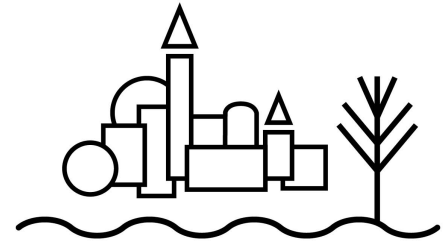


Connecting with My IMMIGRANT Neighbor

Luke 10:29-37

Immigrant: noun -

a person who migrates to another country, usually for permanent residence. (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/immigrant>)



Did you know that the word “Immigrant” originally comes from a Latin word *immigrāre* which means “to move into?” The term itself doesn’t appear in the English language until around 1780-1790 in the United States. In other words, the foundation of the United States created a need in English for a term to describe masses of people migrating from one country to another. What determines a country of origin? Is it where you are born? Where your parents were born? Your DNA? Many people would label my husband as a Colombian, an immigrant, and I am a US citizen. Recently we both did DNA tests to determine our ancestral backgrounds. Not surprisingly, I am nearly 100% European. Johan, among many things, has 47% Native American background that stretches up the entire west coast of the US. Who is the true immigrant now?

In Hebrew, the word “Ger” has been translated into English as stranger, foreigner, and immigrant throughout the Bible. The word “Ger” appears in the Old Testament alone nearly 100 times. Throughout the Old and New Testament, the message of how God wishes that we treat “Ger”, is unmistakably clear regardless of the translation you may favor. In Leviticus 19:33-34 CEV, it states “*Don’t mistreat any foreigners who live in your land. Instead, treat them as well as you treat citizens and love them as much as you love yourself. Remember, you were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*”

The Bible also states very clearly earlier on in Leviticus 19:18 NIV to “*love your neighbor as yourself.*” As Christians following God’s word and life of Jesus, it is only natural that we extend grace and love to our immigrant neighbors. We have all been immigrants at one point or another in our life (or history). We all are here as a result of that same grace and love that was extended to us. God’s mandate for us is to love one another and that message is undoubtedly clear throughout the Bible.

Reflections

1. Name some people/stories in the Bible where the people were immigrants (someone who moved into a new country). Talk about how they were received or not received by “the local” citizens.
2. Why do you think the Old Testament has so many references to how a foreigner (“immigrant”) is to be treated?
3. What do you think would happen if we treated all immigrants the way the Old Testament mandates?
4. The reference from Leviticus 19:18 is also found in Mark 12:30-31. What was the context in which Jesus said these words? What “neighbor” do you think Jesus was referring to in this statement?

A Call to Action

1. Find ways to connect with immigrants who live near you. What countries are they arriving from and why?
2. Look into what kinds of organizations in your community are working to support immigrants? How can you get involved?
3. Educate yourself on what the immigration process is like and how that may differ depending on country of origin. What does coming here entail and what leads people to become undocumented immigrants?
4. Find ways to share your new knowledge with others. Are there things that have surprised you?

Resources

1. Church Leader's Guide to Immigration, World Relief. A 72-page guide for churches with very detailed ideas - <http://welcomingthe stranger.com/sites/default/files/page/files/ChurchLeaderGuideToImmigration.pdf>
2. Immigration Legal Program Toolbox, Mennonite Central Committee, a resource for church's in their ministry to immigrants - <https://mcc.org/learn/more/immigration-legal-program-toolbox>
3. What Part of Legal Immigration Don't You Understand? A great timeline showing the frustrations and challenges of legal immigration. Print off a copy for each participant and distribute to your group - <http://reason.org/files/a87d1550853898a9b306ef458f116079.pdf>
4. InfoGraphic: Getting in Line: Understanding the U.S. Immigration Process (Council for North American Policy) - <http://thetwoeagles.com/2014/06/infographic-getting-in-line-understanding-the-u-s-immigration-process-council-for-north-american-policy/>

Prayer

Lord help us to look beyond the labels that we have placed on our immigrant neighbors. Help us love immigrant neighbors and see them as ourselves. Amen

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Erin Daza Sigler has spent the last 16 years supporting and working with immigrant and cross-cultural ministries. She currently works as a Spanish Legal Interpreter. She and her husband Johan dream of someday helping to support mosaic churches where people from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds can worship and build community together. The Dazas' have two children (with a third on the way) and live in Cordova, Tenn.