



STRANGERS IN OUR LAND

By Clint Morgan

From a very early age we teach our children the warning, “stranger-danger.” That thought gets planted deep in our hearts and minds and does not suddenly vanish when we become adults. If we lived under the mantra “stranger-danger,” we would constantly be paralyzed by fear and perhaps would spend an inordinate amount of time locked in our homes. I’m confident none of us desires to live in a constant state of alarm, nor barricaded behind closed doors and blinds, even in our own home. So how do we respond to this growing challenge?

JUST THE FACTS

In our ever changing world we can hardly leave home without encountering one of the 44 million foreign-born inhabitants of the US, which is 13.5% of our population. That within itself is a large social grouping that can, and does, have an effect on our lives at many levels. Research from the Pew Forum in 2015 tells us the attitude of many Americans, which unfortunately doesn't vary much for Christians, is somewhat resistant to this growing number of new faces in our communities.

According to a 2015 LifeWay Research poll, "90 percent of all evangelicals say that the Scripture has no impact on their views toward immigration reform." It is sobering, and to some degree frightening, to think the Bible is not the primary source guiding Christians in their thoughts about a matter as important as immigration.

Another LifeWay study in 2017 found that "Protestant congregations in America were twice as likely to fear refugees as help them," though senior pastors overwhelmingly believed that "Christians have a responsibility to care sacrificially for refugees and foreigners." Perhaps a weak, or undeveloped, biblical view on how to properly treat the "strangers in our land" is due the fact that only 33% of evangelical pastors have addressed this issue from the pulpit. Will

the people in the pews grapple with such questions if the leadership chooses to not bring them up? Not likely, but this does not eliminate the individual believer's responsibility to search the Scriptures in the face of life's issues, even the question of how to deal with the "strangers in our land."

THE PRIMARY QUESTIONS

It appears the most pressing question is how do we, as the Body of Christ, directed by God's Word, address the increasing challenges and opportunities before us due to the influx of immigrants and refugees in the US? Foundationally we will do well to embrace their presence by aligning our responses with a biblical foundation rather than political rhetoric, emotionally charged tirades, or culturally driven reactions. Isn't it safe to say we should be looking for solutions that reflect God's love, mercy, grace, kindness, and justice? Is it not reasonable to state that immigrants and refugees should find their contacts with believers to be comforting, refreshing, and breathing hope into them? (see Matthew 25:31-46).

Followers of Christ can agree the Bible has a good deal to say about loving strangers and caring for foreigners. There is a compelling biblical case to be made for a compassionate approach to people coming to us from every nation, language group, and ethnicity.

It is well established that most immigrants and refugees come searching for something better. But, in order to realize these aspirations they must deal with a new land, language, culture, and in many cases a new God.

Those factors alone are significant enough to cause great emotional, physical, and spiritual trauma. Do believers bear any responsibility in helping the “strangers in our land” respond to these challenges? The Bible, both in the Old Testament and New Testament, gives a good amount of attention to this question (see Leviticus 19:33-34, Deuteronomy 1:16, Revelation 7:9-10).

DANGEROUS PRESUPPOSITIONS

As humans we see the world through a grid of accumulated knowledge and experiences that form our presuppositions. Presuppositions about the “strangers in the land” will to a great degree shape our response to them. As we seek to develop a practical biblical response to the challenges and opportunities

Read more about the issues at LifeWay Research:

<https://lifewayresearch.com/2015/03/11/evangelicals-say-it-is-time-for-congress-to-tackle-immigration/>

<https://lifewayresearch.com/2016/02/29/churches-twice-as-likely-to-fear-refugees-than-to-help-them/>

offered us by the presence of over 40 million immigrants and refugees, we must deal with some major presuppositions that will surely influence our reactions to their presence.

First of all, let’s take a look at some negative presuppositions that may skew one’s processing of this matter. **If we perceive those coming to the US from other countries to be:**

- ***A raider in our work force***
- ***A financial burden to our country***
- ***A menace to our culture***
- ***A danger to our religious beliefs***
- ***A disturbance in our educational system***
- ***A carrier of strange and dangerous diseases***
- ***A nuisance in our communications***
- ***A threat to our security [terrorists, infiltrators, spies, etc.]***

. . . then our treatment of them will most likely tend toward the negative. If this is the starting point of one’s thinking, it will be difficult, but not impossible, to move toward a compassionate response.

There is no doubt that some of those coming to the US do arrive with hate-filled hearts and other ulterior motivations and, therefore, present a threat. However, should we allow this to be the dominant factor in directing our actions and reactions to the presence of non-native Americans?

Political analyst, Jamelle Bouie, warned that we often fear the next wave of immigrants, even though we are already a nation of refugees. A good starting point may be to reflect on our own great-grandparents, or even our grandparents, who were once “strangers” in the United States.

POSITIVE PRESUPPOSITIONS

Let’s take a look at some values that we, as Christians, should attribute to the immigrants and refugees. It’s highly probable that by including this affirmative, Bible-based, angle we will arrive at a more compassionate and just response to their presence in our country.

We should remember that:

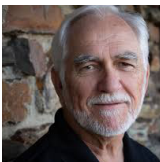
- **All people are God’s creation. Are there any exceptions?**
- **Every human has a soul and that soul has eternal value. Are there any exceptions?**
- **Christians should love all people as we love ourselves. Are there any exceptions?**
- **All humans have the right to feel loved, safe, and valued. Are there any exceptions?**

- **Everyone should have access to the necessities of life. Are there any exceptions?**
- **God desires that all humans spend eternity with Him. Are there any exceptions?**
- **Christ died for all. Are there any exceptions?**
- **He has commissioned us to take the gospel to all nations, and this includes those coming to us as immigrants and refugees. Are there any exceptions?**

Note the question, “Are there any exceptions?” We can ask it of both the lists of positive and negative presuppositions. Does wisdom not dictate that we formulate our response based on these positive non-variables rather than the negative possibilities?

CONCLUSION

We can’t resolve all the issues surrounding this matter in this setting because it is complex and multi-layered. But collectively as the Body of Christ, we can make an unwavering commitment to respond to the “strangers in our land” in a way that reflects biblical values, brings hope to those in need, and will ultimately glorify God.



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