

Vacation Bible Summer Overview

When an immigrant resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress them. The immigrant who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the immigrant as yourself, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

~Leviticus 19:33-34, adapted

God's expectations for us regarding how we are to treat everyone we encounter is clear from Jesus' statement of the greatest commandments: to love our neighbors as ourselves. Jesus also made it clear that our neighbor includes people we do not like or feel comfortable around. Jesus pulled this from Leviticus 19:18. What is less well known is that only 16 verses later, God used a parallel construction: "You shall love the immigrant as yourself" (Leviticus 19:34) This is the basis for this unit's Lesson 1 (Love Immigrants). The reasoning given for this is based on empathy—the Israelites had been immigrants in Egypt and were oppressed. They should not do that to others.

In fact, immigration was a key factor in the grand story of our faith. Where would we be if Sarai and Abram had not followed God through the Promised Land (Lesson 2)? Their grandson (Jacob) and his family were forced to move to Egypt due to famine, and God led their descendants to that Promised Land as they escaped Egyptian enslavement (Lesson 3). Naomi and her family escaped famine by immigrating to Moab, and her daughter-in-law Ruth immigrated to Bethlehem with Naomi, allowing her to become part of King David's family tree (Lesson 4). Foreign empires forced the Israelites to immigrate to exile before they were able to return to their land. Even our Messiah became a refugee with his family when he was young as they fled the jealous wrath of King Herod (Lesson 5).

Throughout history, individuals, families, and whole groups of people have immigrated to find better and safer lives. God's call and command remain relevant: love the immigrant as yourself. In fact, Jesus teaches us in Matthew 25:35 that how we treat an immigrant (stranger) is how we treat our Lord himself. Love in action—service and justice—is how we live out our faith in response to God's unconditional love for us.

While this is a serious topic, we can have fun while learning together! And we can rejoice in the knowledge that wherever we go, God always travels with us. Thanks be to God!

As a note: Every two weeks, our Sunday School will be covering a different lesson, filled with a plethora of activities from science and crafts to games and music, capping off with a youth-led worship service, **August 30**. We hope your children will be able to find meaning and value in this Spirit-filled summer here at Parkway UCC!