

**Ep #5: Real Immigrant Stories of Hope,
Justice, and Compassion**



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Tracie L. Morgan & Ashley Glimasinski

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Tracie: Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." I have that verse on a sign right next to the copy machine in my office. Every time I see it, I'm reminded, and so is my team, that even when the work is exhausting, even when it feels overwhelming, we have to keep going. Because the work we do isn't just paperwork. It's lives being changed, independence being gained, and worries being lifted.

Our clients depend on us not just to navigate a complex immigration system, but to help them build a future. In today's episode, we're going to share stories. Our own stories as immigrants and the stories of the people we serve, and explore how the work we do every day shapes the way we see the world, how it informs our faith, and how it reminds us why we don't give up.

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.

Welcome. My name is Tracie L. Morgan and I'm an immigration attorney in Atlanta, Georgia.

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Ashley: And I'm Ashley Glimasinski, a community advocate, a former ESL teacher, and a friend of immigrants. And it's funny how you mentioned you have that verse hanging on the wall in your office, Tracie, because I actually have, I'm looking at it now. I actually have a hand-painted scroll that I got in Asia that says, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful." And that's from Hebrews 10:23. And this is the one that I think of when I think both of these verses encourage us to keep us going and to keep us placing our faith in God and to trust really that God has it all in his hands and he's going to bring everything to work together for good. I think it's important that we both have those verses on our walls as a reminder in this work that we do.

So like Tracie said, in today's episode, we're going to share stories, our own stories as immigrants and the stories of the people we serve, and explore how the work we do every day shapes the way we see the world, informs our faith, and reminds us why we never give up. So each story you'll hear is more than just an account of crossing borders. It's all about resilience, hope, and the pursuit of belonging. By listening, we expand our empathy, break down barriers, and discover how connected we truly are. And we're so glad you're here.

Tracie: So Ashley, in an earlier episode, you mentioned that you had lived abroad for 10 years. I can't imagine that. I lived abroad for about 10 months and hit my limit. Can you share some of your memories about being an immigrant yourself for so long?

Ashley: Yeah. So I actually spent most of that time in Japan and Poland, and then I spent a year backpacking Asia with a mission trip and missions organization. And I also lived in Southern

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California for two years. That's when I did my master's at Fuller Theological Seminary. But Southern California, when I came from North Carolina, kind of did seem like a foreign country. So I actually count that in those 10 years. Obviously, California is not a foreign country, but the culture was very different for me.

But the first country that I lived in was Japan, and I was so ready to live in Japan. I had fallen in love with the country and culture when I was in middle school. So by the time I arrived in Japan, I had studied the language and the culture in high school and college. I studied abroad for a semester in college. So I was conversationally fluent by the time I actually arrived to teach English in Japan. And everyday conversations were easy for me, but going to the doctor was difficult. That's kind of what conversationally fluent means. So I understood the culture, I spoke the language, but I looked very foreign, blonde hair, blue eyes. So I surprised a lot of people when they would speak around me and I would respond in Japanese and they'd be, "Oh, oh wow, okay." So it was an interesting experience to be in that place.

And then the next place I lived was Poland, where I didn't speak any Polish and I had very little understanding of Polish culture. So in Japan, I could do a lot of things on my own, like have conversations with my coworkers, go to pay my bills, talk with my car mechanic, just take care of everyday life things. But in Poland, I was like a little kid who had to rely on a grownup or an adult to take care of her and to make sure I got everything done. And I remember this one time I was trying to find the post office. It was early on in my time in Poland. And I had looked up the word for it beforehand. It was "poczta." And I knew kind of where it was in town, but I didn't know exactly what markers there would be, what

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sign there would be. So I just got lost and I wandered up and down the street asking anyone who would maybe look friendly and say, "Poczta? Poczta?" And unfortunately, no one helped me or no one understood my accent maybe. And I realized that even though I knew nothing about Polish or Polish culture, I looked Polish. That everyone expected me to be Polish and to understand the language, understand the culture. So it was just a really big difference from being in Japan where it looked like I didn't fit in, but I kind of did, versus Poland where it looked like I fit in and I really had no idea what was going on.

So it was just a different experience being in both countries. And one more quick question, or quick answer to your question. I also realized just how privileged I was as an American when I traveled to all those different countries, and I thought the world was always supposed to be open for me. I would always get a visa no matter where I went. The power of that blue passport, right? And I went to visit a friend in Korea and I just knew her university. I didn't know her address. I knew I was going to meet her at the McDonald's down the road at this station. So the person at the border security in the airport really didn't like that I didn't have an address to put on this form.

