knew there were white and black people in America because I saw them on TV. Growing up in a minority-majority, mostly Spanish-speaking, monocultural city, let's just say I did not have the typical ethnic minority experience.

One might wonder how I came to be so passionate about diversity and reaching people who are different than me given such a monocultural upbringing. If there was ever something that is of God, it is this. Through my faith journey, God has bestowed upon me an immense love for all people, but especially those in the margins. And I have spent my entire adult life sharing my passions and convictions while navigating through white evangelical spaces. Though it has been challenging, I have welcomed the adventure because it is where my calling lies.

My Spiritual Conversion

It all began when I put my faith in Christ in high school. When I was a young boy, my family was Catholic. I remember attending a Catholic retreat and developing a strong interest in spiritual things. They helped me ask the right questions, but the problem was they didn't help me find the answers. The Catholic church has come a long way since Vatican II, but back in the 1970s I had a hard time growing spiritually in my local church context. Their greatest gift to me was a Bible at the end of the retreat. I read that Bible cover to cover and knew there was something there, but I couldn't quite figure out how to take it to the next level.

In the summer of 1973, a man named Carlos Cuellar finished his education and boot camp and was stationed at the Laredo Air Force Base, where he joined a Bible study led by Captain Gary Combs. Carlos and I had a mutual friend named Angela, who started attending the Bible study and was led to the Lord. Angela then introduced me to Captain Combs, and I never turned back.

I put my faith in Christ and started walking to the Air Force base every week to be in their Bible study. A man named Pancho Garcia began discipling me, and his fiancée, Lilia Vasquez, also played a crucial role in nurturing my walk with the Lord. I was so blessed to be around committed disciples in Laredo. I can't tell my story without mentioning them and the deep value for discipling I've had from the very beginning of my spiritual life. I could not get enough of it, and these dear souls gave time to a lowly high school student who was very needy.

My life was marked by major transformation. I went everywhere with my big black New American Standard Bible and my big wooden cross necklace. Bathroom, band hall, *everywhere*. I wouldn't lay that Bible down without putting a white cloth under it. I was a real, stinking Jesus freak. Many of my high school friends said, "Leave Alex alone; he's going through a phase." But I did not want this to be a phase. So I made a pact with Jesus: I prayed that he would not leave me and that he would take my life before I would ever leave him. I made a commitment that *nothing* would stop me from being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

I didn't know what my spiritual gift was at the time, but one thing I knew for sure was that all of a sudden I had an immense love for people. I was never a very good student before my conversion, but after my conversion I had a huge hunger to read the Bible and to learn—not so much for my sake, but to be able to share with other people.

Never did I imagine that this love for all people would take me away from my family and my cocoon of a city. But in the mid-1970s the US government decided to close the Laredo Air Force Base, so the Bible study I had been attending—which was part of a ministry called The Navigators—would be ending. I was distraught. But the leaders told me if I wanted to continue to be disciplined by The Navigators ministry, I could go to the University

of Texas in Austin, and they would be there. Without knowing what that meant or how painful it would be, off I went.

Off to “Gringolandia”

Not only was I the first person in my family to go to college, but I was also the first of my siblings to leave Laredo, Texas. It was certainly disconcerting. On the day I packed up to move to Austin, I stood on the porch and received my mother’s benediction, the sign of the cross, and she gave me her parting words of advice: “Stay away from the hippies.”

When I arrived at the University of Texas in Austin, I was in full-bore culture shock for two weeks. It was only 240 miles away, but it might as well have been the other side of the earth. For the first time in my life, I felt like a minority. Everyone around me was white. There were drugs everywhere to be had. The feminist movement was in full swing, and women were being called to burn their bras. My mother’s benediction and admonition to stay away from the hippies left me ill-prepared.

Eventually I developed friendships, but the culture continued to grate on my nature. To many of my friends, I was an enigma. I’d like to think I was an enjoyable enigma, but frankly, I was a little bit of a pain in the neck. I was one of about five people of color involved in campus ministry. My mates certainly were not offensive—they were kind—but it was clear from the beginning that I would need to adapt to their culture, and I did not fold that easily. I was okay with being a bit strange and very persistent, always offering a different perspective on things.

