

Ep #19: Ask Us Anything:
Immigration, Faith, and the Questions Christians Are Asking



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Traciee L. Morgan & Ashley Glimasinski

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

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Tracie: We must obey God rather than men. People are imperfect, and we are sinful, and we can create sinful laws. And so that brings me back to thinking about love God, love your neighbor. That's where I start. I just see the person in front of me and how do I come alongside them, love them, welcome them as best as I can.

Ashley: It's important to walk alongside people, and not just to walk alongside them and tell them what to do or tell them how they should think, but to listen and be present and to support them in those moments. But there is hope, there's joyful things happening. Joy exists hand in hand with grief, and I think we can honor both at the same time.

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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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Ashley: My name is Ashley. I'm one of your co-hosts for Hope In Action.

Tracie: And my name is Tracie. I'm your other co-host.

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Ashley: And again, we are so excited to be with you today. Thank you again for your patience. But we wanted to end our last season, well, this past season, I should say, Season Three. We hope to do future seasons, but we wanted to end Season Three with something a little different. So we wanted to host a live Ask Us Anything, Questions for Curious Christians. And that is something that we believe is important with our faith as Christians, that we can talk about immigration, that we can talk about why we should care about the stranger, why we should care for the foreigner. And it's not political to talk about these things. God calls us to care for our neighbors and politics is the act of being involved in your community. So we wanted to host this time today to answer your questions live and to understand and help you understand the questions you might have. So Tracie, you want to get us started?

Tracie: Absolutely. Thank you so much. And I just want to say, as we jump into this, I'm so grateful for the questions that we've received over the season, either through social media or through personal interactions with people who know about this podcast. We love the curiosity, and it just, it does spark great conversations. So thank you to you all for caring.

But yeah, let's go ahead and jump in. And one of the first things that we often are confronted with is that question of, why don't people just come the legal way? And man, I tell you what, I feel like if there was a legal way, people would do it. And a couple thoughts to this. Number one, I think a lot of people think of asylum seekers as not doing it the legal way. They don't have a visa, they don't have entry documents. But coming to the US border, a port of entry, and asking for asylum is the legal way to do it. You don't have to come in on a tourist visa and then apply for asylum. You can, but that's not the only way.

And then thinking about families, I'm thinking about families where maybe someone came across the border undocumented, falls in love, marries a US citizen.

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Well, they can't get a green card here in the United States, right? They either have to go through consular processing, or heaven forbid, they have two illegal entries, and now they're stuck outside the US for 10 years before they can do anything lawfully. So it's just unrealistic for a lot of people. And then thinking about DACA recipients. There's often no line for them to get into because they came over as young kids. They may not have a US citizen spouse or US citizen parents to help them, and they don't have that sponsor to help them sink their roots here in the United States in a lawful way.

Ashley: Yeah, and it's really complicated, right? We know that there are four, technically four legal pathways to come to the United States. There's your family reunification, there's employee sponsorship, there's refugee and asylum or humanitarian reasons, and then there's the diversity visa lottery. And Tracie and I actually just spent the last weekend at a conference where we presented at immigration 101 workshop. And as we did this, we said again and again, these are technically still the legal pathways to come to the United States because these laws have not changed. This is still our system. And yet, there have been so many changes to this system in the past year and a half that pretty much makes some of it just obsolete at this point. That we are still saying this is the legal way you're supposed to come and yet we're not processing those applications. We're holding green cards for refugees. We're saying to the people who might want to apply for the diversity visa, the applications aren't open right now, but we'll open them at an unspecified date.

So there's just pathways that should still be legal and are not. So when we say to people, when we hear the expectation that people should come the legal way, like Tracie said, people are trying to come the legal way, but we're making it a lot more difficult for them to do that.

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Tracie: So we could say a lot more about that for the sake of time let's move on to our next question, which is, is crossing the border a criminal offense? I assume this means crossing the border undocumented, because coming across with a visa, I'm totally fine. Sometimes we do have people who use fake documents, and that can be a crime. I've seen people prosecuted for using a fake passport. It's not common, but yes, that can happen. Or using a US citizen's birth certificate to cross. That's definitely a huge no-no with immigration and can also be a crime.

But for those who are coming across the border undocumented, the only time it's considered a criminal offense is if they've already been ordered deported, and now they're trying to come back into the United States without documentation. That can be criminally prosecuted. But simply crossing the border without permission, the first time, the 30th time, not a criminal offense. It's a civil infraction, like maybe, you know, not paying the right amount on your tax return, or I've heard people compare it to a speeding ticket, and even then, I feel like a speeding ticket might have more legal repercussions than crossing the border undocumented. So no, it is not a crime for people to come across the border. Should they do it? No. But it is not a legal offense to be prosecuted for.