So he pulled me aside and we took about maybe 30 minutes of just going back and forth. He was like, "Where are you staying?" "With my friend." "What's the address?" "I don't know." "What university does she study at?" "This university." And it was just, it was the first time I realized that maybe I wouldn't be allowed into a country. That was early on, but all the time I lived abroad, including the year in backpacking, I was able to get a visa fairly easily in each of these countries. Sometimes there was a visa application or a

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longer wait period, like in India and China, or maybe an extra fee that was applied at the last minute. That was Vietnam. But it never crossed my mind that I would never be allowed to enter a country.

So it was just a really big lot of different experiences, a lot of different places, different cultures. The way I was treated was different. But it was definitely an interesting experience to have all that time. So Tracie, that's enough about me. How about you? What was your experience? You said you lived 10 months abroad. What was that like?

Tracie: So like you, I also spent time in Poland. I was in Łódź, and for those of you who aren't familiar with the Polish language, Łódź is spelled L-O-D-Z. And that was part of my struggle living there was because I thought initially when I got this teaching job in Poland that maybe I could learn the language. There aren't nearly enough vowels in the Polish language and it was so hard, which was part of my struggle.

So yes, in Poland, I was an ESL teacher and had a variety of ages of students that I worked with. The hardest was working with kids. They didn't speak a word of English. I hardly spoke a word of Polish. And we would all end the class in tears. We were so frustrated until we learned that the kids could maybe teach me Polish. Then they could hear me sounding like a child and very foolish and then they themselves would open up. So we got a lot of giggles that way, but man, I learned I am not cut out to be a teacher. Being on all the time, that's rough.

I had also done a few short study abroad programs in college and law school, but with that, you're in a bubble. You're with people who are studying with you, with other Americans. Everything's

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planned out for you. But Poland was fully independent. It was eye-opening. I really felt alone. This was about 25 years ago. So back when we had to go to internet cafes to check our email. Anyone remembers that? Or having a calling card to connect with anyone back at home. I didn't have the world in my pocket like we do now. There was no instantaneous communication.

The school I taught at was supposed to arrange language lessons for me, but that never happened. On some of my worst days, a smile from a stranger on the tram would be the only kindness I experienced. I think that's shaped how I view people who come to the United States. They may not be as isolated or as shy as I was, but it can be really easy to withdraw. I want to make our immigrant friends feel seen, valued, and welcomed. And I think about Hebrews 13:2, which reminds us, "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so, some have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it." And so just wanting to maybe be that one moment of kindness that someone can experience is huge for me.

So for me, my experience abroad was about loneliness and realizing how much that kindness matters. But Ashley, for you, your work into immigration started closer to home. It started with your family story.

Ashley: Yeah, it really did. And I've talked a little bit about this before on the show, but I really got involved in immigration because of my husband. Like I said, we were living in Poland when he proposed, and as we considered where to get married and where we wanted to live, we decided that we were going to emigrate to the US. Because after all my time moving around to

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different countries, I thought emigrating to the US was going to be easy. And I just have to say that line every time to remind myself how ridiculous that statement is and how little I really knew about immigration. And maybe that'll help our listeners also understand about immigration because spoiler alert, it was not easy and it was definitely not cheap.

We got him here on a fiance visa and after we got married, we transitioned to the green card or the legal permanent residency. But our struggles during that time opened my eyes to how intricate and complicated our immigration system is and it gave me the empathy for others navigating the same system.

But my story with immigration might have just ended there if we hadn't been asked to be house host at Welcome House Raleigh, which is a temporary housing ministry for refugees and asylum seekers here in Raleigh. And during our time in the house, we lived with refugees from all over the world. We got to have a lot of conversations, a lot of great meals, and we got to know the people and hear their stories. That experience taught me Christian compassion for refugees and asylum seekers. I'd already developed some empathy, but that was the Christian compassion side of it. And the experience taught me that my work in this field was going to be important because I had experiences that I could use to help them as they resettled into the United States. I had also lived abroad. I also knew some of the experience of not knowing how to order in English or a different language or how to go to the doctor.

So it led to my work with refugees and asylum seekers by living in the house, but then it also led me to my work now with We

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Choose Welcome, where we educate and disciple women about immigration and God's heart for the foreigner. So it's been a journey into this work from different stages, from the immigration process myself with my husband, assisting directly with others, and now to working with women and helping them to form welcoming communities where they are.

Tracie: But what about you, Tracie? You mentioned that you lived in Poland, which is just an amazing place to live. But was it your time in Poland that led you to focus on immigration law?

