



**DYNAMIC GOSPEL  
NEW EUROPE**

CONVERSATION  
AND GATHERING

# October 2021 Conversation

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# Welcome

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Welcome to the October 2021 Lausanne Europe Conversation page.

The news during the month of August was dominated by events in Afghanistan. Some Afghan refugees have already arrived in Europe and many more may do so in the months and years ahead, not to mention those who are already here. Many of them are Muslims so this month's Conversation seemed a good time to look at both the issue of Islam in Europe and the broader issue of Refugees.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email us at [conversation@lausanneeurope.org](mailto:conversation@lausanneeurope.org)

And if you are just starting your Impact Group, or are confused about what they are about, then check out the introduction pages to the [Conversation](#) and [Impact Groups](#) to find out more.

# Instructions

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## 1. Introductions and Prayer

Give time for everyone to introduce themselves if this is your first Impact Group. Ask someone to pray that God would speak to us as we meet together.

## 2. Muslims in Europe and the Response of the Church

The October Conversation features an article by Bert de Ruiter, a consultant in Christian-Muslim relations. His article encourages us to understand the reality of Islam in Europe today and to consider our attitudes towards Muslims. As he writes, “The presence of Islam in Europe should be high on the agenda of the Church in Europe”, so it is a necessary part of the Lausanne Europe Conversation.

After reading Bert de Ruiter’s article we would like you to discuss the following questions together:

1. Bert de Ruiter suggests that Islamophobia is common among European Christians and this negative attitude is impacting our ability to communicate the gospel. Do you agree and, if so, what should we do about it?
2. What do you know about the Muslims who live in your locality? Do you know where they are from and which branch of Islam they are part of? What might be the benefit of hearing their stories?
3. How might you develop “a compassionate heart, an informed mind, an involved hand, and a witnessing tongue”, for the growing numbers of Muslims in Europe today?
4. Were there any other parts of the article that you found particularly insightful or challenging?

### 3. Podcast on Refugees in Europe: Finding Christ in the Chaos

This month's Conversation includes a short podcast interview with Vimal Vimalasakaran who works with refugees in South West Germany. With the prospect of many more refugees arriving in Europe from Afghanistan in the coming months, we need to reflect on this issue again. In the podcast, we will hear something of Vimal's story as a refugee from Sri Lanka, and how God is working in the chaos of the refugee crisis to bring about His purposes in Europe. Make sure you listen to the podcast and consider the questions before you meet in your Impact Group.

After listening to the podcast interview, we would now like you to discuss in your Impact Group the following questions:

1. Vimal talks about his perspective of sharing life with refugees, not "just" helping them. Do you find this perspective challenging? Do you agree that "Europeans don't like to be helped"? Do you have experiences from sharing life with refugees (or other

groups in need) that might be worth sharing in your Impact Group?

2. Vimal really emphasised the importance of the church saying it was "the best place for taking care of refugees". Why do you think he says that?
3. In the podcast Vimal talks about how God is using chaos for the re-evangelization of Europe. Do you see examples of this happening in your city/country?
4. How might you and your local church/community prepare for, and engage, in the potential arrival of many more refugees in the months to come?

For more information on how Christians and churches can respond to this issue:

EEA REFUGEE CAMPAIGN

## 4. Scripture

Please prepare in reading the whole letter to the Philippians, all 4 chapters through the lens of: **EVANGELISM AND CHRISTIAN MISSION.**

### **Taking the gospel to our local context and beyond.**

Please pray before you start reading that the Holy Spirit will guide you to learn new things.

Take notes so that you can summarize the conclusions of your Impact Group in the Comments section below.

1. **OBSERVATION:** Concerning this month's theme: **Evangelism and Christian Mission.** Is there anything that stood out to you?
2. **INTERPRETATION:** What do you think is the **main idea** in Paul's mind around this theme? Please share.
3. **APPLICATION:** What are the **implications** for us today as we read these words? Is there anything you can **apply** to your local context? What about Europe?

