Immigration Issues

Part 2 of 2: Building a Better Ministry to Immigrants
with Darrell L. Bock, Soraya Marin, Alejandro Mandes, Samuel Rodriguez, and M. Daniel Carroll Rodas
Release Date: July 2013
Darrell Bock: I think another tricky thing here that kind of works underneath the surface that's worth talking about is that when you say immigrant and you ask, "Well, are you here legally or illegally?" The bulk of people who are here are actually here legally, and so the automatic suspicion that, "If you're an immigrant, not only have you come in, but you've come in illegally," is actually a bad assumption to have. Is that not correct?

Samuel Rodriguez: Completely accurate. And Danny and Alex can even answer that with more stats – completely correct.

Darrell Bock: And I actually think that's an important thing to observe, because even in going around this small table with the four of you, everyone here belongs here, you know, no one's here illegally – which is probably fortunate for the seminary that we don't have any illegal speakers. But more importantly, you all have roots. Some of you were born here and have been here all your life, and yet the suspicion is from someone just looking at you or hearing your accent would be, "Well, I should view you, not only as an immigrant and an outsider, but I can be very suspicious that you don't even belong here."

And that adds a tone to the discussion that also can be very destructive. Is that not right, Samuel? I'm keeping Samuel in the loop here, because we're going to lose him here in a second. Go ahead.

Samuel Rodriguez: It is, unfortunately, it is. Hey, you know, my cousin died in the battlefield of Iraq, my first cousin; my uncle died in Korea. My family members have fought for our nation since World War I, and I've experienced in a number of settings, comments and questions like, "Mexican, go home. Why don't you tell your people, please, to learn how to speak English," etcetera, etcetera.

So my children, who are 21st century young people, they've experienced racism and discrimination because of the color of their skin, because of their last name. So I never thought that as a Generation X'er that I would see in my generation, my children experiencing racism after the fights of Dr. King and others. So far, we've come so far as a nation, but the reality is that it's beyond immigration. There is a xenophobic threat.

Not everyone who opposes immigration reform is anti-immigrant. There are some great people that just based on the rule of law say, "We want them to come here legally."
And I would agree. I want people to come here legally, not illegally. But there is a small thread that stands exacerbated because of the polarizing rhetoric that impacts all of us.

*Darrell Bock:*

And we're all faced with trying to fix something that everyone recognizes is broken. And you can't undo where you are. I mean you have to deal with where you are. So those are all realities that we face.

Soraya, I want to ask you – as you look at the practical side of this of what people go through as they come and they have this – not only do they have this shadow of possibly being illegal, and so if they're illegal, being nervous because of their status – but you also have this shadow, a second shadow that we've now mentioned, about being under suspicion of being illegal, even when you're completely legal. How does that impact the way people acclimate to the culture that they've entered into?

*Soraya Marin:*

Well it polarizes people in terms of the activities and the integration into the community that they belong to, because you – like you use the term "shadow" but you're always always on guard, you know, because you don't know sometimes when you're going to be discriminated.

I had one time a repairman come into my house and he said, "Ma'am, I notice that you have an accent; and please don't be offended. But are you from," and he mentioned a country.

And I won't mention it just because, you know. But then that told me very clearly that he is biased against people from that country. And I said, "No, I am not from that country, but I would be proud to be from that country the same."

So it really polarizes people, and then I think it drives the immigrants to stay within their cocoons and within those circles that – you know, like anything or like most things, you have positive things and negative things. The positive things that we will observe there is that you preserve the cultural aspect of it – the language for either your first or second generation – but then you miss so much out of being part of the rest of the community. There are wonderful things here in this country to enjoy and to be part of that we've experienced also when we have that exchange, that people once they go through that experience, they welcome it.

