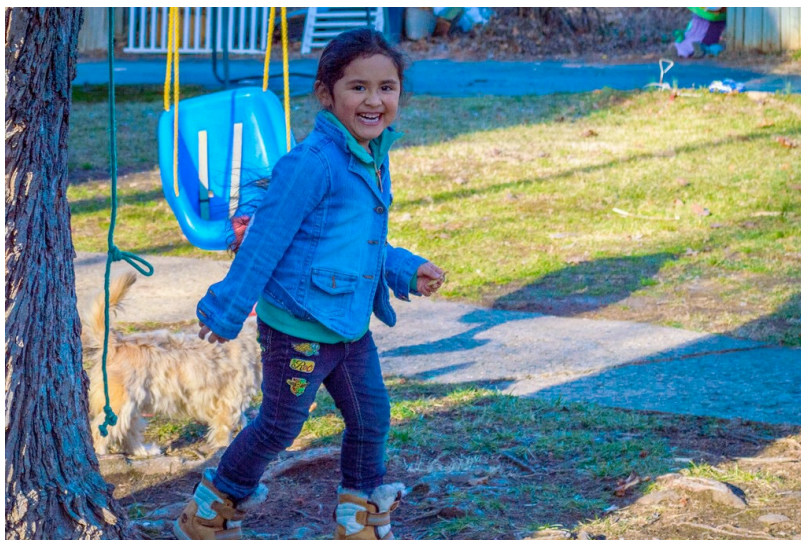


IMMIGRANTS, SCRIPTURE AND THE AMERICAN DREAM

THE STRANGER

A FILM BY THE EVANGELICAL IMMIGRATION TABLE



Film Synopsis

“The Stranger” is a 40-minute documentary film commissioned by the Evangelical Immigration Table and produced by Emmy-award winning producer Linda Midgett. “*The Stranger*” profiles three immigrant stories and includes interviews with local and national Christian leaders.

By highlighting biblical teaching related to immigrants, sharing compelling stories of immigrants who are also evangelical Christians, and addressing some common economic and political misconceptions, “The Stranger” seeks to mobilize evangelical Christians to respond to immigrants and to immigration policy in ways that are consistent with biblical principles.

Many Christians are already involved in ministry with immigrants, but have questions about our broken immigration system, the economics of immigration, and biblical teaching on the subject.

The Evangelical Immigration Table’s short documentary *The Stranger* highlights different pieces of this complex issue to help spark conversation, discussion, and reflection about why and how we should work to reform our nation’s immigration laws.

The Stranger documents three stories of people across the country suffering under our broken immigration system. Religious and business leaders also shed light on the economic impact of immigration re-form and how restoring the rule of law will strengthen America.

Unpacking *The Stranger*:

Immigration is one of the most complicated issues of our time. Yet, if opinion polls are accurate, few Christians have ever considered the issue as one for which our faith should guide our response. Those who do take Scripture into account often find themselves torn between the desire to uphold laws and the call to minister to the vulnerable. *The Stranger* seeks to equip people for a biblical response to immigrants and immigration in America.

Two important trends set the foundation for discussing *The Stranger*. The first is the fact that immigrants are transforming the Church in the United States. Immigrant congregations are growing faster than any other segment of evangelical churches. As 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.” How does the Church respond to this?

The second key trend is that, while we might disagree on the political specifics of achieving a just and compassionate immigration policy, there is general 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 individuals from realizing their God-given potential. How does the Church speak to these concerns and to our lawmakers?

The stories you’ve just heard in *The Stranger* are real. So are the people and their struggles with our broken immigration system. Through Maria, Liuan, and the Stewarts you now have faces, names, and stories of hardship, hard work, and hope that will stay with you for many days to come. Perhaps you heard something in *The Stranger* that resonated with you—an experience or feeling that you’ve had yourself or that some-one you love has had.

Let’s talk about the film. Our rhetoric must be informed by more than politics, but most importantly by the gospel and by God’s mission. We are grateful that you will join 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 help advocate for immigration reform consistent with biblical values.

Discussion Questions for *The Stranger*

Part 1

In the New Testament, we are called to show hospitality to strangers (Hebrew 13:2). Jesus also tells His followers that how they treat a “stranger” is in fact how they treat Himself (Matthew 25:33-45). We also are clearly commanded to “be subject to the governing authorities” that God has established (Romans 13:1); while not a passage about immigration specifically, this is certainly a relevant teaching in our context, when many undocumented immigrants are present and many employers have hired individuals without authorization. Scripture guides us to advocate for legislative solutions that are both welcoming toward immigrants and which respect and restore the rule of law.



1. If not native to America, where did you or your ancestors immigrate from? Do you have an immigrant story of your own or know the stories of your ancestors' migration?
2. Do you know of any immigrants in your church, workplace, or neighborhood? Do you know their immigrant stories? If not, how can you learn more about their journeys to America?
3. Has your Church addressed the biblical passages pertaining to immigrants and immigration? If not, what might be an appropriate way to begin a discussion on the topic with a small group or your local church?
4. Have you ever considered that many of the characters within the narrative of Scripture were themselves immigrants, crossing borders for a variety of reasons? How many characters in the Bible can you think of who were immigrants, and what circumstances does Scripture tell us motivated their migration?
5. How do you think we can best apply passages that call us to love and welcome immigrants while also abiding by the biblical commands to respect the rule of law?

Part 2

Maria came to the United States at age 16 with her boyfriend. After marrying and having children, her husband becomes abusive. Maria's four children are US 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. 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 US.

