

# New Roots Review

August 2019 Edition

*Longing for the Old Days.?* by Fred Wilgenburg



**NEW ROOTS  
MINISTRY**

Why would pastors, originally of countries where they faced civil war and persecution, or life in refugee camps, describe leading church as more difficult in the US than in their former countries?

We live in a wonderful country. Most new Americans would agree with that assessment of the US—a robust economy, money to help loved ones still in other countries, a good education. Still, my pastor friends say leading church, especially in regards to seeing spiritual and numerical growth, is more difficult in the US. For one thing, Americans are typically busier than people in other countries. Former refugees often work six days per week in the US, while in refugee camps, time was plentiful. Therefore, they enjoyed gathering together for worship and Bible learning. Now, if Sunday is their only day off, including for the pastors who typically work full-time jobs besides volunteering as pastors, it's difficult to carve out quality time with God and His people.

Achieving church growth is also difficult as there is becoming a lack of focus on “making disciples of all nations” within American churches. Yes, part of this is due to congregants’ lack of time to do evangelism. But, it also seems to be part of the American church culture.....

Much of the rest of this article has come from visits with my ministry colleague, Aaron Myers. Aaron served as a missionary in Turkey for five years. Following that, he is both an area coordinator of [www.CrescentProject.org](http://www.CrescentProject.org), and a mission mobilizer for [www.Multiply.net](http://www.Multiply.net). I often turn to Aaron for discipleship expertise.

Aaron makes some interesting points about the American Church, a church that he, like many of us, is part of, and which he loves. For one thing, the American Church has much wealth, so in times of famine or weather-related tragedies around the world, or in providing toward Gospel mission needs, its financial generosity is vital. Beyond that, there are some interesting points about the American Church which are cause for concern, including for my pastor friends whose congregations are becoming “American.”

For many years, the American Church was seemingly in a good place. Since the US's beginning, there has been constitutionally-protected freedom of religion. Up until 1962, many public schools had school-sponsored Christian prayer each day. In 1962, the Supreme Court ruled against school-sponsored prayer in keeping with the First Amendment. Still, students could pray voluntarily and silently. When we Christians bemoan public prayer being pushed out of schools, we might not realize that the freedom of religion that we have been blessed with has been an anomaly for the Church. More common in most places has been the persecution of Christians. Most of the original disciples of Jesus became martyrs for their faith. Many of the New Testament letters were written to churches facing persecution. During the —>



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Continued... early church, believers were executed and tortured for their faith, as described in Hebrews 11.

It's during times of extreme hardship that the Church has often grown. Christianity is experiencing fast growth in Iran, even though house churches are hunted down and conversion to Jesus is seen as an action against national security (CBN News, August 2017, "Christianity is Rapidly Growing in Iran"—<http://bit.ly/2KRZUZZ>). Despite widespread persecution and re-education programs, China may become the world's most Christian nation in 15 years (The Telegraph, August 16, 2019, "China on course to become 'world's most Christian

nation' within 15 years"—<http://bit.ly/2HnWADX>). Afghanistan is seeing many come to Christ. This is in spite of the fact that "if someone leaves Islam and converts to another religion, he or she can be executed. The Afghan church is completely underground." (Christian Headlines, "Afghanistan: Growing Number of Christians Causing Unease Among Muslim Leaders"—<http://bit.ly/2NotrMF>).

Jesus told His disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it" (Matthew 16:24-25). Today, in many countries, believers live that, not praying for reprieve from persecution, but to stay the journey. The Apostle Paul encouraged, "we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; character, hope...." (Romans 5:3-4).

Back to my pastor friends who are originally of third-world and developing countries, part of their difficulty in leading their congregations now in the US is that they are becoming "American-ized." American churches are used to freedoms, and of having some honor in society. "Take up your cross" can seem foreign. Meanwhile, the Church is growing worldwide, but where? Not in the US. Rather, it's growing in places of suffering, where gathering with other believers is special, partly because it is risky, and where the Good News about our God of grace, peace, and refuge is given away passionately as the only thing of real, lasting value.

Is suffering necessary in becoming an effective disciple maker? Perhaps not, but Aaron Myers would love to seek to facilitate people in rediscovering our Gospel worth suffering for, including through simple, practical discipleship training. We at New Roots Ministry would also be supportive in that. Check out Aaron's ministry at <https://www.everywhere2everywhere.org>, for helpful resource information, and for communicating with him.

**What is New Roots Ministry?**  
It's "a springboard for immigrants & their churches." This is done through workplace chaplaincy (both as Fred is chaplain for 17 hours/week at Smithfield Foods & as we train & place bi-lingual chaplains on commercial farms), through Timothy Leadership Training, through hosting special educational events, through empowering refugee/immigrant pastors, leaders, and their churches, through offering unique Service Opportunities—serve in, or visit, stores owned by refugees or immigrants, then hear their stories, and through helping people navigate the American system and strategically achieve their goals, like education.

Plans are being made to offer another educational workshop on a Saturday, this Fall. Stay-tuned to [Facebook.com/SFNewRoots](https://www.facebook.com/SFNewRoots) OR [www.sfnewroots.com](http://www.sfnewroots.com), as details will come out in the next few weeks. **It will be fun, it will have food, it will be free, and it will be inspirational!**