Ashley: That's right. And just as you pointed out earlier, seeking asylum is legal. So if you do cross our border undocumented, for example, you do have a chance within the first year of arriving to then apply for defensive asylum. And that is defending your case from being removed from the United States because it's dangerous for you to be sent back to your home country. That means it's dangerous as in a way like, oh, I just won't have a job. It means like I would be persecuted, I could face a lot of severe repercussions, including death, if I go back to my country. So in that case, it is possible to cross undocumented and then apply for asylum and then obtain asylum, be granted it, and then have a legal status within the United States.

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So another question that we get, and that I get quite often as someone who is a US citizen married to an immigrant is, does marriage to a US citizen solve everything? And I'm going to let Tracie go into that, but I'd love to speak really quickly to the assumption that when you marry, when an immigrant marries a US citizen, they are automatically a US citizen themselves. They are not. That would have been great for my husband if he could have just automatically been a US citizen when we got married, but it's not part of the marriage certificate, unfortunately. He still had to apply for a green card, and he still has to apply for citizenship. And we're currently at about six years and counting. So it takes some time. But Tracie, can you talk to the other parts of why marriage to a US citizen doesn't solve any other legal problems that you might have?

Tracie: Absolutely. So your immigration history sticks with you, no matter who you're married to, who your child is. I even say, if you married the daughter of the president of the United States, it doesn't fix anything. You've got to go through a process. And, you know, I was scrolling on Facebook yesterday even and someone's like, well, isn't, doesn't, you know, marriage to a US citizen fix everything? And people were like, yeah, of course, you know, you can, they leave out the part that you can get a green card based on your marriage to a US citizen in some cases. But the mere fact that you're married to a citizen doesn't give you any protection, none at all. We deport spouses of US citizens every day. Unfortunately, it's the reality. So it's not protection, it's not a green card, it's not citizenship. You have to go through a process. And if you have prior immigration violations, like we talked about at the very beginning, that could stymie your application. Criminal history, that's definitely going to be a factor. Any false claims to US citizenship or a frivolous asylum application in the past, you're never going to get a green card, even if you are married to a US citizen. I call those the kisses of death in immigration. So it opens a path, but it doesn't get you to the end of the path automatically.

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Ashley: Yeah, and that's so complicated. I really wish more people understood that. So as you hear the answer to this question, try to think of how you can take that response, put it in your own words, and still keep the facts right, but put it in your own words and in a way that you can then tell others about that too. I think it's really helpful as you learn things to then be able to teach others as well. And in teaching, you tend to learn it in a deeper way. It becomes more of a natural answer rather than something you have to think about. So I encourage you as you hear these answers, think about how you can tell someone else about it.

So another question. Yes. Another question, what's the difference between an immigrant, a refugee, and someone seeking asylum? And I see that I skipped a question, but we will come back to that one. But what's the difference between an immigrant, a refugee, and someone seeking asylum? So Tracie, if you don't mind, I'll take a stab at this one.

Tracie: Please.

Ashley: All right. So an immigrant is someone who comes to live in a country that is not their own, and they come intending to stay permanently or for a long time. So that could be someone who comes with an employment visa and then intends to transition to a green card and then maybe apply for citizenship. Or it could just be someone who intends to come for a temporary time to work, and then they meet someone or they find a really great job they want to apply for, and they apply to stay for a green card. They apply to stay longer. That is a lot of broad, a lot of broad categories, actually.

And then a refugee is someone who has fled their country for one of five reasons, and that's their race, their religion, their nationality, their membership in a particular social group, or their political opinion. So that would be someone, for example, who has fled the Democratic Republic of Congo, and there is a war going

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on in the Congo, so it's not safe. Maybe there's a particular ethnicity that they hold or a religion that they hold that is being persecuted in this war, and they flee to Zambia. And in Zambia, they are waiting for years. They apply to the United Nations to become a refugee. United Nations goes, background checks and screening and vetting and medical examinations and interviews and says, okay, we believe you, you can't go back to your country, so you are now a refugee.

Now, a refugee may stay in that camp for years, or they may decide to make their home somewhere in the country, but it's often difficult for refugees in countries close to their own to obtain a status that is going to be permanent, to get work permits, to be able to work, to have the status that is legal. And so they are often then, let's say, I hate to say put up for adoption, but kind of, they're kind of, they're presented to another country, to a third country that's part of the United Nations, like the United States, like Canada, like Germany. And the United Nations gives case files to those countries and says, how many refugees can you take? These are the ones that we're offering you. And the United States will say, yes, we want this person, we want that person, we don't want this person. And then the United States will conduct their own interviews, their own background checks, their own medical examinations before that refugee can come to the United States. So a refugee is someone who has fled their country for again one of those five reasons. They go to a second country, apply for refugee status, and then are resettled in a third country.

