

Listen to the Children

Conversations
with Immigrant
Families

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

For use with *Listen to the Children: Conversations with Immigrant Families* by Elizabeth Conde-Frazier (Judson Press, 2011). www.judsonpress.com / 800-4-JUDSON

Introduction: Children in Immigrant Families

Scripture Meditation

Read Psalms 12–13. Imagine the psalmist as an immigrant longing for safety and stability in a new land. What needs does the writer identify? What answers does the seeker ask for?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What new information or insights did you learn about immigrants from this chapter? How did it confirm or contradict your previous assumptions? What surprised you and why? What did you *feel* in response to the information and why?
2. Take a few minutes to recall an immigrant story—whether it is your own experience, that of a family member, friend, or coworker, or a story you heard from the news media or even a fictional account from book, movie, or television. What do you know about the immigrant and his/her/your reasons for emigrating? What challenges did the experience entail? What does this story reveal about the human face of immigration?
3. How has faith played a role in your family dynamics—both as a child yourself and now as an adult child or parent? Conversely, what role has family played in your faith development? Considering your own experiences alongside Scriptures such as Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and Proverbs 6:20-23 and 22:6, how might the immigrant experience affect a family of faith?

Action Steps

- **Learn more** ... (1) Research the immigrant demographics in your own community or state. Who are the immigrants in your area? Where have they come from—geographically and personally? (2) Next, research their countries of origin to learn more about the religious, political, and economic circumstances they left behind.
- **Do more** ... (1) Reach out to a neighbor or church member who is a recent immigrant (first or second generation). Invite that person to share his or her story with your group. (2) Sponsor a Bible study that explores the biblical book of Ruth as a story of an ancient immigrant experience.

Chapter 1: Deciding to Leave—and Telling the Children

Scripture Meditation

Read Numbers 6:24-26. Imagine you are being left behind by a partner or parent who is emigrating. How do you hear these words of priestly blessing? If you were the person leaving, how would it feel to speak such words (or hear them spoken over you)?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What new information or insights did you learn about immigrants from this chapter? How did it confirm or contradict your previous assumptions? What surprised you and why? What did you *feel* in response to the information and why?
2. Take a few minutes to recall a time when you faced a difficult separation from your family or loved ones. What were the circumstances of the separation—voluntary or forced, temporary or permanent, painful or poignant? Were you the one leaving or the one being left behind? What do you remember about the transition? How did the adults involved communicate with the children and involve them (if at all) in the process? What were the obstacles? What were the blessings? In connecting that experience with the separation stories in chapter 1, with whom do you most identify and why?
3. When has the story of faith (your own or someone else's) provided a significant anchor in your life experience? What stories (biblical, historic, or personal) have been most vital to your endurance as a human being and as a person of faith? What about such stories offers us hope or strength or resolve to persevere and survive? Consider Psalm 78 as an example of how a key biblical story (the Exodus) became a lifeline to the people of Israel (as well as to African Americans and others) throughout their history. What elements of that story are meaningful to you and why?

Action Steps

- **Learn more** ... (1) Research the effects of secrets in the life and development of children. (2) Study Jesus' use of stories in his teaching ministry—the value and meaning of the parables in the Gospels.
- **Do more** ... (1) Especially if the season is appropriate, host a *Santa Clause* movie marathon (original and second films only) and use the character of Santa Claus's son to discuss the impact of family secrets on children, especially as they affect immigrant families. (2) Sponsor a Bible study about the biblical book of Esther as an example of secrecy in Scripture—as the secret of Esther's identity as a Hebrew first protected her and then endangered her people.

Chapter 2: Reuniting with Children in a New Land

Scripture Meditation

Read Song of Songs 8:5a, 6-7a. Imagine yourself an immigrant, long separated from your family and now facing reunion. How do you hear these words? What emotions do they evoke? (Consider also reading Jeremiah 29:11-14 or other “gather from exile” passages.)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What new information or insights did you learn about immigrants from this chapter? How did it confirm or contradict your previous assumptions? What surprised you and why? What did you *feel* in response to the information and why?
2. Take a few minutes to recall a time when you faced a reunion with a family member or friend after a long separation. What was the original nature of your relationship? What communication or intimacy were you able to sustain over time or distance, if any? What were the circumstances of the reunion—planned or unexpected, anticipated or dreaded, public or private? If planned, what emotions did you feel leading up to the reunion? How would you describe the initial encounter? What was difficult about it—and what was surprising? Why?
3. How has your faith eased you through periods of loss and grief—and recovery? How might grace play a powerful role in easing the transitions that are integral to and inevitable with reunification? What about forgiveness? How might the church play a role in equipping immigrant families for the work of grief and restoration that come with even long-anticipated reunifications?

