WELCOMING THE STRANGER

Thinking Biblically About Immigration

WITH MATTHEW SOERENS & LIZ DONG

Arrive Ministries

world relief
Our mission is to carry out God’s command to welcome and bring lifelong transformation to refugees and immigrants in Minnesota.
Welcoming the Stranger: 
Thinking Biblically about Immigration

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Evangelical Immigration Table
Some Troubling Statistics

- According to LifeWay Research polling…

- 86% of Protestant pastors in the US affirm that Christians should “care sacrificially for refugees and foreigners”
Some Troubling Statistics

- But...

  - But only 29% of Protestant pastors say their church is actively serving immigrants in their community (LifeWay Research)
Some Troubling Statistics

- 57% of evangelical Christians (and 69% of white evangelicals) say that the arrival of immigrants to their community presents a threat or a burden of some sort.

- Only 42% say it presents “an opportunity to introduce them to Jesus” (LifeWay Research)
Some Troubling Statistics

- Just **12%** of evangelical Christians say their views on the arrival of refugees and other immigrants are primarily informed by the Bible
Thinking Biblically

– Jesus was one of many biblical heroes who was an immigrant (Matt. 2:13-18)
Legal Definition of a Refugee

- A refugee is a person who has fled their *country* because of a well-founded *fear of persecution* on account of their

  - Race
  - Religion
  - Political Opinion

- Globally, 25.4 *million* people meet this definition, not including more than 40 million who are “internally displaced” (UN High Commissioner for Refugees)
Thinking Biblically

– Immigrants are made in the Image of God and possess inherent dignity and potential (Gen. 1:26-27)
Economics of Refugees & Immigration

– 40% of Fortune 500 Companies were founded or cofounded by an immigrant or their child (Forbes Magazine)

– 20 years after arrival, the average refugee adult has contributed approximately $21,000 more in taxes than they have received in governmental assistance and services at all levels (University of Notre Dame study)

– Almost all economists believe that the net economic impact of immigration on the U.S. is positive, including 96% of economists surveyed by the Wall Street Journal who believe that the net economic impact of illegal immigration is positive
Economics of Refugees & Immigration

Contrary to widespread misconception, immigrants who are unlawfully present cannot receive federal means-tested public benefits, but they can—and do—pay taxes, including:

- In Minnesota, contributing $49.7 million in sales taxes and $18.7 million in property taxes annually (Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy)

- Federally, contributing $12 billion annually to Social Security that they cannot benefit from (Social Security Administration)
Thinking Biblically

- God loves and cares for the vulnerable: the orphan, the widow, and the foreigner (Deut. 10:17-19; Ps. 146:9; Zech. 7:9-10; Jer. 22:3; Mal. 3:5)
Thinking Biblically

– We are commanded to love our neighbors—without caveats (Lev. 19:18, 34; Luke 10:25-37)
Refugees and Terrorism

- Refugees admitted through the U.S. Refugee Admissions program already are subjected to the most thorough vetting of any category of visitor or immigrant to the US

- Since the Refugee Act of 1980, 0 Americans have lost their life in a terrorist attack perpetrated by a refugee

- The odds of the average American being killed by a refugee-turned-terrorist are 1 in 3.6 billion (Cato Institute)
Immigrants and Crime

- Immigrants are incarcerated at lower rates than US citizens
  
  - Incarceration rates among people ages 18 through 54, in 2017
    - 1.47% among native-born US citizens
    - 0.36% among lawfully present immigrants
    - 0.76% among unlawfully present immigrants (including those in immigration detention facilities, pending deportation hearings because they are accused of violating immigration laws) (Cato Institute)
Thinking Biblically

- We are commanded to be subject to governing authorities (Rom. 13:1-5)
Immigration Legal Statuses

- About 70% of immigrants in the US are lawfully present, including all who are admitted as refugees.

- Among the roughly 11 million immigrants who are unlawfully present in the US, nearly half entered on a temporary visa but overstayed, and they come from all over the world, not just from Mexico (Center for Migration Studies).

- Under current law, legal immigration is limited to:
  - Family-sponsored immigrants
  - Employer-sponsored immigrants
  - Refugees and Asylees
  - Diversity Visa Lottery Winners
Respecting U.S. Asylum Law

- After World War II, after the U.S. was among many countries that sent Jewish asylum seekers back to Europe where they were killed, our government established laws committing not to return individuals who reach the U.S. who have a credible fear of persecution if returned.

- Under existing U.S. law, an individual can seek asylum – essentially professing to meet the definition of a refugee – whether already in the U.S., arriving at a port of entry or when apprehended crossing unlawfully.