Now I have people that I also work with on the American side that say, "Would you please try to see if you can get some of the folks on the Spanish side to come and help with this?"
Hospitality is one of those things where the Latinos are so notorious for just having a great knack for hospitality. So really the mention of term "negotiation of loss" I heard before, it really goes on in many of these arenas in terms of negotiating what we're missing from both sides of the fence, both from the Latino or for the immigrant side, as well as from the American side.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, because everyone loses in the sense of those who aren't Latino don't get the benefit of really a Latino compassion and gentleness in family and compassion that they often bring to any group that they're a part of, and that gets missed out. Alejandro, I want you to talk about from the church standpoint, from a pastoral standpoint. You know, you're connected to denominations concerned about how this impacts the churches. What do you see within church communities, or the pressures that are put on churches as a result of where things are?

Alejandro Mandes: Well I think as I mentioned before, churches fall along the spectrum. Too oftentimes, nowadays, people are approaching church from a very political evangelical perspective, and we need to inject into that conversation the biblical perspective. So I think churches nowadays are trying to decide where do they fall on this. Those that are, I believe, more of biblical background are having to ask themselves very, very difficult questions as they hear the culture, they hear the communication and the media, and those sort of things, and try to reconcile that, as Danny had mentioned, in terms of a biblical framework. And it's very confusing, because they really don't know what they can and what they cannot do; and that's one of the things that the Evangelical Free Church has really worked hard to do, and that is –

Darrell Bock: So what can churches do and what can't they do?

Alejandro Mandes: They can love, they can share the Gospel. Immigrant Hope is an organization that we called, that Danny had mentioned. Our mission statement is to, "Provide the hope of the Gospel, help in a legal pathway, and home of the church."
What my sister here shared is so true. There's this polarizing. And what we want to do with Immigrant Hope is remove the polarizations, break down the walls, give people an opportunity to see Jesus at church. So a lot of these Immigrant Hope sites that we're setting up are providing legal counsel in a local church. Not only are they taught the particulars of the law – which is not easy – you've got to go through some certification by the government to be able to provide that. But we also want our people to be able to share the Gospel and to share compassion.

Initially when we brought this idea out, there was a lot of skepticism, there was a few churches that actually couldn't believe the Evangelical Free Church would do this. But the conversation has changed a whole lot now, from at first when they would ridicule them, they would argue, and now there's a lot of imitations that are going on, and we encourage that. So changing the culture of the church's conversation from a political framework to a biblical framework is very, very necessary, and it's happening.

Darrell, I don't see the resistance we were facing five years ago. What we're facing today is a lot more friendly conversation.

**Darrell Bock:** So what church communities are able to do is kind of provide a means of counseling for people who need it and a community in which they can function and help get assimilated. Is that what I'm hearing?

**Alejandro Mandes:** Right. Like the first Immigrant Hope site we set up is in Brooklyn, New York, a great laboratory. Even though I could have picked anywhere to go, I went to Brooklyn, because I didn't want to fight with the border craziness. And so Brooklyn embodies immigrants.

**Darrell Bock:** Yes, absolutely.

**Alejandro Mandes:** So the site that we chose is First Street in Brooklyn that has five congregations – Norwegian, Arabic. And we actually have a paralegal counseling center there where people went through this training that we've developed. They got recognized by the government, the church did; and now they have people entering the church that never would have entered before – Muslims, all sorts of people. And it's in their neighborhood, you know. They have confidence, they have trust that they're not some crazies, they've always been there.
The Table Podcast  Immigration Issues

_Darrell Bock:_ So is there a way – I'm reading between the lines here, I don't know if I'm getting this right. Is there a way for someone who is illegal to enter into a path to becoming legal, or is that a very, very difficult hurdle right now?

_Alejandro Mandes:_ Darrell, there's two issues that we have to deal with – one is advocacy, the other is capacity. Advocacy is what we're all trying to do in terms of speaking into the government for this humane pathway. But if we don't start building the ark now, when it rains, we won't be ready. As they've done this work in the past in terms of changing immigration law, they only leave a small window. In 1986, when they had the last immigration "amnesty", there were 7 million immigrants. Only 1.3 partook of that very generous – partially because there were not enough people to counsel and advise, or people they trusted. So now we have double the people with much less capacity. So what we're trying to do is move beyond advocacy to building capacity for when the law changes. We've got churches that are ready, already set up to counsel immigrants.

