


MATTHEW SOERENS & JENNY YANG

# WELCOMING THE STRANGER

*Discovering and Living God's Heart  
for Immigrants*

**LEADER GUIDE**

world relief 



Compiled by: J. Mark Bowers, Damon Schroeder, Andrew Belcher  
Editors: Lauren Nadolski, Anna Strickland, David Brubaker  
Illustrations: Chloe Cahill



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J. Mark Bowers  
[mbowers@wr.org](mailto:mbowers@wr.org)

# Welcoming the Stranger

## Leader Guide

Thank you for leading a Welcoming the Stranger cohort! This leader guide is designed to help you as you gather and facilitate your group. While every learning cohort or small group is unique, this guide will be a helpful, consistent foundation as you lead complex conversations about immigration for the realities of your group.

### Who?

#### *The Leaders and Participants*

As a leader, you are passionate about seeing God's people grow in their knowledge and practice of welcoming newcomers and immigrants in your midst. The ideal group leader for facilitating these groups has:

1. Experience in leading groups with adults using a dialogue-based approach
2. Completed the *Welcome the Stranger* course online or participated in a live group
3. Received the buy-in and blessing of your pastor or other influential church leader in your congregation before starting
4. Solidified a co-leader who will help to host the gathering

Your learners can be any members of a church or community group who show interest in thinking, understanding, and responding biblically to the issue of immigration. As learners wrestle together in respectful dialogue through the concepts, the ideal participants will be those who:

1. Can commit to weekly gatherings for discussion and fellowship
2. See immigrants as those who are made in God's image, regardless of status
3. Take the Scripture seriously as a guide for engaging this conversation

### Why?

#### *The Situation*

At World Relief, we believe learning happens best in a safe, yet challenging community where people commit to grow together. We believe the issue of how we approach immigrants is first a biblical issue before it is a social or political one—and here we offer God's people an opportunity to unpack what that means. Because of this, World Relief staff published the book [Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, and Truth in the Immigration Debate](#), (Jenny Yang and Matthew Soerens, 2018). This hybrid course, with both virtual and live components, is derived from this book and builds out a structure with activities for you to engage learners in this tough, important conversation.

## When?

### *The Place and Timing*

This engagement in the course is designed to last 8 weeks. The online portion of this hybrid course is 6 weeks long, while the live portions as scripted in this Leader Guide are for 7 weeks. To kick off the course, Week 1 consists of a live session to build rapport, trust, and relationships among group members who may not know each other. The group then walks through the other 6 sessions. For Week 8, there is no scripted session; this final gathering provides an opportunity to debrief the experience, fellowship together, and discuss next steps at a deeper level.

This course is designed for your participants to work through the online content each week before the cohort meets together in person. In this way, you will be able to see their progress and answers to better understand what may need to be focused on during the class session. You'll host the first session live (Week 1: A Live Introduction) before sending participants off to complete the first session online (Session A: Mission on our Doorsteps) - and then meet again to debrief what they learned online.

The live scripted meetings are designed with 1 hour of learning tasks. Consider setting the meeting time 30 minutes earlier to allow for learners to arrive and enjoy a refreshment and informal fellowship together. The learning space can be in a church or in someone's home. It should be large enough to accommodate up to 8-12 people with access to tables for writing, wall space for posting group activities, and physical space for small group discussions and activities.

While the content of the course holds some gravity, we recommend making the space fun and inviting for participants. Especially for the first gathering, consider providing an element of cross-cultural food and music before the group conversation begins. Invite people to take turns bringing food or snacks to subsequent gatherings, where they can offer a taste of their own culture.

## How?

### *Getting Set Up*

Before leading the course, you as the leader should go through the *Welcoming the Stranger: Small Group Leaders* course on World Relief's online e-learning platform, The Workshop. After you have taken the course, follow this basic setup:

1. The curriculum that all learners will use is called *Welcoming the Stranger: Small Group*. It is fully provided on World Relief's online e-learning platform, The Workshop. Though not essential, you may also find it helpful to download an electronic [PDF copy of the curriculum](#) or to order a [printed copy](#) if you prefer.

2. Go through the *Welcoming the Stranger: Small Group* course. Get accustomed to how the e-learning format works for your learners.
3. Enroll in the *Welcoming the Stranger: Small Group Leaders* course to learn how to launch the course and use this guide.
4. You will be given admin access to Thinkific as well as an online community just for your group. This will allow you to track what your group is doing in the online course, as well as foster group connection between meetings.
5. If you did not request admin and group access after you completed the *Welcoming the Stranger: Small Group Leaders* course, please email [elearning@wr.org](mailto:elearning@wr.org) with the following information, and we'll get you set up!
  - Your first & last name and email
  - The name of your church or group
  - Your city & state, or city & country if you're based outside the U.S.
6. Your admin access will be ready to go in 3-5 business days after requesting it from our team. When it's all set up, we'll send you an email with information on how to access it. This email will include a link to the *Welcoming the Stranger: Small Group* course that is **unique to your group**.
7. Share your unique course link with your group members so they can enroll in the *Welcoming the Stranger: Small Group* course. They will need to create a Thinkific account for The Workshop in order to enroll. When they enroll using this link, they'll be put into your online Group and Community. You will be able to view each member's progress in the course and to facilitate discussion and ongoing connection through the online Community.
8. More detailed guidance on how to use your Thinkific admin access and Community can be found in Module 5 of the *Welcoming the Stranger: Small Group Leaders* course. Please revisit these resources at any time. And If you need further technical support with your course, please reach out to [elearning@wr.org](mailto:elearning@wr.org).

# INTRO TO THE LESSONS

Each week, you'll use a lesson that looks like this to prepare for and lead your group session. Skim through this example below to get familiar with the introduction of each lesson.

## LESSON SUMMARY:

An at-a-glance summary of what you'll cover that week.

## TIME:

An estimate of time needed to get through each learning task with your group. You may wish to extend the meeting duration to include other elements of fellowship before or after the lesson.

### Objectives

- This section outlines what your group will do in each weekly learning conversation. Objectives help you assess what you want to accomplish and how your group is learning. It's helpful to share the daily objectives with group members as you begin the lesson and prepare to learn together.

### Preparation and materials needed:

- This section reminds you of any tasks you need to do before the session, including sending reminders to your group and printing or gathering materials needed for the Learning Tasks.

## Learning Tasks:

- There are 5 Learning Tasks to cover each week, and they each correspond to one of the session's objectives.
- Under each Learning Task is a scripted portion to help you lead your group through the task, noting places to invite discussion or engage with materials.
- Each Learning Task includes a time estimate. Sticking to the estimate allows you to respect your group's time and get through the Learning Tasks in 1 hour.

## Facilitating Learning Tasks<sup>1</sup>:

- Listen carefully to learners, and thank them for speaking. When people feel safe, they speak more freely, give honest answers, ask questions and, in the end, learn more.
- If people give a very short answer, you might want to encourage them to say more. You could say, "Tell us more about that."
- Try to have as many people as possible participate in the discussion. Encourage this by saying, "Let's hear from a new voice..."

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<sup>1</sup> Derived from *Savings: You Can Do It!* by Freedom From Hunger, 2008.

### **Telling Stories:**

- Know the scripted stories well and practice telling them dynamically before the session.
- Show different feelings on your face and in your gestures, such as worry, excitement and fear.
- Be sure to follow a story with the questions presented in the curriculum. Most learning happens after the story, during the discussion of open questions.

### **Presenting information:**

- Be familiar with important points to avoid reading them word-for-word. As you practice using the script, learn to relax your delivery style and use the script as a guide.
- Look at the participants as you give the information. Even if you read the information, look up occasionally so that people do not feel ignored.
- Watch people for signs of confusion. If you see signs of confusion, stop and ask what questions they have.

### **Asking open questions:**

- Use open questions to draw out ideas, opinions and experiences. These questions help participants think for themselves, discuss issues and make decisions. A closed question sounds like: "Any comments?" An example of an open question: "What might you add?"
- Pause after asking an open question to allow participants time to think. Look around the group expectantly as you wait for someone to answer.
- If no one responds, ask the same question using different words and pause again to indicate you are waiting for responses.





# WEEK 1

## A Live Introduction

### LESSON SUMMARY:

The facilitator will help the group lay foundations for learning together about God's heart for immigrants.

**TIME: 1 hour**

### Objectives

By the end of this session, we will:

1. **Introduce** ourselves by describing our interest in this topic;
2. **Create** a group agreement for our gatherings together;
3. **Review** learning journey and logistics regarding meeting topics and times;
4. **Examine** biblical foundations and goals for this gathering; and
5. **Share** experiences and commitments to practice welcome.

### Preparation and materials needed:

- Send a reminder message 2 days in advance, encouraging them to complete the *Introduction* section and reminding them of the time and place of the group meeting.
- If appropriate, invite your pastor to the first meeting to endorse the importance of this conversation.
- Photocopy group agreement (Appendix A) and key terms for all (Appendix B)
- Draw and post the Course Roadmap
- Post-it Notes

### Task 1: Introduce ourselves by describing our interest in this topic (10 minutes)

Thank you all so much for gathering together here with us!

**1A:** To open our time together, **share** your name and why you joined this learning cohort. Each person should take 2 minutes to share how you want to grow and be stretched through this experience.

## Task 2: Create a group agreement for our gatherings together (10 minutes)

**2A: Examine** this group agreement I've passed out. This agreement sets up some parameters and expectations for our time together. We want to create a safe space where your heart and mind are fully engaged. This does not mean it will always be comfortable, but it does mean you can be honest about where you're at. We want this to be a learning conversation, not a debate.

**2B: Read** through the group agreement on your own in silence for 2 minutes. Then, let's **discuss** it and **agree** on what we might want to add to our agreement in the empty bullets.

