

New Roots Review

The Nations Have Come to Us.?! by Fred Wilgenburg

April 2026

“It is what it is” is a phrase that I have disliked. Do you hear it quite often too? It means acknowledging something that is negative but that you cannot change, and accepting unpleasant circumstances rather than fighting them. Similar phrases are “that’s life,” “whatever happens, happens,” and “so be it.”

I’ve especially disliked “it is what it is” because the words haven’t made sense to me. But its meaning hit me recently, with more of a sense of acceptance. Let me explain: I admit I can be obsessed with world news and politics, tapping news apps on my phone, and clicking back and forth between news channels on the TV. It can get me uptight because it is largely about difficult events and hardships for people, which I cannot actively impact. Added to that, New Roots Ministry is about working with immigrants from troubled places, like Sudan, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, and others. Our friends lament to us about the awful conditions that their left-behind loved ones continue to live within. And add to that, longtime Americans can sometimes seem indifferent, cold, or overly simplistic about people’s extreme difficulties—understandable as they are not hanging out with the same people we are. I get frustrated. But, “it is what it is!” Often, beyond prayer, there’s not much to do for many difficult things.

Sometimes associated with “it is what it is,” is theologian Reinhold Niebuhr’s Serenity Prayer: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” It’s a prayer often used by people in recovery programs. Similar to “it is what it is,” is the end of the first phrase: “to accept the things I cannot change.” But then, so we are not stuck in the negative, the prayer can be helpful as it reminds us that there also are some things we can positively change. Most importantly then, the prayer addresses God, the ultimate giver of answers and peace.

In light of the above paragraph, two guys who inspire me are Dawit and Moses. They are ethnically Kunama, therefore originally from the country of Eritrea. Eritrea became an independent country in 1993, separating from Ethiopia after years of conflict. The Kunama people have been persecuted much by the Eritrean government and military, which are led mostly by Tigrinya people. Most Kunama people have had to leave as refugees, with many coming to Sioux Falls. Dawit left on his own as a young man in 1999, moving to neighboring Sudan. He lived there for 6 years, before moving into a refugee camp in Ethiopia for 2 years, and then coming to the US. In 2010, Dawit experienced a reawakening of faith in God, which has carried him through being uprooted and apart from family. Dawit also received God’s call to form a Kunama congregation, and to actively evangelize; he shares the Gospel with almost anybody he meets. After 5 years in Sioux Falls, in 2019, Dawit, who had been alone and away from family for 20 years, was blessed to get married. Much of Dawit’s life included unchangeable, difficult circumstances. But, he still could have much positive impact on certain areas, so he has.

Moses was 5 years old when he and his family left Eritrea as refugees to Ethiopia. After 10 years of survivable, but difficult conditions in the UN refugee camp, Moses, his 4 brothers, and his mom, were able to leave to the US, settling in Sioux Falls. For various reasons, his dad could not leave with them. They stayed in regular contact with him for 7 years before he died in Ethiopia. Moses focused on his education, finishing college, and then working at a hospital as a community outreach worker for immigrants, as well as developing a videography business. In addition, he and his wife, Phusuda, originally from Thailand and —>



**NEW ROOTS
MINISTRY**



People are newly entering personal relationships with God all the time, in our case, especially from other religious backgrounds. A big need of the Church is having disciples interested in walking with new believers.



Idris family: Moses, Phusuda, & baby Mateo.

(continued...)

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of a difficult background, have started Light for the Next Generation. It's about uplifting underserved youth by providing holistic development and discipleship through sports, arts, and educational programs. Among other things, presently this involves 6 sponsored soccer teams. As well, Moses has begun Shine Your Light 365 podcast, which is a platform to share about identity and faith in Jesus, becoming more fruitful and Christ-like everyday, and shining our God given light in the world. Like Dawit, so for Moses and Phusuda, some unfortunate things in their lives could not be changed, but that did not stop them from profoundly impacting areas they could.

Jesus set the best example for us of carrying a sense of hope, while being in difficult, seemingly unchangeable situations: "... for the joy set before him he (Jesus) endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:2-3). Jesus had a most difficult mission to accomplish, while knowing what He would achieve—the opportunity for salvation for us lost ones and then being at the right hand of his Father. He then did it. Jesus' original disciples were good examples, as well. As things became increasingly difficult, many deserted Jesus. He then said to the Twelve: "You do not want to leave, too, do you?" Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). Though the path was increasingly dangerous, and would end in martyrdom for most of them, it offered fulfillment and eternal peace, so that's how they went.

Here's one last example of the truth, in part, that "it is what it is," but that there's also often an upside. My predecessor, Carl Bruxvoort, began New Roots Ministry in 2007, frequently proclaiming: "the nations have come to us!" One large group that has come since the early 1990s has been Somali people immigrating especially to Minneapolis, Minnesota. The original Somalis left a dangerous, troubled country, as refugees. A refugee receives a green card a few months after arrival, and then 5 years later, they are eligible to become a citizen. There are now 80,000+ Somali Americans in Minneapolis, and several thousand more in cities in the surrounding region, including Sioux Falls. 95%+ of Somalis identify as Muslim. As many of us know, Somalis were in the news several months ago as some large-scale fraudulent crimes were committed by a few people in their people group. That has given them much stigma, and they painfully feel it. Since then, I have heard many, including some of my siblings in faith, upset about Somalis, because many of them receive some government assistance, because of their strong Muslim identity, because many of them do not seem to integrate well into American culture, and because of the fraud committed. Well, "it is what it is," in that, most of them are legally here, and they are likely to stay. How would God want us to respond? God the Father said in Leviticus 19:33-34, "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native born....for you were aliens in Egypt." God the Son, in Matthew 25:35,43, teaches us to invite the stranger in. I think God would likely favor Carl Bruxvoort's attitude: "The nations have come to us!" That's not speaking against the government having immigration laws and good administration, but an encouragement for us, the Church, to answer God's call to rise up and do what we can—being a "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18), including teaching and exemplifying Good News and better ways. **Please reach out if you would like ideas for doing that.**

What is New Roots Ministry?
It "equips immigrants & engages the local church." This is done through workplace chaplaincy (we provide chaplaincy at Smithfield Foods & we train & place bi-lingual chaplains on commercial farms), through Timothy Leadership Training, through hosting special educational events, through empowering immigrant pastors, leaders, and their churches, through offering unique Service Opportunities—serve in, or visit, stores owned by new Americans, then hear their stories, through helping people navigate the American system and achieve their goals, like education, through driver training for immigrants, through Everyday-Ambassadors Practicum, and through English training.



Our liaison, Ranee, practicing English with Saida, who originally became acquainted with us through our driver training program.