_Darrell Bock:_ In other words, what I'm hearing you say now is, is that we could change the law. We could even change the law in a very humane way, and the ability and the capacity to actually absorb that difference would be so difficult and traumatic that is might not actually work even though it would be very well intentional.

_Alejandro Mandes:_ It wouldn't work; it wouldn't work without building the capacity by taking advantage of the places where we have boots on the ground, the church. So right now, there's about 700 actual places where immigrants can go to get counsel, other than lawyers. And what we want to do is double that if we can. They're saying generously, the best chance for the law changing might be next summer. It takes them about six months to eight months to write the laws.

_Darrell Bock:_ That's under ideal conditions I think.

_Alejandro Mandes:_ Those are very ideal. But the point being, if we're not about equipping our churches and equipping our people to be able to take advantage of that, then it's just going to get clogged up all over again.

_Darrell Bock:_ Danny, what are you sensing as you hear this conversation that we're having about what people need to be aware of?
Daniel Carroll Rodas: Can you hear me, Darrell?

Darrell Bock: Yeah, I can hear you fine.

Daniel Carroll Rodas: There are several things, and I don't know if you've mentioned it. Apparently, the need to understand, especially for what. You say if there were a change in the law, you'd have to have a registration process someplace. And that's kind of what was talked about. We got to have the boots on the ground to help these people.

Darrell Bock: Danny, I think your sound just went out. Soraya, yeah, go ahead.

Soraya Marin: May I? I'd like to tie something that he started with about the Great Commission and this opportunity to provide with the resources and counsel people on the legal aspect, as well as show some compassion. Because the ability to be able to provide them with a path that – not everybody needs a lawyer to be able to get some of the documents and even become legal. And that's something that sometimes people believe that you have to have thousands and thousands of dollars, and you have to have a lawyer, and that's not necessarily so. But it does take some work to be able to work through the administration and the paperwork.

We've done several of them where we have been able to help families to get legal, just because they didn't know and they were not aware that they had something in the make-up of their family and their work structure that they were able to use to get back into the legal side of it.

But the other thing is that between the legal aspect, the language aspect, it provides for a wonderful, wonderful terrain to disciple people. And that's why I wanted to link it back to what you started with, the Great Commission, because as families are displaced in all these different countries and all these different places, the heart is ready to really listen from the Lord.

And we have seen beautiful examples in which families understand what the law is, understand really what the biblical background is; and they seek the will of the Lord, and many families actually go back to the country of origin and they thrive a lot better than sometimes they do here. Many stay and strive with a much different framework than what they came with originally. So really the beauty of all this is that by pairing those two things up, then really we are paying a lot more contribution to the Great Commission, and that excites me tremendously.
*Alejandro Mandes:* Darrell, can I make a comment of what my sister has said?

*Darrell Bock:* Yeah, sure, yeah.

*Alejandro Mandes:* Acts 17:26 says, you know, we're all one nation, one blood. And it goes on there and says, "God is the one that sets the times and the boundaries," I love 27, "so that they might grope for him and find him."

Evangelical Free Church has 1,500 churches; they did a survey once. And let's just pick one country. Of those 1,500 churches, 500 had done something with Mexico – blankets, seminars, books, missionaries. For all that work – and we're just talking one denomination – what percentage of Mexico do you think is evangelical, which also includes Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses? It's 4 percent. When they come here, statistics show that in the first generation 13 percent, and by the third generation, up to 30 to 40 percent become believers.

*Darrell Bock:* This is this faith that gets plugged into the context.

*Alejandro Mandes:* Yes. So the whole issue of moving, ripping out from your social structure, opens you up to something – because of fear, because of need – verse 27 kicks in, "So that they might grope for him and find him."

