

Ep #18: Finding Joy When the Immigration Headlines Feel Heavy
with Stephen and Susan Beck



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With Your Hosts

Tracie L. Morgan & Ashley Glimasinski

[Hope In Action: Navigating Immigration with Faith and Care](#)

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Tracie: They don't owe you their trauma. They don't have to explain their legal status. And they don't have to represent an entire country or culture. But just get to know them as a human being. And I think maybe that's where the conversation and the hope starts.

Ashely: Because stories don't answer every policy question, but they can change the way we ask the questions, and that's a pretty good place to begin.

Tracie: When the headlines get so loud that we're tempted to stop seeing people altogether, maybe that's exactly when our faith kicks in and asks us to look again.

Ashely: To stay tender, to stay connected, to keep noticing the goodness and joy that are still here, even in the middle of the hard things.

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Tracie: Hi, I'm Tracie.

Ashley: And I'm Ashley.

Welcome to Hope In Action, where we offer clear insights, practical tools, and inspiring stories to navigate immigration with confidence, compassion, and faith.

Each week, we break down the law, share real-world examples, and help you speak up, live out your values, and make a difference in your community.

Whether you're looking to understand immigration through a faith-driven lens, have courageous conversations with those who matter to you, or take small steps toward justice, you're in the right place. Let's dive in.

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Tracie: Welcome back to Hope in Action. Ashely, this is our last regular episode of the season before our live finale. I can't believe it. I know that when we started talking about this season, we knew we'd be stepping into some really heavy conversations. I mean, we live and work in this world every single day. But even knowing that, I don't know if we could have predicted all that these past few months would bring or how relentless the attacks on immigration and immigrants would sometimes feel.

Ashely: I don't think we could have predicted it at all. This past year has felt relentless, and I guess I hoped that these past few months would somehow be different, but maybe that was just optimism and not really hope. But I think that this season has been really helpful for me as we've been through all this, just talking with you, talking with our guests, speaking with others in my community. It has really given me encouragement to keep going in this time. And I think in this season too, we've reflected a lot of that as we've talked about the border, asylum, enforcement, waiting, and what our immigration system looks like from very different perspectives.

But while we've been having those conversations, the headlines have just kept coming. There's been more policy changes, more detention stories, more families afraid of what might happen next, and stories about refugees and immigrants who thought they were finally safe in this country are suddenly feeling vulnerable again and they're being re-traumatized in that experience.

Tracie: That's so true. For me, and I'm not going to speak for you, but I'm going to guess, there's this tension, right, between wanting to pay attention, being informed, and then just feeling completely overwhelmed by how much there is to pay attention to. You know, I have to pay attention to policy alerts. You know, is this application valid? Is this program still existing? And that's part of my job. But then

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I also wonder, at what point does taking in more and more bad news, when does that stop helping me respond and just makes me feel numb instead?

Ashely: I feel that and I'm really sure that a lot of people are feeling that. Because we don't want to look away. We don't want to become indifferent. But we're also not built to absorb an endless stream of human suffering every time we pick up our phones. And our algorithms unfortunately have been conditioned to show us that stream. So maybe the question isn't simply, how do we keep up with all of this? Maybe instead the question is, how do we keep seeing people as people when the headlines are so heavy?

Tracie: Absolutely. And that makes me think of another question that's underneath it for us as Christians. Where is God in all of this? Where do we find hope when circumstances get bad, when they are not changing, and we're not getting the answers to prayer that we expect that we should get? But even more surprisingly, I want to know, where do we find joy?

Ashely: Which is a good question because it brings us to today's guests. Because we wanted to end this part of the season somewhere a little different. Not with another policy expert or another lawyer, but with people who are living this out in community. People for whom immigration isn't primarily an issue to debate. It's their church. It's their neighbors. It's the people sitting around their dinner table.

Tracie: And so our guests today are Stephen and Susan Beck. And their story didn't begin in Minneapolis where they are today. They've actually spent much of their adult lives crossing cultures. Their family moved from the U.S. to Canada when their children were growing up, and they spent a lot of their formative years in Canada. And then Stephen and Susan moved to Germany after their youngest finished high school. And their work in ministry has really brought them into relationship with people all over the world.

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And now, as I mentioned, they're back in Minneapolis. And I don't think when they moved there, they anticipated what would happen just a few months later.

Stephen's a pastor, a theologian, and a church planner who has spent decades thinking about what it means to build Christian community across cultural and national lines. And Susan's been alongside him throughout all of that, raising their four daughters, building a life far from home, and welcoming people into their family and their community, and experiencing firsthand both the beauty and the difficulty of living across cultures. So again, today, they're part of All Saints Community in Minneapolis, an extraordinarily diverse church that's made up of people from all sorts of different nations, cultures, languages, backgrounds, and I think is honestly a picture of what heaven's going to look like.