To be fair, looking back I realize that these were all young leaders like myself who were doing the best they could with what they knew. Fortunately, I had the kind of personality and mindset that nothing was going to turn me away, despite how painful it was at times. However, I’m certain there are many other

non-majority-culture disciples who could not survive the predominately white Christian environment—both in those days and today—and they shouldn't have to. That reality speaks volumes about what needs to change. I will forever be grateful for the friends whom God sent to nurture my soul for him.

It is because of the marginal life I was born into—combined with my experience in highly impactful cross-cultural disciple-making/church planting, degrees in social work/community development, and theological training—that I have a deep passion to see God's church ready to reach the vulnerable and the marginalized. My concern for these brothers and sisters may seem sentimental to some, but it is in fact biblical and urgent: Western Christianity has pushed underrepresented and disadvantaged minority groups to the margins of its concern, in a similar way to how the people of God in the first century sent a whole people group to the fringes of the faith.

The New Samaria

In Acts 1:8, Jesus says to his disciples, “And you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Historically, Christians have taken this command to heart and flown missionaries all over the earth to spread the Good News. Today, however, we are living in a moment in history when Samaria and the ends of the earth have come to *us*. We are living in the New Samaria.

I often use the term *Samerica* to describe America, because I believe Samaria is here, all around us. This is true all around the world. Societies all over the globe have become increasingly diverse, multicultural, and multilingual. In North America, the Send Institute calls these areas global gateway cities.⁴

It is easy to miss the fact that the American immigration political conundrum is actually a global diaspora phenomenon. It is

accelerating because of population growth and people's ability to move. No matter where you live, it's likely that people from every tribe, nation, and tongue are living in your neighborhoods, attending your schools, working hard to keep the economy running. Here in the United States, the children of immigrants are being born and raised here and will account for much of our nation's growth in the next fifty years. But this book is about more than just immigrants. It is about all of those who have been marginalized, ignored, and treated unjustly. The structures in our society have made it difficult for them to thrive, sometimes rendering them invisible. Unfortunately, it is no different inside the church. While some authors have written about the importance of having an evangelistic strategy for reaching the diaspora,⁵ unfortunately much of the conversation remains at the academic level. Generally speaking, many Christians look at "outsiders" with sympathy but little relevant missional draw. And some Christians do see them, but their hands are so full with church programs that they can't engage. What I refer to as "the New Samaria"—or the "Samaritans" living among us—are the people who are near but different, the people we are literally flying over in order to fulfill the letter of a Great Commission to reach the ends of the earth.

Walking toward the Barking Dog

Even though Jesus' entire ministry was among those living life in the margins, somewhere along the way the vision of that got lost to the church. The disciples resisted seeing his passion for the marginalized, and today we are no different than the disciples, who saw little need for reaching the Samaritans of their day.

I often compare the demographic changes happening around us to a barking dog: The noise annoys us, so we move away from it. Similarly, many evangelicals shrink when faced with the barking dog of demographic shifts happening right under our noses. It is

too complex a development for us, and we ignore it because we don't know what to do with it.

Frankly, I think the demographic shift is a barking dog that we must walk straight toward, and if we ignore it or put it off for someone else, we are missing out on its transformative power. From my perspective, the people in the margins are the blessing we must embrace as if our spiritual house depends on it. In fact, it does. We have become the New Samaria, and we must not look away. If we can get our spiritual mind around this, we will not only save the most vulnerable among us, we will save the church, ushering in the justice revival of Isaiah 58 that will give America another generation of life.

My Goal for This Book

My goal for this book is to help Christian leaders learn to *see, love, reach,* and ultimately *be* the New Samaria in a way that brings true transformation to our churches and communities. But in order to begin we need religious and cultural humility. We must see that the application of our doctrine is as important as the integrity of our doctrine. We must quit measuring our worth by the size of our budgets, credentials on our walls, or butts in the chairs, but by the way we equip and encourage our members to adventurously engage strangers outside of the moat of our churches. If we are to start making disciples like Jesus and planting churches like Paul, then we must not limit ourselves based on what we believe we are entitled to but surrender to the Holy Spirit as an unstoppable force.