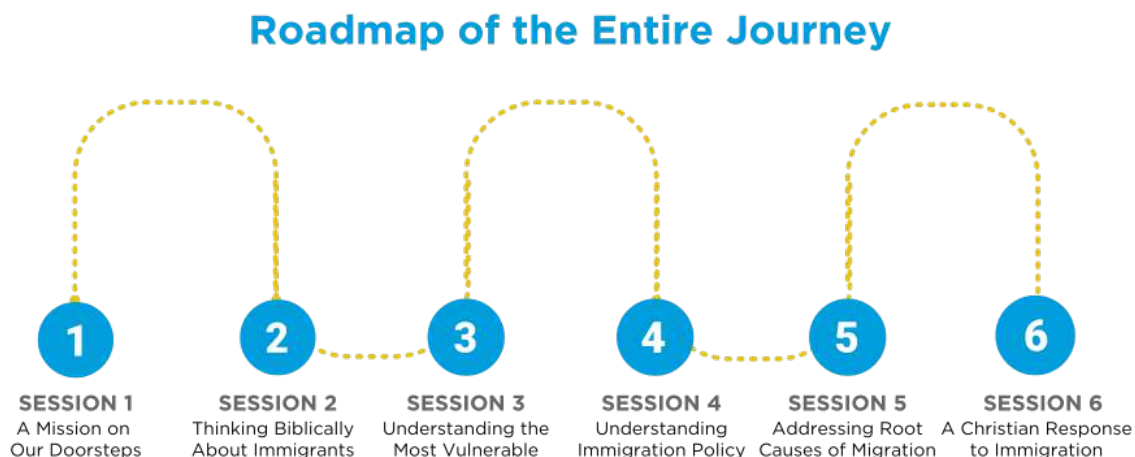
Thank you all so much for your thoughtful work and additions here. This is a place where we want to engage in active listening – listening thoroughly to what someone says and giving space for everyone to share and process honestly.

## Task 3: Review learning journey and logistics regarding meeting topics and times (10 minutes)

**3A:** Let's **open** by discussing our learning together, including the online pre-work, in-person group meetings, and take away experiences. We'll **clarify** any questions you have.

Before we meet each week, you'll work through a session online before our cohort meets together in person. I will send you an email invitation to join our cohort and set up an account in Thinkific to get started. This way, you will be prepared with the content in advance each week so we can go deeper in person. Before we gather again, you'll complete the first session online: *Session A: Mission on our Doorsteps* - and which we'll debrief when we meet next time.

**3B: Examine** this course roadmap of the journey we'll take together. **Listen** as I describe a glimpse of each step:



What questions do you have?

#### **Task 4: Examine biblical foundations and goals for this gathering (20 minutes)**

**4A:** Let's begin with the Bible as a starting place for this conversation. When asked by a religious expert, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers with the now familiar story of the Good Samaritan. Based on what we know of first century Jewish culture, this would have been the most hated man in the world by his hearers. As you listen, **think about** how Jesus defines *neighbor* in this passage—and how that informs the way that we talk about and engage with newcomers. Would a volunteer please read?

**4B:** After reflecting on this passage, **share** in the large group:

- Why do you think Jesus chose a Samaritan to be the hero of the story?
- If Jesus was telling this story to our group today, who might he have chosen to be the neighbor?
- Why do you think this definition of *neighbor* was so important to Jesus?

Jesus' answer to the question "Who is my neighbor?" can be understood as essentially: "*Who do you hate? Who are the people that make you uncomfortable? Who are the people you struggle to forgive? Are you willing to do whatever it takes to be a neighbor to them?*"

Showing hospitality to friends or people who are similar to us is a good first step, but this passage requires us to define *neighbor* differently, helping us to examine some deeper challenges to practicing cross-cultural welcome.

Thanks so much for boldly examining this Scripture together. While we are aware that there are lots of starting points possible in this conversation – economics, safety, politics, personal experience – our starting point as God's people should always be His heart. Every person, regardless of their status or origins is made in His image with profound dignity and worth and is worthy of God's love and ours. (Genesis 1:27)

**4C:** One primary goal of this time together is for all of us to become more responsive to God's heart on this issue. **Imagine** this as 3 steps:

1. **Awareness:** We see and acknowledge there are issues or problems.
2. **Competency:** We see, acknowledge and understand the issues or problems and how those play out.
3. **Responsiveness:** We see, acknowledge, understand and then act based on that understanding.

By the end of our journey together, our hope is that you will have the tools and courage to develop an authentic relationship with an immigrant friend - starting with inviting them for coffee/tea/lunch. As we begin this journey, look for what God might be doing in you and for opportunities He might be bringing your way.

### **Task 5: Share experiences and commitments to practice welcome (10 minutes)**

**5A:** As we prepare our hearts for this work, **think about** a time when you were welcomed well—into a new school, community, job, church or country. How did it make you feel? Write each word on a sticky note and post them on the wall, one word per note.

What similarities and themes do you see?

**5B: Reflect** on these experiences and words. **Choose** 1 word that represents the most powerful idea of welcome for you. This week, **commit** to praying that God will fill you with this virtue and that He will give you the wisdom and courage to practice it.

Let's pray together now for God's power to do this.

**5C:** As part of our commitment to love and understand our neighbors, **examine** the list of key terms on the back of our group covenant. Before we meet again, **familiarize** yourself with the distinctives of each term.

# WEEK 2

## Session A: Mission on our Doorsteps

### LESSON SUMMARY:

The facilitator will unpack the complexity of the issue of immigration and help the group develop nuanced foundations that avoid extremes and account for biblical complexity.

**TIME: 1 hour**

### Objectives

By the end of this session, we will:

1. **Share** honest connotations we carry regarding immigrants;
2. **Compare** 2 prominent views on immigration and **reflect** on our own perspectives;
3. **Consider** the opportunity immigration creates for the church;
4. **Examine** nuances and tensions in immigrant ministry; and
5. **Commit** to reflecting on Biblical stories and commands about engaging with immigrants.

### Preparation and materials needed:

- Send a reminder message 2 days in advance, encouraging them to complete Session A and reminding them of the time and place of the group meeting.
- Post-it Notes

### Task 1: Share honest connotations we carry regarding immigrants (5 minutes)

Welcome back! I'm so glad to gather with you all again to continue unpacking this important topic.

**1A:** To open our time together, **call out** one word that you think of when you picture an immigrant. What comes to mind? There is no right or wrong answer here—just your honest connotations. Take a few seconds to reflect, then **share** your word aloud in the large group.

### Task 2: Compare 2 prominent views on immigration and reflect on our own perspectives (20 minutes)

Thank you for sharing openly. If you listen in your community, you may find that many people have been influenced by 2 prominent views on immigration in our surrounding culture.

**2A: Listen** as I share this description of 2 prominent views. As you do, **think about** how these perspectives might have influenced your own.

### Immigrants as a threat:

On one end of the cultural and political debates, immigration—particularly illegal immigration, but sometimes also the arrival of refugees or foreign-born individuals in general—is blamed for any number of social woes: unemployment, terrorism, budget deficits, disease, crime, gangs, even global warming. From this perspective, immigrants themselves are often framed as the problem.

### Immigrants as an opportunity:

From a drastically different perspective, others see the broken immigration system as the problem. They consider the current immigration situation to be unjust toward immigrants who can add value to our society. They blame arbitrary laws and fear-mongering politicians for driving undocumented immigrants into the shadows, dividing families, restricting immigrants' ability to fully participate in the U.S. economy and preventing vulnerable people fleeing persecution from finding refuge.

**2B: Share** what tensions arise in you when you consider these contrasting positions. What voices or ideas have influenced your perspective on immigration? Let's hear from 2-3 people.

Like you, many Christians feel a tension between these perspectives. Guided by faith, they want to show love, welcome and compassion to those from other countries seeking a better life in the United States. But they also want to respect the rule of law—also a biblical principle—and to be able to protect and provide for their own families.

In 2022, Lifeway and World Relief commissioned a study on the views of evangelical Christians in the US on immigration. In general, evangelicals across ethnicities overwhelmingly support bipartisan immigration reform, including increased border security and establishing a path for undocumented immigrants to apply for citizenship if they pay a fine and pass a criminal background check. Compared to previous studies on the view of American Christians toward immigrants, many cited the Bible as a strong influence on their views about immigrants, though it still comes in third place after “friends and family” and “the media.”<sup>2</sup>

Speaking of Scripture, let's explore this issue further by looking at stories from the Bible.

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<sup>2</sup> Belz, Emily; *Today's Evangelicals More Likely to Welcome the Stranger*, Christianity Today, September 2022.

**2C: Divide** into two groups and **examine** these case studies from the Bible on two Pharaohs—one who saw immigrants as a threat and the other who saw them as an opportunity.

Each group has 5 minutes to **skim** the Scripture given to them. Then, you'll have 2 minutes to **share** key points with the large group.

Pharaoh over Joseph (Genesis 41)	Pharaoh over Exodus (Exodus 1)
<p>Key points to draw out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Trusted Joseph and saw the opportunity; gave him agency</li> <li>● Recognized the assets in Joseph, even as immigrant, i.e. “Immigrants are not just mouths but hands and brains” (Michael Gerson)</li> </ul>	<p>Key points to draw out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Did not trust the Israelites; wanted their labor, but not them as people</li> <li>● Saw immigrants through lens of fear; threat become so immense that Pharaoh committed genocide (killing baby boys)</li> </ul>

Many thanks to both groups for sharing your insights.

**2D:** Together, let's **analyze** this comparison between the 2 Pharaohs.

- How might our beliefs about immigrants—as threat or opportunity—shape our attitudes and practices toward them?
- Is it fair to apply this idea to our immigration situation today? Why or why not?

We are presented with a similar choice as the Egyptian leaders of a few millennia ago: to view immigrants as a threat or as an opportunity.

Immigration can present an economic opportunity for the United States—economists almost universally agree that immigration, and even illegal immigration, is beneficial for the United States economy<sup>3</sup>. However, more importantly for the Church, immigration presents vital social and spiritual benefits.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, 96% of economists surveyed by the WSJ believe that the net economic impact of illegal immigration on the U.S. economy has been positive. See Tim Annett, “Illegal Immigrants and the Economy,” Wall Street Journal, April 13, 2006.

**Task 3: Consider the opportunity immigration creates for the church (15 minutes)**

**3A: Divide** into 3 groups and **discuss** these 3 potential opportunities that immigrants create for the church: *missional, spiritual formation, and renewal*.

I'll explain 1 of these 3 opportunities to each group, including a key question. Then, your group will have 5 minutes to discuss and prepare to share a summary with the large group.

