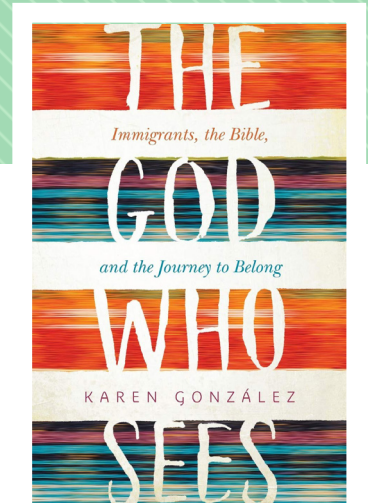




# CBF Book Discussion Guide

by Michelle Elizabeth Navarrete



## *The God Who Sees: Immigrants, the Bible and the Journey to Belong*

By Karen González

### Overview

As an immigrant herself, Karen González travels through the narratives of the Bible that inspire her journey to belonging.

Each chapter comes between the citing of a passage of Scripture that deeply resonates with themes of immigration and a sacrament that represents the tradition of the Catholic Church. Being raised in a culture that is permeated by Catholic tradition, these sacraments were fundamental to González's faith and identity. She shows how each of these aspects resonates with the stories of immigrants, refugees and asylees. Only then can we understand the tumultuous journey that many immigrants experience with their decision to migrate into a foreign country with a foreign language. In each of their steps, something new is encountered.

González is also transparent as to how the evangelical faith has shaped her understanding of immigration and politics. She does not shy away from asking the hard questions. Her readers are forced to confront their own presuppositions and perspectives, something that is

perhaps true even for those who may be immigrants or children of immigrants themselves. No matter what the reader's background, each one is invited to take a piece of González's story. Her personal reflections allow us to dive deeply into the life she experienced as an immigrant daughter.

Practical steps are incorporated throughout the book, as well as a final conclusion on ideas for action and reflection. As González demonstrates throughout, to be a believer means to act with both your heart and your hands. She provides plenty of opportunity for readers to choose their next step.

Her final chapter poses the ultimate challenge: What will you do now that you've read this book? And how will this newfound commitment to biblical hospitality extend to those in marginalized places and spaces?

*Michelle Elizabeth Navarrete is a graduate student at Wheaton College studying Old Testament Biblical Exegesis. She currently serves as a Scholar-in-Residence at World Outspoken, an organization that aims to serve the Latinx church "in-between."*



# Book Discussion Questions

## ***Chapter 1—Naomi and Ruth: A Blessed Alliance***

1. How have you perceived the current discussions on immigration, especially as presidents and politics have changed in recent years? What about your background informs these perceptions? Has Scripture informed these opinions?
2. How have you read the story of Naomi and Ruth in the past? Has it changed at all?
3. Discuss the ways you see Naomi's role in the narrative and her importance in it.
4. Reflect on your own proximity to immigrant and refugee populations. How can you use these newfound perspectives from González to build bridges between immigrants/refugees and your own perspectives?

## ***Chapter 2—Baptism***

1. Discuss the significance of baptism in your own life. Were you baptized as a child, as an adult or perhaps both/neither?
2. "Whether I recognized it or not, the experiences in that storefront church and in my Catholic parish shaped me and expanded my view of God." (43)

Reflect on how an approach that draws from different faith traditions can help you better understand the traditions of others, as well as your own.

3. Many immigrants and refugees come from different faith backgrounds, even those that may not be Christian. If you have had encounters with those of differing faith backgrounds (even religions like Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.), talk about your experience. Was it negative or positive? Why or why not?

## ***Chapter 3—Abraham: The Immigrant Father of Our Faith***

1. What was your initial reaction when reading about Abraham being described as a "criminal immigrant"? Why?
2. Read the story of Genesis 12 and Genesis 20. Discuss the differences and similarities between these two passages. Why would Abraham have tried again to give his wife Sarah away?
3. "Immigrants are actually less likely than the native-born to commit serious crimes or be imprisoned." (55) Do these statistics surprise you? Why or why not?
4. Discuss how the laws of the United States and the laws of the Old Testament differ. What could a biblical foundation of the law look like in your country?

## ***Chapter 4—Communion***

1. How have you understood communion in your own faith and life?
2. Do you know of any immigrants/refugees in your congregation? Reflect on the ways that communion can be a bonding experience among believers of all backgrounds and experiences.
3. "It used to shock me that so many Christians I knew loved Ronald Reagan and thought him a leader who pursued policies that furthered the interests of Christians." (69)  
  
González experienced the era of a particular president from a different perspective than that of Christians in North America, especially as a Guatemalan immigrant. Challenge yourself to reflect on the ways that politics have altered your faith life, especially in light of immigrants and refugees.

## Chapter 5—Hagar: The ‘Foreign Thing’ and the God Who Sees Her

1. What is the significance of Hagar, whose name translates to “foreign thing,” and her being the first person to name God?
2. Compare and contrast the responses of Hagar and Sarai. With whom do you identify most? Why?
3. Reflect on the way in which González describes *lo cotidiano*. How does a Western perspective of productivity and work affect an understanding of *lo cotidiano* and its value?

