

## How I Met God at the Bus Station

Most Christians have heard Matthew 25:35-40 where Jesus speaks to the power of radical hospitality and concludes in verse 40 by saying “Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.” Let’s be honest. The world is teeming with people we would rather not see. What does that say about us and our ability to see and experience God?

My husband and I decided to ditch the kids and celebrate our 14<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary by serving at the Bus Station with the Migrant Assistance Project. I thought it might be a good opportunity to remember why we married each other (he’s pretty sexy setting up supplies, and don’t even get me started on handing out snack bags to kids). When we arrived, the mood at the station was full of good humor and anticipation. A kind employee brought several cases of bottled water for our supply stash while the new volunteers learned what procedures were in place to assess and meet needs. I felt confident in my ability to help. After all, I had extensive experience teaching refugees and immigrants. I had taught teenagers who had walked from Central America, clinging to the tops of trains and digging hollows in the desert at night, desperate to be reunited with their parents in the US. This was surely within my comfort zone.

The first migrant family through the door was a hollow-eyed pregnant mama with 3 exhausted children. More families shuffled in. One toddler had no shoes. Many of the children were sick. Where my children would be catapulting off the walls of the station after a long bus ride, these little ones stood shell shocked and expressionless. There was no way to escape the trauma and desperation etched into their tired eyes. Almost worse was the transformation after I offered a small toy to each child. Those poignant smiles. The kind that made me turn away time after time, attempting to gain control of my emotions. Tears don’t exactly say welcome, we are here to help you. But good luck controlling them, should you ever decide to volunteer at the bus station.

Right before our shift concluded, I handed out with one last basket of snacks. I saw mothers snuggling with toddlers, reading the Spanish language books we had handed out (a GREAT item to donate, by the way). Children were happily unwrapping their new toys and snacks. The American passengers mostly deferred the snacks, specifying that they should be kept for the migrants.

I could say I saw God in the exhausted eyes of the pregnant mama, in the barefoot child or the filthy baby with the runny nose. Maybe in the kindness of the other volunteers or the American passengers who wanted to save resources for the migrants. And that would be true, I think. But over the days and weeks since serving I have not been able to stop thinking about those families. I have prayed for them. For their safety, their pasts and futures and that one day the desperation will leave their eyes. And that, I believe, is what Jesus was talking about in verse 40. God as a force of change. God as a fire in the heart. God as a reminder that weary families who trudge through danger across jungles and mountains and deserts and rivers and borders are every bit as beloved as you and I. And because of that, we are connected. And because of that, our hearts should be broken. And because of that, we should rejoice. Because that is our relentless, pursuing, ever challenging, all loving God.