



# Welcome.

*The Ruth and Naomi Project:  
Welcoming the Stranger in Our Midst*

**A SMALL GROUP GUIDE**



# Welcome.

## **The Ruth and Naomi Project:**

*A small group study on immigrants, refugees, and our call to love the sojourner.*

Ruth and Naomi—two of the most beloved women of the Bible—give us a model of Christlike love and friendship. They also show us what it's like to be immigrant women in difficult times.

According to the Book of Ruth, Naomi's family left Bethlehem in Judah due to a famine that threatened their livelihood. When Naomi's husband and sons died, she traveled back to Judah with her daughter-in-law, Ruth. After Naomi urged Ruth to return to her homeland, Ruth promised loyalty, saying, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (1:16).

These brave women knew what it felt like to be strangers in a foreign land.

They understood the promise and challenge of moving to a new place to seek opportunity for their family.

Across the globe today, vulnerable women and men are fleeing violence and persecution and working to provide their families with the food they need to live and opportunity to give them hope.

The Ruth and Naomi Project—a small group study created by the Welcome. community—is committed to supporting immigrant women and men who have come to America seeking opportunity and hope. We want to play our part in creating a culture that is ready to say "welcome" to all people who come here and say, with Ruth, "your people will be my people."

*Welcome.* is a community of Christian women committed to living out-Christlike hospitality for all God's children, specifically for "the stranger."

The Bible references immigrants 92 times; nearly every time, God's Word is encouraging or commanding God's people to welcome them. Jesus calls us to reach beyond our own families to extend hospitality to people who are different from us. In Matthew 5, Jesus asks, "... if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" (v. 47). In a divisive culture, Christians will stand out by reaching across the aisle to those who need welcome and care.

*Welcome. is a community of Christian women committed to living out Christ-like hospitality for all God's children, specifically for "the stranger."*

## world relief®

*This study was created by Katelyn Beaty and is adapted from "Welcoming the Stranger" and "The Stranger," two study guides written by Jenny Yang and Matthew Soerens of World Relief. World Relief is the relief and advocacy arm of the National Association of Evangelicals. All rights reserved.*



---

## BEFORE YOU START

---

### How to Make the Most of Your Small Group Time

**Choose a date and time:** Keep in mind the church calendar and other regularly occurring events.

**Advertise and invite:** Get the word out to folks you would like to attend. Consider creating a Facebook event to send out invitations and communicate with the group.

**Share leadership:** Consider inviting staff from a local nonprofit that serves immigrants or a pastor of an immigrant congregation to help lead the discussion. Ask for help from friends and colleagues in setting up, hosting, and cleanup.

**Dress rehearsal:** For the screening of *The Stranger* (week 2), be sure to test all the equipment you are planning to use (computer, speakers, projector, screen, microphones, etc.).

**Food and laughter:** Coffee, cookies, and time for fellowship can be a perfect way to start your time together and make sure everyone's comfortable before delving into heavy topics.

### A Note for Leaders

Immigration is one of the most complicated issues of our time. Those who follow Scripture often find themselves torn between the desire to uphold laws and the call to minister to the vulnerable. This small group study seeks to equip Christian women for a biblical response to immigrants and immigration in America.

Two important trends set the foundation for discussing immigrants and refugees.

The first is that immigrants are transforming the church. Immigrant congregations are growing faster than any other segment of Bible-believing churches in the United States. As the National Association of Evangelicals president Leith Anderson says, "Church historians will look back to the beginning of the 21st century and say that immigrants saved American Christianity from decline. And they will observe that Hispanics were the majority and epicenter of that historic renewal."

*Church historians will look back to the beginning of the 21st century and say that immigrants saved American Christianity from decline.*



The second trend is that, while we might disagree on the specifics of achieving a just and compassionate immigration policy, there is vast consensus that our current immigration system does not adequately respect our values, benefit our economy or uphold our national security. A broken immigration system puts families at risk of separation, exposes workers to exploitation and prevents many from realizing their God-given potential. How does the church speak to these concerns and to our lawmakers?

We are grateful that you are joining us in this important discussion. Together, let's unpack the challenges, hopes and fears that it brings to the fore, with the hope that we will understand immigration in America—what drives it, what it looks like today and how we can intervene to advocate for immigrants consistent with biblical values.

---

WEEK 1

---

*Delving into God's Word*



Many Christians today do not think of immigration as a biblical issue. It's not a common subject of sermons, and polls suggest that most Christians do not think of immigration primarily through the lens of faith but rather as a political or economic issue.

Yet Scripture speaks repeatedly on how we are to treat the immigrants in our midst. The Hebrew word *ger* is translated "foreigner" or "immigrant," and appears 92 times in the Old Testament. Here are a few examples of passages that might inform our thinking about this topic:

- Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt (Ex. 22:21).
- When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God (Lev. 19:33-34).
- He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt (Deut. 10:18-19).
- Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other (Zech. 7:10).
- "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the Lord Almighty (Mal. 3:5).

## **"Love Those Who Are Foreigners": The Old Testament and Immigration**

Throughout the Old Testament, God gives specific and repeated commands to his people about how immigrants are to be treated. Willow Creek Community Church pastor and author Bill Hybels' experience is typical of many believers who begin to look for immigrants in the Scriptures: "I read verse after verse about how God desired his followers to treat the foreigners in their midst. How had I not noticed all these passages before? The single thought that kept swirling in my mind was, 'Immigrants matter to God.'"

### **IN THIS WEEK**

- **Old Testament and Immigration**
- **New Testament and Immigration**
- **Romans 13**

*Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.* EXODUS 22:21

Many key characters in the biblical narrative themselves cross borders at one point or another. Abraham migrates on multiple occasions: he leaves his homeland following a divine promise that God will make him into a great nation and through him bless many nations. Later, he travels into Egypt in search of food. Repeatedly in the biblical story—as is often the case today—hunger motivates migration.