*Darrell Bock:* Well, you know, and I have shared very little of our own experience. But we, of course, have spent four sabbaticals in which we're in a foreign country, using a foreign language. When one of our kids were in German schools, we went to the equivalent of a PTA meeting. Of course, it was all in German. My wife and I walked out and said to each other, "How much of that did you actually get in terms of what was happening?"

I mean I know what it is to feel very, very isolated. And the ability to have someone come alongside you in the midst of the culture and help you negotiate the way the culture actually works, helps you to get located, it helps you to function well, it helps you actually to contribute better to the place where you live. All of that is a terrific service it seems to me, and the church's ability to do that is huge, because it does have the potential to have a variety of resources, a variety of expertise because of the make-up of its communities.
The Table Podcast  Immigration Issues

Danny, we've got you back. Let me ask you – you're kind of hearing in and out on the conversation. But what would you add to what we're saying here about these issues?

Daniel Carroll Rodas: What I was trying to say is I think people in this country need to realize just how big the problem is. Alejandro was talking about the registration piece. And then, you know, I have people in the church that I go to from Juarez, and they've lost family members in the drug war. You don't talk about going back and thriving. In fact, you don't want to go back because you've already lost two family members in random gunfire.

The flipside of it – and this is where, again, it challenges the culture. It appears there's a drug war in Mexico because the US consumes drugs. And so you have to ask yourselves, "Where would Juarez be if the US didn't have a drug problem? Where would migration be into this country if the US didn't have a drug problem? Where would the migration be if the US didn't need immigrants for their economy?" I mean these are the hard questions, the uncomfortable questions, and in the church I go to, those questions have a human face and names in kids.

Here's another piece, Darrell, talking about dividing families. I have people in the church that I go to where some of the kids are legal because they were born here; other kids are not because they came when they were small and their parents aren't. And so not only is it about splitting parents from their kids, but you have the internal dynamics of a family that is mixed legality within the home itself.

It's a very complicated, complicated thing. So, yeah, just layer, after layer, after layer of things we can talk about. I can talk about resources. I don't know how much time we have, but I think I'd like to mention some resources for people.

Darrell Bock: Go ahead.

Daniel Carroll Rodas: I'd like to highlight Alejandro's work, Immigration Hope, and Alejandro you might, after I'm done, maybe give people contact information. I think what you do at local churches needs to be put out there more and more. I read a book on immigration called Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible. There's another book written by Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang called Welcoming the Stranger.
The Table Podcast  Immigration Issues

And then something that Samuel alluded to, though he wasn't specific – there is something called Evangelical Immigration Table. This is where you'll see people from across the spectrum from Jim Daly at Focus on the Family to Jim Wallis at Sojourners, all who claim a broad evangelical faith, signing on basic principles. And you can find that at EvangelicalImmigrationTable.com.

There's also a program they have set up, a 40-day reading program of the Scriptures. They'll send you like a bookmark. And if you spend 40 days just reading the Bible, you know, a few verses a day, what would your view be at the end of that time? So there's all kinds of resources.

But I just mentioned my book Christians at the Border, Matthew Soerens and Jenny Hwang Welcoming the Stranger, Alejandro's work, and then the EvangelicalImmigrationTable.com

**Darrell Bock:** Well one of the things that we've tried to show is the complexity of this issue that it's not easy, it's not straightforward, and it's actually a very tangled conversation in many ways. So I think to wrap up, I'm going to let each of you take a shot at answering this question: "How do you move forward – given where we are and given the complexity of what it is that we see – what's the way forward?"

And I think I would want to put this in categories. How should individuals think about this? What can they contribute? And then how can we help the larger social conversation that we're having in the country about this topic? So think about from an individual standpoint, think about it from a more corporate standpoint. And, Soraya, I'll let you start. We're ladies first here, we're in the South.