In reading this book, you will notice that it gets personal. I have lived most of my life in the margins, and my tone may reflect it. Many illustrations are from my own life. People who know me will tell you that I have a way of saying hard things in ways that stick. It is never my goal to offend, but I also will not sanitize my

INTRODUCTION

language for the sake of being nice. You should also know that I did not write this book to turn the heads of academics or politicians. My intent is for its application to go from the elders' table to the Communion table to the kitchen table. I speak not just for myself but for the many marginalized who are often told to move on and not take things personally. But it is personal. And I ask you to take it personally.

This is when my *sueño* will be achieved: when our Great Commission zeal is matched to the Great Commandment—feeding the poor, loving the stranger, defending the oppressed, clothing the naked—and we begin to see the Great Community on earth as it is in heaven.

Then your light shall break forth like the morning,
Your healing shall spring forth speedily,
And your righteousness shall go before you;
The glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer;
You shall cry, and He will say, “Here I am.”

ISAIAH 58:8-9

This is the justice revival. This is the mountain I will climb, and this is the only hill I will die on. I invite you to join me on this journey.

Vamos, compañeros!

PART I

see the
new
samaria

CHAPTER 1

Recalibrating Our Vision

ONE OF MY FAVORITE MOVIES is *A Christmas Carol* (1984), based on the novel by Charles Dickens. Ebenezer Scrooge, a name that today has become synonymous with stinginess, is a curmudgeonly businessman who experiences a remarkable transformation. At the beginning, we see Scrooge walking down the street when he is solicited for help for the poor. His response is callous.

“Are there no prisons?” he asks.

“Plenty of prisons . . .”

“And the Union workhouses?” demanded Scrooge.

“Are they still in operation?”

“Both very busy, sir . . .”

“Those who are badly off must go there.”

“Many can’t go there; and many would rather die.”

“If they would rather die,” said Scrooge, “they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.”¹

Shortly thereafter he is confronted by his deceased business associate, Marley, who expresses concern for his soul. Marley, who is wandering about as a troubled spirit, tells Scrooge that he will be visited by three ghosts. The first ghost recounts Scrooge's past and how business became his god. When the second ghost visits, he reveals the joys of Christmas that Scrooge has missed all around him. Before his departure, the ghost opens his robe and reveals two gaunt, dirty, and hungry children.

Scrooge asks, "Spirit, are they yours?"

"They are Man's," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased."²

Scrooge demands that they be covered up. He doesn't want to see them any longer. They are not his problem. The ghost obliges but says they are still there.

People throughout all time have chosen to not see uncomfortable truths when confronted with them. We choose to look away or cover them up, but that does not mean they are not there. We might not be as crass as Scrooge and dismiss people by calling them "surplus population," but we, too, hedge ourselves from issues that cause dissonance.

This story is reminiscent of the many times in Scripture when Jesus opened the eyes of the disciples to see things that they had become blind to. Humans are contextual beings. We see and interpret things around us based on the culture and context of the time in which we are living. When the disciples began following Jesus, they viewed their theology and worldview through a very

particular historical, societal, and political lens. Very quickly we begin to see Jesus turn everything on its head. It turns out that the disciples had a lot to learn.

We as Christians face the same problem today. As Christian church leaders, we all embrace a mission for our lives and our ministry, and the ways in which we live out the mission are influenced by our culture. The question we must continually ask ourselves is, *What* or *who* might I be overlooking?

My guess is that some of you will define the church's mission more in terms of evangelization—sharing the Good News with people around you, making disciples, planting churches, sending missionaries to the ends of the earth—and for good reason, as this is the Great Commission that Jesus left for us. Others of you might define the church's mission more in terms of loving people—showing compassion toward the suffering, serving your community, bringing justice to the oppressed. This, too, is essential, as it is the Great Commandment that Jesus left for us.

As I stated in the introduction, both of these facets of the mission are essential. Unfortunately, we as Christians have done a poor job of executing both at the same time. The tendency of many churches is to lean more toward one, and in my experience in full-time ministry, as the population of our country has shifted, many churches have leaned into the evangelism mandate while the Great Commandment to love our neighbors has fallen to the wayside. We find ourselves wondering, just as the religious expert did in Luke 10, “Who is my neighbor?” and hope that the answer is people who are just like us. We've filled our churches with people who look like us, talk like us, eat the same foods as us—people who aren't going to make us too uncomfortable or make too many waves. The reality is that we're only willing to fulfill the Great Commandment halfway. I'll share more about this in chapter 7.