Not necessarily. After I spent time in Poland, I got back to Kansas. And I'm thinking, "Oh my gosh, there's this whole world outside of Kansas. I want to explore." And so I applied for jobs all around the United States and the first one that said yes was an English school in Atlanta. I didn't teach English. I had learned that lesson, but I was hired to work with their international students as their international student advisor. So helping them with their paperwork and all the immigration compliance because this was just after 9/11 and so that was really taking off at that point.

And so I would work with students who would have questions beyond their studies like, "I just got married, what do I do?" Or, "I got a speeding ticket, what do I do?" And I got tired of saying, "I don't know, I'm not a lawyer." So I fixed it. I decided to go to law school. And when I started, I was really surprised by how few people in law school actually know what kind of law they want to practice. I knew immediately I wanted to do immigration. There was no question about it. I loved working with international students and getting to know about other cultures and there was just no doubt in my mind.

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And so in my last year of law school, I started working for an immigration law firm just outside of Atlanta. My boss was really excited when he would tell me about how he took someone from being on the verge of removal or deportation to getting a green card. Like to me, it's like, how does that happen? It's like coming back from the brink of death and it was amazing. And one day in the office, he asked me to talk with a woman who had been a victim of domestic violence. She had come in for a consultation and he said, "Tracie, I think she might relate better to you than to me." And at first, I'll admit I was a little offended. I was thinking, "Well, you're just doing that because I'm a woman."

But talking with her that day showed me a new side of the law. It showed me how the law can take us from a tragic past or a horrible incident and turn it into something good. We can't change the past, but if there is a way to get a benefit from it, by golly, I want to be part of that. And so from that point, I really felt the calling to work with immigrant survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking. And thankfully, I can balance out this heavy work with the happy work of also assisting newlyweds with green card applications or maybe fiance applications, Ashley, and then helping people with naturalization as well, which is always a happy time.

Ashley: We definitely need happy moments in immigration because it's not always a happy field to be working in. But I love the parts of immigration where we can bring people together. That's one of my favorite parts. And immigration work always moves between those moments of deep pain and the deep joy. And the fall of Afghanistan, I think was one of those moments that I think of that brought both together, both the pain and the joy.

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And it's something that you and I both experienced, Tracie. So would you talk a little bit about that?

Tracie: Absolutely. So in prior episodes, we've talked about our work with Afghans and their families in the aftermath of the Taliban takeover in the fall of 2021. About 76,000 Afghans came to the United States as part of Operation Allies Welcome, which created a way for those who worked with the US military or who would have been targeted, it allowed them to enter the United States. They were paroled in, which is a special status, meaning they had a legal entry, and they were given the opportunity to stay here for two years and have a work permit. But two years is temporary. They needed to find another way to try and stay in the United States. Those with military ties often use special immigrant visas, but many others filed for asylum.

Ashley: That's right. I remember those days really clearly. Actually, my husband and I had only been in Welcome House for a couple months at that point, but it was August 2021 when we had our first Afghan guest arrive. He was a man who had worked with the Afghan side of the military but had assisted the US troops in that process. So he was offered the SIV, which is the special immigrant visa. And I remember sitting with him in August 2021 when the news was reporting the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the fall of Kabul. And it was really hard for him to watch it because his wife and his kids were still there. He had arrived just maybe a week or two earlier with a plan to come and get settled in the US and then his wife and kids would come later so he'd be able to support them. So they'd made the decision to separate for what they thought was going to be a few months. And unfortunately, it didn't turn out that way. He didn't speak much English, but I remember

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just hearing in his voice how worried he was for his family, for his wife, and for his country.

And over the next two years, Welcome House welcomed in about 185 Afghans. And the one house that we had grew from one to six houses because so many churches said, "What can we do? How can we help?" And they had properties that were just sitting unused. So they said, "Yes, please use this for temporary housing. We want to do whatever we can." There were just so many ways that people wanted to help.

And another story that I remember was of a woman who arrived by herself. She was really quiet. She was pretty depressed, I have to say. And she didn't come out of her room for two days. We gave her the space that she needed. We didn't try to force her to speak or come out. But she did eventually come out and we spoke to her warmly and tried to make her feel comfortable. And eventually, over time, she opened up and we found out that she had left Kabul. She had been with her husband and her two children under the age of three. They had all been in Kabul. They had gone to the airport trying to evacuate, but they got separated in the big crowd. And so she got on a plane thinking that her husband and children were getting on another plane. But she didn't find out until she got to Qatar that they had not made it on a plane and they were still in Afghanistan. So that story was heartbreaking.