Now, an asylum seeker has fled their country for the same reasons as a refugee, that race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, but they go to the country that they want to resettle in permanently, or maybe they're transient and they're going through several different countries trying to find a place that will accept them. And when they do get to that country, they are going to apply for asylum, which means they still go through all the same background checks as a refugee, the vetting, the screenings, the interviews, the

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medical examinations, but they're going to do it in the country they want to live in permanently.

So that is the person from the Democratic Republic of Congo going directly to the United States or going directly to Germany and applying for asylum there. So their pathways are a little different, but a refugee and an asylum seeker have fled for the same reason. And if their refugee application is accepted, if their asylum application is accepted, they will then become an immigrant to the United States where they have come to live permanently in that country. So I hope that helps to break it down a little more. It's a lot of complicated terms and figures, but there's lots of good resources online that we can recommend too.

Tracie: Absolutely, and you did a beautiful job explaining all of that. I am going to go to the next question that popped up, and that is, if someone has lived here in the United States for, let's say, 20 years, they've worked, paid taxes, stayed out of trouble, why can't they just apply for citizenship? And to start this answer, I always say there's no good guy visa or good woman visa. You cannot apply on your own generally for a green card. So that's number one, it's a green card you have to apply for first, so permanent residency, which then gets you on the path to citizenship. But how to even get started with that?

You have to have some sort of hook in the United States, be that a family member. It can be a parent, spouse, child, sometimes a sibling, and no grandparents, no aunts and uncles, they don't count in our immigration rubric. Or on the employment side, you need an employer to sponsor you, which is getting cumbersome and expensive. I think about the \$100,000 tax or fee that they tried to implement on H1B workers, so skilled workers that come to the US temporarily. And a lot of times people just don't have that tie.

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And, you know, I talk a lot to young women who are immigrants and maybe they have DACA or maybe not, and they're like, I have a college degree, I have amazing things to offer on my own. What do you mean I have to get married to someone in order to prove myself worthy of a green card? And as an independent woman, I'm like, yeah, I get it. It's not ideal. And I can definitely see men in this situation as well. But it is so hard to self-sponsor. And you know, for self-sponsoring, you're talking about people who have won Nobel prizes and academy awards, or people doing amazing work on cancer research and of one awards. So that's really the only time you can self-sponsor, until we start talking about the humanitarian side, like asylum or victims of crime or human trafficking. But you certainly don't want people to have to go through those experiences in order to gain status in the US.

Ashley: Yeah, it's so complicated. I think that gives me a lot of empathy for people to see that they have been here for 20 years. They've paid taxes, they worked, they've been an upstanding, for all purposes considered, a citizen, right? Except they haven't been able to vote. But they've been a contributor to their communities, and citizenship is just not an option for them.

So another question, and this is kind of related to one that we answered before as well. But when we hear “get in line,” I'm going to put that in parentheses, get in line or in quotations, right? Is there actually a line everyone can get into? Ah, I think we kind of answered that, like there are only four pathways to come to the United States, and those are quite complicated. Again, there's your family reunification, there is employment, there's humanitarian, and then there's the diversity visa lottery. And for many people, those are not lines they can stand in. You can't apply for family unification if you don't have family in the United States. You can't apply for an employment visa if you don't have a company that's willing to sponsor you, or like Tracie mentioned, you are someone of incredible intellect and means who has done some amazing things and then can self-sponsor. And for

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many people, humanitarian is also not an option because you can't just come to our country again and say like, I need a better job. I'd like to come in as a refugee. That's not who a refugee is.

And there are some unfortunate pathways too with the humanitarian process as well when we think about victims of violence, violence against women, or for humanitarian parole or temporary protected status. Those are people who are fleeing really difficult circumstances and we really would hope that we live in a world where those are not necessary, but unfortunately we do. So it's not really something you just want to apply for. And then again, the diversity visa is currently not accepting applications. So that is also not a line that you can stand in. And when we say stand in a line as well, it's, you know, you send in an application, and as we talked about with one of our guests this season, your application doesn't just get put in a line that then gets processed in order. It could be maybe your application gets set aside because it needs more information, or maybe it gets set aside because there's some process that still needs to happen. So it's not like your case is going to be processed one after the other, like you're number 433 and then yours will be decided after 432. It's going to take some time, and a line is not as linear as people think it is or would like it to be.

Tracie: Speaking of that line, I saw something shocking yesterday. The I-130s, which is the petition for family members to lay that foundation to say, I've married someone who's not a US citizen, or I want my parent who maybe was born in India to become a permanent resident and sponsor them. The I-130 is that underlying petition. Posted processing times from the official USCIS Citizenship and Immigration Services website says 139 months.

Ashley: No.

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Tracie: So I just did the math, and that's almost 12 years. Now, is that reality on the field? What we see? No, I would say maybe closer to two years, but when we're in posted processing times, that means we can't inquire about the case, we can't contact congressional representatives to act on our behalf to try and expedite a case because it's normal. But there is nothing normal about a 12-year wait for a simple application that should, I think, I read somewhere it takes maybe 15 minutes to adjudicate. I'll leave politics out of it, but that's where our priorities are right now, it seems, not on the family side. So there's that.

