

Ep #13: What Would a Better Immigration System Look Like?



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Tracie L. Morgan & Ashley Glimasinski

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

Ep #13: What Would a Better Immigration System Look Like?

Tracie: The Bible isn't an immigration policy manual. Faithful Christians can absolutely disagree about how immigration policy should work.

Ashley: But scripture absolutely has something to say about how we see people, how we use power, how we pursue justice, how we treat the stranger, and whether fear gets to drive our decisions.

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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: Welcome back to Hope in Action. I'm Ashley Glimasinski, Education Manager and Administrative Director at We Choose Welcome, and I'm also one of your hosts for this podcast.

Tracie: And I'm Tracie Morgan, founding attorney of Hope Immigration, and your other host. Ashley, we are finally back.

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Ashley: Wow, that took us a while, but we are back. And not without good reason that it took us a long time, which we'll get to. But I think when we started talking about this season, we both had the same reaction: Where do we even start?

Tracie: Oh my gosh, no kidding. I feel like the last six months in immigration have been absolutely bonkers. It feels like six years. Everything's changing every minute of the day, it feels like.

Ashley: It really does. And some of what's been happening has been getting a lot of attention on the national news. We've all seen the headlines, and then there's the images coming out of places like Minneapolis. But then there's so much more happening that I don't think everyday people are aware of because they aren't seeing or hearing it on the news.

Tracie: Exactly. And I think that's a part that people outside the immigration community, they don't necessarily realize it because they're not getting the attention. And behind the big national stories, there's been, like I said, this almost constant stream of major policy changes. It feels like something's changing at least once a week or more often, and really significant changes are coming through.

Ashley: Oh my gosh, there's always a new policy or a new restriction. Something changes with enforcement or the courts. There's a longtime contract that's been canceled or program changes or there's a new rule. I just feel like my head is spinning all the time with these things. And it's something that our immigration system is something we thought we understood because it's been this way for years. And then because of all these changes, suddenly it works differently.

Tracie: Exactly. I mean, just last week there was a board of immigration appeals that totally uprooted 14 years of precedent. And how do you deal with that? Something like that happening every single week. Sometimes I feel like we're just trying to understand that one change, and then the next one comes, and it's whiplash. I feel like I'm trying to practice law while someone else is writing the

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rule book. And I am starting to tell clients that, yeah, we're operating on quicksand right now. Everything is shifting, and there's just no stability.

Ashley: That is so difficult, and I really feel that. It's exhausting for the people whose job it is to understand the rule book, but if it's exhausting for us, imagine what it feels like for the people whose lives depend on it.

Tracie: Oh my gosh, yes. And I mean, that's the part that really matters. For me, a policy change means I need to read something, understand it, talk with the team, figure out what it means for our clients. And for an immigrant family, that same change could mean much bigger things, like, "Can I keep working? Can my spouse come here? Is my application still going forward? Is the protection that I was given still going to exist? Is it safe for me to go to this appointment? What if something happens to my children?" And those aren't policy questions to the family. Those are important life questions.

Ashley: And that's one of the things that we talked about wanting to do different this season, because we obviously want to help our listeners and others understand what's happening in immigration, but we also can't ignore the reality of this moment. We don't want to spend an entire season chasing headlines. I feel like we would get nowhere, and as we just mentioned, things would change almost immediately.

Tracie: I mean, honestly, we could probably record an episode every week just explaining what changed in those last seven days.

Ashley: We really could, and that would be so exhausting. So I think there's something else that we can do this season. Because there's something that happens when everything feels like a crisis. You start focusing on the trees, and you miss the forest, as the saying goes, that it means that you miss the larger context in which everything is settled. You see the headlines, and you forget what the bigger

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picture is, because you become so focused on reacting to what's happening that you lose the ability to imagine what could be different.

And that brings us to our first scripture of this episode and thinking about Paul's words in Romans 12, where he tells Christians to not simply conform to the patterns around us, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. I don't think that's a verse specifically about immigration policy, but I do think it gives Christians permission and maybe even a responsibility to reflect on scripture and then ask whether the systems and assumptions we've inherited actually reflect the things we say we value.

Tracie: I so love that, because that's really the question we keep coming back to as we were planning this season. What if, instead of only asking, "What's wrong with our immigration system?" we also asked, "What would a better immigration system actually look like?"

