

Why Pro-Life Evangelicals Should Care About Refugees

It's a widely known fact that American evangelicals are overwhelmingly pro-life. A recent Pew survey found that fully 77% of white evangelicals believe abortion should be illegal in all or most cases.

But while the vast majority of evangelicals support defending and protecting pre-born children, evangelicals are the group least likely to say that the U.S. has a responsibility to aid and protect the lives of refugees. This is an incredibly discouraging and alarming disconnect. If we evangelicals are to truly adhere to the whole of Scripture, then caring for refugees and immigrants is irrefutably connected to our pro-life ethic.

Evangelicals know and believe that every human life is created in God's image (Gen 1:27-28). Scripture tells us we are knit together in our mother's womb (Ps. 139:13) and that God calls us by name, claiming us as His own (Isa. 43:1). Human beings are unique in this way from all else in creation. Therefore, each and every life matters to God. This is the core of our pro-life ethic and why we oppose the violence of abortion against preborn children.

But our fight to uphold the sanctity and dignity of human life—protecting those made in the image of God—shouldn't simply end when a child is born. Scripture is alive with God's heart for people, and any refusal to acknowledge and act toward the flourishing of others beyond birth is of great concern to God (Matt. 25:40). A pre-born child's heartbeat matters. So, does the migrant child's heartbeat at the border. I have yet to find a verse in Scripture that allows me to justify ignoring or prioritizing one of these vulnerable populations over the other.

Being pro-life should transcend culture, status, race, age, and opinion because we know that each and every person bears a unique reflection of God and has immeasurable worth to him. I'm often told that talking about human dignity issues is too political. But being pro-life is not a political issue; it's a biblical issue.

We are to love God and love others. But how can we truly love our neighbor if we ignore policies that knowingly put innocent lives at risk of undue harm, injury or degradation? We have the power and influence to change these things. These offenses are an affront to the expression of the image of God within the people He created. It's why we rally to engage when we hear of these kinds of injustices. And if evangelicals were to rally more holistically and collectively, it would only serve to help advance our Christian credibility and pro-life ethic in this country and around the world.

Some may argue that adding other vulnerable populations to the pro-life narrative makes the subject matter too crowded. May I boldly suggest that God's resources aren't depleted when we choose to care about life holistically, that we actually bring more glory to Him when we choose to care consistently about all human life? To truly be pro-life, we have to defend and advocate for the sanctity and dignity of every life—at any stage—from conception to natural death.

And this is where the refugee crisis intersects with our pro-life ethic. Refugees today are exposed to and at risk for numerous abuses of their human dignity. One of the greatest of these abuses is human trafficking, a form of modern-day slavery.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security reports that there are 5.4 victims of human trafficking for every 1,000 people in the world. In 2016 alone, there were 40.3 million victims of human trafficking. But while anyone can be a victim of human trafficking, migrants and refugees are uniquely vulnerable to

this grave evil. Ask any human trafficking or immigration expert, and they will tell you that migration and trafficking are inextricably linked. One survey even found that 70% of migrants to Europe from North Africa were victims of human trafficking or exploitation.

Refugees and migrants are easily exploited by human traffickers because they often lack sufficient community safety infrastructures and legal protections. One of the most common, yet notoriously underreported, forms of human trafficking is labor trafficking, where vulnerable men, women and children are forced to work under threats of violence and coercion. For the immigrants, migrants, and refugees who constitute 95% of labor trafficking victims in the U.S., this lack of attention and protection is devastating.

For evangelicals who may be tempted to think that human trafficking only affects migrants and refugees in other parts of the world, think again. The U.S. National Human Trafficking Hotline reported 11,500 situations of human trafficking in 2019. For those where immigration status was known, less than one-quarter of trafficking victims were U.S. citizens or Lawful Permanent Residents. The majority were foreigners, and among the most vulnerable are the thousands of unaccompanied minors crossing at the southern border. Right now, children, separated families and victims of violence crossing our border are at a high risk of becoming trafficking victims.

Evangelicals can work to change this by collectively using our voice to protect migrants and refugees. These are vulnerable people who are currently slipping into the shadows of human trafficking due to the kinds of immigration policies in effect in America today.

There's so much we can do together, from advocacy to activism. At Women of Welcome, the movement I'm privileged to lead, we're encouraging and equipping evangelical women to lend their voices to the fight against trafficking, and I'm proud

to have signed a letter to Ivanka Trump urging the full enforcement of the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA), a law with vital provisions to protect unaccompanied children that has been ignored since March. More than 25,000 Christians have added their names to this letter, along with evangelical anti-trafficking and child protection ministries like International Justice Mission, World Relief, World Vision and Bethany Christian Services.

But whatever specific actions we take as a community, the most important thing is for evangelicals to join together to advocate with fervor, integrity, and compassion toward their very real struggle. We must join together in one voice because we know their lives matter—these people are an invaluable piece to the pro-life narrative. We must show a watching world that our faith compels us to engage and advocate consistently for every human life. {eoa}

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