



YOU TOOK ME INK

3-DAY DEVOTIONAL

DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL

VIEW ON IMMIGRATION

**BY
KRISTEL ACEVEDO**

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INTRODUCTION

It was 1985 in Managua, Nicaragua. My dad was driving through the streets late at night on his way home when he noticed something suspicious about the car behind him. Before he knew what was happening, bullets were flying. He got out of there as quickly as possible and felt relief when he made it home with no injuries and his life. That's when he knew. His beloved Nicaragua was no longer a safe place for himself or his family. He, my mom, and my sister prepared for the journey to the United States in search of freedom. Before they made it, I was born in a small hospital in Honduras.

Eventually my family made a home in Miami, FL. It was a comforting city because it was filled with immigrants just like my parents, people who had fled their homes due to violence and an unstable government. I grew up listening to the stories of immigrants who had crossed rivers and oceans, hid in the back of trucks, or simply got on a plane with only a change of clothes to their names. They were all searching for a life where they could flourish.

I became a Christ follower in my teen years, but it wasn't until I was an adult that I became curious about what the Bible has to say about immigration. I believe that discipleship should encompass all of life. That means we need to learn to think biblically about everything, including immigration. So much of what I hear, even from Christians, comes from a political angle. It is my hope that this short devotional will help you to start thinking of immigration from a biblical perspective, instead of a political one. I want us to remember the *imago dei* of all people, including our immigrant brothers and sisters.

The *imago dei* (Genesis 1:26) is what sets us apart from the rest of God's creatures. It's what gives us dominion over the earth

(Genesis 1:28) and allows us to connect with our Creator in a special way. There are all kinds of implications when it comes to being made in God's image. For the purposes of the topic at hand, I want us to think about what it means morally and socially. How we treat one another and how we fellowship with one another.

As you read, keep in mind that this is not an all-encompassing work. It's simply an introduction and a call for compassion. If you're interested in learning more, I provide a list of resources at the end.

Thank you for reading along.

Kristel Acevedo

DAY 1

IMMIGRANTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

**Scripture: Leviticus 19:33-34; Deuteronomy 10:17-19;
Deuteronomy 31:12-13**

The Old Testament has many laws. If you've spent any time in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, you've probably noticed. Depending on what you've been taught about the laws in the Old Testament you might view them as oppressive. Here's the thing you have to remember, though. The law was given to the Israelites after they had been freed from Egypt. Notice this statement before God gives the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the place of slavery." He has already freed His people when He gives them the commandments! These laws were never meant to bring freedom, they already had that. So, what was the purpose of these laws?

The laws in the Old Testament were a guide on how to live as God's people who now had been freed and redeemed. When we go back to Genesis 12:1-3, we see that God is calling Abram (later known as Abraham), to be a divine blessing to "all the peoples on earth." In short, the law shows the world an example of what a life that is pleasing to God looks like. They are like a fragrant offering, an aroma of righteousness and compassion.

The next question we have when thinking through this is, were there any laws regarding how to treat immigrants in the Old Testament? The answer is yes!

Throughout the Old Testament you will see words like *sojourner*, *resident alien*, and *stranger*. These are all indicative of people who were outside of the nation of Israel. One of my favorite passages comes from Leviticus 19, "When an alien resides with you in your

land, you must not oppress him. You will regard the alien who resides with you as the native-born among you. You are to love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.”

“WE ALL HAVE INTRINSIC VALUE BECAUSE WE ALL HOLD HIS IMAGE.”

God has a heart for the vulnerable. We are often commanded to love the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. When I think about why that is, I remember the *imago dei*, the image of God. We all have it. From the greatest to the least. We all have intrinsic value because we all hold His image. In a world that discards those who are not “good enough,” Christians reject that notion and embrace the marginalized. We take care of God’s kids.

This includes the immigrant, whether documented or undocumented. There are no restrictions on who to love. We simply love. Rondell Treviño, of The Immigration Coalition says, “If you refuse to love undocumented immigrants because of their status, then you are in sin. God doesn’t give you a free pass to not love immigrants because of their status.”

Remember Jonah? He was the prophet who was supposed to preach to the Ninevites and instead he went in the opposite direction and got swallowed by a fish. The first time I read his story I wondered what he was thinking and why he so adamantly refused to go to Nineveh. It turns out, the Ninevites were a brutal force in the ancient world. Their wickedness knew no bounds. And yet, God wanted Jonah to preach to them and warn them of their impending destruction. The surprising part of this story, other than the big fish of course, is that the Ninevites end up repenting. Jonah is angry and says, “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster.” He’s mad because if anyone

deserved destruction, it was the Ninevites. Jonah had good reason to want to stay far away from them. But God had compassion for them. If God can have compassion for the Ninevites, can we have compassion for immigrants and refugees fleeing oppression, violence, and poverty? What is it that we are afraid of exactly?

Now, to be sure, there were also expectations for the “resident aliens” who were brought into Israel. We see an example of this in Deuteronomy 31. They were gathered together with everyone else to listen to the law of the Lord being read. This implies that they probably learned Hebrew and were integrated as members of society. They showed a solidarity with the nation that brought them in.

In my experience in the immigrant community in the U.S., immigrants love it here. They’re thankful to have found refuge. They’re thankful for an opportunity at a peaceful life. They want to better this country, not make it worse. As Christians, we can champion and aid them. We can also learn from them. Immigrants have so much to offer us; wisdom and experience and perspective and culture. What are we losing when we shut them out or have a lowly view of them? That answer is - a lot.

REFLECTION

I encourage you to take some time to reflect on your own heart towards immigrants. What do you believe about them? What misconceptions do you have? Do you know any immigrants? How can you take Leviticus 19:33-34 and live that out in your daily life? Pray and journal.