As you reflect on the way you are living the mission as a

Christian and as a church, think about the people who are sitting at your table and the values you emphasize. Who and/or what is missing? Many of us have blind spots that we don't even realize are there. It's hard to see what you don't know. Jesus saw the blindness in his disciples, and he was prepared to overturn centuries of conventional wisdom in order to recalibrate their vision.

Twelve Clueless Guys

In John 4, at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, he gave his disciples a not-so-subtle command to look at what they did not want to see. Many people refer to this chapter as being about "the woman at the well," but I don't think it's as much about the woman at the well as it is about twelve clueless guys being taught an important lesson by their master. The story is about more than the woman's conversion and subsequent witnessing; while that aspect is very important, there is more to the story. Jesus used his encounter with the Samaritan woman as an opportunity to train his disciples, and we also have much to learn from this lesson in today's context.

In John 4:1-4, we see that Jesus intentionally chose to go through Samaria with his disciples. If you know the history and cultural context of the Samaritans and their relationship with the Jewish people, you'll understand why this decision was so significant. Jesus is teaching his disciples a lesson about the importance of mission over convention. While I'm certain that Jesus had the heart of the Samaritan woman in mind, he also had a bigger, broader lesson to teach regarding the disciples' predisposition to *not see* people that their worldview told them are not of value. Frankly, the lesson is as important today as it was then.

In 2 Kings 17, we learn that Israel and Judah were not keeping the commandments of the Lord, so God sent the people of Israel away from their own land into Assyria. So the area would not be

depopulated, the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and they began to reside in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel. We learn that the new residents did not follow the ways of the Lord, so God sent lions among them, which killed some of them.

As a result, the king sent one of the priests who had been carried away from Samaria back into the land in order to teach them how to live in a way that would please the Lord. Interestingly, while they did learn to fear the Lord, they still served their own gods “according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away” (2 Kings 17:33).

Here is an interesting point. When the Jews came back to the land, the Samaritans did not leave. Instead, they inhabited the section between Israel and Judah and were loathed by the Jews as unwelcome immigrants. But they had been living in the land for around two hundred years, so as far as the Samaritans were concerned, the Jews were the immigrants. My point is that both groups should have exercised a bit of pause relative to who were the landowners. The Jews forgot that they were at least remigrants to the area. Even though the Samaritans considered themselves worshipers of the Jewish god, the Jews never accepted them; in fact, the Jews hated them. The Jews called them dogs and declared that “righteous” Jews would not walk among them.

The Appointment That Should Have Never Happened

Taking this context into consideration, it’s obvious that Jesus’ encounter with the woman at the well is an appointment that should have never happened. Jesus, who was a prominent Jewish rabbi, should have never walked through Samaria with his disciples. Furthermore, when Jesus stopped by the well to speak to a Samaritan woman, he was going way out on a limb.

EMBRACING THE NEW SAMARIA

Jesus sent the disciples into the Samaritan city to get food while he stayed out by the well. He knew that the disciples would have resisted his decision to talk to this woman, just as they resisted when women brought their children to be blessed by him. He had to get rid of the disciples for this conversation to happen.

A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.” For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, “Give Me a drink,” you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.

JOHN 4:7-10

The conversation between Jesus and the woman went on for a few more verses, but verse 10 is essentially the outline of their entire conversation. Allow me to break it down, since I’m amazed by the theology packed into this conversation.

1. First, Jesus clarifies the *what*: when he refers to “water,” he’s actually talking about the gift of God, the living water, which is eternal life.
2. Then he addresses the *who*: the source of the living water, the giver of eternal life, drawing attention to himself as the Messiah.
3. Finally, he refers to the *how*: in order to receive the gift of eternal life, you must ask the giver and he will give it to you.

In the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, you can see the wheels in her brain turning as she tries to work out the theology and figure out who Jesus is and how he fits into the story of God that she's been taught. In fact, she asks him for the "living water" before she even understands that he is the Savior. After he points out her sin and she comes to realize her need for the salvation he brings, she doesn't need to ask again. The work is done.