Ashley: That's terrible.

Tracie: Which leads, yes, it is. It's unacceptable, but that leads us to that next question about, can someone be deported while the government is processing their case? And the answer is yes. And I would say we have definitely seen an increase in this in the last two years.

Immigration has always been law on one side, like, what's the actual statute say, who can sponsor people, what are the requirements? But then discretion on the other side. We talk a lot about the gray area or the nebulous black hole while people are waiting in process. You know, they are allowed to be here, but they don't have a legal status, or they even have a work permit, but a work permit is not legal status. It's temporary to help you while you wait. And what we have seen is discretion has been taken away. And so we hear stories about people flying domestically. They might have a green card case pending based on their marriage to a US citizen. They have a work permit. They feel safe and secure because they've done everything right. But maybe they entered as a tourist, and now that tourist visa has expired. But again, the green card case is pending, and in the past, that would be protection.

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And it's not. People are getting arrested at airports in this situation and being detained. And detention is not a great place to be. We've heard all sorts of horror stories, you know, from Delaney Hall, alligator, Alcatraz. That's where people are sent. That's not for criminal immigrants. That is for anyone caught up in the system. And people would rather, quote unquote, self-deport or try to leave on their own than to fight the case because fighting might take several months and in humane conditions like that, I don't care, just get me out, and maybe they decide they don't want to set up their home in the US, but in their home country. And I don't know if that's the desired outcome, but that is what we're seeing.

So when discretion is pulled out, families get separated. Victims of domestic violence have been deported while their cases are pending. Thankfully, a federal court intervened earlier this year and said, no, you have to look at them in the humanitarian context and give special considerations. So yeah, I think it is a sad reality that we see in practice, but maybe those who aren't as familiar with immigration didn't realize could happen until it started happening to their neighbors and friends.

Ashley: Right. And when I think about that too, I always come back to my husband's story that he came on a fiancé visa, the K-1, which is a 90-day visa. You have to get married within the first 90 days of arriving in the United States, and so we did. And then we applied for adjustment of status. We applied for his green card about maybe a month afterwards, so it was early January when we sent in that application. His visa expired in February, and we waited nine months to get the green card. And during that time, he didn't technically have a legal status. We had like the paper saying, yes, you filed for adjustment of status for the green card. But what do you do in that time? If ICE were to show up during that time and say, show us your legal status, or we know that you're out of status. Well, it's not really his fault or another immigrant's fault. They did have a legal visa. They were

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following the legal pathways. But because of processing times, it took, there was like an eight-month gap where he didn't have that status. He didn't technically have a legal permission to be in the country.

So that's just always the way our system has worked. We can argue about if that is the right way it should work. I would say it's not. But why are we holding people accountable for our delays and for our processes that are inefficient rather than saying, hey, we recognize that we've done something wrong and we're not going to make you accountable for our own mistakes?

Tracie: Absolutely. And I'm just so grateful for everybody who already has their documentation. It's like that is gold. I don't mean like gold card like what Trump has introduced, but like, it's just such a sense of security. Anyways, and I used to feel that way about the work permit, and now I'm like, it's good, but it's not great anymore, and that's so sad.

So moving along, I want to address this question about mixed status families. What do we wish that people understood about families where some members are US citizens and others are undocumented? Or maybe have temporary status. You know, we had families also that where you have recipients of DACA or the temporary protected status that, you know, only exists for four countries right now. But thinking through, you know, working with these families, it's complex, right? Because you have someone who was born in the United States, typically the youngest family members, and they don't have to worry about their own personal security and safety. They have the ability to vote once they turn of age and live their life freely. But then they're always worried about their parents, maybe, or their older siblings who are not able to have a driver's license. And so every trip to the doctor or going to work, you're worried about your family member. Are they going to make it home? And so there's feelings of guilt and privilege, I think, on the US citizen side.

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But then you also have the people who are undocumented. And this is heartbreaking in conversations I have with folks who maybe came into the United States undocumented, built a life here, and now they have a 21-year-old US citizen child and they're like, great, now this child can sponsor me for my green card. And the reality is, yes, but no. Yes, it's a family relationship you can use and do the I-130, but you entered unlawfully, so you cannot get a green card in the United States. If you leave the United States, you trigger a 10-year bar. There are waivers available, but you need to have a US citizen spouse or parent in order to qualify for the waiver. Having a US citizen child does not qualify you for the waiver. So the moment you leave, you're stuck for 10 years outside of the country. And so that's always such a heartbreaking realization that folks might not have anticipated, thinking that things were going to get better. And I'm like, no, not under our current system, that doesn't happen.

