



Episode 35: What is Diaspora Ministry? – David S

David S has served with international students for over 25 years, reaching and discipling Chinese students in the United States for the past 18 years with OMF International. He is currently the Director of OMF's Diaspora Returnee Ministries Team in North America. He and his wife Lynn live in Denver Colorado and he has five children.

Tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to be passionate about missions.

- I was raised in a Christian home, in fact, I was the son of a pastor, but I didn't really come to know the Lord until I was twenty-four. It was shortly after that, that my wife and I began to volunteer at our local church with international students. Through this we began to see how God was bringing students to the United States that were not only interested in friendship but also interested in the Gospel.
- We later took the Perspectives course and that was something that the Lord used very powerfully to show me as a relatively new Christian that the Great Commission was not a New Testament afterthought but that God's heart has been for the nations from the very beginning, all the way through scripture.
- To listen to our episode on the Perspectives course, visit www.globalmissionspodcast.com/014

Let's start with a definition – what does this word 'diaspora' mean?

- It's a Greek word that shows up in the New Testament several times. Most notably it is used in 1 Peter 1:1, where he says that the letter is written to God's elect, scattered through Asia Minor. The term scattered is the term diaspora.
- In James 1:1, we see it again when he says the letter is written to the 12 tribes scattered among the nations.
- If you break it down, *dia* means 'across', as in the word diameter and *spora* means 'to spread or scatter'
- Originally the term was used in reference to the Jewish diaspora, but more recently it has been used for any people group living outside their homelands.

So an example of a modern diaspora would be?

- Well, there are so many!
- I just read that Vancouver is the second largest Sikh city in the world, so there's an example of a diaspora.



- Here in Denver, we have over 30,000 Ethiopians who are living here.
- As you probably know, Toronto is considered to be one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world with over 50% of the population having been born outside of Canada.

As we think about diaspora communities, how do these communities fit into a missions strategy to bring the Gospel to Unreached People?

- As a sending agency we have had more and more churches asking us why we are sending people to Southeast Asia when we have Southeast Asians living here among us.
- I believe that diaspora ministries is an integral part of what God is doing in the world to reveal himself to the nations.
- God has always worked through movements of people, starting back at the Tower of Babel – when he scatters people, he always does it to re-gathering people to himself. We see that in exiles recounted in the Old Testament.
- We no longer have to cross oceans to engage with the unreached but now we can cross our streets and interact with people from all around the world.
- One of the big challenges is that it requires all Christians to think like missionaries and to be willing to cross cultures for the sake of the Gospel.

Can you give us an example of where diaspora ministry is being very effective?

- In Diaspora Returnee Ministries, we focus on diaspora populations who plan to return to their home countries – we’re really focused on the Japanese, the Chinese and the Thai. We desire to disciple them and teach them and prepare them return to their home countries to make disciples of their own people.
- We have seen some exciting things. Japan is one of the least reached nations on the earth and yet many young Japanese are coming to Christ while overseas and they are going home and having opportunities to share Christ with their family and friends.
- One of the events that has been an annual event for the last few years is a gathering of the returnees to Japan to help them better engage with the Japanese church.
- The sad reality is that of the thousands of international students who come to Christ overseas and return to their home countries, something like 80% of those so-called Christians will fall off the radar. They may still know Christ but they aren’t having an influence for Christ because they didn’t return well.



How can North American churches that have international students among or near them, what are some ways the church can participate in or support diaspora ministries?

- Wherever there are international students there are usually churches or para-church organizations that are focused on international students. There are all kinds of ways to reach out – to host them when they first arrive and help them to settle into the new culture. Many times students are interested in improving their English through a conversation partner.
- There may be organizations such as International Student Ministries Canada that you could look into – that would be a good starting place.
- This isn't just limited to students. Offering hospitality to refugees and other immigrants is a great ministry.
- Something like 85% of international students will not be invited into a North American's home during the course of their studies in North America.
- In Leviticus 19:33-34 (NIV), God says - *“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”*
- I think we really have a responsibility to reach out to the stranger in our midst and extend hospitality. It's not difficult, it can be quite exciting. It does require some cross cultural training but the beauty of this kind of cross-cultural contact is that the people who have come to North America are making the effort to bridge the gap. They aren't expecting us to act like people from their own culture – there is a meeting in the middle.
- It's a ministry that families can do together.
- Some churches have chosen to offer English-as-a-Second-Language classes. To learn more about that, listen to our interview with a ministry called [Love New Canadians](#).

You mentioned how international students who become Christians while they are in North America have trouble transitioning back to the church in their home country. Is there anything you would recommend to help North Americans who engage in diaspora ministry or international student ministries, things they can do to help with this adjustment?

- In North America, we have Japanese churches and Chinese churches and working together with other ethnic churches can be helpful. You might want to consider introducing a Chinese student to a Chinese church. By introducing someone to Christians from their home countries and opportunities to worship and be disciple in their own culture, you mitigate a lot of issues related to their return to their home country.
- One thing we often recommend is that we need to introduce these young Christians to different flavours of Christian expression so that they see there are different ways to worship Christ and expressing our faith in Christ. This will also help them in their transition to a local church in their home country.



If there is someone in a church group, are there resources you'd recommend to a church that would like to launch ministries for international students or other diaspora groups?

- [Thinking Outside the Window](#) – Yaw Perbi - a helpful look at diaspora ministry opportunities.
- [Strangers Next Door](#) – JD Payne
- [Crossing Cultures with Jesus](#) – Katie J. Rawson great insights on how to share the gospel cross culturally.

If someone would like to learn more from you, how might they contact you?

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