## 5. Prayer

Always make sure that you leave enough time to pray together every time you meet. Here are the prayer points for this month's Conversation:

1. Pray for God's healing (physical, emotional, mental, psychological) for the Refugees from the traumas of fear, deprivation, loss, and abuse they may have encountered in their journey seeking safety.
2. Pray for the Holy Spirit to spur us as nations, communities, and individuals to see Refugees as our brothers and sisters, and to welcome them with joy while responding to their needs for food, shelter, clothing, and love.
3. Pray that God will give us eyes of love and compassion so that we may see grace instead of threat when responding to the presence of Muslims in Europe. Pray that we may respond with:
  - a compassionate heart
  - an informed mind

- an involved hand
  - a witnessing tongue
4. Pray for God to give us knowledge and wisdom on how best to walk alongside our Muslim brothers and sisters as we embody the attitude of God's self-giving love.

## **6. Make Your Contribution to the Conversation**

We really want to hear back from your Impact Group after each session. Please find a few minutes to summarise what you hear from God, the highlights of the discussion, and any questions that were raised, in the comments box immediately below.

[GO TO THE CONVERSATION](#)

# Muslims in Europe and the Response of the Church

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By Bert de Ruiter

[\*Go to the article online\*](#)

How should the church in Europe respond to the growing visible presence of Muslims in our continent? I suggest in a fourfold way, with i. a compassionate heart; ii. an informed mind; iii. an involved hand; and iv. a witnessing tongue. Nevertheless, before we seek to touch the hearts of our Muslim friends with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we need to honestly look at our own hearts.

## **Fear of Eurabia and its consequences**

The growing visible presence of Muslims in Europe is a cause of concern to many Europeans, including Christians. There are many people across Europe who fear the Islamization of Europe. They believe that Islam is considered a problem or an obstacle to modernization and point out that the tense relationship between Islam

and Europe is a clash of civilizations. Others state that Islam is hostile to and incompatible with the values of the western world and argue that key European values, e.g. secularism, freedom of speech and security, are threatened by the presence of Muslims in Europe.

Some write that the presence of a substantial number of Muslims in Europe is a deliberate strategy to make sure that Muslims will form a demographic majority within a few generations, in order to impose their shari'a law on this continent.

Islam's progress in establishing itself in Europe continues to be a difficult phenomenon to accept. European societies essentially have a negative response to the

growing visibility of Islam in their midst. An Islamophobic attitude continues to remain strong in Europe and is expressed in public with increasing frequency. Islamophobic attitudes can also be found among Christians and who seem to be moulded by the societies in which they live.

***“Islamophobic attitudes remain strong in Europe... unfortunately Churches and Christians often share this negative sentiment”***

These negative sentiments have several consequences. Firstly, it leads to a marginalization, discrimination, and exclusion of Muslims in finding housing, jobs or internships; and secondly it contributes to growing xenophobia and resurgent nationalism.

Unfortunately, often Churches and Christians share the negative sentiment that permeates the societies they are part of. This might be one of the reasons why many of them are not interested to look more closely at what actually takes place within the Muslim communities across Europe.

## **Phases of Relations between Islam and Europe**

When we look at the relationship between Islam and Europe in history, we can identify several phases. A long **first phase**, lasting for at least the first ten centuries of the history of Islam, was one of major conflicts, symbolized by the Crusades. The **second phase** can be seen historic waves of Islam in Europe that have left an imprint on Europe till the present day, such as: the Islamic civilization in Iberia, the Muslim Tatars in the northern Slav regions; the Ottoman Empire. In the **third phase**, we see European dominance of Islamic lands, through colonialism and economic globalization. In the **fourth phase**, beginning in the 1950s and 1960s Islam began to spread in Europe through migration of first-generation immigrants coming from former colonies and labour migrants in response to European demand. In the **fifth phase** we see an increasing indigenization of Islam in Europe. The result of this is the formation of a European Islam, with its own pronounced identity different from that of Arabic Islam or that of countries of origin. This can be considered the **sixth phase**.

