IN THE SHADOW OF EXILE,
HOPE BECAME THEIR HOME.

BETWEEN BORDERS



DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction

Based on an incredible true story, **BETWEEN BORDERS** is a film that will touch your heart, challenge your thinking, and make you thankful to be living in relative peace.

Forced to flee their home in Baku, Azerbaijan during the collapse of the Soviet Union, an Armenian family endures discrimination and inhumane treatment as they desperately seek a safe community where they can raise their two daughters. They begin to build a new life in Volgograd, Russia but face difficulties there as well.

In the process of their resettlement, Ivan and Violetta Petrosyan embrace a faith in Christ that changes their lives forever.

The movie begins with helpful background information so viewers can relate to the family's predicament. It reads: "Throughout most of the 20th century, Armenia and Azerbaijan were Soviet Union member nations. But as Russia's power weakened in the 1980s, fractures between the two countries emerged. When a bloody military conflict erupted near their border in 1988, thousands of Armenians living in Azerbaijan became targets of ethnic cleansing. Between 1988 and 1994, more than 30,000 people were killed and 200,000+ Armenians were forced to flee."

Written by Mark Freiburger (who also directed), Adam Sjoberg, and Isaac Norris, the film stars Elizabeth Tabish and Patrick Sabongui as Violetta and Ivan Petrosyan.

BETWEEN BORDERS is in theaters January 26-28 and in churches January 29 through the end of March. This film is a compelling reminder of the impact we as Christ-followers can make by loving and accepting those who have been discarded and mistreated by others. For more information on how you can see this powerful film, visit BetweenBordersMovie.com.

This Discussion Guide was created in partnership with All Pro Pastors International.

View the trailer for **BETWEEN BORDERS**



Suggestions for Using this Discussion Guide

1. Open and close your group sessions with prayer. Pray that eyes would be opened and ears would hear what the Lord wants each person to learn from this time together.

2. Since the movie deals with ethnic cleansing, consider asking group members to read aloud some of the facts about immigration and asylum.

- Immigrants face three challenges in their struggle for refuge:
  - Risks of exploitation
  - Violence
  - Discrimination

  Most migrants strive for dignity and security in their quest for a better life.

- In the United States, asylum seekers must navigate a difficult and complex process that can involve multiple government agencies. Once granted asylum, they can apply to live in the United States permanently and gain a path to citizenship; they can also apply for their spouse and children to join them in America.

- Currently, more than two million pending asylum cases in the U.S. have created a backlog that forces seekers to endure waits of up to seven years.

- The United States of America has been the preferred country of destination for international migrants since 1970. The number of foreign-born people residing in this country has more than quadrupled, from less than 12 million in 1970, to close to 51 million in 2019.

- In September 2024, Germany remained the top destination for asylum seekers in the EU, with 24% of the 20,000 applications. The next three EU countries each received similar numbers of applications: France with nearly 14,000 (16% of total), followed by Spain and Italy each with nearly 13,000 (15%). [The World Migration Report 2020 - International Organization for Migration.

3. Create a take-home handout of The New Colossus poem by Emma Lazarus, which is inscribed on a brass plaque at the base of the Statue of Liberty in the New York City harbor. One memorable scene near the movie's conclusion features the judge quoting several lines of the poem that are worth reading again and again.

The New Colossus
By Emma Lazarus
November 2, 1883

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

4. Before beginning with the Discussion Questions, ask group members to introduce themselves and state in one sentence whether they have ever been the victim of discrimination or negative comments about their ethnicity. The facilitator should make a note regarding which members might be interested in sharing more of their specific experience as the group session continues.

Questions for Group Discussion

Note: If the group is particularly large, it may be necessary to divide up into smaller groups.

1. The name of this movie is **BETWEEN BORDERS**. Let's have someone read Philippians 3:20 aloud. What does this verse say to you about citizenship and what matters most in this life?

2. When we meet Ivan and Violetta, they are successful professionals thriving in a communist country. But when everything they've known is stripped away, they find themselves being drawn toward Christ. Read Ephesians 2:12 and share the connection you see between this verse and the story.

3. In the movie, we see two different churches—one in Russia and one in the U.S.—coming alongside the Petrosyan family. What are some of the ways those churches impacted the family, both in their physical needs and spiritually?

4. Let's read the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). In teaching on this, the Russian pastor shares "This story places emphasis on the Father, who wants nothing more than to be with us." When was a time you sensed God calling you to be closer to Him?

5. After the Petrosyans settle in Volgograd, Violetta and the girls begin to attend church with her parents. Violetta notices positive changes in her mother's approach to life. She later shares that her mother "had a sense of peace, despite our circumstances." Talk about a time when you sensed a "peace that passes all understanding."

6. Ivan is hesitant to sit in the church service, so he reads and fixes things during the service. But he does hear the pastor reference how loving your neighbor means loving "everyone you come in contact with." Why was that so hard for Ivan? More importantly, why is that so hard for us?

7. We meet Dwayne from the American church that serves the mission church in Russia. Dwayne shares his story of loss, his anger at God, and how serving the people in Russia has helped him deal with his pain. How is it that focusing on and helping others can help us in times of our most trying times?

8. During the asylum court proceedings, members of the West Virginia church arrive to show their support. Their presence was an encouragement to the couple and a great visual of how a church rallies around its people. When was a time you felt the love, concern, and care of your church or small group?

9. Read Romans 15:1-7. List out examples from the movie where we see people helping their neighbors. Share a time where you came alongside a neighbor who needed a helping hand or a friend.

10. Galatians 5:13 says we should serve one another "humbly in love." What are some ways you can put that in action in your world in the coming days and weeks?

11. Bonus question: What is your biggest takeaway from **BETWEEN BORDERS**?

Pay It Forward

If you enjoyed BETWEEN BORDERS, please let others know. Share your reactions and reviews for this important film on social media and by encouraging others to see it. Consider that this film might be a planted seed which prompts others to explore their faith. This film could change attitudes and broaden perspectives about how we view our neighbors. This film could change someone's life for eternity.

About All Pro Pastors International

As one of the largest networks of Pastors throughout the world, All Pro Pastors International includes Pastors from all denominations, races, and cultures, with a heart for unity and cooperation. The Champions Table is the foundation of the ministry where Pastors sharpen Pastors. The Pastors Prayer Center is our powerhouse where we pray for and with ministers everyday throughout America and the world. Find out more at AllProPastors.org.

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