Opportunity: Missional	Opportunity: Spiritual Formation	Opportunity: Renewal
<p>Scripture: Matthew 28:19 - "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"</p>	<p>Scripture: Ephesians 2:13-14 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility."</p>	<p>Scripture: Acts 17:26-27 - "From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries. His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us."</p>
<p>Question: Missiologists have found that immigrants are one of the most receptive groups of people to believing the gospel. Why do you think that immigrants are more open to the gospel than those who do not migrate?</p>	<p>Question: Friendship across ethnic and cultural lines can challenge and change us, helping us to see God's image more clearly. How have you experienced this in your own life?</p>	<p>Question: Immigrants are more likely to already be Christians or become Christians than many other populations. How might this renew the church and society in the US?</p>

Thank you for sharing your insights! From the early church in Acts up to the reformation, and from the early colonists in America to the modern day, immigrants can spark renewal in the new communities where they arrive, shaping culture for greater good. This creates an incredible opportunity for the church in our nation to grow and revive.



**3B: Call out** any examples you've seen or heard about how immigrants have helped to revive a community.

#### **Task 4: Discuss nuances and tensions in immigrant ministry (15 minutes)**

Thank you so much for sharing! While immigrants can help to revive the new communities where they arrive, they also face complex struggles, too. Like you and I, they are human beings who have been affected by the Fall. Immigrants themselves make imperfect choices at times—and they can also be used by those who see them as a threat or opportunity. Let's explore this further.

**4A: Listen** to the story of Amir and Susana and **think about** the complexity of life as an immigrant.

After the war stole his wife and home, Amir fled to the US from Southeast Asia as a refugee. He met Susana, from Latin America, in an ESL class the same year he arrived. A medical technician by training, she came to the US on a temporary work permit. After it expired, Susana took on busing tables and contract translation work for cash to make ends meet.

The couple's daughter arrived shortly after they moved in together. Even with no family or roots in the country, their pastor Luke encouraged them to marry. They are part of a small storefront church where Pastor Luke preaches on Sundays and works alongside Amir in remodeling during the week.

Amir and Susana have learned to feel at home with this small group of immigrant brothers and sisters. Some own business and homes; others are undocumented farm workers and struggling to get by. From factory line work to office professionals, one size does not fit all—everyone's story and situation is unique. There are even a small group of college students who have joined their fellowship this year.

Even after many years in the US, life is still not easy for Amir and Susana. Their daughter is often told to "go back to where she came from" at school - though she was born in the US. Others have taken advantage of their labor, underpaying them and then threatening to call the police. Still others, even US born citizens, have been incredibly welcoming to them. One of Amir's ESL teachers, who has hosted them for dinner, taught him about the image of God in all people. "And that's something I see in each one of you" he remembers her saying through a smile as she pushed back the wisps of gray hair from her teary eyes.

**4B: Call to mind** the people you know like Amir and Susana. **Share:** How has your personal relationship with them shaped your views about immigrants?

**4C:** If you don't know anyone like Amir and Susana, **imagine:** How might building a friendship with similar people shape them—and you—to grow closer to God's heart?

As followers of Christ, we often must live in tension, walking alongside others in situations that we cannot fix. Let's acknowledge that it's okay to feel that discomfort and frustration—I invite you to trust the process as we continue this conversation. In future lessons, we'll get further into legal complexities and issues surrounding immigration.

### **Task 5: Commit to studying Biblical stories and commands about engaging with immigrants (5 minutes)**

Thankfully, the Scripture is not silent about how we should engage with immigrants. As followers of Jesus, we should seek to understand His heart and perspective on all things.

**5A:** Before we meet again, I invite you to **commit** to the *I Was a Stranger* challenge, prayerfully reading 40 different Bible passages that relate in one way or another to the topic of immigration. You can find these Scriptures in the online course or on YouVersion's Bible app. Of the 40 passages, **choose** 1 that you will meditate on and share in our next gathering.

**5B:** Let's **close** in prayer together now, asking the Lord to speak to our hearts through His Word.

# WEEK 3

## Session B: Thinking Biblically about Immigration

### LESSON SUMMARY:

The facilitator will illuminate the idea that God is not silent about immigrants in the Scripture, unpacking this theme throughout the Bible.

**TIME: 1 hour**

### Objectives

By the end of this session, we will:

1. **Share** immigrant stories and verses from Scripture;
2. **Analyze** the complexity of immigration through scenarios;
3. **Explore** the tension between morality and law within immigration;
4. **Imagine** the Christian posture toward the state; and
5. **Consider** the call to practice Biblical hospitality.

### Preparation and materials needed:

- Send a reminder message 2 days in advance, encouraging them to complete Session B and reminding them of the time and place of the group meeting.
- Print and prepare *Immigrating the Legal Way* scenarios. Important tip: Print in color. Print pages 2-13 double-sided. Print pages 14-21 single-sided.
- Clay or Play-doh (4) and photocopies of 2 Views
- Post-it Notes

### Task 1: Share immigrant stories and verses from Scripture (15 minutes)

Welcome back! I'm so glad to gather with you all again to continue discussing the important topic of immigration. Today, we'll keep exploring God's heart for immigrants in the Scripture and imagine what our posture and practices toward them should look like.

In fact, many of the key Biblical characters cross borders at one point or another as immigrants. Hebrews 11 goes as far as to make a blanket statement about God's people: "They were aliens and strangers on earth."

**1A: Think about** people from the Bible who come to mind who were immigrants, moving from one country or nation to another. **Write** each one on a separate post-it note and **stick** it on the chart/wall. Then, we'll **organize** them chronologically.

It is fascinating to see how many of our ancestors of faith were immigrants. As you know from the *I Was a Stranger* challenge, God's heart for the triad of immigrant, orphan, and widow is central throughout the Bible. Showing love and care for immigrants is not just general guidance in Scripture—there are numerous specific instructions and rules to ensure that God's people care for and consider them, with the Hebrew word *ger* (foreigner/immigrant) appearing 92 times in the Old Testament.

**1B: Listen** to Deuteronomy 10:17-19, a favorite Scripture from the Old Testament. This comes from Moses, who tells the new generation of Israelites in the wilderness to be faithful to God who gives them a new chance to stand apart from the cultures of the world through His wisdom and justice.

For the Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great God, the mighty and awesome God, who shows no partiality and cannot be bribed. He ensures that orphans and widows receive justice. He shows love to the foreigners living among you and gives them food and clothing. So you, too, must show love to foreigners, for you yourselves were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.

**1C:** Let's now take a moment to **call out** some of the Scriptures that spoke to you from the *I Was a Stranger* challenge. Let's hear from several who want to share.

- What common themes did you find in these references in the Bible to immigrants and immigration? What surprised you?

## **Task 2: Analyze the complexity of immigration through scenarios (20 minutes)**

Thanks so much for exploring these Scriptures! Let's dive deeper into how they apply to the realities of our global neighbors who have come to the United States.

In the modern day US, we no longer live in a theocracy like Israel that was founded on things in common—with God as King and giver of the law and all people called to keep Him at the center. Today, the US is a representative democracy and the concepts of national borders and modern immigration structures are surely different.

The challenging question that still remains is: how does God's foundational vision for love, compassion, justice, and care for the vulnerable carry through? What core principles apply in spite of these different contexts?

**2A:** With a partner, **read** this card that I've passed out to you with scenarios from around the world. During the online course, you skimmed through several of these scenarios on immigrating the legal way. To begin, just read the first side. Don't look at the back of the card yet.

**2B:** Let's have 2-3 people **share** their scenario and we'll walk it through the system. After we attempt to navigate toward eligibility, we'll hear more about your possibilities on the back of each card.

- What new insights does this give you about the complexity of immigration?

As you can see, immigration is a multifaceted, complex system. Let's revisit Amir and Susana's story where we'll explore the tension between submitting to human authority and our ultimate authority which is God.

### **Task 3: Explore the tension between morality and law within immigration (5 minutes)**

**3A: Listen** to more of Amir and Susana's story. As you do, **think about** what it means to be a good citizen of the kingdom of God *and* also a good citizen of the United States.

It's been 3 years since both Amir and Susana arrived in the United States. Between paying rent, caring for their daughter, tithing, and sending remittances back to their families overseas, their budget is always tight. "We said we'd do a beach vacation this year" they laughed to each other as they paid the \$2 entrance fee to a local lakefront park.

As a refugee, Amir has the right to a legal work permit that could lead to a better job once his English improves. However, due to a paperwork error, his work permit was delayed. He then began working in remodeling for cash under the table. The only attorney Amir knows says the error—including the time lapsed and unauthorized work he took—will now cost thousands of dollars in legal fees to make right. Amir doesn't have the money or time to fix it. He feels stuck. He wants to do things right, but also needs to provide for his family this very week.

Susana, on other hand, came to the US on a tourist visa—and decided to remain without authorization, beginning to bus tables for cash. She couldn't go back to her former boss in her country who was abusive—even threatening to kill her if she wouldn't continue to sleep with him. She cried for days when her asylum claim was denied last year.

Although it isn't much above minimum wage, in the US, Susana can make 5 times her salary, supporting her ailing mother and son back in Latin America. It would be especially complicated to go back to her country now that she has a husband here and a daughter who is a US citizen, too. Like Amir, Susana is stuck without a clear pathway to both care for her family and honor the law.

**3B:** Let's **consider** and **discuss**:

- What might it look like for Amir and Susana to follow both biblical commands to care for their family while also following the law?
- What should they do when these two things seem to contradict?

Many cite Romans 13 on submitting to governing authorities. When read in the context of Romans 12, we must also remember we are called “not to be conformed to the world...but to share with God’s people who are in need...to practice hospitality.” These are the standards for our leaders and laws in Romans 13—and we must always call them back to biblical values of welcome and hospitality.

Thankfully, one thing is certain: showing welcome, gestures of compassion, or relational help is not in violation of US law for citizens (only employing someone who is not authorized to work).

**Task 4: Imagine the Christian posture toward the state (15 minutes)**

As we further consider this tension between morality and law, let’s think about what a Christian posture toward the state should look like.

**4A: Divide** into 2 groups and **examine** these 2 perspectives: the *God & Country* view and the *Resist & Reform* view toward the state. After reading, use the clay to sculpt an object that depicts the view you’ve been assigned.

You have 3 minutes. Then, we’ll **hear** from both groups and **applaud** your art!