Ruth presents another immigrant story. When famine hits her native land of Moab, Ruth follows her mother-in-law, Naomi, to Israel. Ruth goes to the fields and distinguishes herself by her hard work. Eventually, she finds favor in the eyes of the field owner, Boaz, "even though she is a Moabite, to whom the law was less than favorable." In God's divine plan, this immigrant woman goes on to become the grandmother of King David and an ancestor of Jesus.

In addition to the many stories of immigrants within the Old Testament, God also has very specific instructions to his people about how to treat immigrants. In fact, he commands the Israelites not to mistreat or oppress an immigrant precisely because they should "know what it's like to be an immigrant, because [they] were immigrants in the land of Egypt."

God commands his people to treat immigrants very differently than what they saw modeled by the Egyptians, who abused the Israelites living in their midst. He tells the Israelites that the immigrant living among them "must be treated as one of your native-born." As he lays out the law for his people, God repeatedly states that "the same law applies both to the native-born and to the foreigner residing among you." He commands the Israelites to love their neighbors as themselves and then mandates that they do so: "Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself."

God's command to care for immigrants and others who are vulnerable goes beyond generic commands: he also legislates specific rules for his people to ensure that they provide for the needs of the vulnerable. He tells them to go over their wheat, grape and olive harvests just one time, then to leave what was left over "to the immigrants, the orphans and the widows." In many of our churches today, we are encouraged to set aside a tithe of our income to help compensate pastors and other church staff for their service, but God mandated the Israelites that the tithe of their first fruits be given "to the Levites" (the religious officials) but also to "the immigrants, the orphans and the widows so they can eat in your cities until they are full."

*God's command to care for immigrants and others who are vulnerable goes beyond generic commands.*

## **“I Was a Stranger and You Invited Me In”: The New Testament and Immigration**

A repeated theme in the New Testament is the command to “practice hospitality.” While many of us think of hospitality as making a nice meal for our friends or having a guestroom available for traveling relatives, the biblical concept of hospitality goes beyond that. The Greek word for hospitality is *philoxenia*: literally, “the love of strangers.” It’s not particularly difficult to love our friends—even the tax collectors and pagans of Jesus’ time did that—but Christ calls us to love those who are unknown to us, even when that radically challenges our cultural norms.

In showing kindness and love to immigrants and others who may be strangers to us, we are presented with the possibility that we might unexpectedly find a blessing. Scripture suggests that, by extending hospitality to a stranger, we may be entertaining angels, unaware. Jesus takes the idea even further: he tells his disciples that by welcoming in a stranger who is “one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine,” they have welcomed him, and will thus be welcomed by Jesus into his kingdom. And, conversely, by failing to welcome a stranger, they have snubbed him and will face judgment.

## **“Let Everyone Be Subject to the Governing Authorities”: What About Romans 13?**

The commands to welcome, advocate for and love immigrants are unequivocal and numerous throughout the Bible. What the Bible never specifically addresses, though, is how to interact with immigrants who have broken the law. How can Christian reconcile the command to be hospitable with the biblical mandate to obey the government?

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority,” the apostle Peter writes to the early Christians, “whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right” (1 Pet. 2:14). Paul sets a similar standard in his letter to the church at Rome: “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God” (Rom. 13:1).

Undocumented immigrants have, by definition, violated the law and thus, some would say, should be deported. Romans 13 and other passages

*Christ’s call is for us to love those who are unknown to us, even when that radically challenges our cultural norms.*



commanding us to submit to governmental authorities have important ramifications for thinking biblically about immigration, but we must read them within the whole of Scripture.

Romans 13 need not really concern US citizens or others with legal status, at least within most states, because none of the activities that a citizen might take part in with his or her undocumented neighbors—sharing a meal, helping them to learn English, teaching a Bible study, helping kids with homework, providing legal advice (with the proper governmental accreditation)—are unlawful. Nor is there any law mandating that citizens report those present unlawfully. We as Christians can and should minister freely and still be submitting to governmental authorities. As Saddleback Church pastor Rick Warren says, “The church must always show compassion, always . . . A good Samaritan doesn’t stop and ask the injured person, ‘Are you legal or illegal?’ ”

It is also important to note that there are times when civil disobedience may be appropriate. Peter and other early apostles refused to obey the authorities when they demanded that they cease to preach the gospel, declaring that “we must obey God rather than human beings” (Acts 5:29).

The undocumented believer reads Romans 13 from a different perspective than the citizen. They are here unlawfully, and many undocumented Christians have anguished over this. They desperately want to be right with the civil authorities, but they also want to provide for their family, something that many struggled to do and ultimately determined was impossible for them in the impoverished nations from which they came. In fact, providing for one’s family is a strong divine command: “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). Many feel torn between this command and the mandate in Romans 13 to submit to governmental authorities. Christians may disagree about the right decision—to stay and provide for one’s family, or to leave to fully comply with U.S. law. But we all can agree that a legal system that puts individuals in this dilemma is flawed, and that a better, more just system is needed.

Finally, many Christian leaders have concluded that our current immigration laws are not good: they are hampering our economy, our national security, the social cohesion of our country and immigrants themselves. Moreover, the current situation makes a mockery of the rule of law, which is held up in Romans 13, because the laws are so out of sync with the movement of our free market economy that, rather than deal with the

*“Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.”*

HEBREWS 13:2

economic maladies that would result from enforcing an illogical law, the government only rarely penalizes either the employers or the immigrants who violate the law—and the law itself begins to lose its meaning. In a democracy like the United States, this reflects poorly on all of us: part of submitting to the governmental authorities in a democracy is actively engaging in democracy, advocating with our legislators to reform immigration laws in ways that make sense for our economy and security, putting into place a system that, as pastor-theologian John Piper says, “gives honor to the law and . . . mercy to the immigrants.”