Ashley: Yeah, what would it look like if we started with values like human dignity, family unity, justice, fairness, belonging?

Tracie: All of it. And also order, due process, rules that people can understand, legal pathways that people can realistically use, a government that makes decision in reasonable amounts of time, a system that actually functions.

Ashley: Ooh, that sounds like a tall order. But for Christians, there's also a question underneath all of those. What kind of society are we called to help build? And that's where we want to begin this season. So before we start building the dream system, though, I want to stay with these last six months for a minute. Because I think there are two stories happening at the same time. There's the story of what has actually changed in immigration policy, and then there's also the story of what living through constant change does to people.

Tracie: Oh my gosh, yes. Like coloring my hair a lot more often.

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Ashley: That's so true. So other than that, what have you noticed about the changes that have been happening to people?

Tracie: Oh my gosh, the uncertainty is so strong. That's probably the strongest and best word that I can use in this era. Immigration's always involved uncertainty to a certain degree, and anyone who practices in this area knows that. But the pace of that change right now just magnifies it. People come to lawyers because they want answers, like, "Can I do this, or what's going to happen? How long will it take? Am I going to be safe? What should me and my family do?"

And lawyers, we really like answers. If you do X, you should get Y. Now I feel like you do X, and you might get a dirty gym sock. I mean, there's no telling what could happen. And so I find myself saying, "I don't know" a lot more than I'm comfortable with, but it's the truth.

Ashley: That's actually really scary to me when an immigration attorney says that she doesn't know the law because it's changing so quickly. You can't predict what's going to happen. And I know you do everything you can to understand it as the changes happen, but that makes me a little worried when our immigration attorneys can't feel safe in this system either.

And I think the constant uncertainty also does something to the rest of us. Because there is such a thing as compassion fatigue, and at some point, another headline comes, another story comes, and another thing that we're supposed to care about happens, and people shut down. There's only so much you can handle. And I really find myself struggling to respond with the same level of energy as every new headline hits.

Tracie: Oh my gosh, that's absolutely true, and you just can't. And I will say too, there are a lot of people leaving the practice of immigration right now because of that drain.

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Ashley: Oh, that's really hard. I know a lot of people who have left the refugee resettlement space, too. So it's difficult. I think we both understand that. We know that we're finite people. And we cannot and we're not meant to absorb an unlimited amount of suffering, despite what our hearts tell us when we want to do everything and care for everyone.

But scripture repeatedly calls God's people to pay attention to people who are easy for society to overlook. That's the stranger, the widow, the orphan, and the poor. Deuteronomy 10 describes God as one who loves the stranger. And Jesus repeatedly moves towards people when everyone else has learned not to see. And he calls us to do the same. So maybe part of faithfulness right now is simply refusing to let constant exposure turn people into background noise.

Tracie: Absolutely. We've got to keep our hearts soft. And I hope that's one of the things that we can do this season, keep bringing the topic back to the people, to the lives impacted. Because immigration policy is certainly about the law. It's about the government and authority. It's about borders and national sovereignty, and those are real. But it's also about marriages, families, children, jobs, churches, our neighborhoods. Whether or not someone gets to be with a dying parent, whether or not a child spends years separated from a parent. And whether someone can work and support their family. We have to be able to hold and do both.

Ashley: We really do. And one of the things that I keep hearing in what you're saying is that constant reaction can really narrow our vision. We talked earlier about the forest and the trees, right? If you're only looking at the trees, you can't see the forest. And when every week brings another change, another emergency, or another reason to be concerned, it becomes so easy to burn out, to lose hope, and to spend all of our remaining energy asking, "How do we get through this?"

And our immigrant friends are even asking, "How do I survive this?" I don't want to ignore their reality and suffering or ours. Our reactions are human and

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understandable. But eventually, and especially for those of us who are allies who aren't spending our energy on survival, there has to be another question. What are we trying to get to? What do we want to exist on the other side of this season?

Tracie: Exactly right. I think we've partly gotten to that point because of just sheer exhaustion. I also find myself motivated by thinking about better days ahead. Every difficult season comes to an end. So I keep asking myself, when this season ends, because it will, what happens next? Do we simply try to put everything back the way it was? Or do we use this moment to build something better?

