

A NEW COUNTRY... A NEW CALLING

*a message by Joe Vermeulen
translated by Tiiu Crouch*



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A New Country... A New Calling

This message by Pastor Joe Vermeulen was delivered in Afrikaans on Sunday, 4 October 2009, at the Grace Christian Church, Perth, WA. This English translation was done by Tiiu Crouch of Bray Park, QLD.

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The subject of what I am about to share with you this evening, came about when I got to thinking how helpful it would have been for me to have had a CD or a message off the internet to listen to, or if I had known of someone who had immigrated and they had said to me, "Listen to this, it will help you." Imagine being able to give someone, having just arrived in Australia, a CD that has a few practical things on immigration to a new country.

If you have been here for a while in Australia, you may have asked God what your purpose is in being here, "Is it just to pay accounts, or do You, God, have a plan for my life? Is there a specific purpose You have mapped out for me and is there a purpose for placing me here in Perth... Australia... or in London. (or wherever you might find yourself?)

I'll never forget when I had the opportunity to come to Australia seven years ago. Someone helped us with the sponsorship and all the details that needed to be taken care of to come over here. We were also blessed by the church

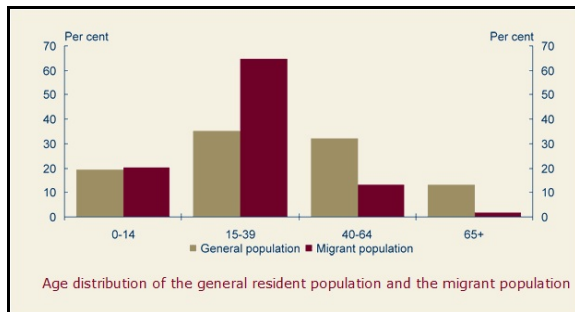
paying for our tickets to bring us over. The church was to be my new work place. When having to purchase those tickets, I was told to buy return tickets, just in case it didn't work out and I wanted to come back within a year. I thought to myself that this was not necessary. My head was already in the right place here in South Africa, before I was to come over to Australia. I wouldn't say that I was smart and had all my facts together. I came over and it was frightening and I missed my brothers, and my mom and dad. When I saw for the first time on TV, the Springboks play rugby and sing the national anthem, it brought back memories and some tears, but I had already prepared my mind back in South Africa for the pain of immigration that would occur when first arriving in a new country, and I was determined to make this work. I said to my wife, even if we had to live in a flat and I had to ride on a bicycle to work, we **will** make this work. I was determined and motivated to make this thing work. Why... because the fact that I can immigrate to a wonderful land like Australia is a privilege. I tell you there are thousands of people that would give their right arm to be in your position, for an opportunity to be in a country like this.

To immigrate takes guts... you have got to be tough... it is not for the weak. There is a big sacrifice to be made, but there is also great reward.

About three weeks ago, on a Tuesday, I was invited to the Senior Men's Fellowship Group in Willetton to share with them, and play guitar. These men that come together are retired. At the end of the morning, they asked me a question, "Do you think that Grace can support us by sending some of your

retired men to our gathering?” I said that we would gladly support them, but we do not have any retired men to send to your gathering, because the fact that we are an immigrant church means that most immigrants, (95%), are young to middle-aged people who work, and who have children who attend school.

I came across some statistics taken a year ago in Australia. It was based on age distribution of the general resident population and the migrant population, and what is clearly evident, is the high concentration of migrants in the 15-39 age bracket. Within that age group, you will find families with children in the 0-14 years age bracket. The numbers are also quite significant here. Where the migrant population tapers off, is seen in the age brackets of 40-64, and 65 years and over. In this age bracket, the bar is barely making itself visible on the graph.



The 15-39 age bracket is the majority of the migrant population... that is us. We are privileged, we have been given an opportunity to immigrate, and we have taken advantage of this wonderful opportunity to come over and to make a future for our children as well.

As immigrants, you will know the feeling of what it's like to break the news to your family in South Africa, that you've made the decision to emigrate to Australia,

England, Canada... you are excited and happy, but at the same time also heartsore and frightened.

My wife, Cecile, and her family are very close and we were afraid to tell them the news, not because they wouldn't understand, but because we didn't want to upset them with the news that we were taking their only grandchildren away to another country. When we spoke with her parents, Cecile's mom did cry, but they were happy for us and supported our decision. Her dad encouraged us by saying, "You're doing the right thing. You must go for the sake of your children." We had prayed about the move to a new country and I believe that it was God's plan, however, we still had to make a final decision, taking into consideration the cost of this big move. There were many factors to consider, but one of the big factor's in our decision-making process was our children's future and the opportunity they would now have.