And I just think about the anxiety that these families face every day, you know, thinking about going to work, going to school, and what happens if they, you know, get pulled over for failing to stop fully at a stop sign, or their workplace gets raided, or who knows what, but they have that ICE encounter. Every day is in fear and anxiety, and I cannot imagine living with that stress.

Ashley: It is so difficult, the stress that people are going through. I think just under our immigration system in general in the past several years, decades, but I think especially now, the stress is a lot higher because we see that things are changing rapidly, and they're often not announced until the day that the change is taking place. I just know that like even yesterday, we heard that the Department of Homeland Security is telling refugees that their status can be terminated, and instead of getting a 30-day appeal time, they're only having a 10-day appeal time. That's barely enough time to retain legal counsel, to find legal counsel. And it's also, like, how do you get that money together to hire someone to help you? But

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there's very little time to put a case together. And that was announced yesterday and it's effective today, even though it is a public rule. And so there's, it's open for public comment for 30 days. Well, why is it open for comment for 30 days if the rule is already in effect? Is it really going to change your mind if I write a comment about this? And we'll get into some advocacy pieces in a little bit, but I think our system just adds a lot of stress to immigrants and to people who are here and wanting to be here legally. Tracie, I have a question. Maybe it's a little rhetorical, but I've heard the phrase anchor baby a couple times. So you're saying that anchor baby is essentially not a thing.

Tracie: Exactly, exactly right. I think people think of anchor babies, you know, someone comes to the United States, gives birth, and just like that false rumor, right, of marriage to a US citizen solves everything, giving birth to a US citizen does not solve anything really. So number one, that child has to wait until they're 21 before they even think about being able to sponsor a parent. So I mean, that's some long-term planning. But then also, the way the laws are, like we said, without that legal entry to the United States, the parent may not have an option, even based on that US citizen child. So definitely, I think a name that sounds cute and catchy and is good for political rhetoric, but the reality is it doesn't really exist.

Ashley: Right. It's sad, but it is unfortunate in our reality of our immigration system. Another question that we got asked is, why would someone flee their country without getting permission to come here first? And that's kind of what we covered during our topic of asylum seekers and refugees, is that they are fleeing really dire circumstances. There's often not time to make a plan of, oh, I'm going to apply for this visa, and I'm going to go to this country, to the United States, for example, or I'm going to, you know, apply to be a refugee. You can't directly apply to be a refugee. There's not like a form that you go to the Department of Homeland

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Security website and fill out to become a refugee to the United States, or, well, I should say in our traditional system. I don't know about currently.

But in our traditional system, it means that someone has to have fled their country, again, for one of those five reasons. And that's a long waiting time. It's waiting in another country to do that to become a refugee, to become an asylum seeker. It's again, someone who has fled their home. There's a war, there's gang violence. Someone is actively looking to take your life or to hurt you and your children. There's not time to plan for visas and paperwork and getting all your luggage together. It is often fleeing with what you have in your hands at the moment that it happens. And that's something that's hard for us to believe. We plan our tourist trips so well. We know what we're going to take. We have a packing list. But imagine that someone is knocking on your door and you know that they're going to kill you. What is the closest thing you're going to grab? It might not be your passport. It might not be any documentation that proves who you are. But that is what you grab because that's what's closest to you, or maybe you don't grab anything. You just run. There's no time to think about that. So someone might come to our country without getting permission to come here first for a multitude of reasons, but often it's they don't have time.

Tracie: Yeah. And I think, you know, just imagining that scenario, like putting myself in their shoes, something that I would never have to think about here in the United States is someone else's very much lived reality. And so I think that kind of leads us to this idea of compassion. You know, we as Christians are called to be compassionate, right? Love God, love your neighbor, no asterisks on, you know, oh, only if they have done everything perfectly right in their lives, only if they have a certain immigration status. The Bible doesn't get into those details. We are all made in God's image. And so, you know, sometimes we hear these questions about, like, how do Christians handle this, this tension, right, between, you know,

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respecting the law and then respecting the imago dei? And so how can we support secure borders and still, you know, support compassionate treatment of immigrants? And if you haven't, I would definitely suggest going back to listen to our episode with former CBP officer, border agent, Michael DeBruhl. That was incredible and really gave great insight to that.

But I think one of the takeaways is that our border is mostly secure. Like what is secure? Is it like nobody coming in undocumented? Is that ever going to be the reality? Like would we ever have a reality in the United States where no crimes get committed in a day? Unfortunately, it's just the reality of being human that there are going to be people who find ways to circumvent the law. And we're not saying that we agree with that, but again, people who are seeking to do it the right way should not be punished. And I think that's my big thing. It's like, yes, let's talk about border security and do all of that. But can we also talk about immigration reform and working with people who are already here or people who, you know, maybe might be foreign trained doctors and we want to have them in the United States to help with our physician shortage? And so I think the two can be and should be separate conversations.