---

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

1. Do you know of any immigrants in your church, workplace or neighborhood? Do you know their stories? Do you or your family have an immigrant story of your own?
2. Have you ever thought of certain figures in Scripture as immigrants, crossing borders for a variety of reasons? How many figures in the Bible can you think of who were immigrants, and what circumstances does Scripture tell us motivated their migration?
3. How do you think Christians can best apply passages that call us to love and welcome immigrants while also upholding the biblical commands to respect the rule of law?

### PRAYER

Dear Lord, thank you for revealing your heart for sojourners in your Word. Thank you for your compassionate heart for all who travel to remote lands seeking safety and security. Help your church befriend the sojourners in our midst in ways that honor the call to uphold the rule of law. *Amen.*



WEEK TWO

*From Policy to Real People:  
Meet the Immigrants*

This week, we will focus on the three stories of immigrants and Christians whose lives are affected by current immigration laws. We invite you to watch and discuss *The Stranger*, a short documentary highlighting immigrants and the Christian response to immigration in America. The documentary, written and directed by Emmy Award-winning producer Linda Midgett, shares three stories of people: Maria, Liuan, and Diane and Bruce Stewart. The film chronicles their journeys, highlights what the Bible says about immigrants and addresses some common misconceptions about the immigration debate.

You will meet a single mother working to provide for her four children while living in fear that she could be separated from them; a recent college graduate who may need to take care of her siblings if her parents are deported; and an immigrant family who has gone through dramatic trials as they try to work their way through the labyrinth of U.S. immigration law.

The core message of *The Stranger* is simple: the immigration issue is fundamentally about people—human beings whom Scripture tells us are made in God's image and for whom Jesus Christ died. Many are already our brothers and sisters in Christ, and their suffering compels us to act on their behalf.

What you will need:

- Television or computer
- Internet connection
- Access to website: <https://vimeo.com/97163476>

## Maria's Story

Maria came to the United States at age 16 with her boyfriend. After they married and had children, her husband became abusive. Maria's four children are U.S. citizens. They live in fear that their mother, who is residing in the United States unlawfully, will be deported. This is stressful both for Maria and her children. In the midst of a difficult situation, though, Maria has also found the hope of a relationship with Jesus.

In *The Stranger*, Maria talks about wanting to get right with the law, though there isn't currently a way for her to do so, short of her leaving her children and returning to Mexico without knowing when she can come back to the U.S.

Her pastor, Derrick Smith, and his wife, Meghan, have been frustrated

### IN THIS WEEK

- **Maria's Story**
- **Liuan's Story**
- **The Stewarts' Story**



by the limitations of the current immigration system, which in the vast majority of cases does not allow someone who is present unlawfully to earn legal status. "We hear people talking all the time about how they just need to get in the back of the line with everybody else," Meghan says. "There is no line."

## Liuan's Story

Liuan immigrated to the U.S. from China at age 3 with her parents under her father's student visa. Liuan was able to become a Lawful Permanent Resident along with her father when he was sponsored by an employer for a visa, and eventually Liuan went on to become a naturalized citizen. Her mom, however, missed that opportunity: because Liuan's parents divorced, she was not eligible for a green card when her daughter and ex-husband were, and she became undocumented.

After her parents divorced, Liuan's mom remarried and had two children, both of whom are U.S. citizens. Despite the immigration legal status issues faced by her mother and stepfather, Liuan describes her childhood as pretty typical. As a teenager, Liuan was invited by a friend to church: there, she became a Christian. Eventually, she was able to help lead her parents, who had grown up as atheists in Communist China, to Jesus as well.

Some years later, when Liuan was in college, her family's life was dramatically disrupted when both her mother and stepfather were informed that they were facing deportation orders. Liuan's stepfather was detained in a detention center for several months before being deported back to China. Her mother spent years and significant sums of money trying to stay lawfully in the United States to support their children. In the midst of this challenge, Liuan contemplated taking in her younger siblings, should her mother also be deported. She sees the emotional impact on her younger brother and sister, ages 9 and 7 at the time their father is detained, as they are separated from their father and face the uncertainty of being separated from their mother or having to move to a foreign country.

In the midst of this challenging situation for her family, Liuan finds comfort and support from her local church. She trusts in God to provide for her family.

Detention and deportation policies impact many more individuals than just immigrants. As Liuan's story illustrates, many American citizens are affected as well.

*Detention and deportation policies impact many more individuals than just immigrants.*

## The Stewarts' Story

Bruce Stewart, who taught special intelligence reading to the U.S. military, and his wife, Dianne, a public relations expert, came to the U.S. on work visas. Their two children came as children and consider themselves more American than South African.

To their surprise and dismay, the attorney whom the Stewarts had contracted to help process their green card applications turned out to be a fraud. Despite trying to do everything lawfully, their visas expired and they became undocumented. They tried every legal pathway to reinstate their status. After experiencing significant financial and emotional hardship to reapply for legal residency, most of the family now has temporary legal status and is waiting for new permanent residence applications to be approved. However, the Stewarts still face the possibility of separation, as their adult daughter has "aged out" and cannot be included in the application.

You have now heard the stories of Maria, Luan, and the Stewarts. While each of their families' immigration experiences is unique, they have something very important in common: during times of great hardship and uncertainty, it was their Christian faith and community that kept them going. You and your church can play a significant part in praying for, helping and advocating on behalf of the immigrants in your congregation and community.




