

What Am I Missing When It Comes to Immigration?

Over the years, I have rarely addressed the question of immigration. That's because I have no expertise in the matter and find it much better to solicit the wisdom of experts. Why give my opinion if it's no better than yours (or, perhaps, less worthy than yours)? So, this article has no hidden agenda. I'm genuinely asking questions.

First, allow me to share these three different examples.

1) Last week, I was speaking with a South African woman who has lived in the States with her husband and children for more than 15 years. She was ecstatic, telling me that just that morning, they had all become American citizens. It meant the world to them.

2) Not everyone is so fortunate. In the early 2000s, one of our ministry school grads wanted to stay here in the States and applied for citizenship, along with his wife. They were from Norway; they were well-educated; they had a stellar track record and he was an employee of our school. Despite our best efforts, including hiring an immigration lawyer, they were denied a path to citizenship and had to return home.

3) A few years ago, I was contacted via social media by the son of a Vietnamese couple who had fled Vietnam when we pulled our troops out, suffering terribly before reaching our shores. They were among the boat people of the late 1970s to early 1980s, and their stories were heartbreaking.

My wife, Nancy, and I were part of a church that got involved in sponsoring these refugees, so if we had a spare bed or couch, we welcomed them into our homes. This couple was the first of a number of Vietnamese refugees to live with us, together with their baby boy.

We had not been in touch with them for quite a few years, and it was another son who was now contacting us. But he wanted to put me back in touch with his parents, which was an incredible experience for all of us. The father told me he had recently become an American citizen and chose my name, Michael, as his new name. Incredible!

Now, I present these three diverse cases here simply to say this: For many decades now, people come to our shores (or, across our borders) to find refuge in this land of opportunity, to start a new life or simply to continue on the path most important to them. And we have a process by which people become American citizens.

There will always be more refugees and potential immigrants wanting to come to our country than is possible for us to absorb. (Again, we have little idea how much opportunity America presents, especially when compared to the many impoverished and war-torn nations of the world.) But we must have an orderly system to process these refugees and potential immigrants. Otherwise we will have chaos.

If you've ever crossed the border into Canada or Mexico, you know that sometimes you can wait for several hours to get through, depending on the busyness of the traffic. And it's not uncommon to get questioned at length if the officers are not happy with your answers. As annoying as this can be, countries need borders.

As for American policy, an immigration website notes that, "The United States has been the top destination for international migrants since at least 1960, with one-fifth of the world's migrants living there as of 2017. Despite its long history of immigration, the United States has oscillated between perceiving immigration as a valuable resource and as a major challenge."

According to Wikipedia, "In absolute numbers, the United

States has a larger immigrant population than any other country, with 47 million immigrants as of 2015. This represents 19.1 percent of the 244 million international migrants worldwide, and 14.4 percent of the U.S. population.”

Those are some amazing stats, and all of this leads me to my questions, which I’m not asking as a Trump-supporter or a Trump-basher. I’m asking in the most objective way possible.

First, if illegal immigrants are flooding our country, what’s so controversial about building a border wall? There’s a legal process for immigration, and we take in hundreds of thousands of immigrants each year. What’s wrong with keeping the illegals out?

Second, since when has anyone been able to force us to take in immigrants? Who decided that the way we treat a migrant caravan—one that was ostensibly stirred up by left-wing activists—is now a test of our national compassion? Don’t we have a long-term track record of compassionate response to refugees?

Third, what’s so controversial about wanting to preserve our national identity? After all, people want to come to America for a reason. If we cease to be America, there’s no reason for people to come here. Can we learn nothing from what some European countries are now experiencing due to a massive influx of Muslim immigrants, many of whom have little or no desire to become incorporated into the host country’s national culture?

Fourth, why would it be so hard to make a path for citizenship, with penalties, for those who came in illegally years ago but have been working jobs, obeying the laws and contributing to the good of the society? Why must they be deported according to some hardliners? Is there no middle ground?

Again, I’m not asking these questions to prove a point or to

support or undermine the president. And, to repeat, I don't talk about this much because it's not an area of focus or expertise for me. But the current caravan crisis, coupled with my conversation with the South African woman, prompted me to put these on the table for your input.

How about some common sense responses without political vitriol? I'll read your comments with interest. Thanks!