Ashley: That's important to remember that this season will end. And like you said, I think hope isn't just believing that the difficult moment will pass. It's believing that a better future can be ahead. That can seem naive, and I've heard that before, but I think that's part of hope, especially the hope that we carry as Christians. Looking forward to something that doesn't exist yet. Hope also asks, "What do we do when the moment passes? What have we learned? What did this season expose? What was already broken before the crisis began? And what would it look like not simply to recover, but to rebuild stronger than before?"

Tracie: So true. And that connects to something that happened to me at our American Immigration Lawyers Association, our conference this summer. We had the opportunity to talk with Ur Jaddou, the former director of US Citizenship and Immigration Services, and with people that she's working with at the Niskanen Center. And they're doing some serious thinking about immigration reform.

I mean, honestly, she led the agency. She knows it inside out. And so they're looking at that agency, the agency responsible for things like work permits, green cards, citizenship. And they're asking, "How can this system work better for the United States and for the millions of immigrants who are trying to navigate it?" And the question underneath all of this conversation was, if we had an opportunity to build an immigration system that actually worked, what would we build?

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Ashley: I love that question because it shifts the question from restoration to imagination. I think that's such an important distinction. And that reminds me of a Cuban American theologian, Kat Armas, who has a book called *Liturgies for Resisting Empire*. It's a great read. But in that book, she writes that empire isn't just soldiers and weapons, like we think of in the movies or in the histories, but it's ideas, it's attitudes, practices, and stories. It's a way of imagining the world. So if we want to imagine new ways of being and belonging, then resisting empire begins in imagination. It's daring to dream of a reality entirely brand new, disrupted, shaken, and free. Ooh, that just makes me get some chills. Going back to a previous immigration system, for example, can sound hopeful when the present feels chaotic. But going back isn't necessarily the same thing as going somewhere better.

Tracie: Exactly, 'cause what we had wasn't perfect.

Ashley: It really wasn't. And I think Christians should be especially careful about nostalgia and looking back and saying, "Oh, that was better." It's very easy to remember an earlier version of something is better simply because the problems of that previous time are more familiar to us. We can think of the Hebrews, for example, who are wandering in the desert in Exodus, and they told Moses that they wished he had left them in Exodus because they were so tired of their current reality, and at least they knew what to expect in Egypt. Can we imagine that in our own lives at this moment?

And in our current context, we can also wish for a previous system. But if people were already being harmed, they were already waiting too long, already being separated from family, already struggling to find a legal pathway, then restoring the old system just can't be the full vision.

Tracie: That's exactly where I'm landing. I want to be clear about this. There are changes happening now that I strongly oppose. There are things we absolutely

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should challenge. There are people we need to protect. But I've practiced immigration law long enough to know that the system we had before this moment was not some wonderful, humane, perfectly functioning system. Immigration courts were already deeply problematic, and families waited years for resolution. People lost work authorization because of processing times, and legal pathways were already inaccessible to a huge number of people. Our laws already reflected a complicated history of racial exclusion. So, I don't want our best vision for immigration to be, "Can we please have yesterday's dysfunctional system back?" Because we don't.

Ashley: We don't need that back at all. And really, it's a pretty low bar if we think about that system. So maybe the better question is, what has this moment revealed that we were already too willing to live with?

Tracie: Yes to that, because some of the problems we're talking about didn't begin six months ago. This season has exposed them or intensified them and made them harder to ignore. But many of the problems we had were already there.

Ashley: So maybe imagination begins by refusing two bad options, the one we have and the one we had. We don't have to choose between the chaos of the present or the dysfunction of the past.

Tracie: Thank goodness. Exactly right. What if we looked forward instead with a blank slate?

Ashley: Not back to what was, but toward what could be.

Tracie: And that's the question for the rest of this episode.

Ashley: And this is something we're going to keep doing throughout this season, because we're talking with people who have seen parts of the system most of us will never see.

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Tracie: We'll talk with a former asylum officer about what it's like to sit across the table from someone asking the United States for protection and what it's like to be responsible for making that ultimate decision.

Ashley: We'll talk with a former senior USCIS official about what happens inside an agency responsible for decisions that can determine the course of someone's life.

Tracie: We'll also talk with a former customs and border protection officer who spent 26 years working at the border and now works directly with migrants. And I am particularly interested in hearing him talk about the phrase we all hear, "Secure the border." What does that actually mean to someone who spent decades doing that work?