Ashely: I would love to see that someday. And I would love to see their church. But I think what really drew us to Stephen and Susan's story, especially after the difficult winter that Minneapolis experienced, wasn't simply the diversity of their church community or their surrounding community. It was the joy they seemed to have found in that community. And not joy because everything is okay, not joy that ignores our fear or uncertainty or division, but the kind of joy that can come from actually knowing one another, from sharing meals, raising families, worshiping together, and becoming part of each other's lives.

Tracie: And that feels like exactly the conversation we need as we come to the end of the season. So Stephen and Susan, welcome to Hope in Action. So I've given everyone the very short version of your story, but there's obviously a whole lot more to it. You've been married for 50 years. You've raised four daughters. You have 11 grandchildren. And you've spent a huge portion of your lives living in and working across cultures. So take us back a little bit. How did this even become your life?

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Stephen: Well, Susan actually grew up in the USA and at a very early age, she felt the call into missions, cross-cultural missions. I, on the other hand, did not grow up in the USA. I grew up in Germany as an immigrant kid, and I learned very early on in life that immigrants such as Americans in Germany after World War II are not welcome. And I lived with that. I therefore have been able to easily identify with immigrants.

When we, much later in life, moved to Toronto to plant a church, we had people of all nations suddenly come into our church, and we just began to love the multiculturalism of a church body. We learned to deal with that and to love that. And then we moved to Germany, and I was a professor there for 18 years at a seminary, but I insisted that I would plant churches with my students. And so we did that, and that's when actually the great adventure started around 2012, is when this huge wave of refugees from mostly the Middle East came into Germany. And they actually came into many, many churches in Germany, including one, our little church plant, and they were asking questions like, so who is Jesus and what is in the Bible? And that's when we really came alive to God working amongst refugees, God working amongst immigrants, God working amongst people like Muslims that we tend to view as way out there and not part of our life. And that's when we really learned the joy of having a multicultural, multilingual congregation with tons of people from different religions seeking the truth.

Tracie: That's amazing. Susan, I'm so curious. Having not grown up abroad, there's so much that you could put into this, but what's something that maybe you've learned from living outside your own American culture?

Susan: The main thing is that growing up in America, America has this just do it mentality and kind of to the point of saying our way is the only way. And certainly it's the best way. But to realize that every culture has positive things that maybe are a little different than what I've grown up with. And hey, maybe it's even a better

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way. And so learning to be open to trying different ways of doing things and learning to appreciate things about the other culture and the other cultures that you're involved with.

Stephen: Yeah, it really takes a stance of humility that you move into a different culture with the thought that there, yeah, there are elements here of a fallen world, but there are also elements here of a God-created world and God-created people. And so my task is not to impose my culture on that culture, but to learn from that culture, what are the gospel, I always call it the gospel elements of a culture that reflect our great God, and then to respect those elements and to move into those elements and to even teach people that this, you know, these good things are happening in our culture or are part of our culture because of God. And so, yeah, so then we start enjoying that culture. And then people feel like, okay, they're part of us, and then ministry can happen.

Ashely: Your words are ringing so true with me and my own experiences of living overseas and being in different communities, but also here within the United States with our immigrant and refugee friends. So I love hearing your experiences, and I'm curious if you could tell us a little bit about your current church and where you are now. If we walked into church with you on a Sunday, who would we meet? What would we hear and what would it feel like to be in that community?

Stephen: Well, our church in Minneapolis is a new church. We're actually called still a mission church or a church plant. We're not even as far along yet as having our own elders and deacons. That's yet to come. You would meet a group of people that, half of them don't speak English. You would see different skin colors. You would see people of different skin colors running around setting things up, being involved. You would see, you would you would hear a lot of noise because we just have this greeter culture that when anybody walks through the door, it's like celebration time, big hugs. And, you know, everybody, even if they don't know

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English, everybody is made to feel that here's a home, here's here's a community where I can belong and where I am accepted.

And you would find that things are a bit chaotic. We've had to put aside any dreams of being like a really smooth running service where everything is working just great because actually we have disruptions. We even have people interrupting the service. Like the funniest thing I ever experienced was at the beginning very beginning of one of my sermons, this guy from Colombia whose English is very broken starts, he yells out, "Hey, Pastor, my neighbor, he no have a translation equipment." And so we had to stop everything, right? Because we wanted everybody to be able to be on board and hear the gospel, even if they don't speak English, hear it in their own language. And so that kind of stuff would happen.

Susan: Yeah, or you ask a rhetorical question and someone answers it.

Stephen: Right. So things are, we have an order of service. We have we even use liturgical elements, but we're somewhat unconventional because we really want the people to feel like they are the focus and not a smooth running service. So we even have a chat room time where after the sermon, where people can ask questions about the sermon or even about the Christian faith. And they can even do it in their own language if they don't know English, and then I am the one who has to get the translation of their question and answer their question. So that's I think in general what you would find.