I understood finally like what she was going through, why she was so sad and upset. It was a really hard time for her, but slowly over time as we welcomed her and made her feel like there were friends here, there was community here, and more Afghan guests started arriving, she really became the lady of the house. She

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cooked for everyone. She took everything I taught her how to do, like how to use the washing machine and the stove, and she taught everyone else those things. To see her flourish and blossom in that way after seeing her come as just this shell that was so empty was a beautiful sight to see and know that we could offer comfort and peace in that place.

And over those years, we met so many people. There was former military, former police from Kabul. There was a woman who was a part of an elite female fighting force, which just sounds so amazing. But there were also civilians who were afraid of Taliban rule and none of them could stay in Afghanistan. They did what they felt they had to do in that moment to stay safe and to protect their families and protect their futures. So I'm glad we were able to give them a safe and welcoming starting place as they took their new steps in the US.

Tracie: I don't think I'll ever forget our time working with Afghan families. I mean, it was such a meaningful moment for me professionally and personally. So our firm worked with over 70 Afghan families during this time and I think these stories are going to stay with me for the rest of my life. It was so impactful, both personally and professionally. And in our firm, we helped them all apply for asylum. And Afghan families, if you've met any, they're not generally on the small side. I think the family that we worked with that had the most kids was 16. And so an asylum application for 18 people was pretty intense.

But like you, Ashley, we worked with a variety of people, women who had been medical students. There was one woman who was training to be a runner in the Olympics. We worked with

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journalists who had been outspoken against the Taliban, former military members who had trained with the US service members, and then some who worked for Western nonprofits, helping to feed and shelter orphans. They were all at risk of being arrested or disappeared, or worse if they remained in Afghanistan. And they had all been told to uproot their lives basically overnight. They didn't have time to prepare or say goodbye. It was just go time.

And so during the summer of 2022, once a lot of the Afghans had arrived here, we spent every Saturday for about four months getting to know these applicants, their families, and their stories. But once the applications were in, the work wasn't over. Each one had to go through an interview, and each interview could be between four and eight hours long. It was exhausting. But I kept coming back to Galatians 6:9. And I'm really happy to say that every family we helped now either has asylum status or has already moved on to receiving their green card.

And like you, Ashley, there is one woman in particular who stays with me. And she came to the United States. She had actually been working at the airport in Kabul. Her boss arranged for a car to come and pick her up. She was eight months pregnant, and she was at home when everything was starting to happen. And her boss is like, "No, you need to get to the airport." She goes out, she talks to the driver and the driver says, "No, I'm only supposed to bring you to the United States," or "bring you to the airport." Her husband and her three-year-old stayed behind. The woman gets to the airport and her boss is like, "Where's the rest of your family?" It was all a mistake, all a misunderstanding. And so she departed for the United States alone and pregnant. And while her family still remains separated today, I know that they stay in communication.

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I know that she's fighting for them, and I just have faith that we will get to the point where we can have a beautiful reunion.

And so helping Afghans find safety showed me both the challenges and the hope that comes with starting over in a new country. And immigration looks different depending on where you encounter it, like at the US Mexico border, where Ashley and I have both spent time learning and listening. So Ashley, tell me a little bit about your experience.

Ashley: That's right, Tracie. I've been to the border twice, both times to El Paso and Juarez for a border encounter with an organization called Abara that builds relational connections with the borderlands. They also have a sign hanging in their building that I really loved and it says, "The border is joy, love, and community, not your crisis." And through them, I learned the history of the border area, how for many people in the area, the border crossed them when Mexico ceded territory to the US in 1848. And for hundreds of years, El Paso and Juarez were actually one city. So people would cross the river and go have a meal with friends or they would go to a grocery shop on the other side.

I was able to meet migrants in shelters on both sides of the border, and I got a glimpse of the journey that many of my friends at Welcome House had taken before arriving. There was one little boy in Juarez who reminded me so much of a little boy at Welcome House who had stayed with us with his family. And then I actually found out they had the same name. So I was really surprised. They looked like each other, they acted just like each other, and then they had the same name. So it was amazing.

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But it made me wonder because this boy and his family were stuck in Mexico at the time, due to policies, they couldn't cross to the US to apply for asylum, whereas the boy that I knew had crossed with his family and was currently in asylum proceedings. So it made me wonder what allows one boy and his family the chance to pursue asylum in the US and not the other? It seemed like it was just a matter of a few months and capricious US policy changing kind of overnight. Was it luck or was it fate? How was it that one boy and his family got to be in a safe place and the other was still waiting? It just really tore at my heart.