### God & Country

**The View:** Many Christians see God's goals and America's goals as one and the same. Therefore, it is not just a civic duty to love and support America, it is also a Christian duty. The merging of biblical mandates for the church to be “a city set on a hill...” are applied to the US nation state, giving the nation the divine right to act in its own spiritual interest however it sees fit. This feeling was particularly strong in America from the early 1920s and into the Cold War, when the global threat was communism.

**The Trouble:** Linking patriotism and faith too closely can lead us to believe that the essence of being a good Christian is being a good citizen. While this view rightfully emphasizes the need for security and integrity of our borders and laws, the focus of discipleship ceases to be spiritual but national, and we begin to view the nation as God's primary way of accomplishing his goals in the world, conflating the goals of worldly kingdoms with the kingdom of God.

## Resist & Reform

**The View:** Many justice minded Christians believe that Jesus' ministry was primarily a model of resistance to the values and aspirations of the Roman Empire. By extension, Christians are supposed to follow Jesus' example by resisting imperial tendencies, including the power, violence, and injustice on which they depend. According to this perspective, Jesus was establishing a counter-empire: the kingdom of God. While this position rightly takes seriously the fact that the first Christian declaration of faith—"Jesus is Lord!"—had political overtones and consequences, it also makes too much of the nation.

**The Trouble:** Instead of the nation being God's partner, the nation becomes God's primary enemy. Christian faithfulness in this view becomes based on one's posture toward the nation. To do God's will is to work for social justice, equality, and liberty, and to resist the abuses of capitalism and nationalism. This can easily reduce the faith to only social reform.

Thank you for sharing your sculptures!

As you can see, both of these views fail to fully capture a Christian posture toward the state. As God's people, we must balance the awareness that we are aliens and strangers in this land (1 Pet. 2:11) and that we are "citizens of heaven" (Phil. 3:20) with our duty to seek stability, peace, and prosperity for the land where we live. As Jeremiah wrote: "seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer. 29:7).

**4B: Reimagine** a Christian posture toward the state that both welcomes immigrants and also honors the rule of law and governing authorities. With your group, use the clay to **depict** a second object that reconciles both compassion and integrity, transcending the previous views.

Take 3 more minutes. Then, we'll **examine** and **applaud** your art!

### Task 5: Consider the call to practice Biblical hospitality (5 minutes)

Our modern definition of hospitality varies greatly from the Biblical perspective. The friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests and visitors (usually people like you—your friends and your extended family, and usually geared towards extroverts).

While this isn't a bad thing, God's people, both the Israelites of the OT and Jesus' followers in the NT) are distinguished by how radically different and counter-cultural their love and care for foreigners is—regardless of their ethnicity or legal status. Biblical hospitality—*philo-xenos*—literally means "the love of foreigners"—a stark contrast from the xenophobia we see in recent times.

**5A:** As we close, **think in silence** for a moment who you might put biblical hospitality into practice. This should go beyond doing a service for someone and instead imagining how you might welcome an immigrant or refugee into your home and life. What would this look like for you and your family? What about your church?

Take a few moments to **write down** your convictions about what this might look like in your own life. What simple step can you take this week?

**5B:** Let's **close** in prayer together now, asking the Lord to help us put what we've considered into practice.



## WEEK 4

### Session C: The Most Vulnerable—Refugees, Undocumented Immigrants, and Victims of Human Trafficking

#### LESSON SUMMARY:

The facilitator will help the group to explore realities and myths regarding this minority of immigrants who are most vulnerable—and who also tend to be the most controversial and prone to misunderstanding.

**TIME: 1 hour**

#### Objectives

By the end of this session, we will:

1. **Reflect** on our own convictions and stories;
2. **Examine** the realities of refugees to the US;
3. **Consider** the church's role in engaging undocumented immigrants;
4. **Explore** the realities of human trafficking;
5. **Assess** how local churches in our community respond to vulnerable immigrants; and
6. **Commit** to share learning with others.

#### Preparation and materials needed:

- Send a reminder message 2 days in advance, encouraging them to complete Session C and reminding them of the time and place of the group meeting.
- Printed *Immigrating the Legal Way* flowchart (from last meeting)
- Post-it Notes

#### Task 1: Reflect on our own convictions and stories (10 minutes)

Welcome back! I'm so glad to gather with you all again to continue discussing the important topic of immigration. Today, we'll discuss specifically the most vulnerable immigrants among us in the US—refugees, the undocumented, and human trafficking victims.

**1A:** Before we example this further, take a few moments to **reflect** on the practices of Biblical hospitality that we discussed in our last meeting and about what that might look like in your own life. What thoughts, progress, or convictions might anyone like to share?

**1B: Review** the flowchart we looked at last time from the *Immigrating the Legal Way* activity. For many of us, unless our ancestry is completely Native American, we also have a migration story in our own family histories—whether that was last month, last century, or 500 years ago and whether fully voluntary or forced.

After exploring your own family tree, **reflect** on the immigration story of any of your ancestors and how they might or might not be able to make it through the current immigration pathway today. **Share** any thoughts or conclusions with the large group.

Thank you for sharing! As we've seen even from our own stories, the movement of people to new lands has been incredibly complex throughout history. Because of this, there are understandably myths, half-truths, and even outright lies surrounding newcomers to our nation. Part of the importance of this time together is to become *myth-busters*, those who seek and find truth, dismantle mistruths, and hold complexity as we engage our neighbors.

Let's take some time now to specifically discuss each category of the most vulnerable immigrants—refugees, the undocumented, and human trafficking victims.

## **Task 2: Examine the realities of refugees to the US (15 minutes)**

**2A: Listen** to this short definition of a refugee and **think about** what you might add.

A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Before arriving in the US, a refugee must undergo a long vetting process that takes anywhere from 1.5-3 years—the most thorough process for any category of immigrant or visitor to the US.

What might you add to this definition?

**2B: Open** your phone and **look up** the current numbers for refugee resettlement in the US. What is the ceiling/cap for refugees coming to the US for this fiscal year as stated by the US government?

Contrary to some myths, overall the US does NOT take in a large percentage of the world's refugees. For example, in 2018, the US admitted only about one-tenth of one percent of those individuals—and never in recent years has the share of refugees selected annually for resettlement been more than one-half of one percent. By comparison, in Lebanon, roughly one in four residents is a Syrian refugee (2018).

**2C: Share:** what other common myths or realities about refugees strike you from our reading?

For example:

- *Safety* - of roughly 3 million refugees who have entered through the Refugee Resettlement Program since 1980, not a single one has taken an American life in a terrorist attack<sup>4</sup>.
- *Fiscal* - 20 years after arrival, the average refugee adult has paid in about \$21,000 more in taxes than the combined cost of resettlement assistance and any public benefits they've received<sup>5</sup>

**2D:** Often, refugee families have only seconds to gather their most treasured belongings before they are forced to flee. **Consider:** if you only had seconds to choose 3 things, what would you take?<sup>6</sup>

**Think** for 1 minute and **select** three things. Then, we'll **hear** from any who want to share.

**2E:** Let's **reflect** on whether our nation has a moral obligation to accept refugees. As the US has been founded on convictions of religious freedom for all, the "Muslim Ban" of 2017 understandably created much public dialogue. These executive orders prohibited travel and refugee resettlement from select predominantly Muslim countries.

The cultural tensions between "taking care of our own first" and the biblical call to love our neighbor have crept into the church, as well. We might be tempted to opt out of these complex policy questions. But if God's people choose not to engage, who is left to shape what these policies become?

Let's take 5 minutes to **dialogue:** does the U.S. have a moral responsibility to take in some of the world's refugees, or not? Why or why not?

### **Task 3: Consider the church's role in engaging undocumented immigrants (15 minutes)**

Let's now consider another controversial group of immigrants—people who are undocumented. Out of respect for the dignity and image of God in each person, we use the terms *unauthorized* or *undocumented* instead of *illegal*.

As we read in *Welcoming the Stranger*, whether they cross the border without authorization or overstay a visa, most of the 11 million+ undocumented immigrants in the U.S. are motivated either by economic desperation, fear of violence in their country of origin, the desire to reunite with family or some combination of these factors. Most would have preferred to have entered the country as lawful immigrants, but they did not qualify for an immigrant visa. And, once they are here unlawfully, there is usually no option under existing law for them to get right with the law.

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<sup>4</sup> Alex Nowrasteh, "Terrorism and Immigration: A Risk Analysis," CATO Institute, September 13, 2016, [https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa798\\_2.pdf](https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa798_2.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens and Issam Smeir, *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis* (Moody Publishers, 2016), 16.

<sup>6</sup> From #threetoflee - <https://worldrelief.org/threetoflee/>

Before his tragic death in 2018, chef Anthony Bourdain wrote an intriguing post about our neighbor to the south—the country of Mexico. Though writing from a culinary lens as a global celebrity chef, Bourdain highlights the complexity of this interdependent relationship.

**3A: Listen** to an excerpt of his words and **think about** this relationship between nations.

Americans love Mexican food. We consume nachos, tacos, burritos, tortas, enchiladas, tamales and anything resembling Mexican in enormous quantities. We love Mexican beverages, happily knocking back huge amounts of tequila, mezcal, and Mexican beer every year. We love Mexican people—we sure employ a lot of them. Despite our ridiculously hypocritical attitudes towards immigration, we demand that Mexicans cook a large percentage of the food we eat, grow the ingredients we need to make that food, clean our houses, mow our lawns, wash our dishes, and look after our children. As any chef will tell you, our entire service economy—the restaurant business as we know it—in most American cities, would collapse overnight without Mexican workers....We (also) love Mexican drugs. Maybe not you personally, but “we”, as a nation, certainly consume titanic amounts of them—and go to extraordinary lengths and expense to acquire them. We love Mexican music, Mexican beaches, Mexican architecture, interior design, Mexican films. So, why don't we love Mexico?

We throw up our hands and shrug at what happens and what is happening just across the border. Maybe we are embarrassed. Mexico, after all, has always been there for us, to service our darkest needs and desires. Whether it's to dress up like fools and get passed-out drunk and sunburned on spring break in Cancun, throw pesos at strippers in Tijuana, or get toasted on Mexican drugs, we are seldom on our best behavior in Mexico. They have seen many of us at our worst. They know our darkest desires...