At this point, the disciples return from getting food in the city. We can only imagine the looks of judgment that the disciples give this woman as she talks with Jesus. She walks away from the conversation under the gaze of the judgmental disciples, but it doesn't matter. She is a transformed woman.

The woman left that conversation no longer afraid of people's judgments. It is reasonable to speculate that she may not have been welcome at the water wells inside the city because of her reputation; therefore, what she did next was remarkable. John 4:28-39 says: "The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men, 'Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did.'" Her testimony was simple. The people immediately went to see Jesus, not because he revealed her sin—everybody knew her sin—but because they saw how the woman was transformed.

Mission over Convention

Now here is where the real lesson begins. The disciples wonder why their beloved rabbi was speaking to a Samaritan woman, as it goes against every social and cultural norm that has been ingrained in them. They are completely unaware that Jesus has just transformed a person's life. They return from the city with chips, cookies, and ham sandwiches (okay, maybe not ham sandwiches), while the woman returns with more souls to transform. I believe the visible contrast we see there was intended.

In this passage we see Jesus crossing cultures and breaking down barriers. Jesus could tell that the disciples were surprised, maybe even disappointed, that he was engaging in an interaction that shouldn't have happened. In response, Jesus tells them, "Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (John 4:35, NIV).

My father-in-law was a farmer for most of his life in North Dakota. It was literally his job to look at the harvest. All farmers know that they have to be vigilant, and in North Dakota it is even more important to be quick because the ground freezes for many months out of the year. No one living in farm country should need to be told, "Open up your eyes and look at the fields," which makes this figure of speech even more profound. The disciples were missing something important and didn't even realize it. Jesus was instructing them to open their eyes and see. He was not talking about the physiological working of the eye but the cultural filters that obstructed the sight of the image made in the likeness of God.

The Process of Unlearning

There are several reasons—theological, sociological, cultural—why the disciples couldn't see what Jesus saw. Everything about their history and their theology had predisposed them to see a certain way. One key consideration was geography. Samaria was in their Promised Land. "*We* are the chosen people, and *they* are on our land." Furthermore, God had instructed his people to be separate from the cultures around them that worshiped other gods.

In spite of all this history, Jesus still instructed them to open their eyes and see the Samaritans as people also made in the image of God. Jesus was asking them to challenge conventional thinking, remove their filters, recalibrate their vision, and re-sort through

their cultural conventions and norms. His request is a shockingly tall order, overturning generations of rabbinic teaching and nationalistic pride.

The conventional wisdom of the day was leading to missional failure. The Abrahamic covenant called them to be a blessing to all nations. In both the Old and New Testaments, we read about instances when the Lord mandated that they love and accept the strangers in their land. The hate and resentment in their hearts could have resulted in them missing the opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission and the Great Commandment given to them.

Are we any better than the disciples? Do we have a point of view that causes us to overlook people? Come on, be honest!

Open Your Eyes and See

Before we can begin to engage the people around us, we must be willing to lift up our eyes and see. There have been significant demographic shifts in the last few decades (more on this in chapter 2), and how we view our neighbors will make or break our missional impact. We must see others as people made in the image of God—even a gift from God—to help us fulfill the mission of God to reach all people. Let me be clear: I am not saying that the New Samaria is a lost people who need to be saved. Of course, there are people of every nationality in our midst who don't yet know Jesus. But there are also some immigrants who come from parts of the world where Christianity is thriving, and they bring a spiritual vitality to immigrant churches in our community. Have you noticed? At the same time, however, majority-culture Christians need to be careful not to prioritize outreach to people who are culturally similar and forget about our neighbors who are different.

In order to rise up and see the New Samaria, we must do two things: (1) challenge our lenses with which we view the Kingdom

and (2) recalibrate our vision to see people as God sees them. To recalibrate means to recheck, or to bring realignment to a tool according to a true standard of reality. As Christian leaders, we will all agree that Jesus is the true standard by which we measure everything and by which we live our lives. We all agree that God sees all people as made in his image—in theory. But when push comes to shove, our vision is stilted by cultural, political, economic, nationalistic, racial, and theological biases. It's not always evil, it's just the way we are wired until someone challenges our conventional norms.

