

# 100 CHURCHES RISING CHALLENGE

## LEARN. PREACH. GIVE. PRAY.

**As pastors and church leaders, it is imperative to share what is clear in Scripture from the pulpit.**

We know for a fact that God is not silent on the topic of immigrants and immigration. "Ger," the Hebrew word for foreigner or immigrant, occurs 92 times in the Old Testament, and "xenos," Greek for immigrant, occurs 14 times in the New Testament! In fact God specifically commands His people to *love immigrants* over 30 times throughout the Old Testament.

God's message is clear: we are to *love* immigrants. God's heart is *for* immigrants.

**In this 100 Churches Rising Challenge, you are committing to preach a message that makes clear**

- 1. God's heart for immigrants as well as**
- 2. The biblical call for God's people to love and journey with immigrants.**

We suggest **Acts 8:26-31** (Philip and the Ethiopian) as the primary text because it is the most straightforward and practical, and it prevents defensive responses. The focus on God's call to connect with immigrants is clear.

- This guide provides a sermon outline of main points you can emphasize to preach about God's heart for immigrants as well as our calling to love immigrants. This outline highlights key biblical principles that teach us how to obey God's call.
- This guide also provides a sample sermon on Acts 8:26-31 preached by Reverend Zach Szmara, Immigrant Connection Founder & Executive Director. This sample sermon highlights how Zach shares about biblical principles and adds examples to make them clear and applicable. A video of Zach's sermon as well as a full sermon outline are included for you to learn from.
- LEGO "Kollaō" keychains - a visual reminder of this passages call to "kollaō" with and journey with immigrants - can be purchased optionally and shared with with your church.

Alternative passages that may be preached on include:

- Deuteronomy 10:17-19 on Ruth and Boaz
- Jeremiah 7:5-7 on justice and immigrants
- Matthew 25:35-40 on sheep and goats, the call to the collective
- 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:8 on philoxenos (love immigrants) and true biblical hospitality

There are a myriad of Scripture passages you could use to preach on God's heart to love and welcome immigrants, and we encourage you to study these passages as you build out a sermon. We also encourage you to read through Immigrant Connection's *Together at the Table* devotional guide to deepen your understanding of the overarching theme in Scripture of love and welcome.

**Please remember, this is not a sermon about inviting immigrants to our churches, making our churches more multicultural, how to evangelize to immigrants, or politics. It is about understanding what Scripture calls us to do - to connect with our immigrant neighbors, to share life and journeys with them, to love and welcome.**

Special invitation: you will have the opportunity to meet with Zach Szmara and others to discuss questions you may have as you preach on God's heart for immigrants and our calling to love immigrants.

## RESOURCES

**Sermon Outline for Acts 8:26-31 that highlights God's heart for immigrants and our call to love immigrants. Outline included below.**

**Sermon Sample: View an example of how Acts 8:26-31 can be preached on. Sermon by Reverend Zach Szmara. [WATCH HERE.](#) (Full outline below)**

**Kollaō LEGO Keychains: This can be given out as a visual reminder of God's call to love and journey with immigrants. [ORDER HERE.](#)**

**Call with Reverend Zach Szmara: Would you like to meet with Zach and others to discuss your sermon? [SIGN UP HERE.](#)**

**Join us monthly for a time for collective prayer for immigrant families as well as a discussion on the *Together at the Table* devotional. 2<sup>nd</sup> Tues of each month, 7pm. [SIGN UP HERE](#)**

## FAQS

**What if my church isn't near immigrants yet and church members don't really find themselves in proximity to immigrants?** A helpful option would be to spend more time on the first part of Acts 8. Philip first moved to proximity before connection. God called him to leave where he was comfortable and go where he would be proximate to foreigners. We can answer God's call to proximity before the call to connection. The sermon sample and outline of Zach Szmara's sermon focus more on contexts where proximity is already occurring but people need urging to move to kollaō. However, this is not where everyone or every church is. Some churches will need to understand the first call (to proximity) fully. Philip had to go to a new place where he would be surrounded by immigrants on the road - he had to first become proximate. He probably wouldn't have crossed paths with an African by staying in Samaria. God had to call him to a transnational highway first - a place where he would be near immigrants.