Tracie: I want to come on Sunday. That sounds amazing. I think, for people who kind of live in their own bubble and haven't ventured out and feel like they don't know immigrants, diversity can definitely feel and sound like an abstraction. But you just explained how extraordinarily diverse your church is. You literally have people from all over the world, all these different languages and backgrounds. You've got immigrant families, refugee families, people who have been in the

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United States for generations or maybe just a few days. And you aren't talking about diversity as something you have to manage. You are actually enjoying it. You seem to delight in it. Where does that come from?

Stephen: Where does that come from? Well, I think it comes from, I think it just it comes from understanding the mission of Jesus. I think the roots are theological. I think the roots are missional. I think we caught on years ago to the fact that God is on a mission, and we don't create a mission. We don't even create a model of church that is according to our personal mission. We participate in God's mission. And his mission from the time of the fall on has been to save people from every tongue, tribe, and nation.

And this is where I think refugee movements have become so important to the church is that refugee movements and immigrants living all around us is not basically a political matter or a political development. I mean, it is that, but that's not the main thing. The main thing is it's a mission matter. It's God moving people to where they can hear the gospel. And so, you know, the English Puritan John Owen back in the 17th century, in one of his volumes, he writes this great thing that really helped me understand the place of the church in the world today. He said, "The mainstream of history is God calling people into his church and calling them the people of God. Politics, economics, anything else are just rivulets that flow into this mainstream."

So we learned early on that we have to have a kingdom perspective on immigrants and refugees, on the stranger, and what Jesus actually meant when he said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And then use the Samaritan who hated Jews and the Jew who hated Samaritans as an illustration of how to love your neighbor. And so, I think that's what helps us get beyond all the political quagmire that we tend to get into and just keep the vision for, well, this is what my life counts for, and this is what my church should count for. We're participating in the mission of God to

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people of every tongue, tribe, and nation. And that includes the people that God has brought into our neighborhood. I think that's what really gives us the passion.

And I think I'd say, I'd say that's also why every time I see a stranger walking into our church community, even if I don't know the person, I just feel celebration going off in my heart. I just feel like, okay, this is God at work again, bringing people from every tongue, tribe, and nation to Jesus and into Jesus' community. And so I just go and hug them because I'm just so excited that we have one more who has just come in from every tongue, tribe, and nation to be part of the gospel community.

Ashely: That's amazing. I love that, one, because it sounds like you have a really, your heart is rooted in missions. Your heart is rooted in loving our neighbors, our immigrant neighbors, our friends who come from abroad. And you welcome them. And I think when we, when Christians talk about welcoming the stranger, we often focus on what we're called to give, like hospitality and compassion and care. And I think those things matter, but I'm also struck as I listen to you by how much we receive also.

When we really know people whose lives and experiences are different from our own, our own lives become bigger. They become more enriched. Our understanding deepens and our communities become richer also. Is that part of what you've experienced?

Susan: Absolutely. There was a meme floating around for a while. I haven't seen it recently, but it was when other people come into your circle, don't build a fence, build a bigger table. And I just love that, that we can when we open ourselves up and we show hospitality, actually other cultures, I think, have a much better grasp of hospitality than we do or than the Germans did also. I think we tend to be a lot more private, but other cultures are just so open and you welcome them into your

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home, they want, they want to be part of your life and we've I just feel like our lives have been enriched by that.

Stephen: Yeah.

Susan: That it hasn't just been we're giving them food that they need, but they're enriching our lives.

Stephen: And I think that's the beauty of hospitality, which Susan is just so good at is that it's more than sharing food with someone. It's it's sharing food with someone in order to give them a real illustration of how God shares spiritual food with us, how God shares grace and home and belonging with us and with the person who's lost his home or the person who doesn't feel like he has any belonging. So there's just a real again, a real missional, a real grace, a real kingdom of God element to hospitality. And that's why, for example, every Sunday, we not only have a worship service, but we have a big meal together, and people bring food, and we encourage people to bring food of their own cultures, their own cuisines, and we celebrate that, right? Wow, the Africans have come through again, you know, you guys have got the best chicken in the world. It, you know, it's so great that there's fire coming out of my ears.

And things like that, and it's a way of showing, hey, wow, God has such a wide embrace, right, that he welcomes you to his table, as Susan said. We've had some amazing experience when we've invited Muslims over to our home, and as soon as they walk in the home, they feel so free to ask their questions about God and why Christianity is different than Islam. And we get they get into heated arguments against Christianity. We just kind of keep our cool because we know that arguing the way they like to argue is really part of the process of coming to terms with the truth and the beauty of Jesus Christ. So we just let them argue, we share food with them, we love them. And then when we've had Muslims over, they we've actually

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had a guy on the way out the door say to us, "This was the best evening of my life."

Tracie: How?