---

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

1. If you were in the position of Derrick or Meghan, the pastor and his wife who have befriended Maria and her family, how would you respond to their situation?
2. What do you know about the immigrant detention system in the U.S.? Do you think that the taxpayer funds used to detain immigrants like Luan's stepfather who are awaiting removal hearings—which average of \$122 per day, per immigrant—are money well spent or that better alternatives should be considered?
3. The Stewarts had more resources—both monetarily and in terms of connections with influential leaders in government—than the average immigrant family, but they still went through a challenging process to

try to get legal status. What does this tell you about the complexity of our immigration legal system?

4. What stereotypes do we have about immigrants in general? How have these stereotypes been challenged (or affirmed) by the stories in the film?

### PRAYER

Dear Father, thank you for stitching the members of the body of Christ together. Thank you that in trials and uncertainty, you provide comfort through your Holy Spirit and through the presence of Christian brothers and sisters. Give us the courage to rally around those in our community who are affected by current immigration laws. Help us to respond with compassion—and to advocate for a better way. *Amen.*

---

WEEK 3

---

*How Immigrants Are Reshaping  
the American Church*



In *The Stranger*, Pastor Wilfredo "Choco" De Jesus, who pastors a large Assemblies of God church in Chicago, and Barrett Duke, vice president for public policy and research for the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, discuss various dynamics of importance as Christians consider their response to immigration.

On one hand, immigration accounts for some of the most dramatic church growth in the United States. In many denominations and local churches, immigrants and their children account for the only net growth in decades. This happens both as immigrants who are already believers enter the country (legally and illegally) and join local churches, and also as churches invite newcomers who are not yet believers, sharing the hope of the gospel. Immigration presents an opportunity to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19) right in our own communities.

As more immigrants join local churches, though, Christians are being forced to wrestle with the complex realities faced by the immigrants who are our brothers and sisters in Christ. When one part of the body suffers, Scripture tells us, every part suffers with it (1 Cor. 12:12). That means that all believers—even those who may not worship alongside immigrants every Sunday—are connected to this issue.

While celebrating the reality that more people are becoming followers of Jesus as a result of immigration, both Pastor de Jesus and Dr. Duke are clear that the rule of law must be respected as we consider immigration issues. They draw the distinction between the immigration reforms that they advocate—which would include penalties for those who have violated immigration laws and would create a process by which qualifying immigrants could then earn legal status and citizenship—and amnesty, which would simply ignore and forgive the violation, which both believe is not the best solution.

### They Are Us

How many churches are in your community? 10? 50? 100?

The Bible has an exact answer to that question, regardless of the community you live in: "in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom. 12:5). While we may worship in different buildings on Sunday and be divided by ethnicity, language and denomination, Scripture makes clear that there is one universal church. Jesus' prayer for us, as his disciples, is that we would be one just as he is

### IN THIS WEEK

- Church Growth and Immigration

*Immigration presents an opportunity to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19) right in our own communities.*

one with the Father, "so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). If we want to live out God's mission, we need to do so in unity.

This has some important ramifications as we think about immigration, because immigrants are a significant and growing segment of the church in the United States. Research by Todd Johnson at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary finds that immigrant congregations are growing more quickly than any other segment of American Christianity, a reality that many denominations are experiencing as well.

The arrival of immigrants to our country is much more than a complex issue for the society outside of our church walls, but an internal challenge that has become very personal: as National Association of Evangelicals president Leith Anderson says, "They are us." Paul wrote to the church at Corinth that each part of the church is indispensable and interdependent, so that "The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' And the head cannot say to the feet, 'I don't need you!'" Likewise, the local church composed primarily of white Americans cannot say to the Hispanic church, "I don't need you," nor the African American church to the Korean church, and vice-versa. Each part needs the other.

We are also told, "If one part [of the church] suffers, every part suffers with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). If many Christians are unaware of the suffering that comes because of a broken immigration system—families divided by backlogs, the trauma of a church member being deported, the economic challenges of providing for children left behind when a parent has been detained by authorities—it is because churches in our country are still largely segregated. Despite the enormous growth of the immigrant church, many American Christians don't know an immigrant believer. This lack of relationship makes it easier to form opinions about immigrants based on television, radio or Internet reports that may not be accurate.

We need to intentionally get to know our brothers and sisters who share a common faith in Christ but who may worship in a different language, in a different cultural style and in different buildings. While we can learn about immigration by reading and discussing online, deeper learning happens in the context of relationship with those whose experiences are very different from our own.

The presence of immigrants within the church, and the relationships that form across ethnic and legal status lines as the church diversifies, do not resolve the complicated questions of how to respond to immigration policy. But they do mean that if we are followers of Christ, we cannot simply

*Despite the enormous growth of the immigrant church, many American Christians don't know an immigrant believer.*

ignore the discussion because it is "not our problem." It is our problem—and could be our solution.

---

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

1. Have you noticed the growth of the church in your community among immigrants? If so, what examples have you noticed? If not, why do you think the growth of immigrant congregations is often "off the radar"?
2. How could you seize the opportunity to "make disciples of all nations" in your community?
3. In what ways do you think that the immigrant believers might be a blessing to the church in the United States?
4. Some in our society tend to think about violations of immigration law in a distinct way from other violations of law, but the reality is that most of us have violated one law or another at some point; can you think of any examples of laws that you may have violated? What were the consequences? Do you think there is ever a role for grace in the enforcement of law?