Legal immigration needs to be more compassionate. We've talked about the insane timelines of people waiting. If you're the sibling of someone who's a US citizen and you were born in the Philippines, you're looking at an 80-year wait. A victim of crime visa might take 25 years to process. And there's no compassion in that. So I think compassion is getting rid of the extraordinarily long wait times. So that may not directly address the issue of security versus compassionate treatment, but I think in some ways you have to separate it because they are two very distinct issues. I'm curious to get your thoughts on that, Ashley.

Ashley: Yeah, my thought immediately goes to detention centers because that has been what we're seeing a lot in the news now or even splitting families up. I think

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as we think about secure borders, yes, we should know who's coming into our country. Yes, we should have a way of keeping track of them once they're here. And I would say we do, for the most part. I can't remember the exact percentage, but the large majority of asylum seekers who have applied for asylum and then are released into the country to await their hearings, they do come back for their hearings. They don't just disappear and live undocumented. Why would they? Because that's a horrible way to live as we've talked about, where you're just so insecure and there's no safety and there's no pathway to permanent residency.

But when we say now that we see people, well, first of all, our borders are not accepting asylum seekers, no one is able to cross in that way. But we see people who are being detained, who have been here for years, who have had work permits, who have tried to do things the legal way. Maybe they were under a status like humanitarian parole or temporary protected. So they did have a legal status and then became undocumented through government action. But I think that putting people in detention centers where they're separated from their communities, where they're separated from their families, where they're not receiving appropriate medical care or the food is not safe to eat, I just think that lacks a lot of compassion. I don't think that's what we're called to do as Christians. I don't see myself as a Christian looking at this and saying, like, yes, that's what Jesus would do. I just come back to that when we want to know who is in our country because it's about securing the border, but it's also securing who's in the country as well. But I don't think detention centers are the answer, especially when we look at how they are often run by for-profit companies that are receiving money that's paid for by our taxes. I don't want my taxes going to that.

So I think there's a way that we can still leave immigrants within their communities where many of them are contributing. The kids are in school, the parents have jobs, they're part of church communities. Many of them are Christians just like us. Even

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if they're not, I still believe in their humanity and their dignity. And detention centers are not the answer for that.

Tracie: Absolutely. I'm so glad you brought that up. And that segues into a question too about, well, yeah, I care about immigrants, but they broke the law. So maybe I should be reporting them to ICE or, you know, chastising them. And, you know, I think a lot of times the root of this is, you know, Romans 13, right? Submitting to the authority of the government. But then, you know, like the Bible often does, there's a counterpoint, because nothing is really black and white. And then that gets us to Acts 5:29, where it says, "We must obey God rather than men." Men are imperfect. Women too. I mean, I'm going to use that gender neutrally. People are imperfect, and we are sinful, and we can create sinful laws dealing with segregation, slavery, apartheid. I mean, our history is unfortunately and tragically full of examples where something was legal but not morally correct.

And so that brings me back to thinking about, you know, love God, love your neighbor. That's where I start. And you know, as we said earlier, too, maybe crossing the border undocumented, not a crime. But I don't even get to that point. I just see the person in front of me, and how do I come alongside them, love them, welcome them as best as I can? And yeah, that's where I leave it. It's not that complicated.

Ashley: I agree. I don't think I need to add anything to it because it's not that complicated. We are all human beings. We have all fallen short of the glory of God if you want to start quoting those scriptures. So I think we have all broken some kind of law and yet we find compassion for each other. Let's find compassion for our immigrant neighbors as well.

Now, another question that we got asked, and this was actually something we were asked at the conference that we were at last week. But when it feels like this is all

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so hopeless, when it feels like, you know, our legal immigration system is being ignored, that the pathways to reach our representatives and ask for change are being ignored, the question is, what can the church do right now? And like I said, it may feel hopeless. That's why we called this podcast Hope In Action because we want to bring hope back into a place that seems kind of dark sometimes. And I think there's a couple steps that we can do as the church. And one is that, I've heard from people that when they call their senators, they get an answer like, okay, thank you. I'll pass that on to the senator. And then nothing happens. Or they send an email or a letter to the senator, the representative, and they get back a form letter that like completely ignores the letter that they sent and just seems to spout talking points that, you know, are like, I don't agree with that.

And so sometimes it feels like, well, why am I even contacting my representatives? Because nothing is going to change. They're not listening to me anyways. I think it's important to continue making those phone calls, to continue writing the emails and sending even the form letters. Quick note, I do think it's more important to do phone calls rather than form letters because I've been hearing from offices that, well, form letters mean you don't actually care because you didn't take the time to write your own words. So I think phone calls are the most important. And each of those phone calls is actually logged in a tally in a book, and at the end of the day is given to the senator, the representative to say, this is who called and this is what they called about. And it's not like Ashley called about immigration. It's like, this many people called about this act that's like being considered at the house, or this many people called to protest detention centers. So all of that is given to your representative at the end of the day, and that means they are hearing from their constituents what's important. So one, there's a public record. I think that's important.