Her pastor, Rev. Derrick Smith, and his wife Meghan, are interviewed in the film. They have been frustrated by the limitations of our current legal system, which in the vast majority of cases does not provide any possibility for 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, "[but] there is no line."



1. What emotional and spiritual effect might being undocumented have on someone? As a parent? A spouse? A student? A child?
2. What do you think that you would do if you were in Maria's situation?
3. 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?

Part 3

In this section, Pastor Wilfredo “Choco” De Jesus, who pastors a large Assemblies of God church in Chicago, and Dr. Barrett Duke, vice president for public policy and research for the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, discuss various dynamics of importance as American Christians consider their response to immigration. On one hand, immigration accounts for some of the most dramatic growth within evangelical churches in the United States in recent years. In many denominations and local churches, in fact, immigrants and their children account for the only net growth. This happens both as immigrants who are already believers enter the country (legally and illegally) and join local churches, but also as local churches reach out to newcomers to their community who are not yet believers, sharing the hope of the gospel. Immigration presents an opportunity to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19) right in our own communities.

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

While celebrating the reality that more and more people are becoming followers of Jesus as a result of immigration, both Pastor Choco and Dr. Duke are also 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 be simply ignoring and forgiving the violation of the law, which both believe is not the best solution.

1. Have you noticed any 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” of non-immigrant Christians?
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. What is your definition of amnesty? What is the dictionary definition, and how do you think this compares to recent proposals for immigration reform?
5. 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?
6. In terms of public policy possibilities, how do you think we can best reconcile Romans 13’s commands to be subject to governing authorities with commands to extend love and welcome to immigrants?

Part 4

Liuan immigrated to the US 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 an employer-sponsored visa, and eventually Liuan went on to become a naturalized U.S. 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 US citizens. Despite the immigration legal status issues faced by her mother and step-father, Liuan describes her childhood as pretty typical for an American family. 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 step-father were in-formed that they were facing deportation orders. Liuan's stepfather was detained in an immigrant detention center for several months before ultimately being deported back to China. Her mother spent years and significant sums of money trying to stay lawfully in the United States to be able to support their children. In the midst of this challenge, Liuan contemplates the possibility of 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 that 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, which prays for and with her. She trusts in God to provide for her family.

1. Detention and deportation policies impact many more individuals than just the immigrants: as Liuan's story illustrates, many American citizens are affected as well. Do you know anyone who has been deported, or anyone who has been affected by the deportation of a family member or friend?
2. Between July 2010 and September 2012, more than 200,000 parents of U.S. citizens were deported, and parents of U.S. citizen children continue to be deported every day. Some of these children end up in foster care situations; others may live with an extended family member; others go with their deported parent(s) to their country of origin; how do you think that each of these circumstances affects these children?
3. 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 Liuan's step-father who are awaiting removal hearings which average of \$122 per day, per immigrant—are money well spent or that better alternatives should be considered?
4. How can churches/small groups create a safe environment where people can share about their immigration hardships and receive encouragement, support, and prayer?
5. What stereotypes do we have about immigrants in general? How have these stereotypes been challenged (or affirmed) by the stories in the film?

Part 5

Virtually all economists agree that immigration has had a net positive impact on the economy of the United States, though not all Americans are aware of this fact. While immigrants (with or without legal status) do bring some costs to the federal, state, and local government, they also contribute in various ways, including, in most cases, as taxpayers (despite the common misperception that undocumented immigrants do not pay taxes). Various studies have found that immigrants' contributions outweigh the costs associated with their presence. While Jesus instructs us to trust Him rather than worrying about the basic economic realities of what we will eat, drink, and wear (Matthew 6:25), it certainly is comforting to know that embracing immigrants is both biblically faithful and—for the average American, at least—in our own economic interest. The economic and fiscal benefits of immigration would be greater still, though, if Congress were to reform our immigration laws. Economists find that the currently stalled reforms to our immigration policies would boost Americans' earnings overall and help reduce the federal deficit. Douglas Holtz-Eakin, Director of the Congressional Budget office under President George W. Bush says, "Immigration reform can mean a better future for all of Americans."



1. What are some businesses that you support or rely upon that depend on or heavily utilize an immigrant work force?
2. Were you surprised by the fact that unlawful immigration has had a net beneficial effect on the US economy? In what ways do immigrants, lawfully and unlawfully present, contribute to the US economy and society?
3. Many Christian economists think that passing immigration reform is a question of being good stewards of the resources that God has entrusted to us—what do you think of that argument?

Bruce Stewart, who taught special intelligence reading to the US military, and his wife, Dianne, a public relations expert, came to the US 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 having tried to do everything lawfully, their visas soon expired and they became undocumented. They tried every legal pathway to reinstate their status. After experiencing significant financial and emotional hardships to reapply for legal residency, most of the family now (as of the time of filming) have temporary legal status and are waiting for new permanent residence applications to be approved. However, the family still faces the possibility of separation, as their adult daughter has “aged out” and cannot be included in the application.



1. What would you do if you were in the Stewarts' position?
2. Have you ever been separated from your family for an extended period of time? What was that experience like?
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 very challenging process to try to get their legal status. What does this tell you about the complexity of our immigration legal system?

You have now heard the stories of Maria, Liuan, and the Stewarts. While each of their families' immigration experiences is unique, they share 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.



1. How can you become more aware of the immigration policies in the US?
2. Do you know of ministries or organizations that help immigrants and refugees with their settlement in America?
3. Given the presence of undocumented immigrants in the US, how should churches respond in loving our immigrant neighbor while respecting the rule of law? How could you respond individually?
4. How could you encourage your Members of Congress to respond legislatively to the challenges of our current immigration system?