### PRAYER?

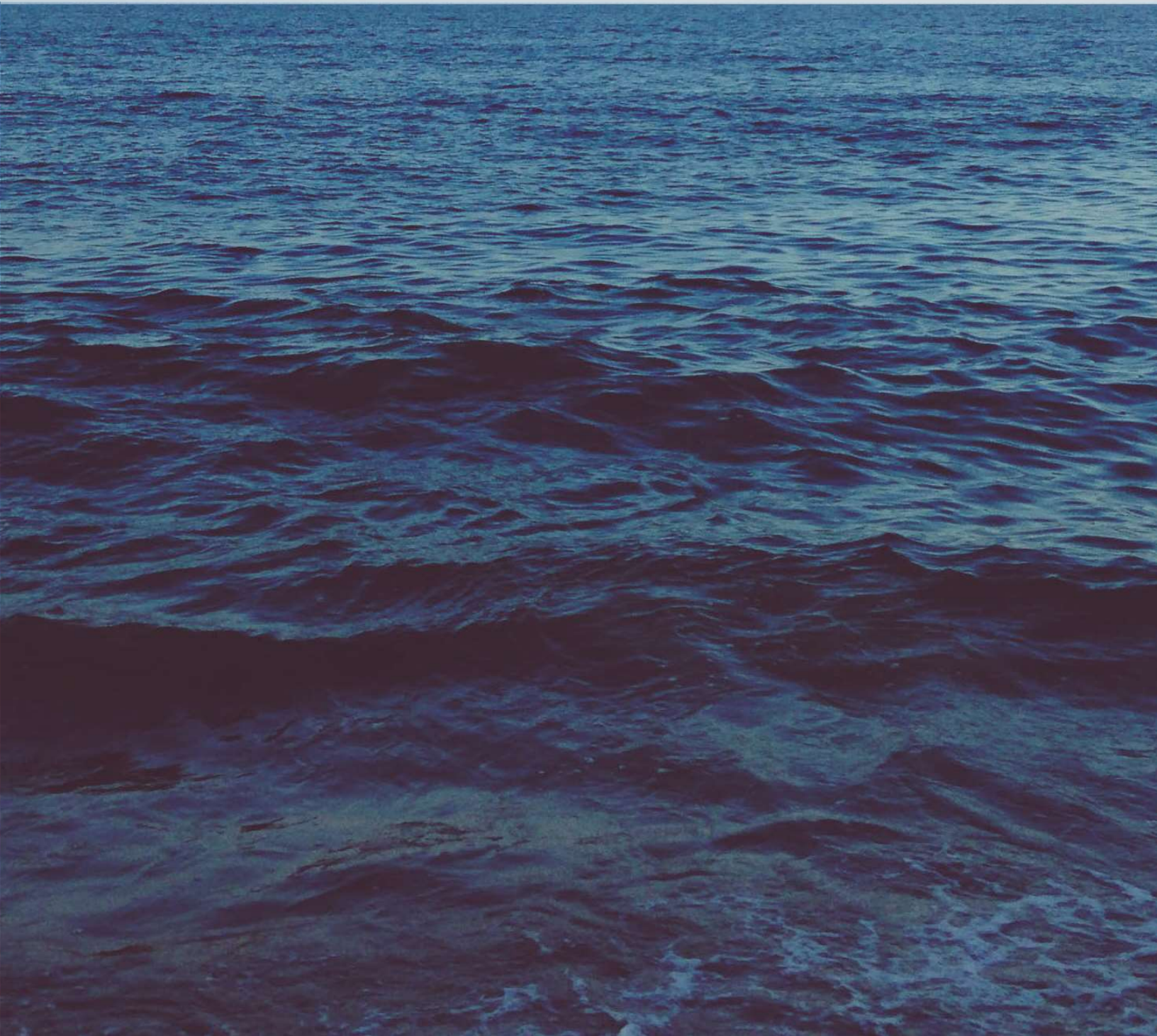
Lord, thank you for the incredible growth of the church in our country among immigrant families. Thank you that you are stitching people together who were previously divided by ethnic and national borders. Give us grace to enter into the joy and pain of our immigrant brothers and sisters in the US, knowing that what happens in one part of the Body happens to all of us. In your name, *Amen.*

---

WEEK 4

---

*Understanding the  
Global Refugee Crisis*



The Ruth and Naomi project study has so far focused on immigrants. But we also want to highlight a distinct group of immigrants who we believe are uniquely vulnerable: refugees.

## Who Is a Refugee?

Millions of refugees throughout the world are forced to flee their homes because of violence and persecution, often leaving everything behind and crossing international borders in order to find safety. Refugees have a difficult journey as they leave what's familiar, often with nothing but the clothes on their back, and find themselves in vulnerable situations in the country to which they flee.

A refugee is defined by the United States as "a person who is outside his or her country of nationality or last habitual residence and is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."

As of 2015, there were more than 60 million displaced people in the world—about 1 in 100 people worldwide. The refugee crisis is particularly acute in Syria and Iraq, where civil war and the violent terrorism of ISIS have driven people, including Christians living in some of the oldest Christian heritage sites, out of their homelands and seeking shelter in Europe and North America. Many refugees suffer great trauma and distress due to war and conflict, often having seen family members killed or tortured. Others have suffered religious persecution and are targeted by their own country leaders for their religious beliefs.

As refugees flee violence and persecution, they often find themselves in vulnerable situations in the country to which they flee. Many refugees seeking safety in another country end up in massive refugee camps, where international assistance is critical to provide food, shelter and water. These camps are often composed of plastic tents; food is scarce and crime is rampant. Other refugees find themselves in urban settings where they do not speak the language and need to find employment to support themselves and their families. Many refugees have to adjust to their new lives in another land while waiting for their home countries to become safe.