But at the border, I also spoke with border patrol officers and I realized that they are human. They are made in the image of God. So much of what we can see villainizes them, but I got to see them and understand a bit of their story as well. I also saw how fortified the border is with the wall, the border patrols, and there is so much technology used for surveillance. There's a lot going on there. But as I saw all this fortification, I also saw flowers growing in the cracks between the wall, and through the fence, and I saw that birds were flying freely over the border wall. And actually during our conversation with border patrol, it was outside in this park, I saw hummingbirds. They were just flying back and forth over our heads. And hummingbirds are migratory birds who fly north and south every year, meaning they fly over the border wall every year. And I realized that humans make borders, but God always finds a way of surpassing them, even the ones that we try to place around him.

Tracie: It's amazing. I can just picture the hummingbirds. That sounds like a beautiful moment. And like you, I think some of my most meaningful moments regarding immigration have come

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when I'm not in the office. Ashley, like you, I had the honor of going to the border twice to work with migrants and immigrants. The first time was in 2019, so it was under the first Trump administration. I went to Tijuana with a group called El Otro Lado, which is a legal organization that helps migrants navigate the US asylum system. My volunteer responsibility was to help people learn how to tell their stories to a border agent when they got to the border. They would have about two minutes to convince the agent that they had a true fear to return to their home country. Can you imagine two minutes to tell your worst fears to a total stranger? And I'd got to talk to people from all around the world. There were immigrants from Iran, Turkey, Haiti, Jamaica, Mexico, Guatemala, you name it. It felt like everybody was there.

And in this experience, there are two moments that really stand out to me. One was having to tell a father that my government, the US government, might separate his children from him once they entered the United States. This was during the family separation era that we had under the Trump administration. And I was really upset and honestly disgusted that I had to talk about this, but I had to be honest with him.

The second thing I think about was there was a play area with coloring books for the kids. And many of the kids had put their artwork on the walls. And I would look at the pictures and wonder what happened to those kids. They were long gone from where we were. But I had to wonder, were they safe? Did they make it to the US? Where were they? And it was just haunting.

And then on a second trip, I went with the Immigration Coalition, a nonprofit that provides food for communities on both sides of the

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US Mexico border in the Rio Grande Valley. And this would have been around 2023. And so I'm on the board of directors and we wanted to see how our resources were being used. We went to one of the encampments and I will say it's an encampment. Picture something about the size of half a football field, but it's all concrete and it's full of tents and sleeping bags. And people have made their temporary homes that way. In some areas, they had like a tent shelter, but in others, it was just a sleeping bag in the hot sun.

While walking through this area, I made eye contact with a little girl who was playing with her two younger brothers. I don't know what made us giggle, but we did. And I don't speak Spanish and she didn't speak any English, but we found a way to like do the whole peekaboo thing and play a little with each other. So with my broken Spanish, I asked their names and their ages, and Genesis, the little girl was seven, Matteo was five, and Josue was six. And once they told me their names, I honestly, I got chills even though it was a million degrees out. But I realized that this is the word of God being reflected right at me. Genesis, Matthew, Joshua, come on. So thinking about Matthew 24:4, it says, "Truly, I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." I thought about that and just being able to have that shared human experience with them was fantastic.

And I think going to the border helped me appreciate my client's stories more. When they're here in Atlanta, and honestly, I can work with anyone in the United States, but for the most part, they're here, they're safe, they're stable. They're not in a moment of crisis and I don't work with people who are coming immediately out of trauma. But working with people at the border, they were in

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it. And I think that we all have a moment where life changes. And for them, that was the moment. And I was able to be part of that and take a little peek into their lives. I can't imagine the steps that they had to take to get that far even, but man, what bravery.

So seeing the border up close gave me a deeper appreciation for everything that migrants and immigrants go through. But immigration work takes a lot of different forms. It's not just legal work. So Ashley, I'd love to hear more about your current role.

Ashley: Yeah. So I mentioned earlier that I work with We Choose Welcome now and it's also a little bit more removed from what we call direct service, directly working with immigrants and refugees, like it was at Welcome House where you help every day with making sure they have the toiletries that they need, that they have groceries in the fridge, that they have rides to doctor's appointments, that their new apartment gets furnished. There's a lot of daily work with immigrants and refugees that happens that way. So now that I'm at We Choose Welcome, I still meet with my immigrant friends from time to time, but it's not the same as working directly with immigrants. Instead now, my work is turned to helping Americans understand immigration and how they can support their immigrant neighbors or get connected in their communities if they want to volunteer somewhere. How do they approach an immigrant church and ask if they can support? How do they become an ESL teacher? There are so many different ways that Americans can get involved.

