

EQUIPPED: Tough Questions

Chapter 5

What About Immigration, Patriotism, and Racism?

Everything we owned bulged wide nine suitcase, two carry-ons, and a ten pound purse brimming over the top. Our missionary hearts pounded with anticipation. A new land. A new language. A whole new world.

Because we were from the United States, we weren't required to have a visa. A passport was sufficient but we couldn't enter the country without evidence that we had a departure ticket in hand.

Their law also required that we leave the country every 90 days and remain out of the country for 72 hours before re-entering.

There, you could apply for different types of residency based on your purpose for staying in their country for a specific length of time. You could apply for temporary residency, permanent residency, or a permit for a temporary visit.

We considered pursuing dual citizenship. It quickly became our home away from home and it would make things much easier. But after two attempts and some crazy unfortunate timing, we decided we would just take a little 3 day trip out of the country every 90 days in order to obey the laws of their land.

For permanent residency, they demanded loads of documentation, references, police reports, and background checks. Temporary residency was much different.

We respected their rules and requirements. Because it was their land and their laws. And we were expected to obey their laws just as we were expected to obey the laws of the United States.

We also learned that they had different requirements and restrictions for different people from different countries. Some were able to come in. Some not. Some were able to stay 30, 60, or 90 days. Some less. But the choice was that of the Costa Rican government.

The Costa Rican people embody a beautiful array of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds who are proud of their country and protective of their freedoms.

Woven into the fabric of every country is a national identity that makes them unique. Immigration, patriotism, and racism are all intertwined into the framework of every nation and every people group.

Voices touting loud ideas and opinions about immigration, patriotism, and racism. Opposing views and experiences bellowing to be heard and embraced.

This lesson isn't about choosing sides. This study doesn't exist to defend positions or debate dogma. Emotions run deep and conceptions conceived in passionate hearts tend to define positions on touchy topics like these.

This study gives us an opportunity to step back from what we've heard, thought, felt, or even experienced, and dig deep and hard to unearth what the Bible really says about immigration, patriotism, and racism.

IMMIGRATION

Boundaries and laws have existed since the Garden of Eden. [Genesis 3:23-34](#) introduces us to the first deportation. Adam and Eve had broken God's law and one of the results was their eviction from Eden.

Read [Genesis 4:16-17](#)

Where did Cain dwell? _____

Where was it located? _____

What is the name of the city that he built? _____

Just four chapters into the first book of the Bible and we see *lands* where people live and *cities* being built.

In Genesis 6, the wickedness of man reaches heights that breach the Lord's heart and we read, "And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart." ([Genesis 6:6](#))

The Lord sends the Flood. Spares Noah and his family. And in Genesis 10 we find the birth of the nations that came through Noah.

In fact, as we are laying the national foundation founded in Scripture, take a minute and read Genesis 10:5, 10-12, 19, 32. Then list below the lands and nations that are conceived from the conception of Noah's children.

For an even closer look at the diversity of people groups, scan through Noah's descendants represented throughout Genesis 10.

Surprised at how soon nations arrived on the scene of Scripture? From the beginning of time as we know it, lands, cities, nations, cultures, and people groups have been a God-ordained beautifully complicated reality.

And then there was the Tower of Babel where differences were Divinely ordained and national roots spread far and wide spanning the globe as Chapter 11 of Genesis eclipsed from new nations fixed firm around the world to our introduction to Abram, the Father of the Faith.

Read Genesis 11:26-31 and list the various locations where Terah's family moved.

Read Daniel 2:21, Acts 17:26, Deuteronomy 32:8. Explain God's role in establishing rulers, governments, and boundaries.

I wanted to lay a foundation for our study to examine where countries and cultures came from.

Long before Abram, the Father of the Faith, took his first breath - and prior to the presence of Israel as a nation - and before the Promise Land was ever promised, God ordained, established, and sovereignly acknowledged the diversity, sovereignty and autonomy of nations.

Both Old and New Testaments brim with migration and immigration. At times, cultural diversity was explored and embraced. Other times, ethnic tensions ran high, wielded wars, fueled hate.

It's one of the most intensely debated issues of our day. Christians and non-Christians alike use specific Scriptures to validate their stances.

Most of us have passionate perspectives about this hot button topic. *But do our beliefs stem from a rightly-divided, contextual view of Scripture?*

So, what is the biblical evidence for how to handle immigration as a nation and as Christians? What did it look like in Scripture? And how does the biblical pattern affect how we should deal with it in *the land of the free and the home of the brave*?