## History of the U.S. Resettlement Program

The United States has a long history of welcoming refugees. Since 1975, the

### IN THIS WEEK

- **Who is a refugee?**
- **History of the resettlement program**
- **How can Christians help refugees?**

country has resettled more than 3 million refugees. The U.S. Resettlement Program (USRP) was formalized with the Refugee Act of 1980; since then, annual admissions have ranged from a high of 207,116 in 1980 to a low of 27,100 in 2002. In fiscal year 2011, the U.S. admitted 56,424 refugees. Each year, the President, in consultation with Congress, determines the maximum number of refugees who may be admitted to the United States. In recent years, most of those resettled have been refugees from Iraq, Burma, Bhutan, Iran, Somalia, Burundi, the former Soviet Union and Cuba. In 2017, at the beginning of his presidency, Donald Trump temporarily suspended immigration from several Muslim-majority countries, in part to keep out radical Islamic terrorists. In response, more than 500 prominent evangelical leaders urged the President to reverse the temporary ban and the dramatic reduction of the total refugees that America would accept in 2017.

Once refugees are identified for resettlement, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) refers refugees to resettlement countries, including the United States (which resettles the largest number of refugees in the world), Canada, Australia, Denmark, Sweden and 17 other countries. The refugee then has to go through a series of security screenings: every single refugee is interviewed in-person by a Department of Homeland Security official, fingerprinted and medically screened before being admitted to the United States. The process can take years.

Once a refugee passes the security screenings and medical checks, they are assigned to one of about ten nonprofit "voluntary agencies" in the United States. One of the most active groups is World Relief, the relief arm of the National Association of Evangelicals. World Relief helps refugees arrive safely and adjust to life in the United States. A refugee is then assigned a flight to come to the United States and takes out a travel loan, which the refugee will pay back upon arrival in the U.S. Before their arrival, refugees have a short cultural orientation, which provides them with a basic English lesson and rudimentary understandings of life in the United States, including what to expect upon arrival.

## **Adjusting to Life in the United States**

When the refugee arrives, voluntary agencies provide services including locating housing, reception at the airport, orientation to the community, facilitation of health screenings, follow-up on health issues, school enrollment for children, enrollment for public benefits that will help support the refugees until they reach self-sufficiency, help finding employment, assistance with cultural adjustment and English language instruction.

Unlike most other immigrants, refugees are eligible to receive limited cash assistance through different governmental programs, but the goal of these programs is for refugees to achieve self-sufficiency in a short period of time, limiting dependency on welfare programs.

Refugees face many challenges upon arrival to the U.S. The first challenge is adjusting to a new community, including settling themselves into a new home, enrolling their children in school and trying to learn English. Another great challenge is finding a job to be able to support themselves and their families.

Refugees come from a variety of backgrounds. Some refugees are well-educated and have a good grasp of English, while others come with little education and may need assistance in navigating basic amenities such as escalators, running water, stoves and microwaves. All refugees who come to the United States, regardless of their educational background, often have to overcome tremendous mental and physical distress—including, in many cases, PTSD—from previous persecution.

## How Christians Can Love Refugees

Christians play an integral role in welcoming refugees to the United States and helping them integrate into American life. This can include picking up refugees at the airport with a “Welcome to America” banner, helping to furnish an apartment, or cooking a hot meal for them as their first meal in the U.S. Arriving to a new country is daunting, especially if one does not speak the language or know the culture. A warm greeting can help refugees feel instantly welcomed in their new country of residence and allow them to know the love of Christ in tangible ways.

Churches can also help after a refugee’s initial arrival to the United States. Many refugee children need school supplies, so World Relief runs an annual “Back to School” campaign in which churches collect donated backpacks and school supplies for refugee children. Other churches have started sports clubs in which refugee children can create a soccer league and compete against each other for a “Refugee Cup.” One of the most important ways that a local church can walk alongside refugees is by simply befriending them. There are refugees resettled throughout the United States, but many have minimal contact with Americans. Befriending a refugee by helping him or her navigate public transportation, filling out school forms or inviting them into your home for a meal can make a critical and lasting impression on newcomers.

*Christians play an integral role in welcoming refugees to the United States and helping them integrate into American life.*

Though refugees have many needs when they arrive, the relationship between local churches and newly arrived refugees is certainly not one-directional: refugees often give back tremendously to their communities. They become hard workers, businessowners and community leaders. Many will share their personal testimonies of how they arrived to the United States, what they struggled through, and what they are grateful for. And many are strong believers—or come to faith in Jesus after arriving in the United States—thus contributing the unique gifts God has given them to serve local churches.

Jesus himself knew what it was like to have to flee his homeland due to threat of violence. As we read in Matthew 2, when Jesus was a child, just after the visit of the Magi, Jesus' earthly father, Joseph, was warned in a dream that the tyrannical King Herod was killing all of the young Jewish boys in Bethlehem, "so he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt" (Matt. 2:14). The gospel account does not tell us how Joseph, Mary and Jesus were received in Egypt, but it was likely both a harrowing journey and difficult once they arrived. Jesus knew in his earthly life the challenges faced by refugees. Welcoming refugees is a tangible way to follow Jesus' command to welcome strangers.

---

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

1. If you had to flee your home because of persecution, where would you go? What do you imagine would be the hardest part of the experience?
2. If forced to choose between living without legal status in a relatively safe country or returning to a place where you risked persecution for your faith, which would you choose?
3. What are some creative ways that your church could welcome a refugee into your community? In what ways could refugees use their own voice to share their stories?

### PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank you that you in your earthly life knew what it was like to flee from home to escape violence. You are able to sympathize. Give us new eyes to see the nations who are coming to our doorsteps, and help us to respond in practical, tangible, creative ways to the many needs that refugees bring with them. Move our hearts and minds to love as you love. *Amen.*



WEEK 5

*How Can Christian Women Respond?*



Over the past four sessions, we have learned a lot about immigrants—how God views them, how they are reshaping the church, and why they come to the United States.