Mexico. Our brother from another mother. A country, with whom, like it or not, we are inexorably, deeply involved, in a close but often uncomfortable embrace.<sup>7</sup>

- What strikes you about the complexity of this relationship between nations?

Although this is the common perception, Mexican nationals no longer make up the majority of new unauthorized immigrants in the US; as the percentage of Mexicans decreases, the number of unauthorized immigrants rose over the 2007-2017 decade from Asia and Central America.<sup>8</sup>

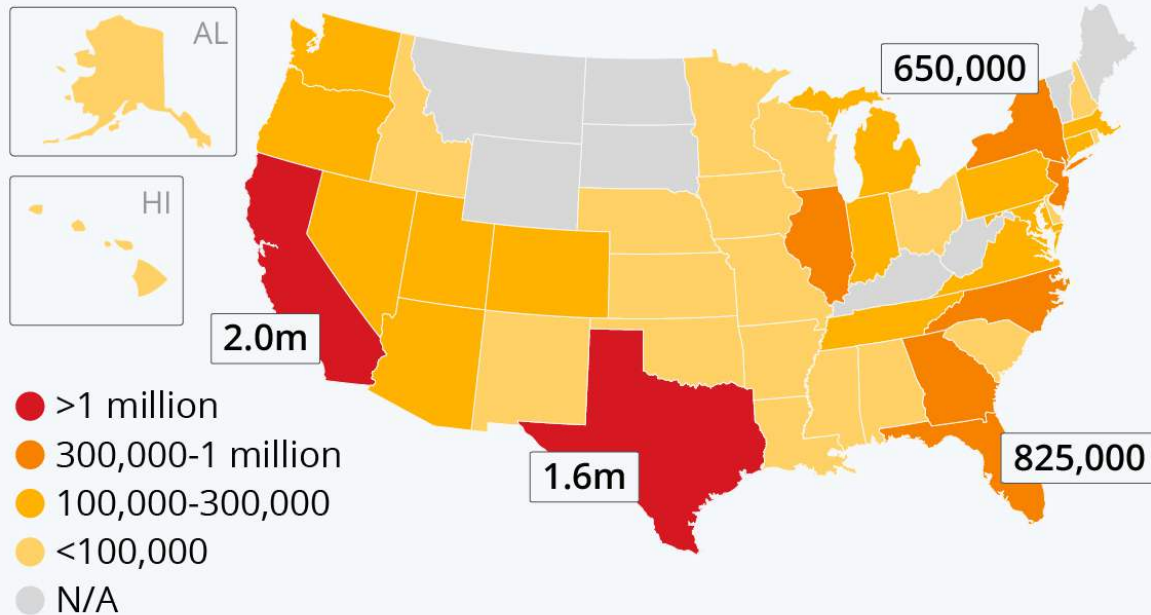
**3B: Examine** this map of the US that depicts where undocumented immigrants live in the US. and **think about** the population in your area. What do you think the role of the church should play in interacting with our neighbors who are in the country unlawfully?

<sup>7</sup> Derived from Anthony Bourdain's field notes on Mexico, *Parts Unknown*, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> *Mexicans Decline to Less than Half the U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population*, Pew Research Center, 2019.

# Where Undocumented Immigrants Live in the U.S.

Size of the undocumented immigrant population by U.S. state (2017 estimates)



Range of +/- 5,000 to 50,000 depending on the size of the population  
Source: Pew Research Center



World Relief advocates for immigration reform that honors the rule of law, but also creates a path to restitution. We imagine an immigration system that is fair to taxpayers and is also restorative for individuals, families, and communities—as well as our economy—not just punitive. We believe that in the kingdom of God, there is always a pathway to reconciliation. We'll talk more about this in our next meeting.

#### Task 4: Explore the realities of human trafficking (10 minutes)

**4A:** Let's now turn our attention to human trafficking—a plight that disproportionately affects immigrants in the US. **Listen** to this United Nations (UN) definition of human trafficking:

"The Act of recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation."

As we explored online, immigrants are disproportionately represented among victims of both sex trafficking and, particularly, labor trafficking in the U.S. In fact, based on Department of Justice prosecution data analyzed by the Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking (FAAST), 95% of labor trafficking victims have been immigrants, most of them undocumented.<sup>9</sup>

**4B:** Though not all have been trafficked directly, many of our immigrant neighbors have experienced trauma in their journey to the US. Let's **explore** the story of Amir and Susana further.

Amir and Susana visit with their pastor, Luke and his wife Miriam, for biblical counseling every month. After years of fellowship together, they have finally built up the courage to unpack and open up about the trauma they've each experienced in their journey to the United States.

After losing his wife, and before he was formally approved for resettlement in the US, Amir lived in the camps for many months. Tricked by a labor trafficker who promised good pay for hard work, Amir crossed the border into a third country and was forced to work long hours for little pay and meager food and water. He weeps as he recalls the story of barely escaping with his life.

Susana cries with him, having also experienced sexual abuse in the workplace back in her country of origin—and even by a man in the United States before she met Amir. She found herself desperate, even on the brink of sex work, the year she met Amir in that church basement ESL class.

They take comfort in prayer, counseling, and the Scriptures of Lamentations, which gives them space to mourn as God's people have throughout history: *The thought of my pain, my homelessness, is bitter poison; I think of it constantly and my spirit is depressed. Yet hope returns when I remember this one thing: The LORD's unfailing love and mercy still continue, Fresh as the morning, as sure as the sunrise. The LORD is all I have, and so in him I put my hope.* (Lamentations 3:19–24)

<sup>9</sup> Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking, "Uniquely Vulnerable: The Nexus between Human Trafficking and Immigration," 2015.

**4C: Discuss:** How might the church be a part of seeking freedom and healing for those affected by the bondage and trauma of trafficking?

**Task 5: Assess how local churches in our community respond to vulnerable immigrants (10 minutes)**

Now that we've discussed a little bit about the most vulnerable immigrants among us—refugees, the undocumented, and human trafficking victims—let's assess how local churches in our community are responding.

While there are certainly legal, economic, and political implications, what is the role of the church here? Ultimately, the most important question for Christians is not what the government's role is; it is whether we are being faithful to our distinct role as the Church: to love God and our neighbors, to stand with the vulnerable and to make disciples of all nations.

**5A: Assess** how you think the local churches in our community are responding to these vulnerable categories of immigrants. **Divide** into 3 groups and each focus on one of these groups. On a scale of 1-10, how appropriately are God's people responding in our area? **Discuss:** What are we doing well? How could we be a part of a stronger, more biblical response?

**Share** for 5 minutes, then we'll hear a summary from each group.

**Task 6: Commit to share learning with others (5 minutes)**

**6A:** As we close, **think in silence** for a moment for what next steps you might take to live out God's heart for these vulnerable categories of people. What would this look like for you and your family? What about your church?

**6B:** Take a few moments to **write down** who you might talk to in your life about what we've considered today. What simple conversation can you have? With whom?

**6C:** Let's **close** in prayer together now, asking the Lord to have mercy on refugees, the undocumented, and human trafficking victims—and to call His church to love them.





# WEEK 5

## Session D: Understanding Immigration Policy: Past and Present

### LESSON SUMMARY:

The facilitator will lead a discussion on the history and current realities of immigration in the US, exploring biblical ideas for immigration reform.

**TIME: 1 hour**

### Objectives

By the end of this session, we will:

1. **Reflect** on our own history and experiences with immigration;
2. **Create** a timeline outlining the last century of immigration in the US;
3. **Explore** the realities for 4 current pathways to legal immigration;
4. **Examine** principles of biblical immigration reform; and
5. **Commit** to small action steps toward reform.

### Preparation and materials needed:

- Send a reminder message 2 days in advance, encouraging learners to complete Session D and reminding them of the time and place of the group meeting.
- Flipchart/markers
- Draw timeline, 6 Principles in advance on flip chart sheets.
- Post-it Notes
- Smartphones/tablets for basic internet research

Welcome back everyone! It's great to see you all again to continue discussing the important topic of immigration. Today, we'll debrief some of our learning about the history of immigration and explore the realities of today and biblical ideals for reform.

### Task 1: Reflect on our own history and experiences with immigration

**1A:** Before we dive in, let's **reflect** on The \$3.20 per Day Challenge. **Share:**

- Who has accepted the challenge? What are you most excited or nervous about?
- What might it be like if you were born into a situation where living on \$3.20 a day—not just for food, but for all of your expenses—was your daily experience?

Many of your own life histories may have involved living in poverty at some point, too. We honor those experiences and thank you for anything you graciously share that helps our learning.

We've also spent some time together reflecting on our own family trees and the immigration story of our own families of origin.

**1B: Think back** to which country or countries you trace your immigrant roots and what you know about your immigrant ancestors. I realize that for some us—such as African Americans, Native peoples, colonial subjects (Guam, Puerto Rico, etc.), adoptees or refugees—this history may reflect traumas related to the Trail of Tears, the slave trade, war, or famine. We honor and support you in this group—and don't expect you to share anything unless you feel comfortable revealing any experiences or emotions most important to them.

For all of us, let's **reflect**: how do you think your ancestors were similar to contemporary immigrants, and how were they different?

Thank you for your willingness to share.

As we reflected upon in the course, the US is known for being a nation of immigrants in our history. We are proud of this, even embellishing and romanticizing this immigrant history. Yet we see a dualism in this today. On the one hand, we revel in the nation's immigrant past—and on the other, we reject much of our immigrant present. Historian Roger Daniels writes about this dualistic divide between the way that Americans view the immigrants of a century ago and the way that we view immigrants today.

Today, immigrants are welcomed by some and scapegoated by others. *Nativist* thought—which seeks to protect the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants—remains mainstream. Even past immigration policy was restrictive, racist, prejudice, and ethnocentric—where the “haves” chose who was allowed to immigrate.