Ashley: We're going to look at immigration history. We're going to talk about refugees. We're going to talk about what happens when the headlines get so heavy that we become numb. And we're going to ask our guest some version of the same question. "You've seen this system from the inside. If you could redesign the part you know best, what would you keep? What would you change, and what would you build instead?"

Tracie: And today, Ashley, we're going to put ourselves on the spot first.

Ashley: Excellent.

Tracie: We have unlimited imaginary authority and unlimited imaginary money. And if Congress is ready to work on bipartisan solutions, what do we do?

Ashley: Ooh, finally a government program I can work with.

Tracie: Amazing.

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Ashley: So before we get to specific policies, can we start with the foundation? Because for me, the first thing isn't a policy. As we've talked about, as Christians, it's a belief about people. Genesis tells us that human beings are made in the image of God. And if we actually believe that, dignity isn't something the government gives you. It's not something citizenship gives you. It's not something you earn by having the right documents. It's inherent.

Tracie: And that distinction matters so enormously in immigration. Because the government can absolutely say, "You qualify for this type of status, or you don't qualify." That's what governments do. But, "You don't qualify for this benefit," can never become, "Therefore, you matter less as a human being." Those are completely different statements.

Ashley: Amen to that. It's also not, "Therefore, we can treat you however we want."

Tracie: Exactly. A humane immigration system can say no. There will be denied cases. There will be enforcement. There are going to be people who don't qualify. But even a no should recognize the dignity of the person receiving it.

Ashley: All right, so let's get started with this. You get your lawyer whiteboard, and what's the first structural change you want to make?

Tracie: I want to start with immigration courts.

Ashley: Okay, I'm a little surprised. That doesn't sound like a really exciting place to start, but why would you start there?

Tracie: Oh my goodness, stay with me on this. I'll try not to geek out too much. So, most Americans probably assume that an immigration judge is part of an independent judicial system, like all other federal judges. But that's not true. Immigration courts are housed within the executive branch, not the judicial branch. That means the structure itself leaves them vulnerable to shifting executive

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priorities. I would absolutely change that. I want immigration courts to be independent of whoever is in the presidential authority at the moment. If the government is deciding whether someone can remain in this country or be potentially separated from their spouse or children, I want the person who's making that decision to have real, meaningful judicial independence.

Ashley: Okay, I think I hear what you're saying with that. And I also think that even though you and I are in charge of this system we're imagining, I wouldn't want a judge in our system to be worrying about our opinions on how they doing their job could affect their job. So like, if my opinion on immigration is that we should have less people, right, then I don't want them thinking, "Oh, well, Ashley wants less people, so I have to approve less people." I want them to follow the law, as we're going to make them, right, those fair, just laws we're going to make. I want them to follow the law and apply it fairly without worrying if I'll fire them for approving or denying too many cases.

Like you said, the immigration judges are housed within the executive branch, so right now they do feel some of that pressure, and I would like to remove that pressure, and it sounds like you would, too. And I think there's also a biblical principle here that's really consistent. The Hebrew scriptures repeatedly command judges not to show partiality. So Leviticus 19 says not to favor either the poor or the powerful, but to judge your neighbor fairly. Deuteronomy says judges should hear people fairly and not show partiality. And again, that's not a blueprint for the federal judiciary, but impartial justice is clearly a biblical concern.

Tracie: Absolutely right. We've heard so many stories of immigration judges getting fired on the spot. Maybe their asylum approval rates were too high, or they were hired by a prior administration. And that shouldn't be the case. We want to believe that everyone should have the chance to have a fair hearing before an impartial immigration judge.

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Ashley: I like the sound of that. All right, so immigration courts. What's next?

Tracie: Work permit renewals. If someone remains legally eligible to work, I would make renewals basically automatic. Because right now, you can have someone who's eligible to work, who wants to work, who has an employer, and the government processing times threatens their ability to do that. We've heard stories in the news recently about DACA recipients who are losing their work cards. People who've been employed for the last 14 years, and now they're losing their job because of processing delays.

So for example, a renewal of their work permit that used to take six weeks is now taking six months, 10 months, even longer. And so there's a gap, right, between when their card expired and when the renewal comes in. And they're not allowed to work during that gap. And so that means losing a job, maybe losing the ability to pay rent, buy their groceries, have health insurance. It's really about families and individuals losing stability, back to that uncertainty element we talked about earlier.

