

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

Assimilate or Go Home:

Notes from a Failed Missionary on Rediscovering Faith

by

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PREFACE

STATELESS WANDERERS

1. After a decade of working with refugees, D. L. Mayfield explains the lifecycle stages of a refugee: starting with anticipation and excitement, then reality setting in, then depression and culture shock, and finally stabilization (p. xiv). She finds parallels in her own life where she moves through these stages emotionally and spiritually. Do you relate to this? What places have you

- left—literally and figuratively? What places are you now trying to adjust to?
2. Mayfield writes that this book is about “learning that it was never my job to save, or convert, but rather to simply show up and believe” (p. xv). Is this a lesson you’ve ever had to learn? What happens when we make the volunteer or mission effort “our job” to accomplish?
 3. Mayfield states that she specifically focused this book on her story, rather than the stories of the refugees, in an effort to respectfully and ethically represent these communities and people. When we work with disenfranchised people, what is our responsibility when it comes to telling their stories?
 4. What experiences, if any, have you had with refugees? What knowledge do you have about the current refugee situation in America or abroad? How have these experiences changed you? How have they changed your views of America? Of the kingdom of God?

CHAPTER ONE ANTICIPATION AND EXCITEMENT

1. “I knew I could be of use to these newly arrived refugees, that I could do some tangible good in this world. It was an intoxicating feeling” (p. 5). Have you ever started something—a job, a volunteer opportunity, a relationship—that gave you a similar “intoxicating feeling” that you could do some good, be of some use? What was it? How did it go?

2. How did you react when reading about adolescent Mayfield and her friends' enthusiastic, but unaware, efforts to do outreach and evangelism in Portland's inner city neighborhoods (pp. 15–17)? If you have ever done short-term mission projects or charitable work, do you see glimpses of yourself in Mayfield's accounts—either of her teenage self or the current self that looks back with criticism and compassion on her younger self? How have you made peace with your younger, less-aware self (or have you)?
3. “I felt like I was looking and looking for this kingdom [of God] and had yet to find it; at the same time, I was supposed to be revealing it to others” (p. 22). How well do you feel you grasp what the kingdom of God is, what it looks like, and what your role is in bringing it to bear on the world around us? How might the act of seeking God's kingdom support or hinder the act of revealing it?
4. The refugees in Mayfield's account have no illusions about the American Dream (p. 30). Has the American Dream worked out for you? Why or why not? What qualms or criticisms of the American Dream have emerged from your own experiences or those of people you know?
5. In what ways have religious teachings left you hungry (pp. 37–38)? Where have you experienced the most satisfying tastes of God's kingdom? How do you think our churches and religious institutions can do a better job

at addressing people's spiritual hunger and witnessing to God's kingdom?

CHAPTER TWO REALITY SETS IN

1. Mayfield realizes that her well-intentioned efforts of showing up every week at Jamila's apartment to teach English were actually having the decidedly negative effect of putting her refugee friends in a position of showing their ignorance (p. 49), so she decides to stop "forcing the kingdom" (p. 51). What has been your interaction with marginalized communities (immigrants, refugees, poverty-stricken communities, etc.)? What are ways we can work toward ending hierarchical and colonial methods of interacting with others and work toward mutuality and real relationships?
2. What is the "good news" to those who are suffering?
3. What kind of reaction do you have to the idea of converting others (pp. 54–55)? Does it have positive or negative connotations, and why?
4. How do you deal with despair over the suffering and hopelessness in the world? Are there spiritual practices, like Frank Laubach's practice of meditating on God's love (pp. 72–73), that help you?
5. What has been your experience, if any, with short-term missions? What are your thoughts on Mayfield's critiques (pp. 85–89) of short-term missions? Does the

harm outweigh the good, or do you think the benefits of short-term missions justify their continuation?

6. How does reading Mayfield's description of being a friend to Saida and Khadija (pp. 89–91) instead of making them into props in her own story of saving the world affect how you approach the poor and marginalized? What would living out a “messy, present, incarnational love” (p. 91) look like, practically speaking, in your own life?

