

July 11, 2021

6. Immigrants as Neighbors, Friends, and Family — **Ruth 2:4-16; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 19:16-22**

I have friends who are immigrants. Their stories embody the difficulties of being “aliens” (a dehumanizing title) in a nation confused and conflicted about immigration. Politicians have won and lost elections over the issue. Our local McDonald’s morning coffee-table conversation turns red and blue, with each color certain of being right. Friendships, families, and churches fracture over this issue.

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:18). “Love your neighbor.” There it is again, as noted in last week’s study. (Loving your neighbor occurs at least nine times in Scripture.) If I had three hands, I would hold Leviticus 19:18 in one hand, Boaz’s treatment of Ruth in the second, and US border policy in the third—comparing them.

Comparison is complicated, though, because my neighbors look like me: same complexion, same location on the social ladder, similar economic status. In addition, we mere humans practice—without awareness—confirmation bias (finding what one looks for), which is a problem because none of us is as objective as we think. An attending issue: I measure myself with biased standards, others by precise metrics. To summarize: my view of the world is skewed toward loving neighbors that share my traits and beliefs, again without awareness.

If I were teaching . . .

What if Christians simply took this Leviticus text and Jesus’ teaching at face value? Love your neighbor. That’s all. Just do it. No matter our neighbor’s national origins, his skin complexion, her accent. How does loving God and following Jesus inform loving neighbors, no matter who they are? Jesus seemed to define *neighbor* as anyone who had need. How does this idea reshape and alter the call to love our neighbors?

Two concluding quotes from Karl McKinney: “Foreigners were protected in ancient Israel.” “Foreigners have a place in Israel” (*Salt & Light Leader*, p. 35). What is the status of immigrants in the Christian church? What is the status of immigrants in Mennonite Church USA and Mennonite Church Canada?

In conversation with immigrant friends, I hear undertones of a quote (mistakenly attributed to Mahatma Gandhi but still a thought provoker): “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” That oxymoron should be erased by the grace of Jesus.

—Ruben Chupp
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Ruben Chupp of Nappanee, Indiana, is a spiritual director, chaplain, and retired pastor. His personal goals: “love God and the person in front of me at any given time; read some, write some, think some, pray some, and take a nap every day; love my wife, Idella, my children, and their children with all the grace I possess; and finally, get home before dark.”

Resources for this session

URLS in the Leader guide

- “Ancient Israel: Slavery, Servanthood, and Social Welfare,”
<https://bereanarchive.org/articles/history/ancient-israel-slavery-servanthood-and-social-welfare>
- “Homeless Female Holding Up Sign,”
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Homeless_female_holding_up_sign,_Los_Angeles_California_2012.jpg

Salt & Light Videos

Jaye Lindo is the presenter for unit 2, Neighbors. These teaching videos are great for leader preparation or introducing each session. They are available on [MennoMedia's YouTube channel](#). Jaye is the pastor of 7 Ways Home Fellowship, Bowie, Maryland.

Additional commentary for this session is available at:
<https://www.mennomedia.org/salt-light-supplements/>