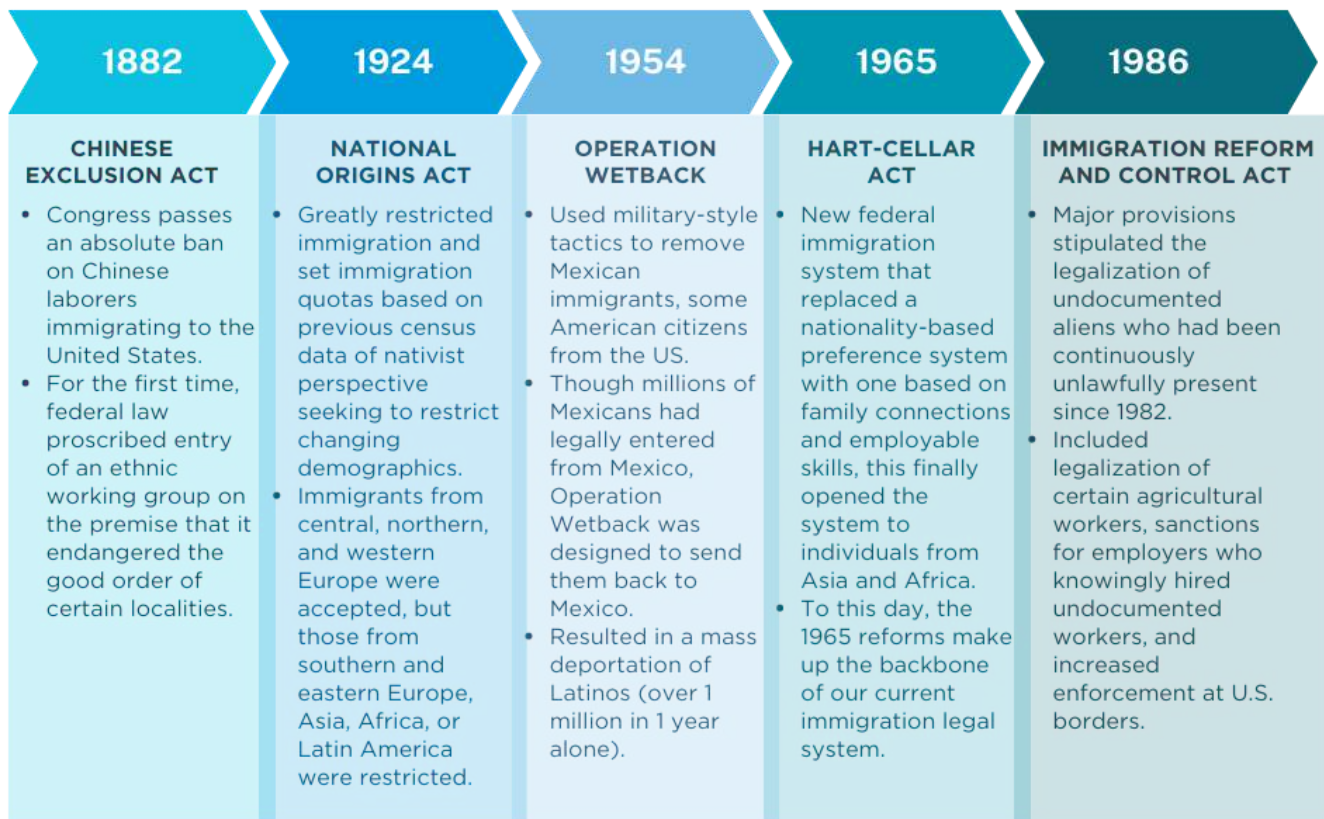
**1C: Share:** after our online lesson, what surprised you about how our current immigration legal system functions?

## **Task 2: Create a timeline outlining the last century of immigration in the US**

**2A: Examine** this visual timeline of US immigration history. Before 1882, the pathway to immigrate to the US was simply to arrive at the nation's borders. As immigration grew and economic conditions tightened, Congress began to pass laws restricting the entry of people in the country.

In pairs, **research** one of the acts listed. I'll assign one act to each pair. After 2 minutes, **share a** short summary to the large group.

## LAST CENTURY OF IMMIGRATION IN THE US TIMELINE



Thanks for your great summaries!

More recently, Congress has authorized other immigration categories, such as:

- TPS - Temporary Protected Status (1990)
- DACA - Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (2012)

**2B:** After this discussion, **think about** what elements of our country's immigration history you see repeating themselves in the current national dialogue about immigration. What similarities or continuing trends do you see? (i.e. nativism, ethnocentrism, white supremacy, scapegoats, assimilation, melting Pot vs tossed salad, etc).

### Task 3: Explore the realities for 4 current pathways to legal immigration

**3A:** As we reviewed online, there are 4 current pathways to immigrate legally to the US today. Let's now **divide** into 4 groups and **consider** current stats on these pathways. Because these numbers

change each year, we'll **examine** current realities for family-based, employment-based, humanitarian, and diversity lottery pathways.

For each group representing these 4 categories, **research**:

1. who is eligible to apply; and
2. what limitations and caps exist.

After 5 minutes, we'll **hear** a short summary from each group.

### Family-based immigration

Individuals admitted either as immediate relatives of U.S. citizens or through the family preference system. Prospective immigrants under the immediate relatives' category are: spouses of US citizens; unmarried minor children of US citizens (under 21-years-old); and parents of US citizens (petitioner must be at least 21-years-old to petition for a parent). A limited number of visas are available every year under the family preference system; only 480,000 family-based immigrant visas per year means the preference categories have to wait (often for years) until a visa is available.

### Employment-based immigration

The focus is on extraordinary abilities, an advanced degree, or an ability to invest in the United States. For this category, only 140,000 visas are available per year. This number includes the immigrants plus their eligible spouses and minor unmarried children, meaning the actual number of employment-based immigrants is actually less. At the time of writing, only 5,000 low-skilled workers per year were eligible.

### Humanitarian-based immigration

The focus of this category is for refugee or asylee immigrants who hold a well-founded fear of persecution due to race, membership in a particular social group, political opinion, religion, or national origin. At the time of writing, there were over 70 70.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, with approximately 26 million being refugees (UNHCR). Claims at the US Southern border have also recently hit all-time highs for those passing credible fear interviews, but being denied asylum (over 65% of asylum cases are denied – with even higher rates for Mexico and the Northern Triangle countries).

### Diversity Lottery

The intention of this category is to diversify the immigrants who come to the United States. To be eligible to enter, an applicant must have at least a high school education or two years of professional experience. With some countries being excluded due to overrepresentation, remaining applicants hold about a 1 in 300 chance to win the diversity lottery.

**3B: Think back** on Amir and Susana's story. Let's **share**:

- What do you remember about their journeys to the US?
- Which of these pathways has Amir taken?
- What pathway might Susana be eligible to take, if any?

#### **Task 4: Examine principles of biblical immigration reform**

Thanks for this conversation. Let's now take a few moments to **envision** reform to our immigration system that aligns with biblical principles.

The *Evangelical Immigration Table* (EIT) believes that our outdated immigration laws have created a moral, economic and political crisis for this nation. According to EIT:

Initiatives to remedy this crisis have led to polarization and name calling in which opponents have misrepresented each other's positions as open borders and amnesty versus deportations of millions. This false choice has led to an unacceptable political stalemate at the federal level at a tragic human cost. We urge our nation's leaders to work together with the American people to pass immigration reform that embodies key (biblical) principles and that will make our nation proud.

**4A: Examine** these 6 principles for reform promoted by EIT and **note** the tensions they are trying to hold.

As evangelical Christian leaders, EIT calls for a bipartisan solution on immigration that:

1. Respects the God-given dignity of every person.
2. Protects the unity of the immediate family.
3. Respects the rule of law.
4. Guarantees secure national borders.
5. Ensures fairness to taxpayers.
6. Establishes a path toward legal status and/or citizenship for those who qualify and who wish to become permanent residents.

**4B: Share** in the large group together:

- What do you appreciate about the tensions being held in these convictions? (*security vs compassion, rule of law vs restorative*)
- What do you disagree with or have further questions about?
- Considering these principles, what elements of our immigration system do you think should be changed, if any? (i.e. end quota system, expand it for certain groups, etc).

Upon deeper examination, one can see that the current immigration system is not current—it is extremely out-dated and in need of reform.

### **Task 5: Commit to small action steps toward reform**

As we close, I encourage you to continue learning so you can thoughtfully speak out about this issue. This might look like:

- **Advocating for reform** using resources from the Evangelical Immigration Table (<https://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com>) and the National Immigration Forum (<https://immigrationforum.org>)
- **Walking with immigrants** moving through the pathway by forming or supporting a Good Neighbor Team with World Relief or getting trained to host citizenship or conversational English classes (<https://worldrelief.org/theworkshop>)

**5A: Think about** 1 small next step you can take toward working for reform for our immigrants in our midst. Take 1 minute to **share** your step with a partner.

**5B:** For those up for the challenge, continue to **reflect** and **pray** as you walk through the \$3.20 per Day Challenge - that's only \$3.20 per person per day in your household for all food and beverages you consume! As you undertake this experience, remember that across the globe, about 2 billion people live beneath the poverty standard of \$3.20 per day. **Imagine** living with this push factor if you were aware of opportunities to earn far more money immigrating to another country.

**5C:** Let's **close** in prayer together now, asking the Lord to reveal to us how He might be inviting each of us to uniquely participate in His work of restoration for immigrants in our midst.

# WEEK 6

## Session E: Where Immigrants Come From: Addressing the Root Causes

### LESSON SUMMARY:

The facilitator will lead a discussion on push and pull factors, addressing the root reasons that draw people or pressure them to immigrate.

**TIME: 1 hour**

### Objectives

By the end of this session, we will:

1. **Review** push and pull factors as root causes of immigration;
2. **Explore** push and pull factors in greater depth;
3. **Consider** the role of the church in transforming push factors; and
4. **Commit to connect** with an immigrant friend.

### Preparation and materials needed:

- Send a reminder message 2 days in advance, encouraging learners to complete Session E and reminding them of the time and place of the group meeting.
- Computer or TV to watch *Displaced* (6 minutes)
- Flipchart/markers
- Post-it Notes

Hello and welcome back everyone! Thanks for your commitment to meeting together to learn. Today, we'll talk about push and pull factors that influence decisions about immigration.

Before we begin, let's **hear** any experiences you have with the \$3.20 per day challenge.

- Who was able to go the whole week eating on \$3.20 per day? Was it harder or easier than you anticipated?
- What did you learn about life if born into a situation where living on \$3.20 a day—not just for food, but for all of your expenses—was your daily reality?