**Soraya Marin:** Thank you, thank you. I think I would like to just say that each of us, as the Lord sets each of us a very individual path, to look up and see what he places around you, so that you can inform and help all those strangers "around you," so that you can either help in very practical ways, in very meaningful ways by pointing them to the Lord, and not be afraid – not be afraid to enter into a brand new culture.

**Darrell Bock:** So have a heart of compassion and sensitivity that would reach out in a personal way, and seek to be a way of helping those around you, and perhaps, meeting the need. I'm sure almost all of us know someone who we know who finds themselves in situations that we've described here, who we might be in a position to help. You know, I can think about we have a lady who cleans our house once a week who barely knows enough English. I have to use my very poor broken Spanish to communicate with her.
Sally comes to me and I'm the translator. Think about that, Danny, that's a frightening thought. And I sit there and sometimes say, "First, I wish I could communicate better with her just to know where she is." But then secondly, "What could we do to help?" We tend to be sensitive to her about recommending her to friends so that she can gain a better way of life and that kind of thing, and take care of herself and her family better. But there's more than that that we could do I think. So that's a good practical suggestion. Alejandro, what would you say?

**Alejandro Mandes:** Well I think for me, it's very important to be patient and pray. But for me in terms of the role that God's given me, it's develop concrete pathways, things people can do that have been vetted. There are churches that want to do things, but we have to tell them what to do.

So that's why ImmigrantHope.org – thank you, Danny – was created. And we've created a training called Immigrant Pathway Institute – basically are bringing everything down to a level that a church can almost plug-and-play. It's difficult, but it's doable.

**Darrell Bock:** So what you're saying is if someone's listening and they say, "Oh, okay. Yeah, I feel a sense of being moved and being more sensitive in this area." What would you say to that person?

**Alejandro Mandes:** I would, first of all, tell them read Danny's book. Second of all, I would tell them look up the ImmigrantHope.org website that has articles and pathways and different sorts of things.

**Darrell Bock:** About practical suggestions about what you need to do.

**Alejandro Mandes:** Practical suggestions about just how to be a friend to strangers and to just – you know, it starts with just simple acts of love and kindness, and realizing where we started from the very beginning. We're all aliens and strangers, every one of us has fears, and we don't make ourself better by putting somebody else down. And we show the love of God by putting a hand out and not worrying about the color or the language.

**Darrell Bock:** Danny, what would you say?
Daniel Carroll Rodas:

Well I won't repeat what's been said, so let me just add to it. I would say get informed, get informed biblically, but get informed about realities of immigration. Too many times, we let the media give us three or four bullet points, and I hope that what's been communicated by all of us today, is this is a historical, global, complicated issue.

One thing is, you have to separate out the people who are here from the discussion about who will come in the future. Those are two different populations, and how you deal with those two things and how you coordinate it. I mean very complex. So get informed, not only biblically, but just socially, economically.

And the other thing I would say – again, not to repeat what anyone else has said – get to know immigrants. Put a face, put a name. What I have found as I travel the country and speak on immigration is, once people get to know immigrants and not just immigration as an abstract idea, everything changes. I mean you gave an example of a woman in your house. That's how it changes. Now it's Maria – oops, the light just went out.

Darrell Bock:

That's okay, you're okay.

Daniel Carroll Rodas:

I have one of those sensitive light things, you know.

Darrell Bock:

I know, I know.

Daniel Carroll Rodas:

But anyway. So once you know somebody and their kids and their family, and then once churches begin to share worship and meals together, that is where things change. So I would say get informed and get to know some immigrants, and you will see a different side; you'll see the human side to all of this. And then I would just echo what everyone else has said.

Darrell Bock:

Now I'm going to close by making an observation and I'm going to let you each have a chance to comment on it, and that is, we have not spent in this hour much time talking about the detailed politics of how you actually solve the problem, what the law should look like or anything like that. That's somewhat on purpose, because I think that that discussion is very much framed by how you approach the issue and think about at an individual level, at a corporate level, at a societal level, that kind of thing.
And so to those of you who are listening to a podcast on immigration and expecting that, and yet we haven't delivered that at all, that's been somewhat intentional, because I think it's important to put, as we've said, put a face on this and put the circumstances in front of you, so that then you can step back and say, "All right, now, does that impact the way I should have the remaining conversation that's definitely on the table?" and that is, "What should that eventually look like?" Your reactions to the fact that we've gone at it this way – if I can say it that way. Alejandro, I'll let you start.