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But it's also, there's a story, a parable in the New Testament where Jesus is talking about a judge who will not give a widow the justice that she deserves. And he kind of writes her off and she goes and is persistent and bothers him so much until he gives her the justice that she deserves. And I think we can be the persistent widow when we continue to knock on the doors of power and when we continue to say, I demand justice for this, God hears that. Our senators and our representatives may not, that's another story, but God hears that and God is the one who can work in these places. God is the one who can change hearts. So I encourage the church to continue to be that advocate in the political space.

And I think it's also important to be an advocate in our communities, to be with people who maybe don't think the same as us. To be one with people who do think the same of us, because that, that gives us encouragement, I think, to know that we're not alone, to be with your refugee, your asylum seeker, your undocumented, your immigrant neighbors who are going through a difficult time right now, when they are scared, they're uncertain, their status was certain and now it's not. We have a term for now people who are undocumented because it means that they are documented currently, but their status could be removed. They are undocumented. We've talked in previous episodes about what waiting with people looks like as they're waiting for their immigration status to be determined. It's important to walk alongside people and not just to walk alongside them and tell them what to do or tell them how they should think, but to listen and be present and to support them in those moments.

And I think also as Christians, as the church, we can continue to call for change in the world. We can continue to think of what a better immigration system could look like, to build that on hope, to build that on past history. I've been a part of some, I'd say like focus groups recently have been asking refugee agencies and others in the immigration space, what would a better system look like? And oh my

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gosh, there's so many ideas from people who have been doing this for decades. They have so many great ideas. We just need to start building on those. And our first episode this season was, what would a better immigration system look like? So if you haven't listened to that, we encourage you to go back. Tracie, I did a lot of talking. Is there anything you'd like to add to that?

Tracie: No, I think you covered that so well. The point of that is the church should do something, right? We need to be doing something. It's not like we just sit here and fiddle our thumbs and be like, oh, this is wrong. It's like, okay, action. Like you said, hope in action. And so I think it's really important for the church to take a stance on this and to do tangible acts of love and welcome for our neighbors.

Which, I think, leads us into this question about, you know, maybe my immigrant neighbor, co-worker, fellow worshiper at church is scared. How do I help them? What do I say or do that would actually be useful? And number one, for this, I would say, number one, check your, oh, your motivation. Like, I know that I am a helper by default. Sometimes my help isn't welcome, though. And so I would just say, talk to your immigrant friend or neighbor and ask them, is there anything that I can do to help? Is there anything that you need? Because maybe help isn't the right word, that sounds kind of pejorative, that we're in a position of the white savior, and we definitely don't want that. But what is something that our friend needs?

Maybe it is, you know, food delivery assistance, you know, paying for that whenever ICE is really active in a community for a long term, like we saw in Minneapolis, Chicago, Los Angeles. It's not safe for our neighbors to go out and buy food. So maybe we can do that for them. We could pick up their groceries. We don't buy their groceries, right? We don't know what they want. That's where I think we cross a line. But we want them to have their autonomy and their independence and say, what do you actually want me to get for you if I'm in a position to be able to do that? And I think that goes a long way. And just letting

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your immigrant friend know that you are there as a resource. Because what happens if your neighbor gets picked up in an ICE raid and their, you know, 15-year-old comes home from school and mom's not there. Do they know where to go for help? Can you be that person? Are you the neighbor that they can go knock on the door and say, you know, my mom's not here. I don't know what to do. And then you're able to take over and help out where you can. So I think talking to your neighbor, finding out what they need or want from us is paramount. Ashley, you have so much experience with this with Welcome House. I'm so curious to hear your thoughts.

Ashley: I definitely agree with that when you said, don't pick up their groceries for them, like don't buy their groceries, don't decide what they're going to eat. So many times we would buy things for them just because we had gift cards and it was easier for us to go, for volunteers to go. And they'd say, but, ma'am, where's, where's this? Where's that? I don't know what to do with these things. And it is a learning experience for them to see new groceries, but we want to honor their dignity. We want to honor the things that they know and that they enjoy, just like we would hope someone would do the same for us. So I think that's a big part is when you ask someone, what can I do to help? It is actually listening and doing it and not questioning, well, wouldn't you rather do this? Because I would rather do this. That's imposing your own thoughts and your own beliefs into their, their story, which I think we can avoid doing.