### Task 1: Review push and pull factors as root causes of immigration (5 minutes)

**1A:** Let's **review** the definition of push and pull factors that influence decisions to immigrate. As you remember:

**Push factors** make individuals and families want to leave their country of origin.

**Pull factors** attract individuals and families to a particular new location.

**1B:** In pairs, **name** some immigration examples from history and/or from Bible times, including the push and/or pull factors.

After 3 minutes, we'll **hear** a few examples.

*(Jacob and his family move to Egypt due to famine (push factor), Ruth and Naomi return to Judah due to family relationships - pull factor, Abraham told by God to immigrate (push factor))*

Thank you for sharing! Even considering these factors, migration is almost always a difficult choice for those who leave their homeland. The feeling of displacement and removal of all that is familiar is seldom an easy decision.

## **Task 2: Explore push or pull factors in greater depth (30 minutes)**

**2A:** To explore this further, **watch** this 6 minute video called *Displaced*. Think about the push factors that create the situation for migration in these cases.

**2B:** After watching, **divide** into 3 groups. Each group is going to take one push factor—poverty, conflict/violence, and environmental disasters and do further research on each. Using the internet and your own experience, take 10 minutes to name ways this push factor influences immigration. Prepare to share a 2-minute summary with the large group. You can share biblical reflections, or current events or facts, or the stories of people you know.

I'll offer a quick definition and reflection question to each group.

Push Factor: Poverty

- Poverty is tied to lack of resources and options, high rates of disease, low levels of educational opportunity
- Think about the illustration of how corn subsidies have affected small farmers in Mexico, demonstrating the complexity of how U.S. policies affect the poor abroad and, as a result, affect migration to the U.S. What would you do if you were a struggling farmer in Latin America under these conditions?

Push Factor: War and Conflict

- At the time of writing, there were over 70.8 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, with approximately 26 million being refugees (UNHCR).
- What would you do if war erupted in the United States and you came to believe you would be killed if you stayed? Where would you flee?



### Push Factor: Environmental Degradation and Natural Disasters

- Red Cross estimates 25 million people worldwide have been displaced by environmental disasters
- Faithfulness to God’s command to care for his creation can also help to minimize the instances when people are forced to emigrate as a result of environmental disasters. In what ways might our consumption patterns affect the environment—and the livelihoods—of our global neighbors?

Thank you so much for sharing your thoughtful insights!

**2C:** Let’s now **consider** some of the pull factors that draw people to immigrate to the US. The factors we’ve discussed in depth are push factors, but **reflect** on the pull factors, as well, such as:

- Education
- Upward mobility
- Adventure
- Movement of God
- Family reunification
- Stable climate
- Increased social/political freedom

What other pull factors might you add to this list?

**2D: Imagine** you were in a situation where that required immigrating to another country. Turn to a partner and **share**: which of these pull factors would be most compelling to you? Why? After 3 minutes, we’ll **hear** from several of you.

### Task 3: Consider the role of the church in transforming push factors (15 minutes)

As the largest, most diverse social network on the planet, the church can be an unrivaled agent of transformation for people experiencing the pain of push factors like poverty, violence, and environmental degradation.

**3A: Think back** to Amir and Susana’s story. **Listen** to how their church is partnering with another church in Malaysia—and also a Venezuelan congregation in their neighborhood here in the US. **Consider** how your church might also address push factors through partnership.

Several of the congregants at Amir and Susana's church are alarmed at the news of continued violence in Southeast Asia. With gang activity and kidnapping on the rise, their hearts were moved to action—but what could they do?

Being from the region, Amir connected with a Pastor Johan, who leads a small church on the border of Malaysia and Thailand. The church gathers every Sunday afternoon with at-risk street youth for soccer and a meal. Open teaching about Scripture is sensitive in the area, but the church uses storytelling with sports as their primary draw. As their numbers grow, the church wants to put more resources into this work.

Being sensitive to avoid overly influencing the ministry, Amir consults his pastor, Luke. Their congregation was burned recently by a missions gift that was not used transparently, so they spent some time in prayer and discernment. After a few weeks, the congregation agreed to match the funds necessary to grow the sports ministry for 1 year. Every month, they hold a video conference call for mutual learning with Pastor Johan and his congregation.

Amir's church has learned a lot the past year in partnership with this church in Southeast Asia. They are even talking about sending a small group to learn alongside Pastor Johan—but they want to do it thoughtfully. Amir is delighted at the idea of getting to return to visit his home country, too.

Here in the US,, it's actually been harder to develop the same kinds of relationships with other churches in their own city. Last summer, Amir and Susana's church partnered with a Latino church to co-host a bilingual VBS in the summer. They had to work through theological differences and cultural misunderstandings, but were grateful to have built a bridge with a church who understands the road of migration. Members in both churches disagree about whether they should co-host the VBS again, so the leaders are meeting to discern and build their relationship, hoping to educate and unite their congregations in the difficult but important work of partnership.

**3B: Discuss:** How is Amir and Susana's church building relationships of mutuality and equity that address push factors?

**3C: Turn** back to your partner and **brainstorm:** what might a similar partnership look like for your church? How could your church help to address the push factors of poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation by building bridges?

Remember, you can start small with simple first steps—you don't have to create a systemic solution right away.

After 3 minutes, let's **hear** a few ideas.

#### Task 4: Commit to connect with an immigrant friend (10 minutes)

I hope you'll consider taking the first steps to form these kinds of partnerships. Remember, building these relationships requires patience, as trust is built across time.

Behind the push and pull factors of immigration, there is always a story of a person. Many times, that story is more complex than we may originally think. While individuals ultimately make choices to immigrate, complex systems are at play - and many times these forces are pulling the strings that drive migration.

**4A:** To understand this further, I invite you to **consider** getting to know an immigrant friend in your community. The table is a powerful tool for connection, listening, and learning—and opening your home is a way to show vulnerability and friendship. Remember the story of Good Samaritan and **think**: who is already crossing your path that you've haven't considered inviting over, especially a *neighbor* who may be different from you?

**4B: Share** ideas for connecting with a partner. As you do, keep in mind:

- Invitations like these are considered as greetings or formalities in some cultures. You may need to gently ask on 2 or 3 occasions before the person knows you mean it literally
- Make your connection about getting to know your friend - not a project or agenda
- If you are an immigrant, and you're comfortable with it, allow someone to invite you into their home to share
- If natural and appropriate to the conversation, discuss what brought them to your country—the push and pull factors influencing their decision to immigrate

After 3 minutes of discussion, we'll **hear** from some of you in the large group.

**4C:** Let's **close in prayer** together asking the Lord to give us a deeper understanding of the peoples of the world that He made in His image.



# WEEK 7

## Session F: A Christian Response to Immigration

### LESSON SUMMARY:

The facilitator will lead participants through a discussion of how to implement the knowledge they have gleaned throughout the meetings together.

**TIME: 1 hour**

### Objectives

By the end of this session, we will:

1. **Celebrate** the joy of connection with others;
2. **Share** our plans or experiences connecting with immigrant friends;
3. **Generate** ideas for responding to all we have learned; and
4. **Envision** how to grow and practice these ideas.

### Preparation and materials needed:

- Send a reminder message 2 days in advance, encouraging learners to complete Session F and reminding them of the time and place of the group meeting.
- Flipchart/markers
- Post-it Notes
- Prepare 6 flipcharts, each titled with a different word from the PLEASE acronym.
- Star or dot stickers for voting
- Plan for final debrief gathering (informal) for the next week

Welcome to our final meeting together! Thanks for your commitment to meeting together over these weeks. Today, we'll talk about practical ways we can put the knowledge we've gained into practice in our lives.

### Task 1: Celebrate the joy of connection with others (5 minutes)

Before we do that, let's reflect on what it means to know and celebrate someone. We've had several weeks together that have been a delight to connect together.

**1A: Listen** to John 3:22-36 and think about John's definition of success. **Consider** as we read: how can we find our greatest joy in the people we get to introduce, celebrate, and perhaps ultimately be surpassed by?

**1B: Divide** into pairs and take 1 minute each to prepare a grandiose introduction of your partner in the style of a boxing ring announcer.

For example, "Ladies and gentlemen, all the way from the East Coast, the pride of Boston, a graduate of MIT, black belt in three martial arts, accomplished concert pianist extraordinaire...JACK NAVARRO!"

After 2 minutes, we'll take turns making our celebratory, silly announcements. The more over-the-top, the better!

## **Task 2: Share our plans or experiences connecting with immigrant friends (10 minutes)**

**2A:** Before we dive into that, let's briefly **hear** what any of you have learned from hosting a meal with an immigrant friend. Without disclosing confidential details that may be sensitive, **share** what you experienced.

For those who haven't had the opportunity yet, what plans have you made?

Thanks so much for sharing your reflections! Remember, this isn't a one-time "I checked that box" project, but rather, the beginning of learning to develop authentic relationships of mutuality across cultures.

**2B: Think:** Aside from building personal relationships like this, what other steps could you take to find more opportunities to hear the voices of the immigrants within your community? Let's **share** a few ideas aloud together.

