

Movie Nights for Thinkers and Seekers

"The Visitor" starring Richard Jenkins, Haaz Sleiman, Danai Gurira, 2007, PG-13, 104 minutes

Major themes:

- Hospitality
- Invitation
- Refugees
- Humanity
- Politics
- Justice
- Interruptions
- Celebration

Major characters:

- Walter Vale
- Tarek
- Zainab
- Mouna

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Background info:

- Writer and director Thomas McCarthy first started writing the film during a state-sponsored visit to the Middle East. This is the second film he's directed, following "*The Station Agent*." McCarthy notes that at the core of both movies is a lonely man, who through chance encounters with strangers finds his life of solitude changed in irrevocable ways.
- Before this role, Haaz Sleiman, who plays Tarek, had never played the drums and had to practice three hours a day for seven weeks.
- Of the estimated 11,000,000 illegal immigrants in the U.S., approximately 300,000 people (including 10,000 unaccompanied children) are held in immigration detention each year in over 200 detention centers, jails, and prisons across the country, while the government decides whether or not they will be deported. Detainees may be subjected to arbitrary punishment, strip searches, shackling, solitary confinement, neglect of basic medical and hygienic needs, denial of outdoor recreation, and sometimes abuse. Under international human rights standards, there is a presumption against detention, meaning that detention should be used only as a last resort.
- Detainees include those seeking safety and political asylum because of persecution, long-term residents of the U.S., and abused women, with or without their families. Although each person has the right to legal counsel, it is up to detainees to find it and pay for it themselves (85% of detainees do not have a lawyer). Even those who have access to legal counsel can be quickly deported back to dangerous places, without a day in court.
- Deportations of immigrants ("*removals*") may be issued when individuals are found to be in violation of the United States' immigration laws. Approximately 180,000 people are deported each year for various reasons which include security, protection of resources, and protection of jobs.
- Richard Jenkins, who plays Walter, prepared for his role by going to a detention center. "*It was grim. I talked to a detainee. I listened. I don't think he had talked to anybody in a long time. It was difficult. I felt weird because I was there doing research for a movie and it's this guy's life. Sometimes no one knows you're there. It's sad.*"

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Scriptures:

Matthew 25:34 – 40 (NLT) – *"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.' Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'"*

Romans 12:15 (NLT) – *"Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep."*

Hebrews 13:1 – 3 (NIV) – *"Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering."*

Exodus 23:9 (NLT) – *"You must not oppress foreigners . . ."*

Psalms 89:14 (NIV) – *"Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; love and faithfulness go before you."*

Isaiah 1:17 (The Message) – *"Say no to wrong. Learn to do good. Work for justice. Help the down-and-out. Stand up for the homeless. Go to bat for the defenseless."*

Luke 14:12 – 14 (The Message) – *"The next time you put on a dinner, don't just invite your friends and family and rich neighbors, the kind of people who will return the favor. Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks. You'll be—and experience—a blessing. They won't be able to return the favor, but the favor will be returned—oh, how it will be returned!—at the resurrection of God's people."*

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Discussion points:

1. What happens when life interrupts our plans? Are we available to God to love the person in front of us? Are we too busy to notice? Do we hold back because of fear? Do we withhold love because we don't feel qualified? Are we immobilized because we don't know what to do or where to begin?
2. One of the characters cries out in frustration, "*It's not fair!*" How can our frustration with injustice give us the impetus to go to bat for the defenseless?
3. Is it more important to try to change "*the system*" or to help individuals?
4. Who are the defenseless in our cultural context? Who are the ones that are not able to "*return favors*"?
5. Even though someone may not appear to be able to return favors in a tangible way, there are many intangible ways in which the lives of others bless us. How did Walter and Tareq build one another up or learn from one another?
6. What helped Walter Vale to climb out of the valley of boredom into the mountains of living adventure?
7. The movie tagline is: "*Connection is everything.*" Consider what life is like for someone who does not feel completely accepted or that they have the same rights as "*them*" (whoever "*they*" are). What does God require of us?

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Get involved:

Friends of Refugees, Clarkston, GA

<http://friendsofrefugees.com/>

Our mission is to care for refugees through relationships and opportunities that provide for their well-being, education and employment as they become contributing members of society.

Every year, thousands of refugees come to the United States seeking a better life. In the early 1990's, the process of resettling refugees began in the community of Clarkston, GA, a small town located within metro Atlanta. Since this process began, approximately 60,000 refugees have been resettled in this area. With over 150 different ethnic groups represented within and around the city, Clarkston has been named "the most diverse square mile in America" by the New York Times.

Café Clarkston, Clarkston, GA

<https://sites.google.com/site/cafeclarkston/>

Cafe Clarkston is an internet cafe designed especially for the English as a Second Language community of Clarkston, Georgia. Patrons come to use the computers, often after their ESL classes finish.

Our passion is helping people find and create employment opportunities. Volunteers are on hand to help patrons search the internet for jobs, create resumes, and learn basic computing skills.

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World Relief, offices around the world

<http://worldrelief.org/>

Our calling at World Relief is to stand for the vulnerable. Every second of every day children are orphaned by disease, women are widowed by conflicts, families are devastated by natural disasters and refugees are relocated to new countries. These are the heartbreaking stories of the vulnerable.

We believe God has equipped the church - the most diverse social network on the planet - to be at the center of these stories, leveraging time, energy and resources to join the vulnerable in their time of need.

We practice principles of transformational development to empower local churches in the United States and around the world so they can serve the vulnerable in their communities. With initiatives in education, health, child development, agriculture, food security, anti-trafficking, immigrant services, micro-enterprise, disaster response and refugee resettlement, we work holistically with the local church to stand for the sick, the widow, the orphan, the alien, the displaced, the devastated, the marginalized, and the disenfranchised.

In our own backyard and around the globe, we stand with individuals and communities through the process of healing, reconciliations, transformation and empowerment.