

Beyond

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Faith

A Study Guide on Race and Faith

SESSION 2: REMEMBERING OUR MIGRATION STORIES

Welcome back to our gathering! As we shared last week, we are dialoguing and journeying together to learn more about Asian American identity and how it intersects with faith in Jesus Christ.

As we begin, let's make sure we're all on the same page of respect, space, and listening well. We want to make sure we're all in agreement on the following:

- This is a journey for all of us, so let's respect one another's stories.
- Let's give each other space to think and reflect. Maybe we take a moment before jumping into conversation, or pull back if we notice that our voices are dominating the discussion. All thoughts and questions are welcome, and we want this to be a safe space for everyone.
- Let's actively try to listen well. Some of the subject matter we'll be covering could be really sensitive for some of us. Let's not get defensive or argumentative, but rather treat this as a journey of discovery we'll be going on together.

With that said, let's move forward! We're continuing to unpack what it means to be Asian American, and then connecting that identity with a faith in Jesus Christ.

Last week, was our first session, covering An Introduction to Asian American History. We talked about why it's important that we learn about these issues.

Today, we'll be continuing on with the second session of Part 1 – Remembering Our Migration Stories. Let's get started!

Icebreaker: Where Are You Really From?

“What tethers me to my parents is the unspoken dialogue we share about how much of my character is built on the connection I feel to the world they were raised in but that I’ve only experienced through photos, visits, food. It’s not mine and yet, I get it. First-generation kids, I’ve always thought, are the personification of déjà vu.”

Durga Chew-Bose, Indian American author of
Too Much and Not the Mood: Essays

Spend a little time reflecting on this quote, taking a moment to think about your or your family’s own migration story. Notice that “migration” does not just mean a family unit choosing to move to another country or culture, but actually includes a wide variety of narratives, both voluntary (moving to attend college or for job opportunities) and involuntary (refugees fleeing famine, war, or persecution; childhood and infant adoptees).

Some of our families arrived in America seeking “the American dream”. Others came as refugees, were adopted as babies, or have been in America for generations. Some may have come as part of a larger, mono-cultural community, while others may be woven into a multiracial family tree.

Our stories vary, and how they impact our lives varies significantly. These different stories can teach us about different sides of God’s character. Maybe God showed up in miraculous ways during our family’s times of migration. Or maybe God is bringing healing to the pain and trauma that can come out of such experiences.

What are some migration experiences that you remember, or family/community stories that you have heard told by parents, relatives, or others?

Last week, we talked about the importance of history. Continuing with that idea, let’s take a little time to think about why it’s important to remember the stories of how and where we and our families have come from. What do we gain when we remember? What do we lose when we forget our or our family’s migration history? Take a couple of minutes to reflect on the following:

- For **those who have immigrated**, reflect on some monumental moments of achievement, struggles, high and low points. What were the hopes, dreams, and goals you had?
- For those who are **children of immigrant parents** or even grandparents, take a moment to reflect on their story – do you know their story, achievements, struggles, high and low points? What were their hopes, dreams, and goals? Is your or your family’s migration story one that you’re proud of or are you more ashamed?

- For those whose family came to America as **refugees**: what are some of the ways that God provided? What are some of the ways that the pain, trauma, or loss of that journey still linger? How do you see this still affecting you or other family members?
- For those of you who are **adoptees**: what questions do you have about your birth family? To what degree do you identify with “Asian America”, and to what degree do you feel like that doesn’t describe you? What are the ways that your family has been a blessing and support for you?
- For those who are **multiracial**, the different sides of your family may tell very different migration stories. How does this inform your Asian American identity? What do people usually think your racial identity is, and how does that make you feel?

After a minute or two, if you’re willing, take 2-3 minutes to share with the group.

“Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants built around our childhoods fits in solid America.”

Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*

Migration has always been a part of human existence, and it plays a central role in the stories of the Bible. If we want to unpack our Asian American identity and experiences, there are specific features of our migration stories that can be helpful for us to keep in mind. While dominant American culture portrays migrant identity from certain countries as a positive trait (think the stereotype of a “sexy French accent” or a “sophisticated British accent”), being seen as a migrant from other cultures can be the opposite.

Have you seen portrayals of film or TV characters with a strong Asian accent or mannerisms that felt stigmatizing and marginalizing? In the following section, we’ll see how listening to God can help us to own and engage with even the most vulnerable of our identities.

Bible Reading: Loving our Whole Selves

Background: By hiding her Jewish identity, Esther assimilated into Persian culture, even rising to become the queen of Persia. When a crisis occurred, the Jewish people in Persia, already a vulnerable and marginalized migrant community, were placed in great and immediate physical danger.

In the midst of this crisis, Esther's cousin Mordecai saw a possibility: with her closeness to the king, could she intervene for her people? He met with her assistant Hathak:

Esther 4:8-16

New International Version (NIV)

⁸ [Mordecai gave Hathak] a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people.

⁹ Hathak went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰ Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, ¹¹ "All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king."

¹² When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³ he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

¹⁵ Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." Esther had a choice: she could try to distance herself from the vulnerability of Jewish identity in Persia, or instead be honest about the community she came from. But Mordecai's words reminded her that her entire journey had led her to this position for a reason. She could use her prominence for self-preservation, but there might be a greater meaning to her life as a Persian-passing Jewish queen of the country.

In this story, Esther ultimately chose to actively reaffirm her Jewishness. By doing this, she wound up playing a part in God's larger plan. She went to the king and wound up saving the Jewish people and helping the nation flourish. Even more importantly for us, this action offered her an opportunity to honor and bring peace to the fullness of who she was, particularly the Jewish migrant identity that she was previously hiding.

Discussion Questions

- We move through many different spaces in life: work, school, home, and various circles of friends. How comfortable are you to own this aspect of your life in each of these environments?
- How could it transform your (or your family's) experiences of migration to know and believe that God has been in the midst of those experiences? What does it change, and how do you feel about that?
- Some of us may be carrying migration-related hurts that still weigh us down, even years or generations later. No matter how distant the experiences were that caused this pain, we may still suffer from the negative aspects of migration. Can you imagine inviting God into this aspect of your life, to bring clarity, healing, and wholeness?

For This Week

- Reflect and journal on your own or your family's migration story. What were the circumstances that allowed you or your family to enter into the United States? What might have changed if you or your family had immigrated earlier or later? In what way can your or your family's story help you to empathize with those who are immigrating today?

Additional Resources

Books:

The God Who Sees Us by Karen Gonzalez

American Born Chinese (graphic novel) by Gene Luen Yang

Podcasts:

Only in America - <http://onlyinamerica.libsyn.com/>

Immigration Nation - <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/27/623662992/immigration-nation>

Other Resources:

Documentary: New Year Baby - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Year_Baby

Documentary: Chinese Exclusion Act - <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/chinese-exclusion-act/>

Documentary: Chinatown: Immigrants in America - <http://www.dctvny.org/documentaries/chinatown-immigrants-america>