

Open Your Borders

My immigrant friends, have made my life richer and more colorful.

On most social issues I usually fit in the staunch conservative category. But when it comes to the hot-button topic of immigration policy, I guess you'll have to call me a liberal. I just don't fit in with the folks who are ready to hang a NO HABLAMOS ESPAÑOL sign on the Statue of Liberty.

Call me naive if you want, but I happen to believe that the United States is a great nation because we embrace people from all cultures. We've had our struggles with racism through the years, for sure, but Christian hospitality has always triumphed—even though terrorism has forced us to get tough on border controls and undocumented workers.

I love the spicy smell of America's melting pot. In recent years my immigrant friends have made my life richer and more colorful. Even my taste for food has changed as I have come to enjoy Bolivian salteñas, Egyptian hummus, Ukrainian borscht, Indian curry, Indonesian satay and Nigerian moi-moi.

Last year I met Gennady, a 21-year-old college student who fled to the United States from the former Soviet Union when he was a young boy. He and his Pentecostal parents had to leave Belarus because the anti-Christian government there was persecuting believers and denying their children access to education. The U.S. government granted Gennady's family religious refugee status, and he was able to attend school and earn a college degree.

Today my young Belarusian friend is the worship leader in his

congregation in Philadelphia, a city that hosts more than 200,000 Russian-speaking immigrants. He has traveled with me on two missionary trips, and we plan to venture someday to Siberia, where he will translate for me when I preach.

Then there's Fernando, a Brazilian pastor I've known since the late 1990s. He and his wife became U.S. citizens several years ago. Now they lead a thriving Portuguese-speaking congregation in Orlando, Florida. Even though he grew up in São Paulo, Fernando and I have much in common, and we lean on each other for encouragement.

A few years ago I met an Egyptian woman who had immigrated to Texas. Besides introducing me to some of the best food on the planet, she got me involved in a ministry project that is now transforming lives in the Middle East. I can't share her name because her evangelistic work has put her life in danger.

There are some immigrants who have become role models in my life. I met Indonesian church planter Paul Tan in 2003 and immediately recognized that he was a man I could emulate.

Paul came to the United States as a student and began a thriving campus ministry. Today his network of City Blessing churches is reaching thousands of people both in this country and back home in Indonesia. Through my relationship with Paul, we were also able to launch an Indonesian version of Charisma that is now touching thousands of people in the world's largest Muslim nation.

These immigrants have taught me that Jesus is all about relationships—and that He wants to move us beyond our fears and prejudices so we can build His kingdom across ethnic

lines.

In the days of Jesus, Jewish rabbis preferred to live within their holy borders so they wouldn't be "polluted" by foreigners. Yet Jesus walked right into Samaria and befriended an abused woman who had a different accent and ate non-kosher food. Jesus shows His love to people regardless of their immigration status or what country is listed on their passports.

Jesus poured out His Spirit on the early church on a day when international visitors had turned Jerusalem into a first century melting pot. When the miracle of Pentecost occurred, the disciples could hear dozens of languages in the streets—and the Holy Spirit did not adopt a "Hebrew only" policy when speaking to them. Jesus manifests His presence in the midst of cultural diversity.

Do you want more of the power of Pentecost? Perhaps you need to befriend an immigrant. Maybe you need to cross a border in your own heart. Start spending time with the Samaritans of your city. You will experience a deeper level of Jesus' love when you open your arms to those who don't look or talk like you.

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