

Don't Close Your Heart to Refugees

My friend Matt Hyde lives in Boise, Idaho, a city that is 89 percent white. After he became the pastor of Discovery Church in 2013, he learned that refugees from many countries were living in Boise. They are from Bosnia, Serbia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nepal, Bhutan, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Congo, Togo and Sudan.

Most of them had fled political oppression or civil war. Many spent time in crude refugee camps before they were granted permission to move to the United States. Almost all of them endured unbelievable trauma.

These refugees have changed Hyde's life—and his entire congregation. Today some of these foreigners are members of Discovery Church. A group of believers from Bhutan and Nepal use the church's facility for their own congregation. A Congolese church and an Ethiopian/Eritrean church also use the building. And members of Hyde's church now go to the airport regularly to welcome refugees when they arrive in town.

"These people have endured things I cannot imagine," says Hyde, who is 38. "Yet they have so much love for Christ. That has been so humbling. As I have become friends with them, it has reawakened my heart to the call to reach the nations."

When God showed Hyde that Discovery Church should minister to Boise's refugee population, he realized this would be a stretch for some of his members. But compassion compelled him. He even got on his knees during last year's Easter service and washed the feet of the leaders of a Nepali and Congolese congregation.

"People were just weeping as they watched us serve them," Hyde says.

For Hyde—and many other charismatic and evangelical Christians—loving refugees is a biblical mandate, not a political position. He and his team point to Scriptures such as Leviticus 19:34 (“The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born”) and Zechariah 7:10 (“Do not oppress ... the foreigner or the poor”), which make it obvious that caring for immigrants and refugees is a core mandate for God’s people.

But how do we fulfill this mandate in an era of global terrorism? Many countries are closing their doors to refugees because Islamic militants are sneaking across borders with bombs. In some cases, nationalism and xenophobia have turned hearts cold toward foreigners who need shelter and food.

Then last week, President Trump triggered a firestorm when he signed an executive order suspending all refugee admission for 120 days. The order also restricts immigration from seven predominantly Muslim countries and bans all Syrian refugees indefinitely.

The people who elected Trump cheered his decision—because they believe our lax immigration laws help terrorists. Those who didn’t vote for Trump view the executive order as a mean-spirited betrayal of American compassion.

I know it’s complicated. But I believe the kingdom of God often is in conflict with both liberal and conservative sides of the political spectrum. God’s love should be extended to the oppressed whether you are a pro-Trump Republican, an anti-Trump Democrat or anything in between.

I know we need to police our borders. I know we don’t want a repeat of 9/11—when foreigners who were legally allowed in this country killed 2,996 people. I know we need to screen people before they enter the country.

But I am grieved that Trump’s order has slammed the door in the faces of thousands of people who are fleeing the kind of

tyranny my ancestors faced when they sailed to these shores in the 1700s. I don't want to imagine what will happen to today's refugees during the next 120 days while they wait for a green light that may never come.

Mr. Trump's aides have assured us that his orders were given to improve the vetting process (which is already extremely tedious). They have also made it clear that this law is only temporary.

But I can't help but wonder how many lives will be lost during the 120 days.

Proverbs 24:11 commands us: "Deliver those who are being taken away to death, and those who are staggering to slaughter, oh hold them back." How tragic that many Christians who pride themselves on being "pro-life" in reference to the abortion issue are happy to keep innocent refugees out of the country in the name of "security."

I believe American churches must develop an action plan that includes the following:

- Write your elected officials and ask that President Trump's ban on refugees be lifted as soon as possible, and that Syrians (a refugee group that includes more than 2.5 million children) be allowed to find a safe haven in the United States.
- Get to know the refugee population in your own city, build relationships and find out how you can serve them.
- Contribute to Christian organizations (such as World Relief) that are helping refugees on the front lines.
- Mobilize your church to provide welcome baskets, meals, job training or English classes for refugees in your area.
- Provide counseling and prayer ministry for refugees who have suffered trauma.

We must speak out on behalf of the oppressed—and we must do it

with a sense of urgency. Some refugees don't have three months to languish in their squalid camps. Moral courage, not fear of terrorism, should guide our policies. We must not let our love grow cold. If we truly want to "Make America Great Again," we can't turn a deaf ear to people who need our aid. {eo}

For more information about Discovery Church and their work with refugees go to .