Stephen: And we know it's because they experienced the grace of God from our hospitality. And so our church does that on a more collective level, right? So every time we get together, there's food, and we all sit together and we talk, including the strangers, and we make them feel welcome, and we let them ask all their questions, and we create a community that we call a gospel community where everybody has belonging.

Tracie: That is so beautiful. Again, I'm going to book a flight and come up sometime soon.

Stephen: We're just a small church and we're new.

Tracie: It's amazing.

Stephen: We are, I think last I counted, we have already something like 25 different nations represented in our little church plant.

Tracie: That is beautiful.

Stephen And half of them, half of the people are white Americans who, if you would ask them four years ago, would have never dreamed that they'd be part of something like this and would be too scared to be part of something like this. And now have discovered what a tremendous pleasure it is for them as Christians to be reaching out cross-culturally, even though they don't feel like they know how. But, you know, as soon as we open up our hearts to people, the Holy Spirit just starts doing the rest. Love is the biggest and the most poignant language, I think, in the world. God's love through us communicates where words can't.

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Tracie: Absolutely. You know, you talked about the importance of belonging and welcome and love. And yet, Minneapolis, this past winter, kind of went through the opposite of all of that. And for those of us outside of Minneapolis, we saw a lot of this through the headlines. But you were there. You experienced it through the people you knew and loved and people had real needs. And like, what did this winter feel like within your church community?

Stephen: It was a very painful time. Still is. Very chaotic time. I don't know how much more you want to say, but I just, you know what, we had no idea that we were going to walk into this. And it isn't really because of Susan and me that our church walked into this. It's actually others in our congregation that just got a passion for how our church needs to get involved in the lives of people who were so scared by what was going down that they went into hiding. What happened there, Susan? Why did people go into hiding?

Susan: Well, I think it was just such a scary time. People were being followed basically based on the color of their skin without often documents were not asked for. You'd just be picked up by these guys who were wearing balaclavas so you couldn't even see their faces, which is scary, and fully armed. So people were, immigrants were afraid to leave their homes. They were afraid to take public transit.

Stephen: Afraid to let their kids out because the kids were taken off the sidewalk.

Susan: Yeah, so they stopped going to work and it was just scary, I think, for a lot of people because they had done, it wasn't like they just waltzed across the border and started a life here. A lot of these people have done everything that they were supposed to do. They've applied for asylum. Asylum applications weren't being processed. So they're caught in this legal limbo.

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Stephen: I think we want to emphasize that we're not anti-ICE. We're not anti-government. I preached three sermons when this all started up in mid-December in Minneapolis, I preached three sermons on Romans 13 and what it means to submit to the government. And I just tried to help our frantic little congregation, scared people, understand the significance of government and try to give practical advice. Hey, if you are here illegally, let us help you to live by the law of this country, right? Let us mediate for you. If you're here legally and you're scared, then how can we help you? How can we serve you?

And this is what got me disinvited by a church when I when I made the statement that we didn't go into people's homes asking the question, "Are you here legally?" We went into people's homes, even people whose language we don't know and who didn't know English, and somehow we got the message across. It's amazing what you can do on your phones with technology with the question, how can we help you? And we wouldn't even say, but you have to come to our church. But once we found out how we can help them, they started coming to our church. In fact, we had one situation where a woman who was here legally, who is here legally from, I think, Ecuador, she went to - her husband was taken off the sidewalk and sent into detention in Texas. And she was beside herself, of course. He was here legally, too, by the way.

And so she went to her neighbor. She said, "What am I going to do? I have no money. I have no income. I have no work. I depended on him. And so what can I do?" And her unbelieving neighbor said, "But I know a church that would be willing to help you. And the guy who leads that team in that church to help people like you, and Susan is the other one that led the team, lives right beside me. So why don't you go ask him?" And then it turned out that the following Sunday, this unbelieving neighbor brought this unbelieving immigrant lady into our church community. And she got help from us, but she, and we also got her husband out of

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detention in Texas. And then he came into our church, and now they've both become followers of Jesus. And they're both - he's a taxi driver, so he brings people Sunday mornings in his car into our church. Again, mostly people that don't speak English and that need help. I've even forget what your question was, but that's essentially what has happened.

Tracie: My question is not important. Your story is incredible.

Ashely: And it makes me want to ask some other questions, too. Like you mentioned some of the things that your church did. Like you were known for helping immigrants in your neighborhood. You were known for just asking, you know, what can we help you with? And what did that look like for your church, not theoretically, but what did people ask for when you said, "What can we help you with?" And what did your church do for each other?

Susan: Yes, actually Stephen made a plea on Facebook to our Facebook friends and we were able to raise, I don't know, \$30,000. And we were able to help people with rent. That was the biggest thing. People were afraid of getting evicted because they couldn't afford their rent because they weren't going to work. We helped people with, we would drive people places. We also gave them Uber cards to help them get where they needed to go. We provided food and Stephen mentioned this one couple where we helped with their legal expenses to get him not just released from detention in Texas, which they would often just release you onto the street in Texas, but he was able to be transported back to Minneapolis from detention. We had one couple in our congregation that was really involved in helping them in very practical ways and even picking him up from the courthouse in Minneapolis. Then on that Sunday when he came to church, just the celebration was awesome.

