

# IMMIGRATION

*What if it's a Missional Opportunity?*



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## Main Texts

- The stories of the Pharaohs in the times of Joseph (Genesis 37-47)
- Moses (Exodus 1)

## Big Picture

While some people, including some within the Church, see the arrival of immigrants as a *threat*, Scripture challenges us to see immigration as a missional opportunity to “make disciples of all nations” within our own communities.

1. **[Placeholder for pastor's personal story]**
2. **The biblical story of Joseph and Pharaoh provides us with a model for seeing the arrival of immigrants as an *opportunity* and responding with *hospitality*.**
  - a. Joseph was an involuntary immigrant forced to migrate to Egypt (Genesis 37:28).
  - b. As one model of how to respond to immigrants, consider the way that the Pharaoh over Egypt interacts with Joseph.
    - i. Pharaoh recognized that Joseph, an immigrant, brought unique skills and wisdom that could be an opportunity to help his nation (Genesis 41:38-40).
    - ii. When Joseph's brothers and father arrived as immigrants in Egypt, Pharaoh welcomed them with hospitality, offering them the best of the land (Genesis 47:5-6a).
    - iii. Pharaoh consistently looked for how the arrival of immigrants could be an opportunity: he asked Joseph to place the most skilled among his brothers over his own livestock (Genesis 47:6b).
3. **Scripture also gives us the negative example of a different Pharaoh, some years later, who saw immigrants as a *threat* and responded with *hostility*.**

- a. After Joseph's death, a new Pharaoh came to power who "did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8); when we only see people as a mass, rather than see each person as a unique individual, it is natural to respond as this Pharaoh did, sensing a threat.
  - b. Pharaoh became afraid of the Hebrews because ...
    - i. They became numerous, presenting a demographic challenge to his rule (Exodus 1:9).
    - ii. He worried that they would join his enemies, presenting a national security concern (Exodus 1:10).
    - iii. He did not want to deport the Hebrews, because he benefited from their labor, but he also would not grant them the same rights as the native-born Egyptians (Exodus 1:11-14).
  - c. Because he perceived the presence of these foreigners as a threat, Pharaoh responded with hostility, ultimately ordering the genocide of Hebrew baby boys (Exodus 1:22).
- 4. As Americans living in a country to which many immigrants are arriving, we can see immigration as an opportunity and respond with hospitality, or believe that immigration presents a threat and respond with hostility.**
- a. Economists almost universally agree that, contrary to popular misperception, immigration and even illegal immigration in particular have a net positive impact on the U.S. economy.
    - i. 96% of economists surveyed by the [Wall Street Journal](#) said that illegal immigration had had a positive impact on the U.S. economy.
    - ii. We err if we focus only on the costs that immigrants bring, without accounting for their contributions as workers, taxpayers, consumers, and entrepreneurs.
    - iii. Michael Gerson, who was a Christian and a former speechwriter to President George W. Bush, [noted that](#) immigrants "are not just mouths but hands and brains. They are a resource."
  - b. For Christians, the opportunity of immigration is much greater than just an economic benefit: it presents a divinely-orchestrated opportunity to join God in His mission.
    - i. We are commanded to "make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), and because of immigration, the nations have arrived at our doorstep.
    - ii. Many immigrants are already strong believers, and they breathe new life into churches and denominations in need of revitalization, serving as agents of God's mission both in their own ethnic communities and beyond.

- iii. Other immigrants are not yet believers, which presents us the opportunity to share the hope of the gospel as we reach out in love to our newest neighbors.
  - iv. Dr. Timothy Tennent [says that](#) “86% of the immigrant population in North America are likely to either be Christians or become Christians. That’s far above the national average ... The immigrant population actually presents the greatest hope for Christian renewal in North America ... We shouldn’t see this as something that threatens us. We should see this as a wonderful opportunity.”
- c. Many Christians *have* seized this opportunity.
- i. A [January 2024 survey from Lifeway Research](#) finds that roughly one-third of all evangelical Christians have been personally engaged in ministry to and with immigrants.
  - ii. And this isn’t new: World Relief has been engaging the world’s greatest crises, including the global displacement crisis, since it was founded by a local church and the National Association of Evangelicals 80 years ago.
  - iii. As the displacement crisis has worsened in recent years — exacerbated by conflicts, a changing climate and persistent pockets of extreme poverty — World Relief and local churches around the world, including here in the United States [or our community], continue to boldly engage.
- d. Still, too many American Christians are missing this missional opportunity, because they have accepted a media-driven narrative that leads them to view immigrants as a threat rather than viewing the arrival of immigrants through the lens of the Bible.
- i. According to that same Lifeway Research study, two-thirds of evangelical Christians believe the recent arrival of immigrants to the U.S. presents some sort of a “threat” or an economic “drain,” whereas only a minority of evangelical Christians said it presented an opportunity to introduce people to Jesus.
  - ii. That attitude is not because evangelical Christians take the Bible more seriously than other groups, but rather because, by our own admission, the vast majority of evangelicals view immigration primarily from a perspective other than that of their Christian faith: just 26% of [evangelicals say](#) their views on immigrants are primarily influenced by the Bible.
  - iii. Perhaps as an effect of Christians viewing immigrants as a threat, many immigrants of non-Christian religious traditions [say that they do not even](#) know a Christian, suggesting we are not doing a great job of reaching out to our immigrant neighbors: fully 60% of those of non-Christian religious

traditions in the U.S., most of whom are immigrants, say they do not know a Christian.

## Conclusion

If we think about immigration merely from a political, economic, or cultural perspective and fail to examine the issue from a biblical, missional perspective, we may miss out on the opportunity God has presented to his Church within the U.S. to join what He is doing through the migration of people, drawing people to Himself. But if we join the legacy of Christians who have seen the global refugee crisis as an opportunity to boldly engage with the love of Christ, we have an opportunity to glorify God and point people to Him.

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