Ashley: Right. And that's not to mention the other side of the work permit process, which is getting one to start with. In my ideal system, asylum seekers would be able to get work permits much earlier, rather than waiting months and months. We expect people to be able to support themselves and also follow the law by not working under the table. But in our current system, that's kind of a catch 22 because there's really no way to do both. And scripture has a lot to say about work, not simply as economic output, but as part of human responsibility and provision. It seems really strange to tell someone, "You're eligible to work, but our paperwork delay means you can't."

Tracie: Exactly. A work permit is paperwork, but work itself is not. It's about how someone supports their family. It's how they contribute and build stability. And if the person is eligible, I don't think government inefficiency should derail that.

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Ashley: That's right. So, next topic on our list, and this one feels especially important from a Christian perspective. Let's talk about family.

Tracie: Absolutely. I mean, if we're building our dream immigration system, I would make family unity a genuine design principle. Not something that we just say we value, but we show it. One of the first things I would do is to get rid of the three and 10 year bars. This is one of those parts of immigration law that makes very little sense to people when I explain it. So for example, someone may be married to a US citizen and have a path to a green card through that marriage. But because of time they've previously spent in the US without lawful status, maybe entering without inspection, leaving the US to complete their process can trigger a bar that prevents them from coming back for three or 10 years.

So think about what we've created there, right? We're telling someone, "You need to leave the US in order to follow the legal process." But then the next sentence is, when you leave to follow that process, we are going to punish you by separating your family for years. Now, yes, there are waivers available in some circumstances, but they're complicated. Not everyone qualifies, and the stakes for the families, they're huge. If we say family unity is a value, our laws should reflect that, and this is one that I don't think does that. A US citizen shouldn't have to face years of separation from a spouse simply because their spouse is trying to correct their immigration status, and they're following the process that we've created. We can enforce immigration laws without designing consequences that unnecessarily separate families for years.

Ashley: And I think this is where our faith should make us stop and ask some hard questions. Because throughout scripture, family isn't treated as incidental. It's one of the primary places where we experience belonging, responsibility, care, and community. And Jesus is really clear about the value and vulnerability of children. So when we recreate a system that knowingly separates a husband from his wife or

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a parent from their child for three or 10 years, I don't think we can just shrug and say, "Uh, well, those are the rules."

We made those rules. So Christians should be willing to ask whether the rule itself is just. That doesn't mean family unity overrides every other consideration in every immigration case. But it does mean that separating a family should carry enormous moral weight. It should make us stop and think. And if our laws are producing years of separation as the price of trying to get right with the law, I think we have to be willing to ask whether we've built the wrong consequence. I'd also like to see family unity remain a priority when there's a choice between putting someone in immigration detention or allowing them to remain in their community while their case is processed. Because I think that we can all agree, violent criminals should be in detention until they're deported. But these days, we're seeing regular everyday people with no crimes separated from their families and held for months in detention. And when family unity is a priority, I don't think that should be happening.

Tracie: Absolutely. I have too many clients that I could share stories of, but yeah, it is the reality right now. But shifting a little bit to an area that I think makes most people happy. Let's talk about naturalization. I would make it free.

Ashley: Well, that sounds amazing to me because my husband is applying for naturalization. But why should it be free?

Tracie: Well, I would say, and just so you know, at the time we're recording this, to apply for naturalization, it's \$710 per person if you file online, \$760 if you file by paper, and the fees could potentially double before the end of 2026. So, these people who are applying to naturalize, and I'm so excited about your husband, Ashley, they've already gone through this really long immigration process, right? They've become a permanent resident. They have shown that they are decent human beings. They meet the basic requirements. And they finally have reached

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that point where we say, "You've been here long enough. You can become a citizen." Why do we want money to be a barrier to that? If citizenship is good, if we want people to participate in civic life, voting, and we want people invested deeply in their communities. I don't think costs should prevent eligible people from taking that final step.

Ashley: And I'd also like to add from a personal experience that each of the steps leading up to naturalization includes fees. So people have already spent a lot of money by the time they apply for citizenship. I can speak from personal experience. We have written a lot of checks to DHS. So I love this idea, Tracie.

