

A black and white portrait of Jeanette Iman'ishimwe, a young Black woman with her hair styled in braids. She is wearing a white top and a necklace, and she has a slight smile. The background is slightly blurred.

# Jeanette Iman'ishimwe

## See Me, Love Me: The Plea of the Refugee

Video (8:48): Jeanette Iman'ishimwe, native of Rwanda, now an interpreter/translator for the United Nations Refugee Agency refugee camp in Chipangayi, Zimbabwe. She is pursuing a master's degree in public policy and governance at United Methodist-related Africa University

Ms. Jeanette Iman'ishimwe, a native of Rwanda, is an interpreter for the United Nations Refugee Agency in Zimbabwe. A former refugee, she describes the rejection her family experienced by family and church because they were an intertribal family. The family found a church home in a Congolese church in the refugee camp, learning a new language in order to worship. She is pursuing her master's degree in public policy and governance at Africa University, focusing on how the church must embrace refugees and immigrants.

## See Me, Love Me: The Plea of the Refugee

### Preparation

Select a room or location to offer the study. Every session needs a room that has the capability to access the video via the Internet and to project the video for groups of various sizes. Check to be sure equipment is working properly. *This video can be found at [www.gcorr.org/series/vc3](http://www.gcorr.org/series/vc3).*

**Preview the video.** Be mindful that this video presenter is sharing a deeply personal story – her family's story that was affected by the civil war in her home of Rwanda. This war did not erase the discrimination she faced in church as a child. Sadly, her subsequent status as a refugee did not erase it either. You may wish to view the video a couple of times and make notes of key points that stand out for you. **Post on the wall the group's covenant of care.**

**Gather the following materials:**

- Bible for reading the Scripture: Romans 8:31-39
- Listening and Looking Guide (one for each person or project on a screen)
- Pens and pencils
- Index cards
- Notebook paper
- Blue painter's tape

**Also prepare:**

- Listen to the song "Friend of a Wounded Heart" as recorded by Brooklyn Tabernacle (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPNCRF8r4Lg>; if desired, skip to the spoken intro and start video at 1:30)
- Prepare a sheet of newsprint for posting with the heading "If Only I Could ..."

## THE STUDY SESSION

**Get Started [15-20 minutes]**

Greet group members as they enter. Introduce yourself and welcome everyone to the session. Make housekeeping announcements, i.e., break times, location of bathrooms. Read statement of purpose (or recruit a volunteer to do so): "The General Commission on Religion and Race presents *Vital Conversations* to help start the dialogue on subjects that may sometimes be difficult to approach. We are all part of the beloved community, and we welcome perspectives that bring enlightenment and understanding."

Begin the study session by noting that feeling welcome in the house of God can be challenging on various levels. Explain to the group that in this session we will meet a young woman who experienced alienation as a Christian because of her mother's tribal affiliation. Introduce the video by saying: M. Jeanette Iman'ishimwe, a native of Rwanda, is an interpreter for the United Nations Refugee Agency. A former refugee – who is pursuing her master's degree at Africa University, Mutare, Zimbabwe – she advocates for how the church must embrace refugees and immigrants.

Before showing the video, review and post the group's covenant. Highlight the key components: confidentiality; everyone's voice matters; disagree with care/do not attack anyone. If desired, invite the group to add thoughts and ideas to the covenant. Also, distribute the Listening and Looking Guide. Ask them to quickly review the questions and statements. Tell the participants they are only to jot down short notes on their guide so as much as possible remain attentive to the video presentation.

At the conclusion of the video, allow five to ten minutes for the group members to individually answer questions and statements on the guide, except for cultivating a new vision and creating a social media share. Tell the group that there will be another opportunity to make notes for that and to create a social media statement.

**Scripture Reflection [10 minutes]**

Read aloud or ask someone to read aloud the Scripture: Romans 8:31-39. Distribute index cards and ask members to work individually and write down the specific persecutions that Jeanette Iman'ishimwe faced as a child: recall the ones that families similar to hers also faced.

Remember the Scripture that nothing can separate us from God. Then recall a time when you “almost let go” – when it seemed you could no longer believe, when you asked God, “Why, why, why?” Was it the death of a child? A home foreclosure? A layoff at work? A betrayal by a trusted colleague? Identify what helped you hold on to your faith and trust in God.

### **Pair 'n Share [10-15 minutes]**

Have the groups work in pairs, with each person reflecting on the time when her or his faith was tested. Ask them to refer to comments related to the questions and statements on the Listening and Looking Guide. Call the members back together and invite people to share aloud experience and memories related to feelings of being isolated within the church.

### **Write a Lament [5-10 minutes]**

Direct the group’s attention to the blank sheet of newsprint with the heading: “If Only I Could...” Encourage them to create a group statement in the form of a lament on behalf of Jeanette (they may review their notes from their index cards or guide). If no one offers a line, write either of these phrases on the newsprint to help the writing begin:

- Give you candy every Sunday after church
- Be your grandmother for the rest of your life
- Pay your family a pastoral visit
- Ask your mom to usher
- Make you feel safe
- Let you sing in the children’s choir

### **Prepare a New Vision [10 minutes]**

Direct the group’s attention back to the guide and the opportunity to cultivate a new vision and make a comment on social media. Specifically remind them of the pain that Ms. Iman’ishimwe faced in so many ways – not getting candies, not being allowed to join the choir, seeing her mom unable to serve in the church. How do we prepare to offer love and healing to someone who is experiencing “church hurt”? What do we say to the little girl Jeanette? What do we say to the adult Jeanette? How will we build a better world for those in similar situations? Invite someone to share their vision for justice and healing.

### **Closing Devotions [15 minutes]**

Have the group sit in a circle, bringing a pen and a blank index card with them. If able, play the song “Friend of a Wounded Heart” by Brooklyn Tabernacle. If not, invite participants to speak aloud some words from song or Scripture that support and encourage someone who is hurting. Examples: “Jesus, he heals your secret scars.” “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Put two chairs in the middle of the circle, side by side and facing in opposite directions. Ask each person to write on each card the first name of someone whose heart is hurting or broken. As the music plays – or in silence – invite members to bring their cards and put on the seat of the chairs.

Once all cards have been placed, close with this prayer (or using one of your own choosing). Our hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus’ blood and righteous – on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. God, we place our hope and trust in You. We lift up the people whose names are laid here at this altar, in the midst of us all. You know their pain, You know their longing. Heal. Deliver. Soothe. Calm. Ease. Bless, oh, bless. We come to Thee. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.

## Listening and Looking Guide: Jeanette Iman'ishimwe

What would you call an unforgiveable sin?

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In what way(s) can you relate to Jeanette Iman'ishimwe's experience?

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Have you known about any conflicts in church or family because "two different kinds of blood" run in someone's veins?

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What was most painful for you to hear in Ms. Iman'ishimwe's story?

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What were signs of hope in her story?

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Ms. Iman'ishimwe describes her experience as "isolation." Have you seen people isolated in your church or ministry setting? Write about it:

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Cultivate a new vision: Jeanette Iman'Ishimwe's family joined a Congolese church for worship and fellowship. What can be done to keep people from being alienated in the church?

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Make a commitment: \_\_\_\_\_

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Tweet This/Post on your social media: \_\_\_\_\_

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