Stephen: Yeah. And you know, we talk about celebration, but it goes with so much pain and there's so much weeping. I'm ready to weep right now. We have a Haitian

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couple. We love these people. They don't speak a stitch of English and none of us speak Creole, but they've been coming every Sunday and they somehow, you know, they sit there with their phones. My preaching is translated into Spanish through technology, not into Creole, but somehow with their phone there, they are getting the word of God in their own language, and we are sure that they have come to faith in Christ. But they are now going to be deported. And they're not only going to be deported, they're going to be split up. He's being deported to Brazil, she's being deported to the Dominican Republic with her little baby. And we're just crying about this. It just rips us apart. And so, yeah, I'm just so glad for our core group of people that are working very hard with every one of these people, and yet every week our hearts are broken.

Tracie: I am right there with you, absolutely every day. And, you know, we have to pay attention to what's going on in the world. You know, we had TPS to protect the status in for the Haitians, which is probably why this couple finds themselves in that situation. We find the end of discretion and immigration courts where there is no grace or second chances anymore. And I think that brings up a really good point, talking about, you know, this couple and this heartbreaking situation they find themselves in. And it's probably, I'm guessing because TPS, Temporary Protective Status for Haitians, has come to an end. We've seen the end of discretion in immigration courts. There's no more grace, no second chances, no anything. It feels like no heart. But yet, we have to know what's going on as advocates and with your community, we need to understand what they're going through so that we can better serve. But I feel like there's a point maybe where consuming more information doesn't necessarily make me more compassionate. It makes me angry. It makes me tired, really tired. And I suspect you maybe and some of our listeners feel that too. So how do you balance that? How do we stay informed without allowing ourselves to become numb?

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Susan: I think we need to limit how much we're watching on the news. Limit, or at least have a broader perspective on which news we're watching, not to be focused in on just one news channel. But I think the biggest thing is to just be interacting with the people who are affected by this. Skip the news if you need to. Get your news directly from Carlos. How is this affecting you today? What are your needs today? How can I encourage you in the struggle that you're experiencing?

Stephen: Well, I also think that, you know, Jesus needed to take a break from ministry. And that reminds me, back in the day when we were dealing with this huge influx of Middle Easterners coming into our church in Frankfurt, Germany, we had a missionary working with us, and she was working 70 hours a week just taking care of all their needs. And what was really helpful in that time was to learn, there was research that was done on cross-cultural ministry to particularly to needy immigrants and refugees. And the study came to the conclusion that after two years, you burn out. So I think picking up again on even Jesus needed to take breaks, I think I would suggest anybody who's starting to feel like they're overwhelmed with anger or they're just numb or they are lacking the compassion or they don't have the energy anymore, it's time for a sabbatical and to allow ourselves that. We in fact, we step away every summer for three months from this church plant and give ourselves a sabbatical of sorts, because I'm still in contact with everybody over the internet and I'm still giving advice to this, that, and whatever.

Susan: And sometimes preaching over the internet.

Stephen: And sometimes that too. Right. But yeah, we need to take breaks and we need to not feel guilty about that because it just sucks the lifeblood out of you when you day in, day out are pouring yourself into the needs of traumatized people. And so often we're trying to fill their needs and in the end, the results are not great. Or in the end, they walk away and they're totally ungrateful for

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everything you've done, you know, and that's heartbreaking too. So you've just got to give yourself time to reload and rest, just rest in Christ.

Susan: And I think the other thing is the importance of being part of a team. That's true. Doing it as a community. I'm not the savior and I need other people to work with me to meet other people's needs and so I think that's an important part that I again, I can't change the world, but I might be able to change the world for one person.

Stephen: Yeah.

Susan: And in community with a team, we can have a greater impact.

Ashely: I think that's true. You can have a greater impact and you can also then take that moment to step away and know that the work is still being done, that people are still receiving help. I think about what such a privilege it is that we can step away from spaces where we are feeling burnt out and overwhelmed. And I know that there are immigrants who would love to do that and don't have that space because it is their safety, their livelihood. And when we have a team of people who can come around, it takes the burden off of one person to be that support and be that help.

Susan: Right.

Ashely: And I think also when we think about this question of ways that we can help others and how much we can be involved and what's happening, how much news we can consume, I think it also brings us to another question, a deeper spiritual question, which is how do we keep seeing a human being when the world keeps giving us categories? We hear categories all the time through immigration and some of them are legal terms like a refugee or an asylum seeker, the term now is alien. But we hear other words like migrant or criminal, deportable, thinking

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about the system, we hear case, customs and border patrol, asylum officer, ICE. There's just so many categories that we can label people with. And I'm curious for you as followers of Jesus, how does following Jesus change the way we see the person underneath these labels that our world has given them?