Let's look at one of the first detailed accounts narrated in Scripture.

Read **Genesis 12:11-20**.

What was Abraham worried about? _____

List those who saw Sarai and how she ended up in Pharaoh's house. _____

Explain why they were deported from Egypt. _____

Who deported them? _____

Tucked into this packed passage of Scripture are parallels to our modern day immigration and refugee dilemma. Other than Adam and Eve being exiled from the Garden of Eden, this is the first immigration and deportation demonstrated in the Word of God.

The famine in the land promptly prompted Abram and his family to flee to Egypt for food. Entering as a foreigner subjected Abram and his family to Egypt's customs, culture, and laws. As a sovereign nation governed by their own ordinances, Pharaoh and the leaders of the land had the authority to decide who could stay and who must go.

Abram and his family were given permission to stay until it was discovered that Abram violated Egyptian law and defied Pharaoh's authority. **They were then deported from Egypt and given a swift kick to that country's curb.**

Look at Numbers 20:14-21 and describe Moses' actions regarding Edom's immigration policies.

What about the verses that tell us to care for the stranger and those in need? What about Jesus' call for us to feed the hungry and clothe the poor?

Read Exodus 22:21, Leviticus 19:33-34, Matthew 25:35 and explain what these verses call us to do for a stranger.

NOTE: *None of the verses above deal with the legal process instated by a government to permit strangers (foreigners) into its land. The verses are actually speaking to those who currently dwell legally in the country as a foreigner or stranger.*

Read the immigration account in Genesis 47:3-6. Joseph was second in command in Egypt, yet, he still felt compelled to seek permission for his family to stay as sojourners in the land.

A LOOK AT THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Throughout Scripture, several words are used that are translated into the words sojourn(er), foreigner, and stranger. The verb most often used is the Hebrew word *guwr*. It refers to someone who has sought hospitality with a foreign land to obtain permission to live (dwell, inhabit) the land. Often for a long period of time. Sometimes for a short stay.

To use our modern day terminology, they were carefully *vett*ed and expected to live by the laws of their new land. They requested and obtained *legal entry* and *status* and were given consent to continue to live there as long as they agreed to adhere to the laws and culture of the land.

What does Romans 13:1-7 tell us about governments and our response to them?

Scripture clearly calls God's people to embrace strangers and aliens who are in the country legally. We are to care for them as we would care for citizens of our nation.

But Scripture also indicates those *seeking hospitality* are, in essence, looking to gain legal entry into a nation in accordance with that country's requirements. They also agree to peacefully comply with the laws of the land. If sojourners (foreigners, immigrants) entered illegally, they are breaking the law and were in jeopardy of being deported.

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Practically speaking, we are all immigrants. When the United States was founded, there were no boundaries, borders, citizens, or laws established to restrict who could come and go.

The Constitution was enacted in 1787 and included a uniform rule of Naturalization. After a couple of changes to the rule of Naturalization and the ultimate repeal of it in 1802, The 14th Amendment to the Constitution was passed in 1802, as well, and it gave citizenship to all who were born in the United States.

Throughout the years, there have been a number of changes to our immigration laws and policies. Today, the United States is facing an immigration crisis. Refugees are fleeing war-torn countries. Families are desperate to escape the terror-ridden territories.

Simultaneously, there is an unprecedented hatred for our country from those who wish to destroy as well as from those who enjoy its freedoms. **Our government's responsibility is to protect all we hold dear-including each dearly loved dear one in our families.**

It's all so very complicated. The lack of enforcement of the immigration laws have blurred the lines and caused confusion and frustration. These are real families with real needs and real dreams who knowingly entered in illegally - and now the question is...what about them?

What about the children who were born in the U.S. to parents who came into this country illegally? What about those who are fleeing persecution and danger? What about those who have been illegally working here for years? Those who now have roots in a country they never sought legal citizenship for?

This study is not about debating the immigration issue. We aren't going to solve the policy problems our country is facing today in this Bible study. We have, however, unpacked what

Scripture actually teaches us regarding immigration. Contextually. Precept-upon-precept. We now know God's Word on the subject.

And knowing what God says about our current cultural issues should filter the way we act and react to them in a way that loves deep, extends grace, and embraces all who enter in legally as citizens and friends.

PATRIOTISM

There are two things you never talk about. Religion and politics. Have you ever heard that? Yeah...me too!

And I believed it too. Didn't even register to vote until I was 26.

When you talk about patriotism in Christian circles, you're bound to get opposing viewpoints. To some, it's basically sinful to consider yourself a patriot. To others, it's sinful not to.