Tracie: Happy to help. Sorry, I'm a little late with that, though.

Ashley: That is okay. But again, shifting a little bit, we really do have to talk about the line. And I say that in that voice because I hear it so often, the line.

Tracie: The great big mythical line.

Ashley: Ah, everyone listening has probably heard some version of, "I'm not against immigration. I just think everyone should come legally. Get in line."

Tracie: And here's where I want to say something important. Wanting people to use legal pathways is completely reasonable. I want people to use legal pathways. The problem is the assumption that a legal pathway exists for everyone. It doesn't. Our immigration system is a collection of very specific categories. You have to qualify for one of them, and for millions of people, there simply isn't a line that they can join, even if they're willing to wait.

Ashley: That's right. Like you said, I think a line, the idea of people following the law, doing it lawfully, is the right way to do it. But like you said, there is just not a line for most of the people to come. So it raises an interesting moral question. If we tell people, "Follow the rules and get in line," what responsibility do we have to create rules that are actually possible for people to follow?

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Tracie: Right, that would make sense. If we want lawful migration, and I know we both do, then legal pathways need to respond to reality. They need to be understandable, accessible, timely. I would say not overly expensive, and they need to bear some relationship to why people actually migrate. We cannot make lawful migration functionally impossible for a huge number of people, and then are all shocked and surprised when unlawful migration still happens.

Ashley: That's right. And that makes me think of something that people might be afraid of when it comes to immigration. And I think it's a principle that we can explore because it will challenge some people. So let's talk about immigration fraud. And I think you're a great person to speak to about that.

Tracie: Thanks, I think. I want to be precise here. Absolutely, fraud exists, and government should investigate fraud. And there should be consequences for those who intentionally deceive the government. But I think this is where we need to pause and examine. What happens when we design an entire system around our fear that someone somewhere might get something that they don't deserve? Every safeguard has a cost. Every additional burden intended to catch a fraudulent applicant also falls on legitimate applicants.

So we have a choice. We can create a system so restrictive that we prevent one fraudulent case, but in doing so, we wrongly block five people with legitimate claims. Or we can build a system that protects five legitimate people while accepting that imperfect human institutions might occasionally fail to catch a bad faith actor. If those are my choices, I would rather let in more people who have claims than fewer people because we have blocked one bad faith actor.

Ashley: So I can hear it already because somebody is going to hear that and say, "Tracie, you're okay with fraud?"

Tracie: No, and fraud hurts everybody. I'm just saying that there's no human system with a 0% error rate. So the question isn't really whether errors happen or people

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who commit fraud get in. The question is, what errors or what type of actors are we most afraid of? And who bears the cost when the system gets it wrong? If someone gets a benefit they shouldn't have received, we recognize that as a system failure. But when someone who genuinely deserves protection is denied because we've made the system almost impossible, that's a system failure too, and we need to talk about it in the same way.

Ashley: I can already think of real life examples of what you've just said and of the system failure. I know of one Afghan Christian who sought asylum in the US and was granted it. And then I know of another Afghan Christian with similar circumstances who was denied asylum. How can that happen? And there's something that's very biblical in taking seriously the consequences of wrongly denying justice. The prophets repeatedly condemned systems in which vulnerable people can't obtain justice. Jesus's ministry constantly disrupts the instinct to sort people first into categories of worthy and unworthy before deciding whether or not we show mercy.

Tracie: And I think this is where Christians, we need to ask ourselves about fear. Yes, of course, security matters, fraud matters, order matters. But what happens when fear becomes the organizing principle, the guiding star? Can we build a system that is wise without being suspicious of everyone? Can we have accountability without cruelty? Can justice and mercy actually live together? And Lord, I hope so.

Ashley: I think it could be possible, but that's something that we're going to talk about more in our next episode, and that's the topic of race.

Tracie: And we have to get into this, right? Because you cannot understand American immigration law without understanding the role race has played in shaping it. Who has America welcomed, and who have we excluded? Who was considered capable of becoming American even, and who was viewed as

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dangerous? Who's viewed as desirable? These ideas about who we want here, that changes over time, but they haven't disappeared.

And I think that's why immigration reform can't just mean making the machinery work faster or be more efficient. You can make an unjust system extremely efficient. Efficiency and justice, though, are not the same thing.