**Isn't Acts 8 about evangelism?** It's important to note that God called Philip not to invite the Ethiopian to his synagogue but to meet him where he was - to join the Ethiopian on his journey. This passage isn't about inviting immigrants into your church. It's about going to immigrants, meeting them where they are, connecting with them, and walking alongside them. It is common to jump to the end of the story, but if we do, we miss this very critical elements in the passage. In this sermon, it could even be helpful to end the passage with verse 30 or 31 and to focus on the critical steps God leads Philip to take.

**Is this sermon making a political statement?** Often people only think of immigration as a political issue - this can lead to completely missing what Scripture so clearly outlines about God's heart for immigrants. This message isn't about politics - it is not a political statement, but a biblical statement. God's Word is clear that He loves immigrants and calls His people to love and welcome them too. We're not asking churches to talk about government policies or political debates — just to preach God's heart. If you stay focused on Scripture and frame it around faithfulness and obedience to God's call, not politics, most people will hear it for what it is: a call to live out God's word.

**The LEGO is such a great tangible illustration of the move from proximity to connection - is there a way I can give these out like Zach does when he preaches this sermon? [Here's the link to order them for your church.](#)**

# SERMON OUTLINE

## ACTS 8:26-31, LOVE WHO GOD LOVES

Big Idea: Because we love God, we learn to love who He loves—immigrants.

### Scripture Passage: Acts 8:26-31

#### Point 1: God loves immigrants

- God's love for immigrants is clear in Scripture—we just need new lenses to see it.
- God sends Philip to a diverse place, and to one particular person, a foreigner
- Scripture constantly affirms God's concern for immigrants.
- Our biases or upbringing can blur what the Bible makes plain.
- Reflection Question: Are we seeing immigrants through God's lens—or another one?

#### Point 2: God calls us to places of proximity to immigrants

- Philip had to leave his comfort zone—he couldn't stay in Samaria.
- He needed to travel to the desert road connecting Jerusalem to North Africa—a bustling transnational highway filled with immigrants and travelers.
- God often calls us to move *physically* before we can move *relationally*.
- You may not encounter those God wants you to love if you stay where you're comfortable.
- Reflection Question: Where might you need to go to be proximate? How is God calling you to step out of your comfort zone?

#### Point 3: God calls us to journey with immigrants (kollaō)

- We're called to stick close—to walk with, listen to, and learn from immigrants.
- God calls Philip to kollaō with the Ethiopian.
- Kollaō literally means to stick together - eg. LEGO pieces stick together and build something new
- Kollaō means to glue ourselves to others—to build true connection.
- Philip joins the Ethiopian's journey, listens, and makes a connection.
- Physical closeness isn't enough—God calls us to relational closeness.
- Reflection Question: Are you close enough to understand and share life with someone different?

#### Point 3: God calls us to love immigrants (philoxenos)

- Biblical hospitality means loving strangers (those not from here), not just hosting friends and people we know or practicing social niceties.
- More specifically, "philoxenos" means "love (phiilo) immigrants (xeno)".
- Philoxenos is closely tied to kollaō; philoxenos calls us to a posture and commitment to extend love to our immigrant neighbors.
- Philip took steps towards philoxenos and kollaō. He obeyed God's call to go and join the Ethiopian and to open his heart and journey to him.
- True hospitality opens hearts and lives, not just dinner invitations.
- Reflection Question: How can you offer a deep love and welcome to immigrants?

#### Conclusion: Will you love who God loves?

- God calls us to move toward, attach to, and love immigrants—will you respond like Philip?

# SAMPLE SERMON OUTLINE

## ACTS 8:26-28, CALLED TO KOLLAŌ

### REVEREND ZACH SZMARA

#### Introduction : Vision Illustration – Glasses

- Illustration: Sometimes we need glasses to see the world as it really is.
- Our cultural, political, or personal lenses may blur our vision of immigrants.
- Scripture helps us see clearly—God is not blurry about His heart for immigrants.
- God's Word corrects our vision and makes it clear: He loves immigrants and calls us to do the same.
- "This is not new and not just American"
- Common global and historical tendency: view immigrants as threats or burdens.
- Set the stage for a radical biblical alternative.