And I've actually found that with all my time living overseas and adapting to new cultures, my previous experience as a teacher and that master's in intercultural studies that I mentioned, it turns out

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I'm actually fairly good at communicating and helping other people step into roles and into places and relationships that seem other or foreign to them.

It was something that I first discovered when I was working at Welcome House and I was assisting volunteers and helping them make their first conversation that wasn't all in English or advising them on how they could help a family or maybe not help a family. But it was something I found that I love speaking at churches and telling them about the immigration system and breaking down those really complex topics. That's what I did as a teacher. It was breaking down difficult things to understand and helping people understand it in a simplified way. And I also love that light bulb moment when people do make that connection and they see, "I can understand this now," or, "They're human just like me. They have wants and needs and cares."

And I just loved that connection with people. So I love what I get to do at We Choose Welcome now. It led me to this work and overall, I get to help build more welcoming communities and that's just a win for everyone, I think.

Tracie: I love it, Ashley. Welcoming is your superpower.

Ashley: Thank you.

Tracie: Of course. I think looking at it from my point of view, for me, trust, I think is my superpower, being able to gain the trust of clients pretty easily, pretty quickly, which is important because in my line of work, I definitely see the worst of humanity, the things that people do to each other is pretty awful.

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And so just a quick disclaimer, if you have kids around, you may want to fast forward through the next few minutes. And even if you don't have kids, you might find some of these examples disturbing. So no offense taken if you fast forward through this next section of mine.

So some of my clients have told me pretty awful stories and I'm going to start by telling you about my first trafficking case. It was a woman who had grown up in Mexico in a small town. When she was 15, she met someone 10 years older than her. He swept her off her feet. They fell in love and before you know it, she was pregnant. And he told her he would take care of her. He moved her to a different city to go live with his parents. And as soon as their baby was born, he took the baby, gave it to his parents, and then told my client, the then 15-year-old girl, that the two of them were going to go to the United States, that she was going to do some work for him. They got to the border and they worked just on the other side of the US border and she was forced into sex work. She was given a quota of condoms to use every day and if she failed to meet that quota, she didn't eat. Again, we see the worst of humanity in these cases.

I talked to one woman, and this is here in the United States, again, eight months pregnant and her husband didn't want her to have the baby. They had a lot of other issues in their relationship, but in this case, he decided to put baby oil on the floor in the shower. He was hoping she would slip, fall, and have a miscarriage. Thankfully, despite slipping and falling, she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl.

I had another client come to the US with a recruitment company. She was from Eastern Europe. She was told that she would work in

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hotels and earn a great salary. But it was a lie. When she got here, her documents were seized by her employer, and she was put to work as a housekeeper. She worked 18 hours a day. She was forced to sleep on the kitchen floor, and she was threatened by her employer saying ICE would be called if she even tried to speak to the homeowners. So totally isolated in her world there.

And then another client was a devout Muslim gentleman. He came to ask for help, wanting to know if he had any immigration solutions because his wife, she would put pork in his food whenever she was angry at him. And as a devout Muslim, this just shook him to the core. His religious beliefs were being violated and he didn't know it. He felt unclean, impure. She also tried to run him over, not just once, but twice.

So these are just some of the stories that I've heard and there are worse ones. I have kind of filtered things out here a little bit. But I am so happy to report that everyone I just talked about is now a US citizen. We were able to help them obtain the right status, get their green cards, and now they live in the United States, free from worrying about their status or their abusers, free to make the choices that they want to.

And so when we reflect and think about Isaiah 1:17, which says, "Learn to do right, seek justice, defend the oppressed, take up the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow." And as a lawyer, I feel like this is my call to arms, right? I have a great responsibility to help my client seek justice. The cases are hard, but man, those tears of relief or seeing someone's shoulders just relax because the weight of the world's been lifted off them, those are the moments that really keep me going.

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Ashley: There are definitely, like we said earlier, there's a balance of pain and joy in immigration, and I think the stories that we've shared have reflected that. It's not always I'm going to welcome this family and it's going to be butterflies and rainbows or they're going to arrive in the US and their lives are going to be perfect. The world is still broken. We are all still human and each of us needs redemption in that. We need grace for each other and from God. And I think that God is working in all of these stories and with the people that we've met and that we've cared for.

But from navigating legal challenges to witnessing moments of true relief, all of these stories highlight both the struggle and the hope in immigration. So let's pause for a moment and reflect on what we want you, our listeners, to take away and how you can respond in your own community. What do we want you to remember about how immigration touches real lives and how can you respond?