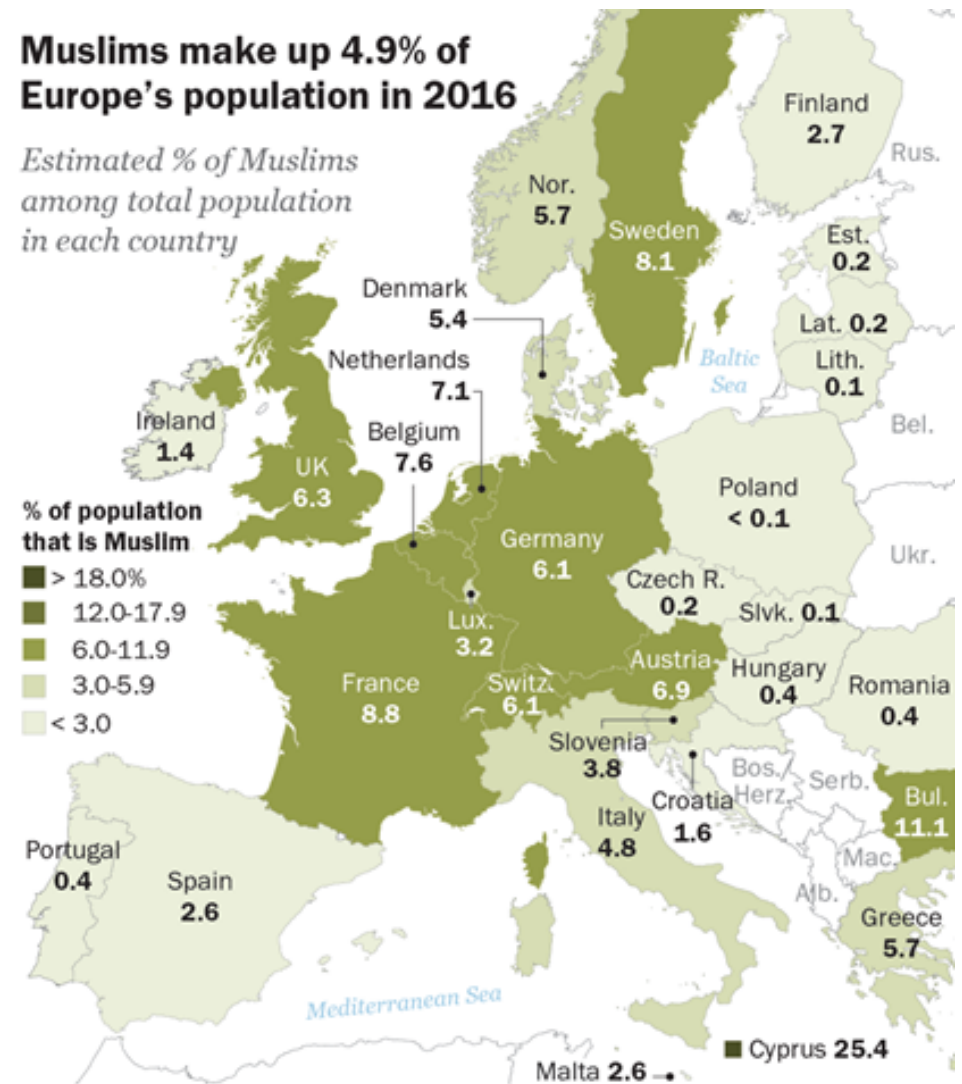
Today, most European countries find themselves somewhere between the fourth and fifth phases and in

some countries we see the development of the sixth phase. I see three trends among Muslims in Europe, namely i. immigrants have become citizens; ii. Islam is being revitalized in the Balkans and Russia; iii. Islam in Europe is not a monolithic entity but expresses itself in a variety of ways.

Generally speaking Muslims in Europe are urbanized, young, economically less well off and diverse.

The number of Muslims in Europe is expected to continue to grow from about 44 million now (6% of the population) to 58 million by 2030 (8% of the population). Depending on future migration, the number of Muslims in Europe in 2050 might be as high as 75 million (14% of the total population).

It is important to be careful in using demographical statistics. Statistics often do not give any indication of the religious commitment, beliefs and practices of a person. Some believe that only a third of all Muslims in Europe actively practice their Islamic faith.



Source: Pew Research Centre Report, 29 Nov 2017

## **Gradual Europeanization of Muslim theology and practices**

I see several changes taking place within Islam in Europe.