Ashley: James warns Christians against partiality, against treating people differently based on status and the categories we've assigned them. And I think one of the most useful things Christians can do in immigration conversations is examine what we've been conditioned to think. When you hear immigrant, who do you picture? When you hear illegal immigrant, who appears in your mind? And when you hear fraud, who do you suspect? When you hear border security, whose face do you see? I'm really curious to our listeners, as I've just said those terms, who did you see in your mind and were they different?

Tracie: And those are such uncomfortable but necessary questions.

Ashley: I think they're supposed to be uncomfortable, actually.

Tracie: Yeah. I mean, just sitting through it, I definitely was. And that's okay, because all of us, we bring assumptions into the conversation. The goal isn't to announce, "I have no bias." That's not true for anyone, I believe. But the goal is to become aware enough of our own assumptions that they don't quietly make our decisions for us.

Ashley: That's right. So we'll get more to that in our next episode, but I want to return to something you said earlier because I do think it's important. So let's talk more about order. Because sometimes Christian conversations about immigration can make it sound as though caring about immigrants means you shouldn't care about enforcement or borders or rules. It's open borders for everyone.

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Tracie: And I just don't believe that. There's so much in the middle. I do want an orderly immigration system. I want a functioning border, and I want laws that people understand. I want agencies to make those timely decisions, and I also want fraud addressed. I want people to use legal pathways, and I want the government to know who is entering the United States. And those aren't inherently anti-immigrant positions. The question is just, how do we pursue those goals?

Ashley: Scripture actually holds justice and mercy together rather than asking us to choose one. Micah 6:8 calls God's people to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God, not justice or mercy. You can do both.

Tracie: Absolutely. And I think humility belongs in the conversation too. Immigration is complicated, and there are competing interests. There are limited resources and legitimate security concerns. And like we said, there are people acting in bad faith. So, you know, there are also people who act in good faith with legitimate cases and they're in desperate situations. I become nervous, though, when anyone on any side pretends that there's just one simple answer.

Ashley: If only there was a simple answer. But I think it also comes back to humility. And that means that we're willing to say, "I have values that I believe deeply, but I might still have something to learn about how those values apply here."

Tracie: Exactly. And that's the kind of conversation I hope that we continue to have this season.

Ashley: I am looking forward to that conversation. So when I step back from all of this, I think we're asking something larger than, "What immigration policies do we prefer?" We're asking instead, "What kind of society we're building?" And what kind of people that we are becoming as we build it. And who gets to join us in the building.

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Tracie: And as the lawyer, I want to be careful here. The Bible isn't an immigration policy manual. Faithful Christians can absolutely disagree about how immigration policy should work.

Ashley: But scripture absolutely has something to say about how we see people, how we use power, how we pursue justice, how we treat the stranger, and whether fear gets to drive our decisions.

Tracie: Exactly.

Ashley: So maybe Christian imagination doesn't begin with, "Which political side has the Christian immigration policy?" Maybe it begins with, "If what we say we believe is actually true, what should it cause us to imagine?"

Tracie: So we've spent a lot of this episode talking about a system that doesn't exist yet. I wish it did. Maybe we'll get there. And I can imagine somebody listening and thinking, "Okay, but I don't run USCIS. Ashley and Tracie don't actually have unlimited authority. And I'm also not in Congress. I'm not redesigning the immigration courts. So what am I supposed to do with this episode?"

Ashley: And that's absolutely fair. Because one of the quickest ways to lose hope is to convince ourselves that the only actions that matter are enormous ones. Most of us are not going to rewrite the Immigration and Nationality Act tomorrow.

Tracie: That's probably for the best because I think I need to go to law school first. Maybe you'd like to take a first crack at it, and I can catch up in a couple years. But we're not going to write that tomorrow, but we do get to decide how we participate in the immigration conversation that's happening around us. We get to decide whether we lead with fear or with curiosity. Whether we repeat something because it confirms what we already believe, or stop and ask whether it's actually true. Whether we see a policy category or a human being. And whether we accept the

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current system as inevitable, or allow ourselves to imagine something better can be possible.

Ashley: And I think that's where hope becomes practical. Biblical hope isn't pretending circumstances are better than they are. There's an enormous amount of lament in scripture. God's people are allowed to say, "This isn't right." But lament isn't the same thing as despair. Despair says nothing can be different. Hope tells the truth about what is broken and still asks what faithfulness looks like next.