But I also think someone is not going to ask you to take care of their kids if they, if the kids come home from school and they find that their parents aren't home, are you the first person the kids would think to come and knock on the door? Have you had a relationship with that family before this moment? Because if you haven't, the kids are not going to come knock on your door. They don't know you. So I would say, if you know immigrants at this time, there are so many ways you can help and

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assist, and that starts with asking and listening. But if you don't know immigrants at this time, or they you are not close enough with someone that they've shared with you that they're scared, what is something you can do to take one step closer to them? What is something you can do to make them feel just a little bit more comfortable with you? It's not going over and say, hey, I'd love to take care of your kids if you get detained. That's that's not how you start that conversation. But it is like, hey, we're having a cookout this week. We'd love for you to come or, you know, I'm going to go get coffee, or I'm going to mow my lawn, can I mow yours too? It's just little bits of connection. Be a neighbor. Be a neighbor to someone. And I think sometimes in our individualistic world, we forget what it's like to be a neighbor, but it's so important to notice what's around us and then to ask, like, what can I do to help?

Tracie: Well, I see time clicking away. And this brings us to our last question. And I just want to say, I am so grateful for a space where we're able to talk about this openly because there is a lot of heartbreaking news right now, and it takes a toll on our mental health as advocates. It takes certainly a toll on our immigrant friends and neighbors' mental health. So Ashley, let me ask you, where are you finding hope these days and what keeps you motivated to keep on keeping on?

Ashley: I would say that the conference we went to last weekend, it's the CCDA, Christian Community Development Association, that gave me so much hope because I realized, and this is, this is how I feel with our online, social media, internet world, that we can see all the work of people who say, you know, I'm fighting for this, or look, there's this action tool that we've released, or there's this educational post, or there's these people who are working in these contexts. And I get the idea that there's this, let's say, cloud of witnesses around me who are doing the work and also supporting immigrants. But it can feel very lonely when we're all in our own spaces doing our own thing. And coming together with others in a

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physical space, standing next to each other, literally rubbing elbows as we're sitting close together, that gave me so much hope to be in a place and to see faces, to laugh, to cry together, to laugh and cry together, right? To feel the burden and support each other through that. I think that's what we need when everything can feel so difficult looking at it through your screens or reading it on the news, seeing it in your own community, seeing it happen to people, but to be in a physical space with others and to realize that there are so many people doing this work together. I know that I'm not alone. I know that God is always with us, but I know that there's a lot of other humans and a lot of other Christians who are doing this with me. That gives me hope. How about you, Tracie?

Tracie: I will, I totally echo that, and I'm so grateful we were able to share that experience together. And then I'll also say this, you know, in my office, when we win a case, we write the client's name on our erase board, white erase board. And some months there's five, some months there's 25. And remembering that there are successes. There is hope in the darkness. We are able to get people their green cards, their immigrant visas, we're able to, we saw an asylum case granted yesterday. Good things are happening, but human nature is to focus on the negative. And so fighting moments to celebrate, not ignoring everything else that's happening, but taking the time to reflect on the good, celebrate the good, I think that is something that definitely keeps me motivated, because it's not all of our clients are getting deported. I mean, it can certainly feel that way, but I need that reality check. And that's why I have it front and center in our office so that we can remember that. So staying focused on the good where we can, I think is really key for us.

Ashley: That is so key. It can feel really dark, but there is hope. There's joyful things happening. Joy exists hand in hand with grief, and I think we can honor both at the same time.

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Tracie: Well, Ashley, any parting thoughts before I take us out?

Ashley: I have loved all these questions. I think they're so important. No question is too small, and it's especially important in time when there is so much misinformation. So again, as I encouraged you at the beginning, think about our answers to these questions and then try to rephrase them in your own words so that you can remember them. And the next time someone asked a question like this, we've talked about this before, don't come back with the immediate answer and say, well, did you know actually that this and this is the case? But try to lean into their question and say, well, why do you think that? Where is that response coming from? And then have your response in a way that is in your words that you can remember it and that invites conversation. We always want to invite people into conversation and not into debates because debates are not going to change anyone's hearts or their minds. So invite space for listening on both sides, from yourself and from the other person, and try to make it into a discussion.

Tracie: Absolutely. I don't know that I can add much more to that, but stay curious. I think that's a tagline for a commercial or something, but I think it's so true. We have seen so many people who maybe four years ago didn't really care about immigration. It wasn't a priority for them. It didn't touch their lives on a day-to-day basis. And people who know what Ashley and I do in our, you know, personal lives, they started asking questions. And I mean, honestly, that's how this podcast was even created. So continue to ask questions, find answers, talk to people that you trust to develop those answers and feel secure in knowing that, you know, God's in this. I think maybe that's where we find hope, right? God already has claimed the victory. And we are just living through one of the battles right now, but we know we're going to get through it.

So I would leave you with that thought as we end season three. I am hopeful for a season four. We will say we've got midterms coming up. If you can, vote, get your

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voice heard, and we'll see what the next, you know, iteration of Congress might bring for our work and more importantly for our immigrant friends. So hang in there and keep asking questions.

Thank you so much for joining us for being part of the Hope In Action family. Just because we're not recording or releasing doesn't mean we're not active on social media. So feel free to reach out anytime. We are around, and we appreciate you so very much. Until next time, bye for now.

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