Regarding structure I see an institutionalizing of Islam in Europe with the establishment of National Islamic Councils; the emergence of Muslim political and civic leaders; the formation of organizations, such as associations, schools, mosques; the westernization of mosques and the democratization of religious authority, where 'cyber imams' compete with mosque imams.

This institutionalization of Islam in Europe is a complex issue and not completed. Governments in North Africa, Turkey and Middle East are still a highly influential force on Islam in Europe. There are still a large number of mosques that are foreign-run and foreign-staffed. There is still a big need to educate imams in Europe and to develop domestic sources of financing for Islamic institutions.

Regarding practice, I see an individualization of Islamic religious beliefs and practices. It is an Islam where the believer decides autonomously which elements of Islam (s)he considers to be binding or not. The individualization expresses itself in the following ways: the development of

an Islamic Youth Culture; decreasing influence of traditional law schools; the development of European Fatwahs; the organization of slaughter during the feast of sacrifice and growing diversity in religious practice and convictions among Muslims.

***"Islam in Europe should be higher on the agenda of the Church... What happens to Europe and Islam is not something the Church can ignore"***

The outcome of this individualization of Islamic faith and practices does not automatically mean a decline in religious practice, nor a liberalization of Islam, although some of this is happening. It sometimes leads to a critical attitude among second-generation Muslims towards the Islam of their parents and religious authority. Some break away from the Islamic culture of their parents in search of pure Islam.

Regarding theology, I see the development of a new hermeneutics of interpretation of the Qur'an and Sunnah, particularly in the writings of four renowned Muslim reformers, based in Europe: Bassam Tibi, Tariq Ramadan, Tareq Oubrou, and Abdenmour Bidar. These four are all contributing to the idea of a European Islam. Other

theologically inspired developments I see are: A desire for gender equality, expressed by Muslim female theologians who explain, define and redefine several key concepts of Islam. Changes in the ways shariah is being interpreted. Changes in how the law of apostasy is being interpreted. Discussion about the legal conditions connected to minority status in Europe.

A growing number of Muslim scholars in Europe believe that European Islam is possible, both theologically and politically. But we have to understand that it is not yet an existing fact, but an ongoing process. In their understanding, such a European Islam integrates modernity values and links them with the divine. It preserves the divine in its modernity.

### **The response of the Church: bystander, follower or trendsetter?**

The presence of Islam in Europe should be high on the agenda of the Church in Europe. What happens to Europe and Islam is not something that the Church can ignore. We cannot afford to be a bystander when Europe and Islam sort out their future together. Nor, should we be following the mindset of Europeans at large. Instead of agents of change and transformation in a society estranged from

God, many European Christians mimic its sentiments towards Muslims. I believe we should speak of and with Muslims with attitudes that are influenced by the way God deals with us. Our thinking, attitude, behavior with regard to Islam in Europe should be guided by God's self-giving love manifested at the cross of Golgotha. I suggest that Churches and Christians across Europe respond to the presence of Muslims in Europe with: a) a compassionate heart; b) an informed mind; c) an involved hand; d) a witnessing tongue.

The Church can shape the future of Islam in Europe when we are willing to reflect the truth, the glory and attitude of God in the way we relate to Muslims in our midst.



# Podcast: Finding Christ in the Chaos - Refugees in Europe

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By Krisitan Lande & Vimal Vimalasekaran

[Go to the transcript online](#)

**Kristian Lande:**

We believe in a God, in a Father, who goes off to find the one sheep who is missing.

In this podcast will look at the millions of refugees living in Europe today, which is some of those sheep that God goes off to find. What is His heart, and His work? To see them coming home. And how can you and I, and our communities, be part of it?

Father God, we cry out to you: Drive out workers to that harvest. Open our eyes to see what you are doing, and what you're seeing. And Holy Spirit; come and do your work in us as we listen and process.

This is the mobilization thread for the Lausanne 2021 Conversation. My name is Kristian Lande. And our guest at this month's podcast is someone who's heart is to co-work with God in exactly this, mobilizing individuals and churches to reach out to refugees. Vimal Vimalasekaran; welcome.