#### Passage: Acts 8:26–29

- Background
  - Philip is called to go to a desert road.
  - But this road isn't deserted—it's a major thoroughfare traveled by people from all over the world.
  - The Holy Spirit directs Philip to this busy place where nations are passing by.
- "A second call: Go and join (kollaŌ)"
  - Though surrounded by people, Philip is called to kollaŌ—to glue himself to one specific person.
  - He is called to join the Ethiopian eunuch, an immigrant (someone not in the place they were born).

#### Big Picture: God's love for immigrants is evident throughout Scripture

- Old Testament Evidence of God's Love for Immigrants
  - Deuteronomy 10:17–19
    - God loves immigrants and commands His people to do the same.
    - God is not vague or quiet on this issue.
    - Obeying God's command to love immigrants is to love without exception.
- Scripture List from Exodus to Malachi
  - A comprehensive testimony of God's commands to care for the foreigner.
  - Love is tangible – love others by...
- A Unique Command for God's People
  - Many ancient Mesopotamian cultures protected the widow, orphan, and poor.
  - Only God's people are repeatedly commanded to care for immigrants.
- New Testament Evidence of God's Love for Immigrants - Matthew 25:35
  - Greek Word Study – Philoxenos
    - Jesus: "I was a stranger (xenos), and you welcomed me." This is what God is calling us to do—more than welcoming people who are like us into our lives and homes, we welcome immigrants and strangers into our homes and to our tables.
    - Jesus identifies Himself with the immigrant.
- Greek Word Study - Ethnos
  - God holds communities responsible for the way our systems show love and welcome toward immigrants
  - Nations are judged collectively on their response to Jesus in the stranger.
  - This is not only a personal command but a communal responsibility.

## Proximity isn't enough

- LEGO Illustration
  - Like LEGO bricks that touch but aren't connected, we can be near immigrants but remain separate.
  - We are called to kollaō – to glue our lives together.
- We are Called to Journey with Immigrants
  - Acts 8:30-31 – “Do you understand?” “How can I unless someone explains it to me?”
  - Kollao means joining someone in their journey
  - We aren't just called to welcome or be near immigrants—we are called to walk with them.
  - Radio Tower Story
    - Illustration: When someone is lost and asks for directions, the best way to help them is to get in the car and go with them.
    - This is a picture of the kind of presence and accompaniment God calls us to.

## Practical Application for Today

- Maze Illustration
  - The U.S. immigration system is like a confusing and overwhelming maze.
  - Immigrants often feel lost and alone in the process.
  - We have the privilege of joining them and walking with them.
  - Thanks to a program created in 1958 by the Department of Justice, nonprofits and their staff can be trained and accredited to offer immigration legal services.
  - 40,000 Immigrant Families - There are real people waiting for someone to join their journey.
- Immigrant Connection Overview
  - Introduce Immigrant Connection as a ministry responding to this biblical call.
  - Overview of services: immigration legal services and welcome programs
  - Journeying with Immigrants
    - Immigrant Connection does not merely provide services—it journeys with immigrant families.
    - Offers a roadmap through the complex immigration system.
    - Embodies kollaō by walking alongside clients through long processes.
- High-Quality, Low-Cost Legal Services
  - Highlight the accessibility of legal support through Immigrant Connection.
  - Certified by the Department of Justice.
  - Focus on dignity, justice, and empowerment.

## Re-emphasize Kollaō

- God is still calling His people to join others on the road.
- How can you as an individual, and with your church, say yes to God's call to kollaō with the immigrants in your neighborhood, school, or work?
- Practical application:
  - Frequent the same places where immigrants are and work.
  - Boldly befriend others—not as projects, but as friends.
  - Join others in their journeys by hearing their stories.
  - Partner with Immigrant Connection by:
    - Learning about God's heart toward immigrants.
    - Praying for the systems, people involved, and our hearts to align with God's.
    - Giving toward the effort to serve and walk with immigrants.
    - Joining the Immigrant Connection Movement