Information is important, but knowledge should ideally compel us to take action. As we seek to understand God's heart for immigrants, it should motivate a response. "Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says," James writes (1:22).

We at the Ruth and Naomi Project have developed an acronym for six ways we can respond to what we've learned:

**PLEASE** stands for Prayer, Listening, Education, Advocacy, Service and Evangelism.

## Prayer

Scripture tells us that we should "pray without ceasing," so prayer should be an ongoing response that fuels action. We hope that the prayer points offered throughout this study have provided helpful ideas as you pray through this issue. Certainly we can pray for the immigrants in our country—especially those who do not know Jesus, and those facing family separation or economic strain.

We can also pray for our churches, that our leaders would have God's wisdom as they approach a complex, potentially controversial topic. We can pray for the churches that minister to immigrants directly, and pray, as Jesus prayed, for the unity of Christians across many lines.

Finally, we are commanded to pray for "kings and all those in authority," which in our context might mean our elected officials such as the President, our Senators and our member of Congress. While it is up to these elected officials to come up with just policies that affect immigrants, Scripture teaches that, ultimately, these decisions fall under God's sovereignty. We plead with our Heavenly Father on behalf of the many affected by the flaws in current policy, trusting in Jesus' promise that "if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven" (Matt. 18:19).

## Listening

The study guide has hopefully begun a process of listening that we think is vital to understanding a complex issue like immigration: listening, first

### IN THIS WEEK

PRAYER

LISTENING

EDUCATION

ADVOCACY

SERVICE

EVANGELISM

and foremost, to the Bible. Week 1 provided a start, but the Scriptures have much more to say on this topic than we have time to cover.

As we read Scripture, we also would do well to listen to the voices of Christian sisters and brothers who are immigrants. It's easy to form strong opinions about immigration as an issue without ever hearing the stories of those whom the issue affects personally. When we have access to individuals who are members of Christ's body, we need to prioritize their voices as we think and pray through this issue.

Finally, we as Christians are to ensure that, as we talk about this issue, we speak the truth in love. We encourage you to check our list of recommended resources to make sure that we're accurately representing the situation. Also be sure to check others' sources whenever you read information—positive or negative—about immigrants. Look at a variety of sources and be wary of organizations that have stated agendas that run counter to your values. Many Christians do not realize, for example, that some of the groups advocating harsh restrictions on immigration and issuing reports critical of immigrants do so out of a belief in population control with which many Christians would strongly disagree.


## Education

As we understand this issue better, we can help to educate others. Most Christians have simply never thought about immigration through the lens of faith, so we need leaders—both pastors and lay leaders—who will help to educate their congregations.

Your group might decide to ask the leaders at your church if they would consider devoting a Sunday to highlighting the biblical call to show hospitality to immigrants. This might be through a sermon focused on one of the many passages related to immigrants, music that praises God for his love and provision for the immigrant and others who are vulnerable, and perhaps the chance to highlight for others ways that they can minister to immigrants locally.

Perhaps you want to lead a group of people at your church through this study—or to innovate your own curriculum based on what you think would best suit your group. Maybe you could bring in a guest speaker to your church, or host a special event open to the community highlighting stories of immigrant neighbors who can help put a human face on this issue. It might be as simple as inviting some friends over to watch *The Stranger*

*We can pray for the immigrants in our country—especially those who do not know Jesus, and those facing family separation or economic strain.*



and having a discussion afterward. Be creative, but don't keep what you've learned to yourselves.

## Advocacy

Scripture commands us to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves.” The church can be a voice for the many within the body of Christ whose lives are affected by a broken immigration system—and for the many who do not yet know Christ. While most of the church's response to immigrants will be on an individual level—meeting practical needs as an expression of Christ's love and making disciples—the command to love our neighbors might also lead us to speak up in favor of legislation that would benefit them.

As we love our neighbors in practical ways, more and more Christians are convinced that the structures of our immigration laws simply do not work—not for immigrants, not for our economy and security as a whole, and not for a society that prides itself on the rule of law. Our current system is also a huge problem for those who recognize the value of intact families, because, as Focus on the Family president Jim Daly notes, “families are being torn apart” under the current policies.

There are many ways that Christ-followers in the U.S. can advocate on behalf of immigrants. Anyone can pick up their telephone or take out a pen and paper to contact their elected officials: you can find their contact information by entering your address and zip code at [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org). In some areas, pastors have signed on to a letter to their Senators or their Member of the House of Representatives, expressing their views. Others have followed up by requesting a meeting with their elected official where they can share their opinions. Some have submitted opeds or letters to the editor of the local newspaper, expressing why, from the perspective of their faith, they believe that our immigration laws need change. Some in your church might personally know a legislator and thus not need to set up a formal meeting: they could simply talk to him or her while playing golf or sharing a meal.

We'll leave it to you as a group to decide exactly what to advocate and what positions to take. The particular policy supported by many Christian organizations—including the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Association of Evangelicals, and member denominations such as the Assemblies of God, the Christian Reformed Church in North America, the Church of the Nazarene, the Wesleyans, the Vineyard and others—is a

*As we love our neighbors in practical ways, more and more Christians are convinced that the structures of our immigration laws simply do not work.*



policy that has become known as Comprehensive Immigration Reform.

Essentially, this reform would make three major changes to current U.S. immigration law:


**1. Make it much more difficult to enter the U.S.**, overstay a visa, or work unlawfully, by investing in border security and workplace enforcement while respecting due process for those detained. This only works, though, while keeping our economy strong if we also . . .