I know there are many people that say you must first pray before you emigrate, and if God tells you not to emigrate, then don't emigrate. However, it is not always so black and white, there is a bit of grey in the middle that we are not always sure how to handle. I would like to give an example from the book of Acts... Jesus gives the Great Commission to His disciples, to go into the world and make the people My disciples. ***"You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*** Then what happened after the Spirit was poured out, ... the church is stuck in Jerusalem. Thousands come to know God, but they stay right there in Jerusalem together. This is what we do if something feels good... we like that cosy

comfortable feeling... our cell groups are growing... we squeeze closer together as the numbers increase... but we don't want to multiply because we want to hold on to that wonderful cosy feeling. Now (back in Acts) what does God allow to happen? ... persecution. Saul, who later becomes known as Paul, persecutes the church... what happens... the Christians scatter. I don't think they held some formal meeting where they had to pray to ask God His advice as to where they should now go and when. Things got so bad, they fled to other towns... and they preached the Word of God wherever they went.

When things are going well, and we have the time to wait on God, then we must do that, but sometimes there is an urgency to do something now and what we need to do is ask God to please guide us because if He isn't guiding us, we can make the wrong decisions, but with the light before us, this is then the right thing to do. This is what we as immigrants did. With the light that was before us, there was a cost to consider, but this was what was being revealed to us to do, and this is what we felt was right, and according to that, we made our decision.

One Australian said to me "Mate, there's so many of you (South Africans)," and I thought to myself... we're making Australia a better place one family at a time :o)

South Africa has a wealth of Christianity. Some are nominal Christians, but there is a coffer full of Christians on fire for God who are being scattered all over the world to places like England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and most of them are people that are serving God and who love Him. They are bringing those

Christian values with them to a new country... and as Jesus said... we need to be like yeast where we are. However, we also need to be careful that the reverse does not happen, where in South Africa we were serving the Lord, and now that we're in a new country, and life is a bit easier, where lots of folk are on their boat on the river on Sundays, church now takes a back seat, and is not as important anymore. Prosperity, comfort and living for "me," now becomes the things which I am chasing after. But God has placed us here for a reason, and it's not just for our own gain, but to enlarge His kingdom.

Paul knew how to be the yeast in whatever situation, environment or culture he found himself in. You know the saying that says, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do?" This means that when you are in a different culture or situation or in someone else's house you must live by their rules in that house.

I want to read from **1 Corinthians 9:19-23**. Paul is saying that we need to function in the context of where we find ourselves ... ***Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.***

Paul conformed to the various cultures in order to win people for Christ. If it meant not eating meat sacrificed to idols or not eating pork, then he would not eat it. He did not exercise his Christian freedom in such things. He did whatever it took to win as many people as he could over for Christ.

A good example is from **Acts 17**. If you read the whole chapter, Paul, Silas and some others were pursued from one town to the next, as the people did not like the fact that he was sharing this new faith about Jesus Christ and the resurrection and that there was only one God. A lot of the people were hostile towards them and we see that Paul went to Athens where he waited for his companions Silas and Timothy. We read in **verse 16... While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.**

So Paul is in Athens, with pagans, they serve meaningless idols and he is upset by this. He must have thought that this is a godless place. He must have thought to himself where is God in this place? It upset him, but he does not flee from this place, what he does is begin to reason with them. He speaks to them about the one true God, and of course the people of Athens were always curious about new information to learn more and they wanted him to address this... to explain this to them. We read in **verse 22 that... Paul stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious..."** Paul didn't address them by calling them devil worshipers... he chose his words carefully and cleverly so that he could gain a hearing. Do you see the tact that he used in this situation? **Verse 23...**

For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To an Unknown God. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. Verse 32... When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." At that, Paul left the Council. A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.

As you can see from these verses just read, Paul looked for a connection point in the place he was in, spoke to them using pictures and examples relevant to their situation. By doing this, he managed to win over a few followers. We need to say, "God, help us in Perth, Australia, or wherever we might find ourselves, and also whatever situation we might find ourselves in, to find a connection point with our neighbour, with the person we work with, so that we might have the opportunity to shine our light, to be the salt, and to make a difference."

So tonight, I would like to share with you **three simple points** that we as Christians can do in our new country to make a difference for ourselves and for God...