CHAPTER THREE DEPRESSION AND CULTURE SHOCK

1. What do you think Mayfield's story of baking the cake and being at Hali's wedding (pp. 97–101) says about supporting people whose life paths we grieve and feel conflicted about? Can you describe any instances where you've been in such a position? How did you respond?
2. How do you respond to injustice (pp.110–116)? How do you want to respond?
3. In what ways are you privileged (pp. 115–116)? What experiences have served to make you aware of the unjust system and your place in it? How have you come to terms with your privilege, or have you?
4. How might lament shape and deepen our response to poverty and injustice? How can we incorporate lament into our personal lives and communal worship?

5. Mayfield's realization of the deep systemic injustices she is a part of leads to a new form of repentance (pp. 134–136). How might you turn toward people who are being shut out? Does the thought scare or intimidate you? What might actually listening and being present to the centuries of pain caused by systemic injustice do to you?
6. In your work or relationships, have you ever come to a place of depression or burnout where your efforts didn't amount to what you hoped? If so, how did you navigate this?
7. What do you do with the paradox that “a very good God [is] at work in the world” even when everything around [you] seems to contradict this statement (pp. 156-157)? Seeing the reality of evil in the world, are you able to declare that God is good? If so, what enables you to do so? Or, if you can't at the moment, explain your inhibitions.

CHAPTER FOUR STABILIZATION

1. How does Mayfield's description of the “spiritual gift of showing up and sitting on couches” (p. 165) resonate with or challenge your understanding of ministry? What message does being “ignored, used, and sitting in silence for long periods of time” (p. 165) communicate—differently than preaching, handing out tracts, and trying to persuade people with logic and reason-

- ing? Is one better than the other, or do you think there are times and places for each?
2. If you are honest, what kind of expectations do you have when you help someone out? Mayfield realizes that expecting her refugee friends to be grateful to her and always open the door when she brings gifts amounts to wanting “to oppress people, in the kindest way possible” (p. 167). What are your thoughts about this statement?
 3. Do you think you have grasped the truth that Jesus states in the beatitudes that the poor are truly blessed? Where and how have you seen this truth played out in real life?
 4. Mayfield lists numerous unrecognized ministries on page 199. How does the list change how you think about “ministry” and what is important to God? Would you add any other “ministries” to the list?
 5. The kingdom of God is available to all of us if we are “in relationship with those to whom Jesus said the miracles of the kingdom would come: the poor, the sick, the sad, the oppressed” (p. 201). How are you in relationship currently with the poor, the sick, the sad, the oppressed (or do you count yourself as one of these)? How might you grow deeper in relationship with people like this?
 6. The kingdom of God is here, Mayfield declares (p. 202). What do you feel when reading this statement? Disbe-

lief? Apathy? Hope? Explore and share where this reaction comes from.

FINAL QUESTIONS

1. Throughout the book, Mayfield is unflinching in pointing out her own self-absorbed and ethnocentric assumptions. How has reading her account forced you to reflect on your own egotism and cultural insensitivities? How has that self-reflection made you feel?
2. Reading through Mayfield's experience of the four stages, can you identify a time or experience in your life when you may have moved through similar stages? If you are currently doing so, which stage do you find yourself in? How does it make you feel to know where you've come from and where you might be headed?
3. How has reading this book changed your understanding of the kingdom of God and your role in it?

Additional Resources

BOOKS TO READ

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Girl, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures by Ann Radioman

Refugee Hotel (Voice of the Witness) by Juliet Linderman;
photos by Gabriele Stabile

What Is the What by Dave Eggers

Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis by
Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, and Dr. Issam
Smeir of World Relief

When I Get Older: The Story Behind Wavin' Flag by
K'NAAN, with Sol Guy; illustrations by Rudy Gutierrez

*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of
Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander

VIDEOS TO WATCH

[*The Good Lie*](#)

Rain in a Dry Land (documentary about Somali Bantu
resettlement)

[#GlobalPov Project](#)

REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AGENCIES TO CONTACT

[World Relief](#)

[Catholic Charities](#)

Lutheran Family Services (search for one locally)