DAY 2

JESUS AND IMMIGRANTS

Scripture: Matthew 1:13-15; Matthew 25:31-46; Hebrews 13:1-3; Romans 12:13

Do you ever think about Jesus as an immigrant? The ancient world is different than our world today, so it may not be fair to categorize Him in this way. But Jesus and His parents did have to flee from their country to another to escape violence. This sounds similar to the experiences of immigrants, migrants, and refugees today. The feelings that Joseph and Mary felt as they fled to Egypt with their newborn son were probably the same feelings my parents felt when they fled to the U.S. with their toddler and newborn daughters. Even on the cross, Jesus endured all our pain and fears. If anyone can relate to the plight of immigrants and refugees, it's Jesus.

Still, did He say anything about immigrants during His earthly ministry? Not directly, but as we established in Day 1, God cares for the vulnerable, and Jesus had quite a lot to say about that.

“PERHAPS TRUE HOSPITALITY IS SHOWN WHEN WE LOVE AND CARE FOR THE STRANGER, THE OTHER, THE OUTSIDER.”

In Matthew 25 we see Jesus identifying with the vulnerable, “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in.” *You took me in.* Those words cut deep into my heart. When I read them, I see a moral imperative to care for the immigrant and the refugee. I see His heart for the weak, the defenseless, the

powerless, the helpless. If we turn away from the immigrant, are we turning away from God Himself?

Something else I see a lot in the New Testament is the word “hospitality.” This is a mark of all Christ followers. In Hebrews 13:2, the word “hospitality” comes from the word *philoxenia*, which means: *love to strangers*. How interesting that it is specifically talking about strangers here. My guess is that it’s easy to love people who are like you, from the same place as you, and who grew up the same way you did. Perhaps true hospitality is shown when we love and care for the stranger, the other, the outsider.

If you find it difficult to love and show hospitality to the immigrant, you may want to ask God to show you why that is.

One of the problems is labels. How often do we give labels to others which cause us to see them in an unfavorable light? A label I hear thrown around a lot is “illegal alien.” I shudder every time I hear it. It sounds crass and makes it seem as though the individuals being referred to are criminals. If we’re talking about people who are in this country without all the proper papers, I prefer the term “undocumented immigrants.” This is a neutral term that expresses the individual’s current reality. But the word I try to view everyone by is “neighbor.” In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment is. Listen to His response.

He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

I once heard a pastor say that we can never love anyone above the label we give them, that’s why the only label we should give anyone is *neighbor*. I’ve never forgotten that, and I hope you don’t either.

REFLECTION

I encourage you to take some time to ask God how you can love the vulnerable around you, including immigrants. How can you support immigrants in your community? How can you show hospitality to the stranger? How can you partner with others (your neighbors, your local church, a non-profit organization) to make the immigrant feel welcome in your community? Pray and journal.

DAY 3

ABUNDANCE VS. SCARCITY MINDSET

Scripture: Ephesians 3:16-19; Luke 6:38; 2 Corinthians 9:6-9

Now that we've investigated what the Bible says about immigrants, what are the implications for today? Something I think about a lot is *abundance vs. scarcity mindset*. For most of my life I have struggled with scarcity mindset. I felt like I didn't have enough and would never be enough. I hoarded everything for myself – my time, my energy, my money, my resources. I couldn't possibly be generous because I didn't even have enough in the first place.

But in God's economy there is always enough. We don't have to live with a scarcity mindset. We've been promised abundance. What does that mean when it comes to immigrants? It means we can pour ourselves out, make space, share resources, lift up their voices, and be generous. When we embrace abundance and give it away, it's freeing in a whole new way.

Often, I hear people operating in a scarcity mindset when it comes to immigrants in our country. They think we don't have enough resources to go around. I reject that perception. I see a Church in the U.S. filled with people who love Jesus. I see a Church that steps up to the plate to care for others. I think we could care for the immigrant as well. There's nothing to stop us. We are Spirit-filled and Christ-led. We have a Father who has given us every spiritual blessing not to keep for ourselves, but to give away to those around us.

“WHEN WE EMBRACE ABUNDANCE AND GIVE IT AWAY, IT'S FREEING IN A WHOLE NEW WAY.”

You might be asking yourself, “Well, what about national security?” Tim Keller says, “There’s nothing wrong with saying we need to have secure borders. But there’s another part of us that says we need to be kind to the immigrant. There’s got to be a balance here, and I don’t see a balance.”

As Christians, instead of viewing immigrants as problems to solve or political issues to win; let’s view them as people to love. Let’s not ignore the opportunity God has given us. In the final commission Jesus gives to His disciples before ascending into heaven, He says, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

The nations are at our doorstep. How will we respond?

REFLECTION

I encourage you to take some time to reflect on whether you are living in scarcity or abundance mindset. Are you fearful that immigrants in this country will “take what’s yours”? How can you show generosity to the immigrant in your community? How can you have a balanced view of immigration in our country? How can you continue to think biblically about immigration? Pray and journal.

CONCLUSION

Thanks for joining me the past few days in this devotional. I pray that this would be the first step in your journey to developing a biblical view of immigration. If you would like to chat further about immigration and the Bible, you can contact me on my website or message me on Instagram & Twitter. I would love nothing more than to have a conversation in love and grace. I know God will continue to reveal to you how much He loves the immigrant and how much He loves you.

RESOURCES

- *The Bible and Borders: Hearing God's Word on Immigration* by M. Daniel Carroll R.
- *The God Who Sees: Immigrants, the Bible, and the Journey to Belong* by Karen Gonzalez
- *Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, & Truth in the Immigration Debate* by Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristel Acevedo is a wife, mom, and writer. She serves at Transformation Church in South Carolina where she gets to create resources and disciple others. She is the daughter of immigrants from Nicaragua.

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