Convention and Norms

Humans navigate the world around us based on subconscious social and cultural norms. I think of it like the unseen code behind the word processor. Most of the time these norms are good and help our society function smoothly. Social norms are what ensure that, for example, when a person enters an elevator with you, they'll stand on the opposite side. (If they were to stand directly next to you while the rest of the elevator is empty, things would get uncomfortable really fast.) Cultural norms dictate whether you hug and kiss a person when you first meet them, or give them a handshake. Sometimes it takes traveling to another place with a different culture to realize that some of our norms are not universal.

A few months after my move from Laredo to Austin for college, I was invited to a wedding by a white friend. In Latino culture, weddings are a big deal. There's lots of food, dancing, and friends and family sharing life together. I was so excited to be invited! On the day of the wedding, they took us downstairs after the church ceremony and gave us fancy little triangle sandwiches and sugar mints. I was impressed. I thought, *This is really high class that they're giving us this food before they lead us to the room for dinner and dancing.* Then my heart sank as I started to see people

leaving the church. It was over! As it turns out, not all weddings are like Latino weddings. This is an example of discovering a cultural norm the hard way. For most of the people there, it was a happy event with nothing unusual about it. But it left me feeling lonely and confused. At my lowest point I even wondered if they were going somewhere to have the party without me!

Unfortunately, sometimes these social and cultural norms result in prejudices and biases against people who are different than us. For example, some people learned along the way that you shouldn't pass through certain neighborhoods because the people there are different and dangerous. Others come to accept certain smells and tastes as "normal," while those different from what you're used to come to be seen as "weird" or "smelly." We accepted those ideas as truth, and as we grew up, we continued to make unconscious decisions about who we associate with based on assumptions that we never thought to challenge. It begs the question: What happens when convention becomes malware? What happens when it becomes the enemy of mission?

The Two Harvests (Mind the Gap)

The harvest that the disciples had their eyes on was the only one they knew—their own people. This is the harvest Jesus alludes to when he says, "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest?'" (John 4:35). It's similar for us today. Oftentimes the people we reach by default are those we already associate with. They are friends and neighbors and coworkers. We go to barbecues together, we know what kind of food they like, we laugh at the same jokes, and we are comfortable entering into spiritual conversations with them. It is absolutely good and right to reach these people. It is part of our mission.

But who is in this second harvest? The Greek text here is very emphatic that there is a contrast between the two harvests. Jesus is

referring to this second harvest when he continues, “I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest” (John 4:35, NIV). This field that is ripe for harvest is the Samaritans. The Jews didn’t cultivate them. They didn’t water them. They didn’t even like them. But Jesus makes it clear that others tilled the Gentile mission field that he is now asking them to see, accept, and consider as God’s children.

This passage in John 4 contains a prophetic message for us today. We live in what I call the “New Samaria,” a place in which the second harvest is right in front of us. In the United States, I call us “Samericans,” but the same idea applies no matter where you live. The Samaritans of today are the people living among us who have been marginalized, ignored, treated unjustly, or looked down upon. Oftentimes they are immigrants from other countries who are viewed as strangers and sometimes made to believe they are not welcomed here. We are not familiar with their customs, or we don’t understand their language. Their second- and third-generation offspring were born here, but they are still viewed as “other” because of cultural differences or the color of their skin. Their foods smell funny to us, and we don’t know how to dance to their music. Whether our uncomfortable thoughts toward them are conscious or subconscious, our lack of association with them speaks volumes about our respect (or lack thereof) for them. This might be hard to hear for some, but if we are being honest with ourselves, we need to admit that we all have biases against people who are different than us. It will be difficult to move forward if we can’t admit that this is true for all of us.

One time at a large national conference I was eating lunch with a group of Hispanic leaders. After lunch we were walking out of the cafeteria when one of the majority-culture leaders called to one of our Hispanic leaders and asked if he could please clean off the table so they could continue their conversation without the table

mess. The whole Hispanic team pitched in to clean off the table and left without saying anything. It's interesting that this leader couldn't conceive of a Hispanic person being there without table-cleaning responsibilities.