1. **Immigrants are the best people to help immigrants.** Why... because we know what it is like to immigrate... it's not easy, it's tough, but we reap the rewards in the end. So we are thereby in a position to help others. Two years ago we invited a

couple over for coffee as they were new in Brisbane. The man pulled up in a work vehicle (open back with tools inside), he was sitting in the front with his child next to him, and when he stopped outside our home (we were waiting outside for them), he opened the side of the tool van and his wife and baby climbed out from there. When I saw this, I asked them if they had another car. They replied, “No, we need to save, as we arrived with basically nothing in Australia, and this is the only vehicle we have available.” This meant that his wife had been house-bound for weeks, that she was unsure about the suburb she was living in, didn’t know which was north or south, had no idea where the shopping centres were, because she did not have a vehicle to help her get around and become familiar with the area. This situation had made them feel really down. Cecile and I had two cars standing in the driveway (this is one of our many blessings in Australia). We looked at one another and agreed that we would lend them one of our vehicles. Now this may not appear to be a big thing, but it is something that we had available to help them with. For them it made a world of difference. When they brought that car back, they were so grateful. This just goes to show that we can make a difference with what may seem small to us, can mean so much to another.

I’ve asked Pierre and Elmarie to share a bit tonight on their experience of immigration because the process is fresh in their minds still. They have been in Australia since January 2009, which is ten months. It looks like things are going well and that they are finding their feet.

***Pierre...** I wrote down small things that made a big difference. As Joe mentioned before, sometimes it is the simplest and smallest things that can make a world of difference to someone who has just immigrated. For us, the first thing we did was make contact with Johan Conradie. We did not know them initially, but they gave us a lot of information via e-mail. This is how we came to this church and why our children are in the school they’re in. The information given to us helped tremendously. We wrote e-mails back and forth. There were a number of people doing little things that helped us so much. I will give a few examples. Someone had sent an e-mail and the one thing that stood out was a line that said... **there is a lot of support in Perth**. That e-mail came on a day where I really needed to read something like that, and those encouraging words which said that there is support and you can come across, really spoke to me. We had so much luggage coming across to Australia, 180kg. We had bought special aeroplane tickets to have this amount of luggage, and because of the amount, we would have had to hire two Taxis, the children would have been tired and the family would have had to be separated between two cars, but Pastor Peter Abetz came and fetched us from the airport in the green combie. This helped us so much and if we had hired taxis, it would have cost us \$200.00. We received further help from Joe and others with providing us with food, lending things like a car and furniture. There was a group of different people each doing something to help in various ways. I arrived here with no work, so it was a very stressful time for us. Many people offered their help. People that I have not even met to this day, called me to try and help where they could. Knowing that we were*

being prayed for was wonderful and meant so much to us.

The last thing that I would like to share with you before Elmarie comes up, is my thoughts on how I would be able to repay all these people for their kindness. I had seen a movie 'Pay it Forward' and like this movie, it made it clear, that I too would like to 'pay it forward'. There will be people that come across our path and like we were helped, we too would like to be a blessing and help others.

***Elmarie...** Like Pierre said, prayer is a very important part of us trusting God to lead and guide us and provide for us, and it is a big comfort. Kari was very stressed on her first day in Grade 1, at a new English school, in a new country, and Joe had said that he would pray for her. When I asked Kari about her day, Joe's prayer, was the one thing that she shared had meant the most to her. So prayer is important and knowing that someone is praying for you means so much.*

I made a friend at Kari's school that came and helped me unpack my kitchen stuff when our container arrived. She could come for 3 hours, and even though this may seem small, it made such a huge difference.

Karen Conradie helped me with 'shopping lessons', for example she shared with me that at certain times of the day the bread or meat will be marked down. When, where and the times to do grocery shopping really helped.

Another friend invited me to come along to the vegetable market and showed me how this all works.

The invitations from various people for coffee, or a meal, was wonderful, and it makes a big difference when you're in a strange country and you're not sure how to make friends and you don't want to

always invite yourself.

There are many stories that we can share that can drive the point home that **immigrants are the best people to help immigrants**, because we know how it feels. Let's do this... let us 'pay it forward'. As we have been helped, let us help others. It makes a big difference to others, the little bit that we can do.

2. Get your heart here as well (In Australia).

Sometimes your body is here, but your heart is still there in South Africa. It can take about 3-4 months to do this and some people say it can take a year or two. But the sooner you can get your heart here in Australia, the better you will be as a person. You'll be a better husband for your wife, a better wife for your husband and your children, if you can get your heart here where you are now living. I'll never forget what someone once said, "No matter **where** you are, **there** you are." Is this not wise? If you are here and your heart is over there, then you're in two places. The bible says "**a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.**" We need to be of one mind, and if you've packed your suitcases to come to a new country, be there with intent... make it work. If you've decided to stay in your country, South Africa, make it work... but be where you are. You need to have a good attitude and this will help tremendously. I've asked my wife to come and share, but let me put it in context for you... "Come stand by me, let them see how much you love me :o)." Last month marked for us seven years in Australia. Six of those years were in Brisbane. At the beginning of the year we 'emigrated' from Queensland to the "Republic of Western Australia." This to

us felt like emigration and we experienced pain.

