

## The Most Desperate Journey Reflections by Jim Reffel

As I walked across the Sonoran Desert in Mexico, I tried to imagine what force makes a person take this deadly journey. “The Sonoran Desert spans 100,000 square miles of difficult beauty stretched across the United States and Mexico border” (Cooney, 2020). My one-mile journey to the border wall was taken with plenty of water, snacks, and good hiking shoes. To get to my spot on the trail, immigrants had likely travelled many miles and were in various states of health when they arrived. Many died before they even got to the wall. The wall is simply a deadly barrier. It does not deter immigration, but it does cause many deaths (USAFacts Team, 2024):

“Extreme heat is a contributing factor to migrant deaths. In the worst cases, heat exposure leads to an altered mental state, dehydration, stroke, convulsions, and death. Migrants have been found to be crammed into metal boxes with 40 other occupants, overloaded vehicles, and horse trailers. Being confined in such spaces can be fatal during either a potential collision or a heat wave.”

“Migrants’ efforts to climb over the border wall have also led to death from falls.”

“Similarly, the actions of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers also affect the number of migrant deaths. The CBP Office of Professional Responsibility reported that 151 CBP-related deaths occurred in FY 2021.”



Most immigrants are coming to the US simply to find work so they can support their families (Adams & Bassett, 2009). The situations in their home countries are desperate and their only hope is to risk their lives for their families. They pay many thousands of dollars to the cartels just to get to the wall. Even if they make it past the wall, few will survive to find work in the US. "Since 1999, over 3,000 undocumented migrants from Mexico and Central America have died within the U.S. portion of this sprawling desert' (Cooney, 2020). US-Mexico border is the world's deadliest migration land route (News Global, 2023).

Let us consider scripture in our response to this situation:

**Galatians 5:14** *For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment; You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*

My hope is that we alter our language and refer to immigrants as our neighbors. It saddens me that our neighbors are treated with so little dignity and respect. So many migrants die just trying to feed their families. As we ask ourselves, what is God's will in this, consider

**Ephesians 4:25:** *So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.*