**Vimal Vimalasekaran:**

Thank you.

**Kristian:**

It's great to have you here.

**Vimal:**

Yes, yeah. Wonderful. Thank you.

**Kristian:**

I heard quite a bit about you already. I'm excited to hear your story, and to hear how you are getting involved in mobilizing Europeans, and European churches, for this harvest field. The reality is that there are millions of refugees already in Europe, and especially know from Afghanistan, more will come. Of course, we could discuss the political realities of that, legal parts, and all these things and challenges connected to it. But what he would like to focus on today is what is God doing? How can we reach them with the gospel, and what is our role in it?

But before we move to that, I would like us to get to know your story Vimal. Because I know you yourself were a refugee once.

**Vimal:**

That's correct. Over 35 years ago, I had to escape from my own country, Sri Lanka, to India as a refugee. In that moving, from my place to the refugee camp in India, the Lord has met me. And that is where I met Jesus, you know, I gave my life. I stayed there for over three and a half years, as a young person. I worked voluntarily, serving God. I was converted at time when I was eighteen and a half years. I had no fears, I love the Lord and just went

around and preach the gospel. I don't know how did I do it, but I did it.

**Kristian:**

This is the beauty you know, it's a world in chaos, it's lives in chaos, and then God breaking in and doing His thing and bringing salvation.

**Vimal:**

Yeah, you said it exactly. The world is in chaos. But the Lord is not in chaos. We see that is chaos, but he sees ... It is his way of doing His will in our life, in everyone's life. So, there's no chaos with God, it's chaos with us.

**Kristian:**

Exactly. Exactly. That's it.

So, then you lived in India, and then you move back to Sri Lanka, and then you ended up in Europe. Could you give us a brief input about your family, where you live now, and what you are doing?

**Vimal:**

Well, I you know, after three and a half years, I had to go back - it was after the peace - we went back to Sri Lanka.

But then Lord opened my heart and I needed to go into ministry. I got this opportunity to study in London, in a Baptist Bible College. Then I moved to Northern Ireland, I became an assistant pastor in a small Northern Irish church. That is an amazing story in itself - in those days in 1990. Then I met an English lady, God provided a wonderful wife, and we both prayed for and believed that God wanted us to go back to Sri Lanka. But because of the Civil War in Sri Lanka, we were graciously guided to come to Germany, for an outreach where we were visiting refugees, and God opened our hearts. So, we just followed God's will and said; okay, we will come and work with refugees in Germany. It's 21 years ago, that we came to Germany. We came only for five years, but we are still here. We have four kids, the oldest is 19, and the youngest is 10. Three girls and a boy.

**Kristian:**

It's typical God isn't it: It is Sri Lanka, it's India, it's Northern Ireland, it's England. And now you're serving refugees from the whole world in Germany. That's just beautiful.

I have a question: What is God doing among refugees in Europe today? Could you give us some stories and some examples, and maybe some numbers?

**Vimal:**

Sure. I mean, the numbers are hard. But I can give you stories. I mean, what God is doing throughout our ministry here ... I have seen, people come to know the Lord, or the Lord met them. We are kind of an instrument in between - just connecting these dotted lines. Many of them have given their lives. I tell you a story about last year: I had an eighteen year old Afghani man, who came from Greece to Germany. Somebody contacted me from Greece and told: Hey, Vimal, we have this guy, we don't know if he's a Christian or not, but now he has arrived. It was during the lockdown - you remember the start of the lockdown last year. So, I went first time and met with this guy - he can't speak much German, a little bit of English. I met with him every week for several weeks during this lockdown. In my van, we read the New Testament. He had his Farsi Bible. Eventually, I took him to church, and he has been going to church. By the way, I don't do things without connecting people to church. Church is bigger than us, so we must do that. So, I took this guy to a church, he connected there, and know he will be baptized. This is his story: He gave His life to Jesus in a park, together with an Iranian brother, we met together. I can tell you another story. It's a Syrian guy. We had a summer outreach here last year. He can't walk,

he was a victim of the war, of the bombing, in Syria. He was in a wheelchair when we met him. And now, three, four weeks ago, I went and visited him again. He wanted to go to church, an Arabic church. So, I took him in his wheelchair to this church. He loved it. He said, he never did something like this in his life. He wanted to continue to go, even this Sunday I would like to take him back to this Arabic church. Actually, it is a German and Arabic speaking church. It used to be a German church, through our contact and help, they opened up their doors to the Arabic speaking people. And now it's an Arabic German church. They're almost 50-50% of Germans and Arabs meeting together, working together and praising God together. This is a story you can tell every time that you go around refugees. is a good thing.

