

A Film Guide to Discussing Faith and Immigration

THE VISITOR

Genre: Feature—Drama (PG-13); 104 minutes

Issue: *The Visitor* reveals how immigration is not just a Latino/Hispanic issue. It also shows how quickly families can be torn apart by deportation.

Synopsis: The film portrays the transformation of 62-year-old Walter Vale after his encounter with a young undocumented couple who take up residence in his usually unoccupied apartment in New York. As Walter gets to know the couple, Tarek and Zainab, he develops a friendship with Tarek that revitalizes his life. When Tarek is threatened with deportation, Walter tries to help his new friend and confronts our modern-day immigration deportation system. The story demonstrates the transformative power of opening our lives to others—which often changes our view of the world and ourselves.

Faith perspective: Walter's hospitality to this immigrant couple is an example to Christians of loving our neighbor and being Good Samaritans to immigrants in our communities. The movie also depicts how the process of deportation can separate families. The story of Walter, Tarek, Zainab, and Tarek's mother Mouna challenges Christians to consider the conflicts that arise from laws that are harmful for families.

Guides: In addition to the Sojourners theological reflection below, a discussion guide from Active Voice and Participant Media (at www.activevoice.net) provides information about the film, discussion starters, material about the legal immigration process, a glossary of terms, and facts and statistics on immigration.

Website: www.thevisitorfilm.com (DVD available for purchase)



THE VISITOR Theological Reflection

1. *He defends the cause of the orphan and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.* —Deuteronomy 10:18-19

Have you ever had the opportunity to welcome strangers into your home—even if not in as dramatic a way as Walter does? Did you do it? What was the outcome?

2. Why do you think Walter was not afraid of asking Tarek and Zainab to stay in his home? Would you be afraid of allowing someone you don't know to stay in your home? Where does this fear of "the other" come from? How can Christians practice hospitality in our current culture?

3. What did you think of the detention center in the film? Did you know that the U.S. government houses undocumented immigrants in places like this and in local jails? Do you think this is an appropriate response to breaking a civil law? Are there other ways the government could handle undocumented immigrants awaiting deportation?

4. Many immigrants do not come into the country through legal paths because there are very few slots for entry, often with multiple-year waits.

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Some come seeking employment, others to reunite with family, and still others to seek refugee from persecution.

Why did Tarek and his mother come to America? What would you do if faced with this situation? What are some common explanations for why people migrate to the U.S. illegally?

5. *Prayer of Reflection: O God, you made us in your own image and sent Jesus to save us; grant that we may have compassion on the whole human family. We pray that you would remove the hatred that divides us and help us to find the understanding common ground that can unite us. Unite us in your love and work in the midst of our brokenness to accomplish your purpose in us.*

Tarek's mother admits to receiving a legal summons for Tarek's deportation, but she throws it away and does not tell Tarek about it. Should immigrant children be held responsible for the actions of their parents? If they are brought to the United States when they are young, should they be punished for not being citizens?

6. In the film, the immigration lawyer says, "either you belong or you do not—post-9/11 the law is black and white." What should make someone belong to a place? Is it birth? Is it where they work? Is it where their family is?

7. Tarek makes the statement that terrorists are not in detention centers because they have money and support systems. Is fear of terrorism a prominent reason for anti-immigration sentiment in your community? Do you think Tarek's statement is accurate?

8. Were you surprised when Tarek was deported without being able to communicate with his mother, Walter, or his girlfriend? Why or why not?

9. *Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. —Romans 12:13*

What can the movie teach us about hospitality? Is it more than sheltering or feeding another person? Does it extend to helping other people with their needs? How can we daily offer acts of hospitality that will prepare our hearts to be ready to embrace larger opportunities for hospitality when they present themselves?

10. *Love your neighbor as yourself. —Mark 12:31*

What does this film teach us about who our neighbor is? Compare your response to the story of the Good Samaritan, which is Jesus' response to the same question. Does the command to "love our neighbor" apply to our undocumented neighbor, or migrants in other countries who wish to come to the U.S.?