Tracie: Absolutely. And I think again, we look back to Isaiah 1:17 and the teachings there about protecting rights and securing freedoms. It's just a tangible expression of God's call to seek justice and defend the oppressed. And so there are definitely a few things to take away. Faith isn't just about beliefs or prayers. It's lived out in the choices we make every single day. Compassion is not abstract. It's showing up for someone who is suffering, listening to their story, and taking action when we can. Justice isn't only a legal principle, but it's about stepping into systems to make sure that the vulnerable are seen, valued, and protected.

What I hope listeners take away from these stories is that immigration touches real lives in very real ways. Behind every case

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is a person whose life can be changed through advocacy, kindness, and empathy. And you don't need to be a lawyer to make a difference. Small actions like listening, offering support, volunteering, advocating for fair policies, or simply treating someone with dignity can ripple into life-changing outcomes.

So when you think about immigration, think about the people, not just the paperwork. Ask yourself, "How can I show compassion today? How can I help someone feel seen, valued, and safe?" These moments of care and these small acts of justice are really where faith comes alive in our communities. And so I do want to talk a little bit more about how the gospel, how the Bible helps fortify me and sustain me as I do this work.

The first is when I feel like I can't give up. I turn to Isaiah 41:10, which says, "So do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." And I think about that before I go into a difficult interview or to court.

Sometimes though, it's just too much and I know I need to rest. And as they say, you can't pour water out of an empty vessel. And certainly I feel myself being empty more often than not these days. And so when things do get too hard or the headlines are too heartbreaking, I reflect on Matthew 11 and verses 28 through 30. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." We all need to know when to rest.

Ashley: Amen to knowing when to rest, Tracie. That is something I had to learn the hard way. When I was living at Welcome House, I

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loved living with the refugees and the asylum seekers, the conversations we had and the meals that we shared. It filled my Enneagram two heart and my extroverted heart. I loved being with people, but after a year of living at the house, I knew I needed a break. My body was telling me that I needed a break. And sadly, after five years in this work, I've seen other people who have burned out from trying to go all in and help. Sometimes they want to help immigrants past the point where the immigrant is ready to be helped.

And I think we have to realize that these are reciprocal relationships when we do want to volunteer and we want to make a difference and get involved. We have to realize that people aren't our projects, that they are full humans, they have rights and autonomy to make their own decisions. And that means that sometimes we let them make choices that we might not agree with. It's like for anyone that we love. We love them and we let them make their own choices. We recognize that they have the right to make their own choice. And so I think it comes back to recognizing, again, that everyone is human. We're all full, complicated human beings created by God, not just caricatures of a human.

And I think what part of sustains me in this work is seeing immigrants find their footing in their new country, when they find friends in the community, they make connections, they have relationships, they build relationships. And for some people, they find themselves for the first time or they find themselves again after a history of trauma, like you talked about. And for me, it's all part of passing on the help and care that I received when I was overseas as a foreigner. All the people who helped me find an

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apartment or offered a place to stay, for the ones who went to the doctor with me to interpret, or who made sure I got to the right government office on the right day with the right paperwork. There was so much paperwork sometimes and I didn't understand. So all those people helped me just do life and their help and support made my life abroad so much kinder and so much more full. And it would have been really different and more difficult without them. So my hope for myself and for others is to be that support for newcomers in the US as well. That's what gives me hope and the desire and the will to keep moving forward.

Tracie: Amazing. So we want to talk about some conversation tips to make sure that you feel comfortable sharing your personal experiences or insights about immigration in everyday conversations that you might have with friends, family, or other community members. I would say number one, start with a story, not a lecture. If you have your own immigrant story, you or your family, learn how to share that. People who know you and love you may not even realize what you've been through and there is real power in real testimony. Even if you aren't an immigrant, if you've traveled abroad, you know what it's like to feel lost or uncertain. You can talk about these feelings when others start to talk about immigrants as something other than human. People connect with personal narratives much more than statistics or legal jargon. So talking about something like, "I met a young woman who came here thinking she would work in hotels, but instead, she was trapped in her job and she couldn't leave. Seeing her finally get her green card, that was transformative in her life." You keep it concise. You keep it to one or two key details, and you've illustrated your point and you move on.

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Ashley: That's right. And we've talked about connecting things to our shared values before. So that's another conversation tip that we would suggest. You can relate your story to values that everyone understands: fairness, safety, family, and hope. An example of that might be, "It reminded me how important it is for everyone to feel safe and have the chance to provide for their families." You can also be mindful of your audience. It's always key to know who you're talking to and what they might focus on. So tailor your language to their familiarity with immigration issues. Maybe you want to share this podcast to introduce some of those keywords or topics, but if they don't know it, avoid the technical terms unless it's really needed. You can use empathy as a bridge and say, "I can't imagine what it would be like to be separated from your child or work under constant fear. But these stories made me realize how hard it is for many people to just live safely."

