

Mi Casa Es Tu Casa

Shouldn't "My house is your house" be the guiding principle in how we treat foreigners?

Earlier this year when I was preaching in California, a woman came to the church altar and asked me for prayer. She spoke with a thick Spanish accent. Her tears had already streaked her mascara, and she was trembling. In between her sobs she told me that her husband, who is not a U.S. citizen, had been deported to Mexico—leaving her and their four children behind.

This woman is a U.S. citizen, but her husband had been standing in line for 10 years to get his papers. As is often the case with Mexicans, bureaucracy offered him no compassion. Now a family is split up. The land of the free and the home of the brave slammed its doors on a Christian brother.

This breaks my heart. I hope it breaks yours.

I have many immigrant friends who came to the United States seeking a better life. Some, like the Russian-speaking Pentecostals I know in Philadelphia, were granted religious asylum in the 1990s because they were persecuted for their faith in their native country of Belarus. I have many Indian-born friends who were granted easy access to America's privileges.

But some of my friends from Central and South America have found it much harder to obtain legal status. They stand in long lines, fill out endless forms and pay hefty fees—only to be told to come back in six months and stand in another line. They face constant rejection. Some get discouraged and give up, assuming they aren't good enough to experience the American dream.

My friends from Brazil, Ecuador and Guatemala are born-again Christians who came to the United States seeking more

education and a higher standard of living. Their English is much better than my Spanish. They are law-abiding people who have a vibrant faith in Jesus. Some believe God told them to come to the United States, in the same way He instructed Abraham to leave the land of his birth. Fortunately, Abraham and Sarah didn't have to produce passports or obtain driver's licenses when they settled in Canaan.

Please hear me. I am not suggesting we should carelessly fling open our borders to terrorists and criminals, or that we shouldn't care about national security. But it disturbs me when honest, good-hearted immigrants hear mean-spirited comments (especially from Christians) such as, "English only!" or "Send them all home!" And it appalls me when people from certain countries (especially those who don't have advanced degrees or big bank accounts) suffer blatant discrimination.

Compassion for immigrants, regardless of their skin color or accent, is at the heart of God's moral law. Leviticus 19:34 says: "The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself" (NASB). Besides Abraham, the father of our faith, many of the Bible's heroes were immigrants who left their homes to serve God in foreign lands:

- Ruth, a Moabite, found God's compassion in Boaz's fields in Israel
- Mordecai and Esther were Jews who found God's favor in Persia
- Cornelius was an Italian who found the gospel while living in Israel.

The Bible is full of stories of the immigrant experience, and God's Word beckons us to open our hearts and homes to foreigners. We cannot be truly "pro-life" if we don't love immigrants.

It is the height of hypocrisy to defend unborn babies and then

mistreat foreigners; it's also shamefully two-faced for us to defend traditional marriage on one hand and then split up families on the other.

What we desperately need, besides a spiritual awakening, is a return to compassionate immigration policy that not only protects our citizens from terrorism but also offers equal opportunity to peace-loving people who are seeking a better life.

I have learned so much about family and togetherness from my immigrant friends. Hispanics love to say *Mi casa es tu casa* ("My house is your house") because community is valued in their culture. My dream is that, some day, all Americans will learn to say that phrase—and mean it.

J. Lee Grady was editor of *Charisma* for 11 years. He now serves as contributing editor while devoting more time to ministry. You can find him on the Web at www.jlee-grady.com. His newest books are *10 Lies Men Believe* and *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale*.