**Kristian:**

Exactly. You know, for me it sounds like God is using people like you, and probably others as well, to connect: He's working in people's hearts, and he's bringing people to him, but then he needs these workers to connect those who are coming to faith with those who are believers and living in local churches. So, I just hear the need for more people like you, who are connecting. But I also hear the

need for local Christians, living in local communities and churches. Germans, Arabs, Norwegians, Czechs, English, whoever ... to actually embrace, and be willing to be connected.

**Vimal:**

Definitely. You know, I call them bridge men. We are bridges, you know, allowing people to walk over our lives. My experience with church people - I think 90% or more of the Christians are very good people. You know what I mean? They are not against refugees, that is just a bad caricature. But they do not know how to go about, or they do not know how to get connected. So, once you do that, I think they are the best place ... I still believe the church is the best place for taking care of refugees - not for the short-term, but for the long-term strategy.

**Kristian:**

Beautiful. I think this is this is really important for us to hear, that: When you feel overwhelmed, when you see in the news ... and you feel like we should do something, but you don't have the power to do it - There are people, like you Vimal, who could actually help us to get going and to get connected. Help us to find out how we can welcome them, and how can we include them and disciple.

**Vimal:**

Well, actually, you need to know, Europeans don't like to be helped. If you say you are going to help, they say no, we don't need your help. We can share our lives, we can share our faith, we can share our perspectives. By sharing our lives, I think we can open up each other, and then maybe I can be helped, and they can be helped, if we are open to be helped. Because, you know, what does it mean being helped. You know, someone doesn't like to be.

**Kristian:**

Yeah, that's a good point. So, instead of saying, we need to help, we need to encourage to actually just share life and walk shoulder to shoulder?

**Vimal:**

Definitely brother. I say to myself; I don't help anyone, because the Lord is the helper. We are facilitators, I mean, we just happen to be there. We are in the best place, with the Lord, to be your friend. You know, what connects you and me, is nothing more than Jesus Christ. So, let's do it that way. I think we will be glorifying God in that way.

**Kristian:**

Amazing. You know, I just heard from a friend of mine - she

referred to a German Bishop from the Landeskirche. This Bishop shared that several of his priests, of his pastors, they didn't believe in God anymore. But then he had seen, on several occasions, that Syrian refugees had found Jesus, or Jesus found them probably, on the way to Europe, or in Europe. And these refugees through their new faith led these priests to faith in God. And I was like: Wow, this is so beautiful.

Do you see other examples of that happening?

**Vimal:**

Remember, we talked about chaos at the beginning? You know, that out of chaos ... I don't think it's chaos. You see the way God works? Reverse, back - his will to the people of Europe. He uses these chaotic people from East, or wherever they come from, to re-evangelize, or re-open their minds to see that Jesus is true - he is living. Because Syrians sound that they met him on their way to here. Once you meet a person, it's hard to deny that he doesn't exist. So yes, I can very well confide that many people, not just Syrians, many Iranians ... 1000s of Iranians have gone into churches, they have said to the priests: Hey, I met Jesus in my dream. What are you talking about? The natural tendency for the European priest is to be

perplexed. Huh, is it true? I think God is doing something bigger than us, greater than us. Sometimes that's why we cannot understand. But, if we are humble enough, we can hear it. God is using a different way to bring back his own people. He has not forgotten Europe, I think he loves so much. He creates chaos, and out of this chaos he brings out these beautiful stories. Stories of how we can turn back to him and say: Jesus lives.