Alejandro Mandes: That's my recollection. There's only been one law that was chiseled in stone; everything else was written on paper. And in this great government that we live in, we're the ones that make up the law. So we ought not to be talking as if it's somewhere out there beyond our control. So we must speak into it. We must speak into what compassion and justice looks like in the rule of law as it is here in America.

Darrell Bock: So your point would be that it's a conversation that's necessary, it's a conversation that we have to have, and it's a conversation in which we have to balance compassion on the one hand, and justice, and if you want to think about it, law and order on the other. And we've got to wrestle with how exactly that's going to work out.

Alejandro Mandes: Yeah. Whenever I talk to people, they talk about "the law" as if it is some static. And I encourage people, if you want to really look at immigration law, then go back and read it, because there's going to be some parts of immigration law that you're not going to be proud of.

So let's not pretend that the law is perfect. It's our law and I own it, and I believe it. But let's not pretend that it is something chiseled in stone like the Ten Commandments that everybody is proud of.

Darrell Bock: Soraya?
**Soraya Marin:** You know, I think that as complex as the issue is, I think this call says for every one of us to think about, "What is your decision? What is your stand?" This is an issue that you are not going to be able to avoid no matter where you live. So are you willing to be an active participant, to be informed, to show some compassion; or are you willing to remain in a cocoon on whatever side you are? So I think the conversation today has shown that: Be informed, because it's going to impact your life one way or another.

**Darrell Bock:** Danny?

**Daniel Carroll Rodas:** Yeah, I would just build on a couple things that have been said. Alejandro's right. There are some dark sides to the US Immigration Law. I mean one that everybody knows who works in it is the Chinese Exclusion Act, which was the first federal law in immigration in 1882, which basically excluded all Chinese from this country until 1943. We don't know. Those who aren't involved don't know these kinds of stories that sometimes are very dark stories.

We don't know about Angel Island on the West Coast, which is the equivalent of Ellis Island on the East Coast. But there, they would put people and lock them up. I have a friend whose grandmother came – Chinese – came through there and was there for six months. So there's this dark underside to the law that they maybe don't know about. But what I would say is this – we need to get to the legislation discussion.

That's exactly what's begun in Washington, all the negotiations and compromises that goes with that. The thing that we have to do is not begin a legislation and then back-feed into Romans 13. We need to go to the Scriptures, get the full breadth of what the Scriptures say about this topic, then move forward to what we would think immigration laws should include, and the kinds of things that the immigration laws should do. So we have to work in a different way than we have on this.

Let's do this informed from the Bible, versus "Here's the immigration law. Let's go to Romans 13 and support whatever the law says." I would say, no, the law is actually complicated, and bad, and contradictory, and too complicated to even work; and that's why everyone needs to change and everyone admits that.

So the question is, How do we change it and in what directions do we change it? Is it going to be a punitive exclusionary kind of law which is one kind of tone and set of values, or is it going to be truly a welcoming and empowering for the good of the country itself?
It's a whole different conversation if you decide to make it empowering and constructive and welcoming versus punitive and exclusionary. So that's where the Bible can help us.

Darrell Bock: Well, and you may have just introduced another topic to which we can come back, but we're not going to do that today because our time is up. I want to thank all of you for being with us. Alejandro, Danny, Soraya, it's been a pleasure. We've had Samuel, but he had another commitment, so I can't say thank you to him directly. But we thank you all for being a part of theTable, where we discuss issues of God and culture. And we hope that this discussion on immigration and seeing life from the standpoint of an immigrant and what they may face may actually prove to have been helpful to you.