Action Steps

- **Learn more** ... (1) Arrange to talk with the local school principal, school counselor, or community center director about the challenges facing immigrant families in your community—and ask about how a local church might help out.
- **Do more** ... (1) Plan a fellowship activity and be sure to invite immigrant families in your church and neighborhood. Consider a theme of “What I Did Last Summer” (or last Christmas or last birthday) as a way to invite participants to share stories and get to know one another again. (2) Sponsor a Bible study about the biblical story of Joseph’s reunion with his brothers and father in Genesis 42–46. Consider their emotions of anger, grief, joy, guilt, anxiety, shock, and fear.

Chapter 3: Making Adjustments to a New Life

Scripture Meditation

First read Numbers 13:25-30. Then read Deuteronomy 31:1-6, which establishes the context of crossing over into a land that was long promised but little known. Reread Deuteronomy 31:6 and Numbers 13:26 and hear the words as an immigrant today. What about the US might be seen as milk and honey—and what are the giants in the land?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What new information or insights did you learn about immigrants from this chapter? How did it confirm or contradict your previous assumptions? What surprised you and why? What did you *feel* in response to the information and why?
2. Recall a time in your life when you experienced a significant transition in living situation (e.g., new marriage, home, city, job, school). What was stressful about the transition? What resources (emotional, relational, physical, financial, material, etc.) made the transition feasible or easier? Why?
3. What role has the church had in supporting your own family through critical life transitions? How do Scriptures concerning care for the stranger (see Exodus 22:21-23; 23:9; Leviticus 19:33-34; Romans 12:9-18; Hebrews 13:1-3) and being the Body of Christ (see Romans 12:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26) speak to a call for God's people to offer ministries of spiritual and practical support to immigrant families?

Action Steps

- **Learn more** ... (1) Research organizations and groups in your area that offer support services. (2) Begin to learn the language of immigrant families in your church or community.
- **Do more** ... (1) Compile local/regional answers to the questions listed on page 25. (2) Brainstorm new ministries or identify existing ones that can address the needs identified in the list on page 25 and throughout chapter 3.

Chapter 4: Education and the Next Generation

Scripture Meditation

Read Deuteronomy 6:5-7 again. Hear this Scripture through the ears of an immigrant parent. What would you teach your children—about faith, about life in a new land, about God’s presence in that life and in that land?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What new information or insights did you learn about immigrants from this chapter? How did it confirm or contradict your previous assumptions? What surprised you and why? What did you *feel* in response to the information and why?
2. Recall your first day at a new school. What grade were you in? How old were you? Did you make the transition with a larger class or alone, mid-year or at the start of a new school year? How did you feel when facing and undertaking the transition? What were the challenges you faced (social, academic, environmental)? What factors were key to a successful (or unsuccessful) transition for you? What degree of culture shock did you experience? How does your experience compare with that of a child of immigrant parents?
3. Compare Ismael’s story in chapter 4 with the biblical story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Goliath is the epitome of a bully, and we traditionally view David as a hero for standing up to him. How do you expect children today (your own or others’) to deal with bullies at school or in the community? How would you respond to Ismael—as his principal, teacher, or parent? What other biblical stories or principles (if *not* David’s response to Goliath) might you offer to children facing violence in their schools or neighborhoods?

Action Steps

- **Learn more** ... (1) Find out what kind of program(s) your local school district offers for children new to US culture and language. (2) Research issues related to violence and peacemaking or mediation in local schools.
- **Do more** ... (1) Develop a partnership with a local elementary, middle, or high school for tutoring, mentoring, ESL, and other support services. (2) Host a peacemaking or conflict transformation workshop for local parents and teachers, and be sure to include a youth/child component. If at all possible, provide a translator for the event.

Chapter 5: The Family's Legal Status and How It Affects Children

Scripture Meditation

Read Isaiah 11:6-12 and/or Zechariah 7:8–8:8. Try to hear these promises of a secure future and restored homeland through the ears of an immigrant today.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What new information or insights did you learn about immigrants from this chapter? How did it confirm or contradict your previous assumptions? What surprised you and why? What did you *feel* in response to the information and why?
2. Recall a time in your life when you experienced precarious or uncertain status (e.g., awaiting a test score, applying for college, interviewing for a job, awaiting the ruling of a judge or jury, expecting medical test results). What were the power dynamics involved? How much control did you have in the situation and its outcome? What was a stake? Were you forced to keep quiet about the uncertainty? Why and to what effect? Describe how you felt and compare your experience with the often prolonged uncertainty of immigrant families (both documented and not).
3. Consider the role of faith, hope, and vision in a life of uncertainty—and how they are all the more critical for children who often feel powerless. What Scriptures speak comfort, assurance, and hope to you? What might be the role of the church in providing immigrants of uncertain status with voice, stability, safety, and hope?

Actions Steps

- **Learn more** ... (1) Research current immigration laws in your state. (2) Visit www.esperanza.us and start learning about the possibilities for immigration reform.
- **Do more** ... (1) Contact your state senators and congressional representatives to ask questions or express support for reform at the state and national levels. (2) Develop relationships with local immigrant families and work with them to cultivate increased stability and certainty in their status.