Tracie: A verse I keep coming back to recently is Hebrews 11:1. "Now, faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." And right now, for me, part of faithfulness is refusing to let the chaos of this particular moment shrink my vision for not only what can still happen in this moment, but also what could come after it.

Ashley: That's so good. So in our past seasons, we always gave you a conversation tip, and we want to continue that in this season. So here's your conversation tip for this episode. The next time immigration comes up in a conversation, and maybe especially if you're talking with someone who sees the issue differently than you do, try not to begin with a policy you disagree about. I know that's hard, but try not to begin with that. And instead ask, "If you could build our immigration system from scratch, what would you want it to accomplish?"

Tracie: I really love that question because it gets underneath the talking points. Someone might say, "I want the border to be secure." Okay, great. Yeah, that's worth talking about. But what does secure mean? Someone else might say, "I want families to be able to stay together." Again, great, but what does that actually require? Or maybe someone says, "I think people should immigrate legally." Yeah, I agree. So what legal pathways would we need to create for that to be a realistic expectation?

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Ashley: And you may actually discover that you agree on more of the destination than you expected. Because you both probably want a system that works. You both want decisions to be fair. You both want people to know what the rules are. You both think fraud should be addressed, and you think cases shouldn't take years and years to be decided.

Tracie: Exactly. You know, agreement on values doesn't mean we're suddenly going to agree on every policy. But it does change the conversation. So instead of beginning with, "Here's why you're wrong," we want to begin with, "What are we actually trying to build?"

Ashley: And that can be a much more curious, and I also think productive place to start.

Tracie: And then, just like we've done in prior seasons, we want to give you some small actions. And our small action for this week is really simple. The next time you see an immigration headline, don't just read the headline. Take five minutes and find out who the policy actually affects.

Ashley: You can ask, "Who is the person behind this story? Is this about asylum seekers? Is it refugees, people with work permits, families waiting for visas? People who have lived in the United States for years? There's a lot of different categories." That someone could fall into when it comes to immigration. Find out what this particular article or this headline is talking about.

Tracie: Right, the people behind it. And then ask yourself one more question with that. If I were designing the system, and instead of simply reacting to this headline, what would I want to have happen here? Again, you don't have to come up with legislation. You don't have to solve immigration. Just practice moving from reaction to imagination.

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Ashley: That's five minutes, one story, one human being, and one better question. That's all it takes to start.

Tracie: And that's really what we're inviting you to do with us this season. We're going to keep paying attention to what's happening right now. We're going to tell the truth when policies are harmful. We're going to talk about what the people are experiencing, what they're going through with these policies. But we're also going to keep asking about what comes next.

Ashley: Over the course of the season, we're going to hear from people who have actually worked inside different parts of the immigration system. And we're going to keep asking them. What works? What doesn't? If you had the chance to build something better, what would you build?

Tracie: Because the immigration system that we have today, it's not inevitable. People created it. People made choices about how it operates, how it prioritizes, and what risk it guards against. Which means we're allowed to ask whether different choices are possible.

Ashley: And we want you, our listeners, to be part of that conversation. At the end of this season, we're going to do a live Conversations for Curious Christians episode. Ooh, that's a tongue twister. And we want your questions.

Tracie: Yes, kind of an ask me anything. Send us the questions you've always wondered about. Send us the thing that someone at church keeps saying that you don't know how to answer. Send us a question that you think is too basic. Seriously, those are often the best ones. Lots of people have those same basic questions. And the easiest way is to hop on our Facebook or Instagram page.

Ashley: Yeah, we'll be looking for those comments as we are going throughout this season and looking forward to your answers, or your questions rather. So as we go through the season, maybe keep your own running answer to the questions we're

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asking our guests. We're going to ask them, "What would a better immigration system look like?" So as we're asking that question, ask yourself and keep a running list of what your answers might be.

Tracie: And maybe your answers are going to change as you listen to future episodes. I think our opinions might change, too.

Ashley: I really hope they do, because listening well should change us.

Tracie: It absolutely should. Thank you so much for joining us for the beginning of another season of *Hope In Action*.

Ashley: We'll see you next time.

Tracie: And until then,

Ashley: Stay curious,

Tracie: Choose hope,

Ashley: And put that hope into action.

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.