But what is patriotism and what does the Bible say about it?

Simply stated, *patriotism* is a love and/or devotion for your country.

Freedom bleeds deep red in the soil of the country we call the Land of the Free - the Home of the Brave. Blood stained liberty puffs proud, grateful hearts that beat hard to preserve hard-won privileges to *go*, and *do*, and *be*.

Earlier in this lesson we discovered what God's Word says about His role in ordaining nations, and people, and leaders. The same God who establishes national boundaries is the same God who places specific people in specific places for specific purposes.

It's the earthly piece of this planet we uniquely call home. Where family and friends gather. Where hopes and dreams swirl big and grand and distinct. Where memories and plans are made, and where the familiar holds our hearts together and we know that we belong.

Patriotism is just an expression of our fondness for the familiar, our appreciation of the price that was paid to make it ours, and even our willingness to protect the country that protects the blessings God has given us.

But our nations are our home for just a vapor's breath. And then we'll walk across the threshold into forever and find the heavenly patriotism we held dear and tight was for a real place. An eternal place. With our eternal God and our forever family.

Read **Hebrews 11:13-16** and describe what they called home.

Read **Nehemiah 1:1-4**.

In verse 2, what was Nehemiah's concern? _____

Describe the condition of the survivors. _____

Describe the condition of Jerusalem. _____

What was Nehemiah's response to what he had just heard and why? _____

Nehemiah stands strong and tall as an example of patriotism at its best. Nehemiah's patriotism was demonstrated by...

- A passionate love for the people he called *his* people
- A risky love of the country he called *home*
- A brokenness over his nation's brokenness
- A willingness to rebuild his country and its people up
- A willingness to work, gather, lead, and pray to restore righteousness in the land
- A willingness to risk his life to help his nation and its people
- A sincere longing to protect the people he loved and to whom he belonged

National patriotism and Heavenly patriotism are not conflicting concepts.

You can love the country you live in and still long for the *better country* you are destined for. You can have a big, huge, global heart and still have a special place in your heart for your people, your place, your home, your nation.

You won't find the word *patriotism* in the Word of God. But throughout Scripture, we are given glimpses of what this national affinity called *patriotism* looks like in the lives of people like David, Deborah, Gideon, Ruth, Daniel, Jeremiah, Benaiah, and so many more.

Each biblical example of patriotism imprints deep seeds of gratitude and grace, and holds hard to the One who had gifted them with people and places they could call theirs. Theirs are examples of love and devotion birthed in thankful and faith-filled hearts. Devoted to God above all. Overflowing into a protective, proud, and passionate love for others.

True patriotism looks like that.

But patriotism is not...

- Arrogance that one country, culture, or ethnicity is better than another
- A disregard for people in need in other countries
- An excuse to hate people who look or act differently
- A reason for prejudice or xenophobia

Go with me for a minute...

I love God. More than I love any person on this planet, I love God.

And I love my family. I love them so much more than I could possibly love any other person. They're *my* people. But I don't love them as much as I love God.

And I love my friends. But not as much as I love my family, and definitely not as much as I love God.

And I love my neighbors. But not like I love my closest friends... and definitely not like I love my family or anywhere near as much as love God.

And I love my country. But not in the same way I love my neighbors... and not in the same way I love my friends... and, for sure, not in the same way I love my family. And it can't even compare to the way I love God.

And I love the world. But not like I love my country. Not like I love my neighbors. Not like I love my friends. Definitely not like I love my family. And not even close to the way I love God.

Even nationalism, when *not* taken to the extreme, is an acceptable form of patriotism.

Love for your country doesn't diminish your love for the world. It's just different.

Because love is like that. Different. Big. Deep. Wide.

God calls us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Our love for others flows from that love relationship with God.

Patriotism, when kept in perspective, is just an expression of the overflow of our love *for* and relationship *with* God - spreading to our community, our country, and to our world.

RACISM

My husband is one of the pastors at the church we call home. Probably one of the most beautiful, welcoming sights you see when you walk through the doors is the ethnic diversity. **Not just ethnic diversity, but diverse ethnic unity.** A oneness that embraces racial and cultural differences. A love that sees beyond the skin. A unity of spirit. A bond of the soul.

Racism is defined as discrimination. It's a mental exaltation of one race above others. Like a plague, it festers, spreads, wounds, and destroys.

Racism stems from a multitude of motives. It's taught. Caught. Experiential. Perceptual.

But not all that is called racism is actually racism. Cultural differences do not equal discrimination. Racism is unmistakably a matter of the heart and is embraced by people of all ethnic persuasions.

