

# WELCOMING THE STRANGER

JUSTICE, COMPASSION & TRUTH IN THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE

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Immigration is one of the most complex and controversial issues of our time. Everyone seems to agree: The United States' immigration system has some problems. However, that is where most agreement concerning US immigration ends. For Christians, the issue is doubly difficult to navigate because of equally valid commands to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:35-40) and to "submit to governing authorities" (Rom. 13:1). How are we, as Christ followers, to find a balance between the two and continue to be a "city on a hill" which offers hope and love to the millions of displaced people in the world looking for a better future? This is the issue "Welcoming the Stranger" by Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang seeks to address and the purpose of this six-week class through their material. We hope you will find encouragement and truth throughout these weeks as we discover God's heart for immigrants and a way forward in navigating such a complex issue.

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## WEEK 1: "Mission on our Doorsteps"

Opinions on the immigration issue in America range between extremes of immigration being blamed for societies problems to our immigration system being blamed for injustice toward immigrants. For Christians, opinions not only range between these socio-political extremes but also between concepts presented in Scripture: loving and submitting. What really needs to be answered, however, is how we as Christians will choose to view immigrants themselves – as a threat or as an opportunity.

**READING: "Welcoming the Stranger" Ch. 1-2**

## WEEK 2: "Thinking Biblically About Immigration"

When we think of the Bible, immigration isn't usually a theme which comes to mind outside of the verse "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities..." (Rom. 13:1) However, immigration is actually a major theme within Scripture – carried throughout the lives of people like Abraham, Ruth, David, and even Jesus. And when it comes to seemingly contradictory verses, what we'll find in week two is that there is actually a clear way forward when it comes to loving and serving our immigrant neighbors.

**READING: "Welcoming the Stranger" Ch. 3-4**

## WEEK 3: "The Most Vulnerable: Understanding Refugees, Undocumented Immigrants, and Victims of Human Trafficking"

Who are these people who are coming to our country, and what are the circumstances surrounding their travels here? These are the questions we seek to answer in week three. We will be taking a look at the similarities and differences between three predominant categories of immigrants who make the decision to come to America in search of a better life as well as what causes illegality among certain groups.

**READING: "Welcoming the Stranger" Ch. 5-6**

#### **WEEK 4: “Understanding Immigration Policy, Past & Present”**

Immigration isn't a new issue within our era. Immigration has been a part of America's history almost since its inception and as a result, policies surrounding the issue have always followed. In week four we will take a look at the history of our country's immigration system, our immigration system as it stands today, and how it affects those seeking to come to our nation both positively and negatively. We will also discuss how we as Christians should interact with our government and advocate for policies which will benefit those we are called to love.

**READING: “Welcoming the Stranger” Ch. 7-8**

#### **WEEK 5: “Addressing the Root Causes of Migration”**

In the parable of the Good Samaritan we see a man attacked on the road leading to Jericho and then being helped by an unlikely friend. When Jesus told that parable, his audience would have been familiar with the road leading to Jericho and the dangers surrounding it. In week five of our class we will be asking ourselves not only what we should do for immigrants but also this question: “What's wrong with the Jericho road?” I.e. What are the root causes of migration in the world and how should we address them globally as Christians? We will be taking a look at issues like poverty, war, and natural disasters in the hope of gaining a better understanding of what we can do specifically to love our neighbors before they would need to become our “neighbors.”

**READING: “Welcoming the Stranger” Ch. 9**

#### **WEEK 6: “A Christian Response to Immigration”**

Information regarding immigration ranging from understanding who immigrants are to the root causes of their migration is a good thing – but it is meaningless if we are not called to action. In week six of our class we will be looking at the “P.L.E.A.S.E.” acronym and discussing the specific ways we can love and serve immigrants in our neighborhoods and globally as those called to reach the world with Christ's love and Gospel.

**READING: “Welcoming the Stranger” Ch. 10**