*(Ideas for inspiration: Facilitate community discussions or events on immigration, Show up to listen and learn at immigrant led coalitions - what groups are meeting monthly?, Frequent the parts of towns where immigrants live and work, Be intentional at the playground - kids are an easy way to connect, Happy hour with neighbors, Visit immigrant churches or Spanish language services, dine at local restaurant with cross-cultural food)*

### Task 3: Generate ideas for responding to all we have learned (35 minutes)

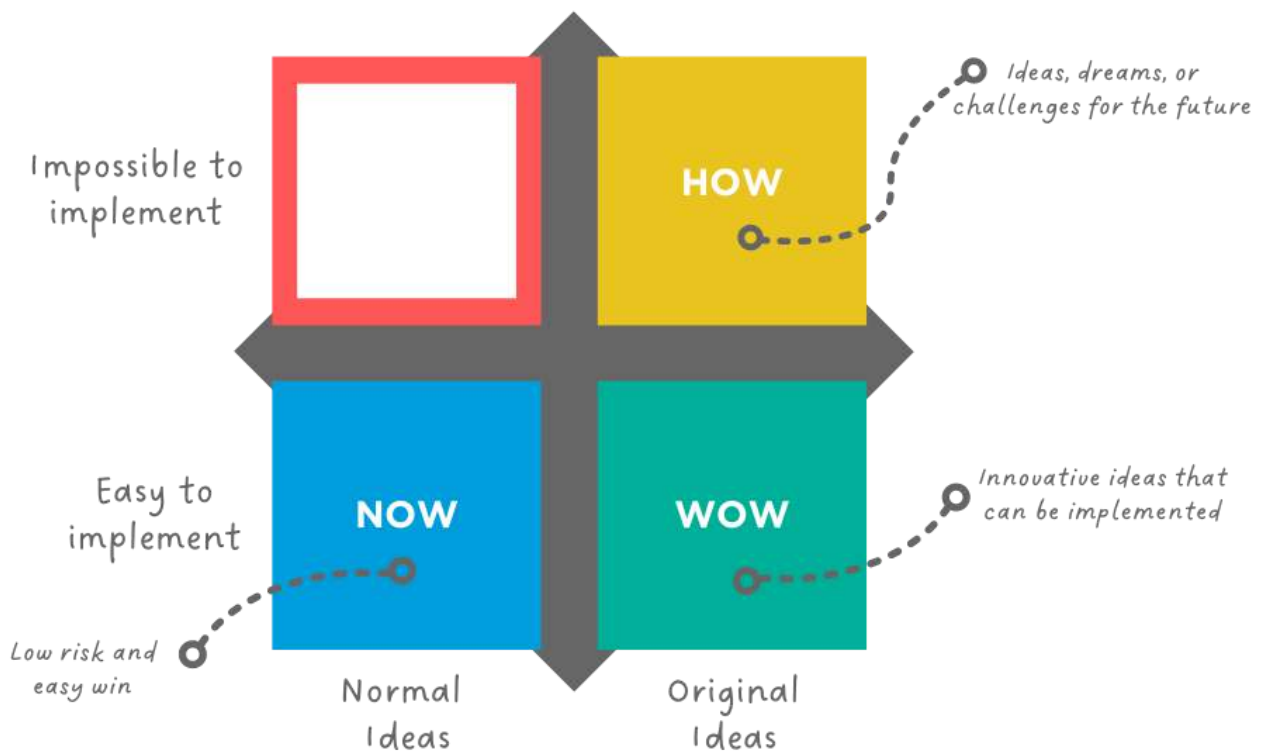
During the online course, we looked at the *PLEASE* acronym for responding to what we've learned about immigration—Prayer, Listening, Empowering Churches Abroad, Advocacy, Service and Evangelism.

**3A:** Together, let's **generate** ideas and suggestions for responding for each of these 6 categories in *PLEASE*.

For each of the words listed on the top of these 6 different flipcharts, we'll take 7 minutes to:

1. Brainstorm and list practical ways to respond (5 minutes)
2. Vote on our top ideas (2 minutes)

**3B:** After listing ideas for 5 minutes, each of us has 2 stickers to vote for our top ideas. We'll use the *now, how, wow* framework to **prioritize** them. Think about which ideas fall into the *wow* space—most creative and effective, but also still easy to implement—and vote for those!



For each word in the *PLEASE* acronym, we'll consider a question reflection that will help us brainstorm practical ways to respond:

**Prayer:** How can you and your community be faithful in prayer for the immigrants in your community?

**Listening:** Think about our ideas discussed earlier to find more opportunities to hear the voices of the immigrants locally. Which might you list as our top ideas?

**Empowering Churches Abroad:** What could you—and your larger church community—do to come alongside local churches elsewhere in the world who are addressing push factors?

**Advocacy:** What could you do to influence the way that your member of Congress or Senators vote on immigration issues? (See Appendix 3: Advocacy)

**Service:** What practical steps could you and your congregation take to serve the immigrants in your community?

**Evangelism:** How might the right tone with which Christians discuss immigration open the way for immigrants to hear the gospel? (Recommended Resource: *No Longer Strangers: Transforming Evangelism with Immigrant Communities*)

#### Task 4: Envision how to grow and practice these ideas (5 minutes)

Thank you for sharing and ranking all of these great ideas!

**4A:** As we close, take a few minutes to **write down** the acronym PLEASE. **Record** the most actionable, effective response you might undertake for yourself under each letter of the acronym.

**Think:** what is most realistic for you to implement while also being creative and effective? What might we implement together as a group, if anything? Take 3 minutes to **jot down** ideas.

Next week, we'll gather for our final session together to debrief all we have learned and share more about these ideas. We'll share:

1. What was the most powerful learning for you over the past 8 weeks?
2. What concrete actions will you take in response?
3. What actions could we take as a group?

In Isaiah 56, God describes how he will gather the exiles to his house as a “house of prayer for all nations”—including foreigners and the marginalized. As we go from this place, imagine what it looks like to cooperate with God in accomplishing that mission.

**4B:** I'd also like to challenge you to prayerfully **consider** leading this same discussion in another church or community. Would you like to facilitate this course like I have? World Relief has all the tools for you to teach this content in any local church or interested small group.

**4C:** Let's close and **pray** that the Lord will fill us with wisdom and courage as we carry these practices and conversations on in our community.



# Welcoming the Stranger

## APPENDIX A: SMALL GROUP COVENANT

As a member of this *Welcoming the Stranger* small group, I agree to and commit to the following:

- Acting with loving and gentle character
- Engaging my whole person in the conversation - mind, affections, and will
- Contributing to an environment of compassion and security, not judgment or hostility
- Upholding confidentiality in all that is said
- Being quick to listen and slow to speak

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As a member of this *Welcoming the Stranger* small group, I agree and commit to the following values:

- **Gospel-Orientation:** As a people gripped by the grace of the cross we seek to extend this grace to those sharing in this group, as well as those to whom this group seeks to serve.
- **Biblical-Saturation:** As a people seeking to live in submission to the authority of the Word of God, we seek to ground and root our conversation in the Bible wherever and whenever possible.
- **Compassion and Meekness:** As a people having experienced life-giving compassion from our Lord, we seek to be loving, gentle, compassionate, and hospitable to those sharing in this group, as well as those to whom this group seeks to serve.

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As a member of this *Welcoming the Stranger* small group, I agree and commit to the following goals:

- **Cognitive:** To learn, engage with, and understand the challenges and circumstances of our immigrant brothers and sisters. Also, to learn, engage with, and understand the biblical foundation for the Christian social responsibility.
- **Affective:** To allow the Spirit to stir me to holiness and right action concerning those living in vulnerability.
- **Willful:** To seek action-oriented steps to be the hands and feet of Jesus in my community, neighborhood, and region for the sake of foreign-born neighbors.
- **Persistent:** To not lose heart or endurance in the long slow road of justice, compassion, and service.

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**Name**

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**Date**

# Welcoming the Stranger

## APPENDIX B: KEY TERMS

- **Immigrant** – a person who has come to a different country in order to live there permanently; an individual who is foreign-born; there are over 45 million immigrants living in the US
- **Migration** – the process of people traveling to a new place to live; 260 million migrants in the world today; 1 in every 30 individuals in the world today is living outside of their country of birth
- **Immigration** – the process through which individuals become permanent residents or citizens of another country
- **Emigration** – the process of leaving a country permanently and going to live in another one
- **US Citizen** – individuals who were either born in the US or who have become “naturalized” after 5 (or 3 if married to a USC) as permanent residents; over 22 million immigrants have become naturalized US citizens
- **Lawful Permanent Resident** – immigrants who have a “green card” and have been granted authorization to live and work in the United States on a permanent basis; over 12 million LPRs live in the US
- **Temporary Lawful Status** – a variety of lawful immigration statuses exist that are temporary in nature and do not have a “pathway” towards permanent residency or naturalization; among them are TPS (Temporary Protected Status) and DACA (Dreamers, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals); around 2 million immigrants are in a temporary lawful status in the US
- **Refugee** – A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. 26 million refugees in the world today; currently the refugee cap in the US is 18,000.
- **Asylum Seeker** – Individuals in the process of seeking asylum; Asylum is a protection granted to foreign nationals already in the US or arriving at the border who meet the international definition of a “refugee” (well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group); over 1 million individuals are seeking asylum in the US; more than 70% of asylum cases are denied.
- **Undocumented Immigrant** - an immigrant residing in any given country without legal documentation; in the US, it includes individuals who entered the US without inspection and proper permission from the government and those who entered with a legal visa that is no longer valid; estimated around 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the US.

# Welcoming the Stranger

## APPENDIX C: ADVOCACY

Here are some trusted sources for keeping up with policies and talking points for immigration advocacy:

**Evangelical Immigration Table:** <http://evangelicalimmigrationtable.com/news>

**Church World Service:** <https://cwsglobal.org/our-work/refugees-and-immigrants>

**Office of Social Justice, Christian Reformed Church:** <http://justice.crcna.org/immigration>

**Friends Committee on National Legislation:** <https://www.fcni.org>

**Network Lobby for Catholic Social Justice:** <https://networklobby.org>

### Advocacy Dos and Don'ts:

#### Do:

- Advocate from a faith foundation formed by the Bible.
- Approach advocacy like a spiritual disciple.
- Find a regular time (i.e. weekly), pray, make a phone call to a representative. •
- Find a warmer way to communicate to your legislators or government officials, i.e..  
Sign a Petition, Make a Phone Call, Visit Their Office, Be Vocal at a Town Hall Meeting, Name Them in an Op Ed
- Spend time helping other Christians understand immigration biblically.
- Encourage other Christians to advocate by doing something that is already familiar to them.
- Ask them to share a testimony of how God used an immigrant in their lives with a legislator who might have a related bill they will be voting on.
- Pastors should preach and small group leaders should teach about the welcome Jesus expects us to extend to immigrants.
- Pray for families to not be separated by our immigration policy in church.
- Build loving relationships with people you are trying to influence.
- Let yourself be led by immigrants and participate in their efforts for change in the way they ask you to.

#### Don't:

- Advocate in a way that is un-Christlike—no matter how just your cause. (Ex. Call names, commit violence, give up on the church)
- Spread unverified news, memes, etc.
- Become a pawn of a particular political vision that is not the Kingdom of God—i.e. conservative or liberal.
- Only focus on influencing elected officials to the exclusion of influencing people who are in your local community (friend, church members, neighbors).
- Retreat into a tribe of like-minded people.
- Treat the enemies of your cause harshly or seek to embarrass them.