**Kristian:**

This is great, because I think, you know, we started out this podcast with the question: How can I be part of serving refugees? But then what we see: This is not just about what I need to do for them. This is about what God is doing. For them, for us - how he is working into the chaos, which is the European chaos, which is the chaos in other parts of the world. And he is just doing beautiful stuff, and we can be part of it.

**Vimal:**

Yeah, I very much agree. I don't like the idea that we are serving or helping refugees - It is true, we do. But I find it a little bit, you know, very pompous - You know, we are like helping refugees. But I think - as you rightly said - that God is bringing his people ... enabling us to be part of

this mission. I mean, I'm just obeying Jesus to be here as a missionary. I'm privileged in that way. I'm just in the right place. So, we are just sharing our lives. I would like to say it again: When I go to the refugee camps here in Germany. I am anguished. I am challenged. I am encouraged in my faith. Even though I'm going to help people. The word "helping" is a very interesting work. But you know, when I go there, God is helping me to love him and serve Him. So, in this process, I am learning more about Jesus, and so they. So, it works wonderfully for both of us - for the refugees and for me.

**Kristian:**

Yeah, exactly. And I think this brings us back to what you what you started with. It's not about helping; it's about sharing life. And I think if you look at the big situation in Europe today, you can see that God is sending quite a number of missionaries to Europe, from other parts of the world - whether they come as refugees, sent by mission agencies, or as tentmakers - they're coming here sent by God as missionaries. Then we have us native European Christians. And we need to stand shoulder to shoulder. What I hear you saying is that we need to start with just

sharing life. Do you have some very practical ideas? How do we start?

**Vimal:**

First of all, we need to change the idea that church is mine. I mean, church belongs to our Lord, and He is doing it. And so, when somebody like me comes into your church, I think you need to look at me not just as the guest. You know, I'm here for a long time. And you know, refugees are not here just for one year, and then move. No, they are going to be here for a long time, they are going to be here with their families, they are going to have their children, they're going to be here. So, I think first thing is to understand the long-term perspective of migrant, or diaspora ministries, or the refugee ministries. Once we understand, then we can start to help and to be part of the process.

**Kristian:**

What struck me when I think about sharing life - whether it would be with a missionary from Brazil, or a refugee who had come to faith on the on the road to Europe - I would probably just eat a meal with them. Some Norwegian food, some Iranian food, some Brazilian. I mean, I love eating. I bet you have done a lot of that?

**Vimal:**

I think it's true, I think invite them. For me, I think opening your home is the best thing in your life. That is biblical by the way. If you don't open your home to the people, don't go and preach the gospel - it just is a hypocrisy. I mean, there is no way that you can close your door and then preach the gospel and come back and sit down. Open your home, because people need to see that what you preach, what you believe, is true in your own life. You know, when I go outside, I put on very nice clothes, I get trimmed, and it looks better. Only in my home, I have no ... you share better. It's important that you eat together. And invite them, learn from them, and understand where they come from. Quite often, we misunderstand a person, because we don't know where they come from, what do they do - so it takes time; understand them, don't underestimate anyone in your life. You know, I do that. I don't underestimate others. God told me that, so I don't underestimate any person who is created in the image of God. I had to learn that - it was not natural to me. Once you do that, if a person is created in God's image, you don't underestimate. You don't know what this person will be in 20 years, 10 years. I have seen people who were just refugees, now they are running stores, and they are doing

businesses. I mean, this is something that God is doing. So, I think you invite them, eat with them. Take your time - you know, I know it's time is a big issue for us in Europe - spend time, get to know the person. It's a work, it is intentional.

**Kristian:**

It's probably exactly that last thing, because time is what we lack, we think so at least. And so probably that's the challenge, to give what we really want to protect and not to give. To give our time, to eat together, to serve one another and pray together. And I think that's a good challenge for us to start there.

And then I know, Vimal, that you would be willing to help and to support, or sorry, not to help.

**Vimal:**

Yeah, that's right. I would share my life.

**Kristian:**

Yes, you would love to share life with those who would love to share life with you, and then find out how to move on. Great. Thank you Vimal. This has been a pleasure. I

think we got a lot of inspiration and new thoughts, certainly I did.

Have a blessed Conversation.