It was a very unfortunate mistake, but there really were fewer than twenty ethnic minority leaders compared to hundreds of majority-culture folk. The Hispanic leaders were gracious and took it in good humor, but this story points out the need to confront our biases head-on and unlearn the stereotypes that have been engrained in us. Case in point: Don't presume that because there is an ethnic minority/immigrant person around, they are the "help."

Ethnic and cultural diversity is a blessing that is here to stay, so we should move forward with a sense of urgency. In John 4, Jesus is not asking us to abandon the harvest we are familiar with, but he is saying that a bit of intentionality (as he demonstrated with the Samaritan woman) can pay huge dividends. He is saying that there is another mission in the margins that he cares for and is urging us to "mind the gap."

The Missional Matrix

Anyone involved in international church missions might be tempted to argue that we as a church *are* reaching people who are different than us by sending missionaries all over the globe to share the Good News. Of course, this work is good, and I'm not encouraging us to abandon this part of the mission. There is a place for it. But we also need to recognize that we don't have to go very far in order to find people who are different than us here.

A team I worked with created a graphic that I've adapted to help us understand where people fall on a matrix of near and far, similar and different. It's called the Missional Matrix. If our mission is to reach *all* people, we need to recognize where we have excelled and where we have fallen short.

MISSIONAL MATRIX



As you can see above, there are four areas of evangelistic focus, all of which fall along the matrix of either similar or different, near or far. The top left quadrant is where global missions would fall—focusing on those who are different and far. The bottom left quadrant is where church planting falls—focusing on people who are culturally similar but far from us. The bottom right quadrant is where our local church work falls—focusing on people who are culturally similar and near. All three of these are important and included in our mission as Christians. However, the area I have chosen to focus on in this book is in the top right quadrant—the area that focuses on people who are different and near, the place

I refer to as “the New Samaria.” This is the area that I believe our church is failing to reach, the people that God is calling us to open our eyes and see.

American Missional Gap

In America we have focused so much on reaching the harvest that we can see—those people who are similar to us—that we have missed the second harvest. We have become excellent at reaching Americans near and like us by creating trainings and conferences aimed at reaching our lost comrades, as well prioritizing those who are far and different by consistently funding and sending people from the West to “exotic” locales with the gospel. Subsequently, we are missing the opportunity to reach the Samaritans in our midst—the immigrants, refugees, the poor, ethnic minorities, the people who have been deemed invisible or “surplus population.”

To be clear: I am not against missions to people who are far away and different, but we who do remain must live as missionaries in our own country. The stakes of failing to reach the ends of the earth are high if our church ceases to be salty in its own backyard. It calls into question what we have to offer the world if we can’t even reach the “other” in our own neighborhoods.

Interestingly, Jesus did not go into long conversations about the disciples’ personal preference, prejudice, privilege, and misogyny, though they certainly played a prominent role in their dismissal of the woman at the well. Instead, Jesus demonstrated what a man on mission with the Father looks like—he engaged in transformational work. His attitude was juxtaposed to the disciples being off mission: They were self-sabotaging their ministry, overlooking a key future harvest, and trivializing the mission of God.

This should truly grip our hearts. Jesus commanded them to “see” because the souls of valuable human lives depend on it. In fact, the vitality of the church depended on them reaching all

nations and peoples. Just as Jesus demonstrated what true mission looks like, so must we engage in this transformational work. But we must also be vocal about why this work is important. While some of us may get uncomfortable with conversations about prejudice, privilege, and preference (I will refer to these as P3), we as the family of God need to talk about them more. (More on this in chapter 3.)

Every summer, adults and youth board planes and fly to other countries for short-term mission trips. Their objective is to do their part in living out the Great Commission, sharing the gospel “to the ends of the earth”—and hopefully having a cross-cultural experience that impacts their worldview. Many of us have experienced trips like this; it has been part of the evangelical experience for decades. This movement toward short-term missions began in the 1960s and grew dramatically in the 1980s and 1990s. Nowadays, it is predicted that about two million Americans participate in short-term mission trips every year.³ Unfortunately, however, after returning home, many people abandon the missionary mindset and return to their comfort zones.