**2. Make it easier to enter the U.S. lawfully**, by adjusting our present visa system—not to allow for unlimited immigration or open borders, but to provide adequate visas to meet the goals of keeping our economy growing (which requires adequate workers at both the high and low ends of the educational spectrum), keeping families united and continuing to provide refuge for those fleeing persecution. Finally, we have to address the approximately 11.5 million people already living in the U.S. without legal status. Comprehensive Immigration Reform would . . .

**3. Allow and require those currently present unlawfully** to come forward, pay a fine, undergo a criminal background check and—except for those who have committed serious crimes, who would be deported—be granted probationary legal status. After several years in probationary status, they would be eligible for Lawful Permanent Resident status if they could demonstrate that they are contributing to society, paying taxes, making efforts toward learning English and civics and staying out of trouble.

Such a reform would avoid the extremes of either mass deportation—which would be extraordinarily costly (between \$80 billion and \$200 billion just to round everyone up and deport them, to say nothing of the much larger cost to our national economy of not having these individuals as workers and consumers in our economy) and would divide many families—or amnesty, which would simply forgive the offense of entering or overstaying unlawfully and, in the process, undermine the importance of the law.

While some commentators consider any policy that would grant legal status to any undocumented immigrants to be amnesty, the reform supported by most Christian leaders is distinct from amnesty—which is a synonym of grace, a free gift of forgiveness—in that it requires the payment of a penalty and strict criteria by which a once-undocumented immigrant could earn legal status.



Author Max Lucado calls this sort of proposal, including an ultimate pathway to citizenship for those who earn it, a “responsible, respectful, neighborly approach” to resolving our immigration problems. Most Americans agree: 72 percent support these principles, according to a study by the Pew Research Forum, including a majority of respondents from both major political parties.

But Congress has not found the will to pass reform. That’s because, legislators say, the calls and letters they get are most often from those strongly opposed to this sort of reform; the majority who are supportive are too apathetic to make a call or write a letter. As a result, we’re left with the status quo. That’s why it’s so vital for citizens who want to love their neighbors to be good stewards of the rights and privileges entrusted to all citizens within this democracy.

## Service

The church has a unique opportunity to extend Christ’s love in practical ways to immigrants, who compose some of the most underresourced individuals in our country. Many churches provide English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, recognizing that learning English is a vital skill for those who want to succeed. Others lead programs for those facing food insecurity, homework help and tutoring for kids whose parents may not understand English, or transportation for those who either cannot afford a car or are ineligible for a driver’s license.

The immigrant community desperately needs legal services. Immigration attorneys often charge more than low-income immigrants can afford, and there are simply not enough authorized nonprofit organizations to meet the demand for the immigrants seeking to get right with the complex maze of U.S. immigration law. With adequate and extensive training, though, a local church or other nonprofit organization can become an authorized legal service provider, meeting this crucial need—and extending the love of Christ in the process.

Perhaps the greatest service an individual within a local church can provide is simply friendship; for an individual who has left behind her family and community, finding someone who will love them, talk to them (and listen to them, patiently, as they learn a new language), and help them to adjust to a new culture can be enormous. In the process, many volunteers find that they also have a great deal to learn from their immigrant friends, and the relationship becomes mutually enjoyable.

*The greatest service an individual within a local church can provide is friendship.*

## Evangelism

As we serve our immigrant neighbors, we have a chance to share the transformative hope of the gospel. While many immigrants arrive in the U.S. with a vibrant Christian faith, many others—including many from unreached people groups—will hear the good news of a relationship with Jesus Christ for the first time in the U.S. We have an incredible opportunity to “go and make disciples of all nations” without ever crossing a border.

We can most effectively share the gospel by understanding the cultural and religious context from which our new neighbors come, and we would do well to look to the leadership of our brothers and sisters from those regions as we seek to effectively and sensitively present the hope of the gospel. We should also not be surprised to find that many immigrants—who tend to come from the Global South, where the Christian faith is more prevalent than it is here—will preach the gospel to us, too, and to the many native-born U.S. citizens who do not yet know the hope of a transformative relationship with Jesus.

As we seek to see more and more immigrants become followers of Jesus, though, we also have to examine our attitudes. We cannot effectively convey the gospel message that Jesus loves and died for the immigrants we encounter if our words, actions or support for particular policies lead immigrants to believe that we—the church—hate them and want them as far from us as possible. Unfortunately, whether intentional or not, the rhetoric that some have used to talk about immigration has sent that message. As Southern Baptist theologian Russell Moore notes, “It’s horrifying to hear those identified with the gospel speak, whatever their position on the issues, with mean-spirited disdain for the immigrants themselves.”

*We have an incredible opportunity to “go and make disciples of all nations” without ever crossing a border.*

---

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

What ideas did you come up with for how you, as an individual or as a group, could help to address the root causes of poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation that lead people to immigrate? Discuss how you could put those ideas into action.

### Prayer

How can your group encourage one another to be faithful in prayer?

**Listening**

What steps could you take to find more opportunities to hear the voices of the immigrants within your community?

**Education**

What could your group do to help educate others in your church and in the larger community about this issue?

**Advocacy**

- What could your group do to influence the way that your member of Congress and Senators vote on immigration issues?
- What role, if any, do you think that your local church should take in public policy advocacy?

**Service**

What practical steps could you take to serve the immigrants in your community?

**Evangelism**

How do you think that the tone with which Christians discuss immigration affects the way that immigrants hear the gospel?

**PRAYER**

Dear Father, thank you that you invite us to participate in your work of loving and serving the least among us. Thank you for the privilege of being the hands and feet of Christ. May our actions demonstrate your love for every person. When we are afraid, give us courage. When we are confused, give us clarity. When we are divided, give us unity. Let our love for the sojourners in our midst be a fulfillment of the Greatest Commandment. In your name, *Amen*.

world relief®

© 2018 World Relief in partnership with the National Immigration Forum