## Chapter 6—Confirmation

1. Think about and discuss the women who have influenced your own life and faith journey.
2. “It was my abuelita who taught me the most about God and the value of preserving and passing on Christian traditions.” (89)  
  
How might *abuelita theology* be extremely valuable to those of immigrant and refugee populations?
3. González describes her father’s being highly educated in one context while feeling undervalued in another. Imagine receiving training or education to pursue the career path that you have now or one toward which you are moving. How might that condition change if your life were uprooted by being forced to move to a new country with a language foreign to you?
4. Describe significant moments in your life, whether it was a formal confirmation or not, where you felt “confirmed” in your faith.

## Chapter 7—Joseph: The Foreigner Who Blessed Egypt

1. “Joseph’s story is powerful and effective because it raises questions about the goodness of God in the midst of suffering.” (98)

Have you read Joseph’s story in this way? Put yourself in Joseph’s shoes. Do you ever question God’s goodness in the midst of suffering?

2. What was your initial reaction to learning that immigrants often experience crime that goes unreported? Reflect on ways that the church could help alleviate this particular issue.
3. “Professor Richard Beck says, ‘We don’t show hospitality *to be like* Jesus. We show hospitality *to welcome* Jesus.’” (108)

Have you heard of Jesus being framed or pictured in this way, as a foreigner who escapes Herod and needs hospitality? How could this viewpoint reframe your perspective of hospitality and foreigners in the U.S.?

## Chapter 8—Anointing the Sick

1. Discuss the importance of Mary’s role in the story of Jesus. How often do you think about Mary in your own faith life and why?
2. “Were we to apply today, our wait would be more like thirteen years, not two. And if we were Chinese, Indian, Mexican, or Filipino immigrants, our wait would be closer to twenty-three years.” (113) Have you heard about this extended wait time for legal migration—even just in the process of securing a visa—into the United States? Why do you think that is?
3. “But this reassurance didn’t take away the many questions I had about the goodness of God in a world where the mother I needed so much died so young...Jesus, the man of Sorrows, was with me through the difficult years shortly before and after she died, and saw me in my grief.” (122)

How do you see Jesus in your grief? Have you lamented in a way that allows Jesus to be present to you even if you aren’t present with him, as González describes her own experience of suffering?

## Chapter 9—The Syrophenician Woman: The Foreigner with Sass

1. Have you read the books of Leviticus and Numbers in a way you could understand? Have you read the story of the Syrophenician woman in a way you could understand?
2. How have you seen the issue of the ratio of jobs to workers change, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic began?

3. Reflect on this quote by Ta-Nehisi Coates: “You are called to struggle not because it assures you victory, but because it assures you an honorable and sane life.” (137) What do you think of this quote? How does this apply to the immigrant, refugee and asylee population?
4. González has mentioned a great number of policies up to this point—things like “border agents,” “a zero-tolerance policy at the border that separates immigrant children from their parents,” “the cancellation of Temporary Protected Status for those who have fled disasters or political instability in their countries,” “the criminalization of immigration,” and so on. (138)

Of how many of these policies or ideologies have you been aware? How can you remain educated on these things in order to contribute to the discussion of immigration in a graceful and productive way?

## **Chapter 10—Reconciliation**

1. “They reconciled themselves to the reality that the United States was home now, and there was no going back—not permanently.” (143)  
  
How do you think this decision that many immigrants currently face affect their experiences in the United States?
2. González describes the difference in culture between home and school that caused her not to feel “fully Guatemalan” nor “fully American.” Reflect on how the contrasting spaces can pull many first- and second-generation children of immigrants into a space between two worlds. Have you ever experienced this type of “in-betweenness”?
3. Read the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4. Think about how her identity shapes the story. Would this story be different if her identity remained anonymous? Why or why not?
4. How does identity play into your faith as a follower of Christ?

## **Chapter 11—The Holy Family: Our Refugee Savior and a Love with No Limits**

1. “It is an irony that is repeated throughout the book of Matthew. Leaders of the Jews—Herod, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the chief priests—reject Jesus. Those on the outside, like the magi, receive him.” (153)  
  
How are the magi outsiders? Have you ever thought about them this way? Why or why not?
2. González offers insight and statistics related to the effects of a closed rather than an open border. How do you view the idea of borders and security? Reflect on some of the presuppositions you may carry from outside sources and the media.
3. What traditions or liturgies did you grow up with? How do these presently affect your understanding of faith?
4. “Indeed, the question is not whether God will see and hear and welcome us. The question is whether we will see and hear and welcome God. Will we live out the radical and subversive hospitality that Jesus modeled for us?” (164)

How do these final sentences challenge you in your own journey of understanding the intersection of faith and immigration?



# Further Reading

*Beyond Welcome: Centering Immigrants in Our Christian Response to Immigration* by Karen González

*The Bible and Borders: Hearing God's Word on Immigration* by M. Daniel Carroll R.

*Welcoming the Stranger: Justice, Compassion, and Truth in the Immigration Debate* by Matthew Soerens and Jenny Yang

*Fearing Bravely: Risking Love for our Neighbors, Strangers, and Enemies* by Catherine McNiel

## **Further Research**

World Relief, [www.worldrelief.org](http://www.worldrelief.org)

RAICES, [www.raicetexas.org](http://www.raicetexas.org)

American Immigration Council, [www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org](http://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org)

World Outspoken, [www.worldoutspoken.com](http://www.worldoutspoken.com)