Unhinged hatred. Racism in every form is cruel. Callous. Calculating. Egotistical.

On display throughout the history of mankind, prejudices have existed among people who can't seem to embrace the truth that, while there are various races, ultimately, we are all part of one race. The human race.

But racism is nothing new. People and nations have been decidedly divided since the whole Tower of Babel thing. Prejudices perpetuate when one person esteems himself better than someone else based on color or culture.

Even in the early years of the church in the United States, racism was regrettably real. African Americans and those of other ethnic origins were prohibited from worshipping with whites. The church began to change but the doors only inched open at first. Back pews reserved for minorities roared with the reality that racism was still very real.

Finally, wrongs were made right, and God’s multicolor creation began to worship as it should. As one.

Times have changed. And the church has come a long way from it’s early American roots. But racism still exists. Relentless in our world and in our churches. In some places it may be a bit more covert, but it pokes its ugly head out of the corners of our communities and churches in oh-so-many subtle ways.

Racism, whether in our countries, communities or churches, may be a reality - but it’s an affront to the all-inclusive work of Christ on the cross and it’s a canker and a curse to every nation.

And by the way, we are all a multiracial mix of a variety of races. Don’t believe me? Send in your DNA and see what your ancestry is. Thoroughbred blood is only for horses - not humans.

Read Genesis 1:27, Psalm 139:13-14, Ephesians 2:10.

- In whose image are we all made of? _____
- Who is excluded from being made in the image of God? _____
- Who is fearfully and wonderfully made? _____
- Who is God’s workmanship? _____
- What were we all recreated in Christ Jesus to do? _____
- Is anyone exempt because of race? _____

Read Romans 2:11, Acts 10:34 and explain what these verses say in your own words.

How do Galatians 3:28 and Ephesians 2:14 echo the truth found in the above verses and how do these verses picture all who come to Christ?

Read John 13:34-35, Ephesians 4:32, and James 2:8 and describe how the Lord expects His people to treat one another.

What does James 3:9-10 tell us about the way we should speak about other people.

Not one pigment in not one person’s skin is a mistake. Perfectly placed. Wonderfully woven. Ethnicity and all.

And He calls us to love one another without partiality. When Jesus went to the cross, He died for the whole wide multi-colored world. For all nations. For all people. His death opens wide the door for every person of every color of every country and of every culture to be forgiven, saved, and redeemed when they place their faith and trust in Him.

Jesus broke down the wall of separation that existed between races prior to the cross. **Jesus united what the sinful heart of man divided.** The way was open for Jew and Gentile to enter into a covenant relationship with God no matter what their race. And so it is that we, as believers, are all ONE body.

Racism in the church is an oxymoron. Christianity careens contrary to racism.

As we look at the sad reality of it in this world and in the church, let’s keep some things in mind that we can do to prevent racism from being a reality in our own local body of believers...

1. We’ve got to stop confusing cultural differences for racism.

When we lived on the mission field we learned that sometimes people flock together because of cultural similarities. Shared experience stitch lives together tightly.

Differences aren’t always racial. Sometimes, they’re simply cultural. As Christians, we are to ‘believe all things’ about each other according to 1 Corinthians 13.

That means, believe the best about each other. We can’t assume that because a church is primarily African American, white, Asian or any other ‘color’ that it is racist. An all

African American church does not necessarily mean they are racist against whites just as much as an all-white church doesn't necessarily mean they are racist against African Americans.

When it comes to culture... birds of a feather flock together... and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that. In fact, it's a beautiful thing. It becomes racist when one race intentionally restricts, avoids, or demeans other races from worshiping in the oneness that Jesus died for us to enjoy.

2. We can't excuse racism in the name of cultural differences.

People are different. Time, experience and cultures imprint perceptions and influence values, beliefs, and behaviors. And the differences are often a beautiful thing.

But when we put up walls between the races and consider one superior to another, we become guilty of racism.

Jesus died to take those walls down... to make us ONE people. To make us HIS children. To be in HIS forever family. No schism. Just a love that demonstrates a oneness. The kind of oneness Jesus prayed for in John 17:22, *"that they may be one even as we are one."*

Racism is the antithesis of unity. Oneness is impossible where prejudice exists. So, while we accept that people may choose to worship together because of culture, cultural differences cannot be an excuse to segregate ourselves. That's called racism.

3. It's important to be sensitive to and respectful of other races.

Love and respect. Reflections of redeemed and yielded hearts. These are the ties that bind instead of break. Resolute to hold each other tight and embrace our differences instead of fighting because of them.