Chapter 6: The Role of Religion and Faith Communities

Scripture Meditation

Read Mark 10:13-16. How might a child of immigrant parents (or the parents themselves) hear this story? What does it say to us as a community of faith in relation to immigrant children?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What new information or insights did you learn about immigrants from this chapter? How did it confirm or contradict your previous assumptions? What surprised you and why? What did you *feel* in response to the information and why?
2. Take a moment to recall an example of a child's spirituality, whether from your own childhood, your own children's, or someone else's child. What do you remember about how that child saw God—or how the child perceived God's people and God's world? What do children see that adults often miss? What gifts of faith do we have to offer children and youth, especially the sons and daughters of immigrant families?
3. Consider Almanida's story and the connections she makes between the Bible story about Samson and her own family's story (pp. 52-54). How does her interpretive experience compare with Israel's reliance on the Exodus story throughout their ancient and modern history? What other Bible stories might speak hope and life for children of immigrant parents? Why? What faith stories (both biblical and personal) sustain you?

Action Steps

- **Learn more** ... (1) Research the importance of spirituality in childhood development (see source cited in footnote 1). (2) Find out which faith-based organizations in your community offer programs for children, and explore partnerships with them.
- **Do more** ... (1) Work with your church's Christian education department to assess your children's programs. Ensure that the programs allow time and space for kids to be kids. (2) Talk with your pastor and worship leaders about creating opportunities to give children voice in the church service—through prayers, Q & As, songs, etc.

Chapter 7: Children and Raids

Scripture Meditation

Read Matthew 18:1-6. Imagine being among the disciples that day, and imagine that the child Jesus calls to him is the daughter or son of an immigrant parent—what the Bible often refers to as a *stranger* or an *alien*. How does that image change how you hear this Scripture? Why?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What new information or insights did you learn about immigrants from this chapter? How did it confirm or contradict your previous assumptions? What surprised you and why? What did you *feel* in response to the information and why?
2. Take a few minutes to recall a time when you or someone you loved was lost—when you had no answers for where that person was, if he or she were OK, if you would ever see each other again. How serious was the situation? How long did the uncertainty last (minutes, hours, days, months, years)? How did you feel during that interval? What did you fear most in the moments of not knowing? What did you do in response? If a child was involved, how did that affect the situation and your reactions and why? Compare your experience with the story of the Castillos in this chapter.
3. What do you believe to be the role of God's people in relation to the legal and human issues described in this chapter? What are the theological issues related to the political and pragmatic realities? Discuss the options for action identified by the author for communities of faith—from meeting basic material and financial needs, to providing sanctuary and advocacy (pp. ____). Which ministries would your congregation or group feel most comfortable with providing for immigrant families? What level of involvement (if any) would seem too risky or inappropriate? Why?

Action Steps

- **Learn more** ... (1) Identify nongovernment service providers in your area that are willing to partner with churches after a raid. (2) Visit www.newsanctuarymovement.org to find out how to become a sanctuary church.
- **Do more** ... (1) Partner with one or more of the service providers (including local schools) identified above to provide for community members affected by immigration raids. (2) Organize legal and social service volunteers in the congregation and community to be advocates for detainees and their families.

Conclusion: Understanding “Status” Differently

Scripture Meditation

Read Leviticus 19:19-37, especially verses 33-34. Imagine the prophet of God proclaiming this Word from your church pulpit this week. Envision your neighborhood, town, or region transformed by God’s people taking this Scripture seriously. How do you hear the words in your context?

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What new information or insights did you learn about immigrants from this chapter? How did it confirm or contradict your previous assumptions? What surprised you and why? What did you *feel* in response to the information and why?
2. Take a moment to recall and even retell some of the immigrant stories you’ve heard over the course of this study—those in the book and those shared by participants. How do you hear those stories now as you conclude this study? What connections have you made between your life and the immigrant experience? What have you learned (or relearned) about issues of status and identity—your own and those of immigrant families in your community?
3. Reflect on some of the biblical texts about justice in the Prophets (e.g., Isaiah 1:16-20; 56:1-8; Jeremiah 22:1-5; Ezekiel 18:1-9; Amos 5:4-15, 21-24; Micah 6:6-8). Weigh the differences between biblical justice and the US justice system. In what ways is the word *justice* defined differently in Scripture as opposed to a courtroom or Congress? In what ways are they the same? If you were writing immigration reform legislation, how would you take both concepts of justice into consideration?

Action Steps

- **Learn more** ... (1) Explore more deeply what the Bible says about justice and what it teaches about the “alien” or “stranger.” (2) Research the US history of immigration law—the origins and trends over time.
- **Do more** ... (1) Recruit volunteers and start a letter-writing and phone-call campaign to local and national legislators. (2) Draft your own individual or congregational statement about human status, identity, and worthiness, and the implications for justice in immigration law.

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