Stephen: Well, I come back to what I said earlier and that is that every Christian has been transferred into a different kingdom. And Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Every Christian has been transferred into the kingdom of God and needs to have that view from above, from the kingdom perspective on human beings. It's very easy for us, as you've indicated, to put people into categories and then to kind of shove them off because they don't fit with our category. The fact is that the kingdom perspective of God is that every single person in this world is within the grasp of God's mission and that every single person, including, you know, we were at a concert last night, we got into a conversation with the couple behind us. And my immediate thought was, this is not an accident. My kingdom perspective says it's very possible that the reason why we're meeting this couple is because God wants to bring them into the kingdom of God. And so I start looking at people not from the perspective of do they fit my political categories of acceptable or not acceptable? Are they, in fact, potential recipients of what God is has begun in me and wants to do in millions of other people.

So we learn to think of people that way and to celebrate when they do come into the community. And then the other thing that has really been brought home to me is the importance of viewing everybody as an image bearer of God. Even the most broken person, even the most sinful person, you know, even the person that has now walked into our church who has kids and every one of them by a different man, she's an image bearer of God. And if I put on my kingdom glasses, if I look at her from God's perspective, there are things in her life that remind me of how beautiful and creative God is. And so even in the biggest sinner, I can see God

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reflected, and I and I see that there's value there for in this person. And so if there's value in this person, I want to invest in this person. That's what drives us, I think.

Susan: And I think another thing along with that is just viewing the fact that I was born in the United States of America as a free person here is God's grace and mercy on me. I didn't do anything to deserve that. And people are coming from all over the world seeking that. And I got it for free as a result of God's mercy in my life. And I think when you have that viewpoint, it helps you to extend mercy to the person who's seeking that.

Stephen: Yeah, and that's loving your neighbor as yourself. I have received mercy. And so now I take that mercy that has brought me into the kingdom of God, and with that mercy, I love my neighbor, the next person in need.

Tracie: That is so good. And yes, what a privilege we have to have been born here. Absolutely. You know, one of the verses that I keep coming back to in the midst of all of this, especially as we were thinking about today's conversation, is Romans 12:12. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer. I love that joy and affliction are right there together. Maybe I don't love it, but I appreciate it. It makes me think. And Paul isn't telling us to wait until the hard part is over until we find joy. Like they're there side by side. And so Stephen, as a pastor, what does it mean to be joyful in hope when what we're facing is genuinely frightening?

Stephen: I think it means keeping our eyes on how this is all going to end. It was just so helpful to Susan and me, and not only to us, but to millions of others, to see this, all that's happening as the fullness of the Gentiles coming in and then all Israel will be saved. I'm quoting verses right before the verse you quoted, Tracy, where Paul is asking sort of sort of asking the question, so how is all this going to end? And we know how it's going to end. We know that at the end of history, there is going to be a great awakening of Gentile peoples, which is what Paul means by the

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fullness of the Gentiles coming in. And this is going to have a huge impact on Israel. I'm not talking about national, political Israel. I'm talking about the Jews. And even the prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zechariah, Zephaniah, they all talk about in those final days, Gentiles will even come to the Jews and say, "We hear that God is amongst you," right? And so what we look to is that there's going to be an amazing awakening at the end of history before Jesus comes back.

And so every time that another Gentile, another Jew comes into the kingdom of God, even through our own local church, we feel like, yes, this is just the trickle of water compared to the huge river that we're going to experience of the fullness of the Gentiles coming in and all Israel will be saved. So it fills us with joy, it fills us with passion, it makes the ministry fun. But in order to get there to the end, we know there's a lot of pain. There's a lot of heartbreak. There's a lot of death. There's Armageddon. And we know, it's all been prophesied, right? So we know that we're right in the history, we're part of history the way God has told us history will be. The important thing for us is to be the kind of church that positions itself within God's mission to become an instrument of the fullness of the Gentiles coming in so that all is and all Israel will be saved. And that's what gives us meaning with our church plant here in Minneapolis.

Ashely: That's a really deep theological premise to think that being joyful in hope is not just being positive. It sounds like that's what you're saying, right? Because I think sometimes Christians confuse hope with optimism, this idea that everything is eventually going to work out the way we want it to if we just believe. Like we hear that from some pastors, I would say. And it doesn't sound like you're saying that. But what would you say makes hope different from this, you know, casual positivity, this casual optimism? There's a deeper theological grounding behind what you're saying.

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Stephen: Well, hope is confidence. Hope is confidence that what God has promised, God will do. And that comes down to the very small things in our own lives that go wrong, and yet God promised that he will for those who love him, who are called according to his purpose, will he will work out all of the wrongs for one grand good in our life, all the way to the way history will end and the hope or confidence that we have that it will end exactly the way God has promised it will be.