You can also invite reflection or action. Encourage dialogue rather than a one-sided lecture. We've talked before that no one wants to be lectured, no one wants to be corrected. It's just true. So instead of trying to come at someone and say, "This is what's right. This is what's true. You should believe it," with finger pointing too, maybe have questions like, "Have you ever thought about how hard it is for someone to navigate our immigration system?" or, "What do you think we could do in our community to help?" That puts the question on them and allows them to think of an answer or gives them the power to think through this question themselves. And then they can engage and reflect, and not just absorb information that you're throwing at them. Also, finally, you can share your small wins. We've shared some today. Highlight moments of hope and progress because it makes the conversation uplifting rather than only heavy. An example could be, "The young woman I worked

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with is now a US citizen and she's finally able to live without fear." And moments like that remind me why this work matters. Those are the stories that Tracie and I have shared today. We have hard stories to share, but we also have the uplifting ones that encourage us and keep us going. So think about the ways those encouraging stories might also help someone else think more positively about immigration.

Tracie: Absolutely. And just a quick side note on that. For our law firm every month, we publish our successes. We say this month we won six green cards, five new US citizens were sworn in, or we had three asylum cases granted because it's so easy, especially these days, to get bogged down in the negative. So those wins are huge. We want other people to see themselves in those successes.

And so for a small action to think about this week, we want to encourage you to reflect on your own experiences with immigration or your interactions with immigrants. And maybe share one insider story with someone in your community. So for example, you can think about writing down a moment where you saw immigration impact a life, your own or someone else's, and then share that story with a particular friend, neighbor, or church group. Small stories like this create connection and understanding.

Ashley: That's right. And if you'd like to take another kind of action step that's different from what we've suggested so far, earlier in this episode, we mentioned our Afghan allies who were evacuated in 2021 and how many of them, not unless you're Tracie's client. Tracie's clients all have asylum or US citizenship now or at least a green card. But many of the Afghans who were evacuated in 2021 still are here without permanent legal status. They're relying on

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that humanitarian parole, which is a temporary two-year period. And obviously, more than two years have passed since 2021. So many of them have had re-parole, but that's still not permanent and it's not guaranteed that it's going to be re-paroled again. So they're stuck in this limbo of not having permanent status. But there's also thousands of Afghans who helped our troops who are also still stuck overseas and don't have a way to get to the US. They don't have support and they're waiting for us to fulfill the promises that we made to them. "If you help us, we'll make sure you get to safety."

So one action that you can take today is to ask Congress to pass the Afghan Adjustment Act, which is legislation that would support and protect those Afghans by providing a path to permanent legal status. And I mentioned We Choose Welcome. We Choose Welcome has a really simple tool. We'll link it in the show notes that you can use where the email is already written and the phone script is ready for you to use. Don't give up on this. I promise. It's not as difficult as you're making it out to be in your mind. The first time I did this, I filled out my name, I put in my address, and it sent the email directly to my senators and my representative. And then it automatically connected me to the phone where I called each of them in turn, and my voice was shaking a little bit, and maybe I was a little bit nervous, but there was a script and I just read the script and that was it. And that's a good way that you can let your Congress people know that you care about this and that you want to see change on this issue. So give it a try. It's going to be a really great step for you to take and something that you can do in a tangible way to help.

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Tracie: Absolutely. I've already signed my name to it, Ashley. So thank you for pointing that out for the rest of us.

We want to leave you with this thought. Immigration isn't just a policy issue or a story in the news. As you've seen, it touches all of our lives in big ways and small. Behind every application, every visa, every case, there are real people with real hopes, fears, and dreams. The simplest way we can make a difference is by stopping, listening, and showing compassion. Sometimes it's as simple as hearing someone's story without judgment, offering a helping hand or treating them with the dignity that they deserve. Again, these small acts ripple outwards, creating hope and change that we may never ever fully see.

So as you go about your week, remember, every person has a story, every life has meaning, and each of us has the power to respond with kindness, empathy, and understanding. That's how we make the world a little bit more just and a little bit more human.

Ashley: That's right. So if this episode resonated with you, we encourage you to share it with someone who may be struggling to reconcile their faith with their views on immigration. Thank you for listening to Hope in Action, navigating immigration with faith and care. See you next time.