I have been asked many times by people in the margins why it is that many Christians feel the need to fly across the globe to interact with people groups that can be found on the other side of our city! For example, according to the Joshua Project there are eighty-five people groups technically defined as “unreached” here in the United States.⁴ With the movement of people groups being as prevalent as it is today, a similar phenomenon can be seen in other mission-sending countries as well.

My contention is that the way the church has historically viewed missionary work may not be as effective today. I feel particularly fervent about changing the church’s approach toward missionary work because we open ourselves up to criticism when we export a strategy that may not even work in our own country. There

needs to be a healthy synergy between home and foreign mission work. The example we give to other sending countries must have integrity. The mandate in Acts 1:8 is no longer a geographical line, from here to “there.” The people from “there” are here, and we need to adjust our paradigm accordingly. We still need to reach the greater world; however, today, chunks of that greater world live in our neighborhoods. Whether through migration, immigration, education, or work opportunities, God has brought the world to us. I believe God is calling us to open our eyes and see. Once we recalibrate our vision, we will begin to see our neighborhoods as a new kind of mission field.

It’s easy in today’s cultural context to conflate immigrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities with law and politics, thus viewing this topic through a political filter. While politics and government do play an important part in ensuring justice for the oppressed, I don’t believe that politics should be our primary filter. Here in the United States, for example, the question for many Christians becomes more about who should be in this country, who shouldn’t be, national security, and which group wields more control, rather than seeing all people in God’s image. It pains me when people believe the solution lies with one political party over another. No political system is perfect. Politics is the process by which a society actualizes its ideals, and as such it is almost by necessity always in flux. Therefore, politics makes for an unreliable filter through which to reliably discern current cultural reality. As Christians, our primary filter when looking at these issues should always be *mission*, not politics. It is our job to speak into it with compassion and justice at the forefront of our minds.

I urge us to keep the mission clear in our minds. Putting mission first means we may well be misunderstood, viewed as disloyal, or even attacked by those who make loyalty to a political party primary. Be prepared. Our allegiance must be to our King and his

mission. If we truly want to see transformed people and communities in our midst, we must keep the GC3, which I mentioned in the book's introduction, top of mind: the Great Commandment and the Great Commission help build the Great Community.

I believe many of you reading this book have seen the need for holding the Great Commission and the Great Commandment in balance in order to see great transformation. Too often lay Christians are afraid to challenge the system. We think that bigger and greater people have this all figured out. If this is you, be courageous enough to speak up when you see the vulnerable being ignored or taken advantage of! In the book *The Leadership Challenge*, Kouzes and Posner say this about the importance of challenging: "Challenge is the crucible for greatness. Every single personal-best leadership case involved a change from the status quo. Not one person achieved a personal best by keeping things the same. Regardless of the specifics, they all involved overcoming adversity and embracing opportunities to grow, innovate, and improve."⁵

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My actual reason for loving the story of Ebenezer Scrooge is because of his transformation from an aging, lonely man to a generous, joyous soul who, with the time he had left, more than made up for his years of selfishness by giving of himself for the benefit of humanity. In order to begin to love others, he first had to open his eyes and see them.

Before we can begin to love our diverse communities, we must first see the community the way God sees it. If we are not even willing to look, how can we love? It starts by obeying the order to see the New Samaritan mission field and recalibrating ministry paradigms to make room for this new harvest. Let us see ourselves,

see the New Samaria, see the will of God, and join him on the road to transformation.

REFLECTION

Consecrating Prayer: Lord, help me open my eyes to see what you want me to see. Even if I can't do anything about it now, please let me see what you see.

Head Work: If you were to have the angels of Christmas past, present, and future visit you in one night, what would they reveal about your life among the poor and the vulnerable?

Heart Work: Has there been a time when the Spirit convicted you to see or do something for a stranger, and you quickly quashed the prompting of God?

Hands Work: When God puts someone in your path who is from a different culture or socioeconomic level than you, strike up a casual conversation and just spend five minutes listening to them. Learn something about their family and their lives in the community. Later when you are spending time in prayer, remember them by name.

RESOURCES

- Book Suggestions: *The Next Evangelicalism* by Soong-Chan Rah; *Strangers Next Door* by J. D. Payne; *The God Who Sees* by Karen Gonzalez; *The Dangerous Act of Loving Your Neighbor* by Mark Labberton