And that's why, if I could just segue into maybe a whole other question that you haven't asked yet, that's why we don't see ourselves as simply creating a multicultural church because we love multicultural church or even because we might be particularly skilled by God for a multicultural church. I don't even like calling it a multicultural church. I don't like calling it an immigrant church or a refugee church. I really don't want any label. In Germany, we came up with - the whole evangelical church decided that what was happening with all these refugees coming in, we should call the mono-multicultural church. And so people, of course, will ask, what's a mono-multicultural church? And then the answer is, well, a mono-multicultural church is where the base culture understands or the host culture understands that the guest cultures are very significant parts of the church. And so the monos, if you will, embrace the multis that God has brought into our neighborhoods in order to become a mono-multicultural church. And it's not a blending of cultures into one, what do we call it here in the USA?

Susan: A melting pot.

Stephen: A melting pot. The church is not a melting pot. In fact, we learned to view it more like a stained glass window where that has many different colored mosaic pieces in it, but every mosaic piece has a border around it. So what that means is that every culture group has its own color, but it is distinct and it remains distinct, and it doesn't blend into one big mishmash we call the church. So we don't blend into each other and lose our cultural identities. We celebrate each other's cultural

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identities. That's real diversity in the midst of unity. And I believe, I believe on the basis of the theology that we've talked about, is that is the most mature expression of church. And I think this is the century in which the church is going to learn to be essentially mono-multicultural, right?

I've learned to say it this way. The church is a sinful, imperfect reflection on earth of the sinless and perfected church in heaven. And if all nations are gathered in the church in heaven to praise Jesus, then the most mature expression of church on earth is a church that's doing the same thing. And this is a movement. And the beauty of this is, you know, we experienced this in Germany. Now we're experiencing it here in Minneapolis, but actually, this is a movement that's going throughout the whole world. And we're part of this movement. It's happening in Pakistan, it's happening in India, it's happening in Africa, it's happening in Europe. It's happening all over the place where people are beginning to understand there's a theological, missional rootage to the way we are church and the way we are church in the last days.

Tracie: I'm going to have to go back and relisten to all of this. It is so impactful and so deep, and I want to say thank you for sharing that with us. And it's such a departure from our past guests this season who have worked in the immigration system or maybe more data-minded. So bringing us back to theology has just been so beautiful today. And one of the things we've been asking these prior guests, based on their experiences, is what they would change in the immigration system. But I want to ask you something different because you are different and have this great perspective. What's giving you joy right now?

Susan: For me, that's we've, it's September. We just returned from being away for a number of weeks. And we came back. Stephen has been training some of the individuals in our congregation. And while we were gone, they carried the load. They really stepped up to the plate and did a lot of the ministry. And we came back

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to see new faces, new people had start, you know, it was summer time. Usually in the summer, attendance drops off. Attendance did not drop off. New people started coming, and I just found a lot of joy from knowing that our hearts are in this ministry, but it's God's work, and we're not indispensable, and he's going to use his people to get the work done, whether we're here or not. And that just fills me with joy and hope as well, that God's at work and we get to go along for the ride.

Stephen: Yeah. I think that's that's also in line with my answer. I think the greatest joy that I find is just seeing people of my skin color who've been, you know, church going all their life and they know the Bible inside and out, suddenly coming alive with passion and joy and tears for the people that have been on the periphery and are now being gathered into the center of God's home, which is the church. And just to see them come alive brings me great joy. We're having a meeting with our leadership team this evening. There will be different skin colors, even people with very poor English who are part of this leadership team that's been developed.

And I know what's going to happen. I know that, you know, hey, I'm going to be casting the vision, but they're going to be advising me. They're going to be saying, you know, "Hey, Pastor, over the summer, you know, this is what happened. We think you should do this. We think you should do that." And my response will be, yes, thank you for that advice. Now, can you help me do this? Because I can't do it alone. And just working together like that is just such it's so much fun. It, yeah, we used to say that the greatest adventure God gave us is what happened in Germany, but I'm thinking that this is turning into an adventure that's at least as great as what we discovered in Germany.

Ashely: It sounds like you are all supporting each other, you're encouraging each other, you're maybe pushing each other forward, like when your congregants say, "Hey, pastor, I think we should do this," and then you say, "That's great. Now, how are we going to do that together," right? It's not just a they come in with ideas and

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the same with you. You don't say, "This is what we're going to do." I love that vision of working together and supporting each other. And it sounds like you're also finding hope and joy together as you do that, which is so important as we think about, as you said, a mono-multicultural church.

And Stephen and Susan, I think this is a beautiful place for us to end this conversation with joy. And I hate to bring this conversation to a close, but I think we can recognize that joy is important, not because the hard things aren't real, and it's definitely not because we have answers for all of the questions and all of the hard situations. I love that so much of the hope you've described isn't abstract. It's people knowing each other, it's people caring for each other, people worshipping together, stepping up, sharing meals, and showing up when someone is afraid and finding real joy in being together.