4. Honor God in the way you act and react to real (or perceived) racial issues.

There is no excuse for racial inequality or violence against one another. God calls us to pursue peace, to love with the love of Jesus, to consider a matter before acting or reacting to it. And honor God in all that we do...regardless of racial, political, or cultural differences. Pursue justice, but do so by waiting until all the facts come out first. Then prayerfully and peacefully seek the best way to assure that justice is served and people are held accountable for violent or inappropriate behavior.

Look up the following verses and describe what our relationships with others is supposed to look like.

James 3:9-10

Matthew 7:12

Romans 12:10

Philippians 2:3

1 Peter 2:17

John 13:34-35

There's an intertwining of souls - and dreams - and fears -and insecurities woven in the hearts of our human experiences. We are one race in need of One Savior.

But I have to clear up a misconception. **While we are all part of the human race, we aren't all part of the family of God.** There's a Fatherhood of God/Brotherhood of man misunderstanding circling throughout Christian teaching that doesn't line up with Scripture.

A DOCTRINAL DETOUR:

While we're all part of one race... the human race, we are not all part of the same family.

The Bible teaches that there are two families on this planet. Those who have been born into the family of God and those who are in the family of the devil. Those who have been redeemed and reborn, and those who have not.

Because we are all born sinners, we are all born into sin. Separated from God. Spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1) In the family of the devil (John 8:43-44).

It takes a spiritual birth (John 1:12-13, John 3:3) to give life to our dead human spirits and birth us into the family of God (Ephesians 2:1-5). God also graciously made us doubly His by adopting us as His child (Ephesians 1:4-5).

We are absolutely part of this one big beautiful diverse human race. But to be part of God's family, we must be born again.

With all the teaching that is out there about our oneness, the teaching that we are all part of the human race is profoundly important. But teaching that we are all brothers and sisters in the same family is biblically and doctrinally inaccurate. The danger is that we can confuse loving others and embracing our differences with premise that loving everyone means embracing what they believe as true.

Each individual has the right and the responsibility to believe what they choose to believe. But giving each other grace to that inherent right does not equal accepting their beliefs as true and valid.

We need to remember that when it comes to cultural and racial harmony. There will be times when your biblical beliefs will create tension. Not because of race but because of creeds. You can still love the person without agreeing with their set of beliefs.

In fact, that's exactly what God's Word calls us to do.

A few ideas to help break down racial barriers.

- * Love *everyone* like Jesus does. Without partiality.
- * When you see someone of a different race come to your church, invite them to sit with you and/or invite them to lunch.
- * When someone in your church or community uses derogatory words or shows signs of racism, deal with it. Deal with it in love – but definitely deal with it. And show them the way of love. The way of Christ. The way of unity and oneness.
- * Invite friends from other cultures to your home, to your church - and visit churches where other cultures gather to worship Jesus. Cultural diversity is a beautiful thing and how we worship God is often very culturally driven. Enjoy and embrace our differences.
- * Remember, **there's no such thing as white Christianity or black Christianity or Asian Christianity or Indian Christianity.** Christ gives us a beautiful oneness that makes us uniquely part of His family...Christians...regardless of color or culture. Don't build walls Jesus died to eradicate.

As we close our study, I think it's important to put things in perspective. People are passionate about what they think and feel. About immigration. About patriotism. About racism.

Some deep down gut convictions about hot topics like these have the propensity to impede even the strongest Christian from *receiving* what God's Word says about these and other sensitive subjects.

But God is never wrong. He never has been. He never will be.

God's Word graces beautiful eternal worth and significance on every soul. It's truth that will remain truth forever. Unchangeable. Unalterable.

Our experience doesn't determine what is true, God's Word does. Knowing what Scripture says equips us to accurately articulate God's heart about the hot topics of our current culture.

Today, my prayer for you - and for me - and for this country - and for the world - is that we will love deep and wide and strong and hard.

The stakes are high and the battle is hard. But it's light that dispels the darkness. **The Jesus kind of light that shines bright and heals hurting hearts and effaces racial lines.** The broken-bread kind of light that rejects fear and reflects the Jesus-kind of humility and kindness that comes from those who are His.

Scripture may not line up with what we've learned, believed, and even embraced. It's not subject to our finite minds. But we are eternally subject to its eternal infallibility and **the goal is, not that Scripture line up with our beliefs and behavior, but that our beliefs and behavior line up with Scripture...even on the hard things.**

NOTES