- In recent months, the number of asylum-seeking families apprehended crossing the U.S.- Mexico border unlawfully has increased dramatically.
Thinking Biblically

- When we extend compassion to persecuted brothers and sisters in Christ, we do so to Christ Himself (Matt. 25:31-45)
Religious Demographics of Refugees Resettled to the US

Religious Traditions of Refugees Resettled to the US, 2006 through 2015

- Christians
- Muslims
- Hindus
- Buddhists
- J faithful
- Animists
- Baha’is
- No Religion, Atheist, Unknown
- Other

Note: Christians include those of any Christian tradition, including Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, simply “Christian,” and others.

Source: U.S. State Department Refugee Processing Center
Persecuted Christians and the US Refugee Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>Percent Decline from 2016 to 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christians from the Top 50 Countries on Open Doors USA's 2019 World Watch List for Christian Persecution</td>
<td>17,065</td>
<td>4,080</td>
<td>76.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians from the Top 11 Countries where Christians face the &quot;Most Extreme&quot; Persecution (per Open Doors USA's World Watch List)</td>
<td>4,591</td>
<td>1,225</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians from Syria</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians from Iran</td>
<td>2,263</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christians from Iraq</td>
<td>1,966</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>98.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: US State Department Refugee Processing Center data as of January 2019)
Thinking Biblically

– By welcoming those who are not yet believers, we have opportunities to “give an answer to everyone who asks” for the hope within us and to “make disciples of all nations” (1 Pet. 3:15, Matt. 28:19)
A Missional Opportunity

Among people of non-Christian religious traditions in North American—most of them refugees or other immigrants—60% say they do not personally know a Christian (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Center for the Study of Global Christianity, analyzed by Christianity Today)
A Missional Opportunity

- Something is missionally malignant whenever we are willing to make great sacrifices to travel the world to reach a people group but are not willing to walk across the street.

- Missiologist J.D. Payne
A Christian Response to Refugees and Immigration

– Prayer

– Listening

– Empowering Churches Abroad

– Advocacy

– Serving Locally

– Evangelism
Prayer

- Pray without ceasing (1 Thes. 5:17 ESV)

- The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest (Luke 10:2 ESV)

- First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way (1 Tim. 2:1-2 ESV)
A Christian Response to Refugees and Immigration

- Listening
  - To Scripture
    - “I Was a Stranger” Challenge (bookmark or digital via YouVersion’s Bible app)
  - To Immigrants’ Stories
    - *The Stranger* (www.EvangelicalImmigrationTable.com)
A Christian Response to Refugees and Immigration

- Empowering Churches Abroad

- Coming alongside churches around the world to address the root causes that compel migration
  - Poverty
  - Persecution
  - War
  - Natural and Environmental Disasters
A Christian Response to Refugees and Immigration

- Advocacy

  - Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves (Prov. 31:8)
Evangelical Statement of Principles for Immigration Reform

- As evangelical Christian leaders, we call for a bipartisan solution on immigration that:
  - Respects the God-given dignity of every person
  - Protects the unity of the immediate family
  - Respects the rule of law
  - Guarantees secure national borders
  - Ensures fairness to taxpayers
  - Establishes a path toward legal status and/or citizenship for those who qualify and who wish to become permanent residents
- Practical Ways to Advocate
  
  - Sign the Evangelical Statement of Principles – www.EvangelicalImmigrationTable.com
  
  - Meet with your Member of Congress or his/her staff
  
  - Write an Op-Ed for the local newspaper
Current Policy Concerns

- State Level
  - HF1500 – driver’s licenses for which undocumented immigrants could qualify

- Federal Level
  - Reduction in U.S. Refugee Resettlement
  - Termination of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)
  - Termination of Temporary Protected Status (El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua) and Deferred Enforced Departure (Liberia)
  - Changes to Asylum Processing and Increase in Families Seeking Asylum at the U.S.-Mexico Border
A Christian Response to Refugees and Immigration


- Refugee Resettlement
- Immigrant Legal Services
- English Language and Literacy Instruction
- Financial Support
A Christian Response to Refugees and Immigration

- Evangelism

- Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19 NIV)

- Always be ready to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Pet. 3:15 NIV)
Further Resources

– Free E-Book: www.EvangelicalImmigrationTable.com/ThinkingBiblically

– Social Media

  – Twitter: @MatthewSoerens, @gnodzil, @ArriveMin
  – Facebook: www.facebook.com/WelcomingTheStranger
                 www.facebook.com/ChristianDreamers
                 www.facebook.com/ArriveMinistries

– Websites

  – www.EvangelicalImmigrationTable.com
  – www.worldrelief.org
  – www.welcomingthestranger.com
  – www.ArriveMinistries.org

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