Tracie: I think we so much needed to hear this as we come to the end of our season. I want to say thank you, Stephen and Susan, for sharing your community with us, for sharing what some of this past year has looked like from where you sit. And especially for reminding us that even in really difficult seasons, there is still so much goodness to notice and so much joy to be found if we just pay attention. So we're really grateful that you joined us today. Thank you.

Susan: Thank you for the opportunity.

Stephen: Yeah, this was a great honor to talk with you and listen to you and hear your questions.

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Tracie: Wow, you know, Ashely, I think what I'm taking away from this conversation is that I have sometimes thought about hope as something that keeps us going until circumstances get better, like the Energizer bunny. But maybe that's

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too small of an image. Maybe hope is something that we practice when things are still hard.

Ashely: That's true. And I keep thinking about the table that they mentioned, how they invite their community members, they invite their neighbors over, they have them over for dinner, and they share a meal together. And the table is so important, that small, intimate gathering because so much of our national conversation happens at an enormous scale when we talk about immigration. There are millions of immigrants. There are thousands of people detained, record number of border encounters in the past, years-long court backlogs, and more than 700 policy changes since January 2025. I need to take a break. That's a lot. That is just a lot. It's a lot of numbers and those numbers matter because each person is represented in those numbers. There is a person behind each of those numbers. And those are important. But you can't really love a statistic. You can't love a thousand people. You can't love all the people who are detained, but you can love a person. You can love an individual person. So it's important that when we think about those numbers, we remember the table that Susan and Stephen have invited people to into those small, intimate places.

Tracie: Exactly. It's about making it personal. And I think that's where Stephen and Susan's church, it offers us something really beautiful. The answer to dehumanization isn't simply having the correct opinion about immigration. It's about refusing to let people remain abstractions or statistics. We want to learn someone's name. We want to hear their story and eat their food and let our kids play together. It's about worshiping together and discovering that the person you thought you were supposed to help is actually your friend, your peers and equals. And maybe that person's helped you too. And that feels like a very different kind of hope. Not a passive hope, not a naive hope, but a really joyful hope, the kind that can exist even when the headlines are heavy.

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Ashely: Joyful hope. I like that. And it brings me to our small action this week, which is incredibly simple, we hope. And that is to share a table, just like Susan and Stephen did. And to do it not as a project, not because you need to rescue somebody, but invite someone into your life who comes from a different background from you. Maybe they're an immigrant or a refugee. Maybe they're a neighbor you've only waved to. Maybe there's someone at church whose story you've never actually heard. There's a lot of those at my church, I know. So have coffee, share lunch, invite them over, because a coffee shop is great, but I think your home table might be a lot more cozy. And then be curious when they're with you.

Tracie: But I would also caution, don't make your questions, right, the price of admission. Don't hammer in on all those immigration questions. They don't owe you their trauma. They don't have to explain their legal status, and they don't have to represent an entire country or culture. But just get to know them as a human being. And I think maybe that's where the conversation and the hope starts.

So, that brings us to our conversation tip this week, and that is definitely connected. So when immigration comes up and someone makes a sweeping statement about, “those people,” try moving the conversation from the category back to the person. Instead of immediately debating the policy or questions, say, you know, have you ever known someone personally who went through the immigration system? And then listen.

Ashely: Because stories don't answer every policy question, but they can change the way we ask the question, and that's a pretty good place to begin.

Tracie: Absolutely. And so with that, we've reached the end of our regular episodes this season, but we're not quite finished. Our finale is going to be about your questions. So if something we've talked about this season has made you curious,

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uncomfortable, confused, hopeful, or if you totally disagree with us about something, send that in.

Ashely: And that could be immigration law, the border, faith, enforcement, asylum, refugees, what Christians should do, something a guest said that you want to push back on. All of these questions and more, nothing is too basic, and respectful but hard questions are absolutely welcome.

Tracie: Yes, I do like the hard questions because, honestly, the whole point of this season hasn't been to tell you what to think. It's been to make room for having better conversations. So please, yes, send us your questions and we'll tackle as many as we can in our live finale on October 14th at noon Eastern. So, when the headlines get so loud that we're tempted to stop seeing people altogether, maybe that's exactly when our faith kicks in and asks us to look again.

Ashely: To stay tender, to stay connected, and, as Stephen and Susan reminded us today, to keep noticing the goodness and joy that are still here, even in the middle of the hard things.

Tracie: To be, as Paul says, joyful in hope.

Ashely: And I think that's a pretty good place to leave this part of our season.

Tracie: We'll see you at the live finale.

Ashely: Bring your questions. We can't wait to see you.

Tracie: This podcast is to inform, educate, and entertain and does not constitute legal advice. If you are making decisions related to immigration or any legal matter, please consult a licensed attorney in your state of residence.