***Cecile...** I went through my second emigration from Brisbane to Perth, and as Joe shared with you, it is not easy, and to do it twice is even worse. I think we all come to a point with emigration where we say, "Never again... this is the last time." I said those exact words... and what happened? ... we 'emigrated' again. For me it was harder to emigrate from Brisbane to Perth, than it was to emigrate from South Africa to Brisbane. When we landed in Brisbane, I had said that this is where I will grow old, my children will go to university and I'll enjoy spending time with my grandchildren here in Brisbane. I was never going to emigrate again. We settled in, we bought a house and I had a circle of friends. After six years you **do** settle in. The children were happy, we were part of a big church and everything was going well. Then, one day Joe says to me, "We're going to Perth." I wasn't a very happy wife. But, we moved to Perth, and as Joe said, **my heart did not come with**. I was here, but my heart was not.*

I really missed Brisbane and because my heart was not here in Perth, everything was negative, everything was wrong... nothing was right. The school was not right, everything was flat, everything was brown, there were no mountains, it was not green, and the sea was on the "wrong side." Then one day I came to the realisation that I can leave my heart in Brisbane but I will stay unhappy. If my heart is not with me and I don't change my attitude and make a decision to be happy, then I will stay a very unhappy person. If I'm unhappy, then my husband will be unhappy and also my children, and so it was up to me to get my heart here

and to make a decision that I will be happy here where I am, and I will see positive things. When you do get your heart here (where you are,) then everything is much nicer. The flowers are much nicer now :o). When we were back in Brisbane just recently, I said to Joe, "You know Brisbane isn't as green as I remembered it," and with the dust storm that they had just experienced, I said to Joe "Perth's sky is much bluer." This just goes to show that it depends on your attitude as to how you view things. If your attitude is right, then everything appears to be much nicer and better.

***Joe...** "The glass can either be half full or half empty."*

The last point I want to make mention of is...

3. Integrate!

You need to integrate there where you are. Where you are... find your feet and put down roots. When I came to Australia, I realised that I am in an English church, which is part of an English denomination and we did not have an Afrikaans service as we have here in Perth. To help myself and to condition myself to speak well in English and also to pray in a service, I did not want to have to translate in my mind from one language to the next. I wanted it to flow naturally. In my own quiet time, I began to read the Bible in English and speak to God in English. I needed to do this. I wanted to integrate with my situation. You'll remember back in South Africa, we would speak about the Greeks in the vegetable shops and the Portuguese in the corner cafés. I remember looking at them and thinking how separate they were from us. They speak another language, they look different, have their own clubs, their own

churches, and their own circle of friends. It did not look like they were part of us South Africans, however on the flipside I had in my class at school a friend, Jose Melado, a Spaniard. He came to the same school as I did, he played sport with us, he went to the same universities and we never thought of Jose as being different. He could speak Spanish, but he was part of us because he had integrated with us. He did life with us.

Integration is important... be a part of where you are. I remember, and am proud of my heritage, and that I come from South Africa. I can speak two languages. I will always love melktert (milk tart) and biltong, and I shed a tear when I hear "Laurika" sing on 'You Tube'. But, my priority is here. I am here by choice and I hope I don't step on anyone's toes, but I am first an **Australian**, then a South African, because this is now my country and this is where I now live. This is the flag under which I am protected. So my priorities are now here.

I would like to invite all of you to be the best Afrikaans speaking Australians you can be. Let us be where we are, and we pray, "Father, use us in this new country. Help us to take root, because if we are settled here, then we can have influence where we live." We can make a difference to other immigrants, but also in this country, Australia, where God has brought us to.

Remember these three points...

Immigrants are the best people to help immigrants.

If you have a friend in South Africa who is about to emigrate, tell him to listen to this message on the internet... if you have

the right attitude before you come to a new country, it will make a big difference for you to find your feet quicker and settle in.

Get your heart here as well (In Australia).

Integrate in your new country!

It's a new country, so let us function in that new calling.

Let us pray...

Thank You for Your Word that has shown us in many practical ways how Paul moved around, and that wherever he ended up, he reached out to the people in the context where he was. We are in a new country and some of us have been here for a while and others of us are still new. Help us to find our feet. Show us the plan You have for our lives and how You will use us here for this season of our lives. Let Your will be done, Father, Your Kingdom come here in Australia. We pray this for Perth, for our schools, for our work places, for our families and in our lives as well. We do this in Jesus' name, Amen.