

A biblical conversation on immigration

with Dr. Ryan Denison

“Balancing borders and compassion”

TRANSCRIPT

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NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Greetings and welcome back to the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Dr. Mark Turman, Executive Director of Denison Forum. I want to remind you that the Denison Forum podcast, along with our whole ministry, seeks to equip people to think biblically, to live holy and beautiful lives, and And to serve actively and redemptively in their areas of influence to be what we call salty bright, to bring about biblical flourishing, biblical righteousness for as many people as possible until Jesus comes back.

And we hope that this podcast conversation and all of our podcasts help you to do that in one way or another. So thank you for joining us today. And we look forward to today's conversation. I'm joined by Dr. Ryan Dennison, who is. senior editor for theology at Denison Forum. He holds a PhD in church history and often writes for our website, writes the daily article that you likely have read at least once a week and sometimes more often than that.

But Ryan's joining me for a conversation today about the really challenging issue that's going on in our world and in our country about immigration and about refugees. Let me say right off. From the beginning here, Denison Forum is a nonpartisan ministry. We are not seeking to take sides one way or the other in the political conversation here.

We probably will tumble into that as a place of reference in some ways in this conversation. But we know that. That topic, this whole topic about borders and about border security and about immigration, illegal immigration, those kinds of things is something of a political football in, in our current reality.

It's been that way really for a long time. And is something that we need to have a really healthy and biblical conversation about. That's what we're going to attempt to do. The reality of it is that.

These issues of immigration, refugees and that type of thing are a humanitarian crisis in many parts of the world, not just what's going on along the Southern border of the United States, but in other places, Africa certainly is having a challenge of this in many different places because of things like civil war, we're seeing this play out in Europe.

Because of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. We are seeing this played out in other places as well, such as in Gaza and the people that are innocently engaged and involved in that conflict. And so this has a lot of scope to it. And obviously as we've talked about many times, Dr.

Dennison has talked about this often. Our proximity to a problem really drives our interest and, and our involvement. And we all understand that, but we want to bring some light and hopefully some understanding to this topic. As we get into it, you probably have heard recent news stories that president Biden recently essentially closed the border.

By an executive order, and we'll get into some of that. Perhaps we also saw that there is a recent poll that came out from CBS and some of their partners that 62 percent of registered voters support the idea when asking this survey, the idea of deporting migrants who are in this country illegally. That raises the question of are we turning down our compassion in some ways?

And but as we get into this with Dr. Ryan and, and try to work our way through that Ryan, I just remember this comment that I heard 20 or 30 years ago, at least by a government official in the Reagan administration, William Bennett, he said, you know, I apply the gate test to a country's health. If you open up the gate to a country, are people trying to get in or are they trying to get out?

That will tell you if the place where you are or the country that you're in is a healthy place or not. Do you think that's a pretty good place to start in our thinking? Is William Bennett's gate test.

[00:04:08] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** I think it's a helpful reminder. I mean, one of the, I think one of the issues we have in our nation right now is that it's easy to forget how good we have it. And there are, I mean, we live in an amazing country. America is not without problems by any means, but by and large, we're still a place a lot of the world would love to live in.

And I think it's helpful to remember, to remember that especially so we don't lose sight of the good in light of having to deal with the bad.

[00:04:36] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah, and I, I think that's definitely the indication that wait, like I said, we are far from perfect, but we do have had a lot better. Do you think there's, do you think it's easy for us to forget? Not only our blessings and our privileges as Americans, but also somewhat easy for us to not remember the history of our nation because.

You know, we've, we've been here now for more than a couple of hundred years, and we don't remember in some ways the origin not quite all of us, but the majority of us, unless we are full blood native Americans. But all of us that are not in that category are in some ways an immigrant to this part of the world.

We learn early in our school history lessons that we are quote unquote, the melting pot of the world. But do you think we easily kind of lose sight of that because of just the routine of our lives?

[00:05:34] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** I think we do. And it's, It makes sense to after a while, because, I mean, I, to be honest, I can't name my great grandparents most, a lot of people probably don't know, can't think back farther than three or four generations, and so if you've been in this country that long, then it makes sense that you see America as your country of origin, because it really is.

After a while, like that's part of the thing about a melting pot is that eventually all the ingredients meld into something unique and new to the point that while they don't lose the characteristics that made them what they once were, they take on a different purpose, a different function. And I think that a lot of what we see in America is maybe, and that's part of why we've had some of these issues lately is that America is increasing.

While America is a nation of immigrants, America has not probably reached that point where we're not really a nation that thinks of ourselves as immigrants anymore. And I think that it's good to be reminded of where our origins are and what our history is. But I, I do think we are, we've been around long enough now that by and large, we People think of ourselves as Americans without, with a more modern understanding of what that is.

And I, I don't necessarily think that's a bad thing. But I do think it comes with some risks of losing the compassion that we need to have when we think about issues like immigration today.

[00:06:53] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Have you, this is what you were saying just made me think in this line. So I'm going to. I'm going to take us down a slightly different track because of what you said. Have you run into this phenomenon, this tension where you have some people on one side of this issue saying, well, if you are in this country, you should think of yourself as an American is not anything else.

And then other people who say, well, I want to be identified as an American, but I also want to hold on to. Significant parts of my culture of origin, if you will the country that they came from, the cultural identity that they had when they were living in some other part of the world or even some other region of the country.

You run into that tension. Do you think there's a good way to think about that part of this conversation?

[00:07:42] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** I, I think that tension's real. I think it makes sense that it would be there. I would hazard a guess that the majority of people who don't like the idea of immigrants coming to this country and. Not thinking of themselves as primarily American. Like, I think a lot of that is more of a fear based approach than it is.

And probably it's not coming from a great place for the most part. I mean, I think we should have pride in our country. Absolutely. But, and I think if you're. Going to become an American and embrace what it means to be American. There is a certain level of embracing that American culture that should be part of that as well.

But like you said before, I mean, at the DNA, what that means to be American is to take, you know, ideally the best of what you had before and combine it with the best of what's here. And it should mean that every generation makes America better. But if we just hold on to trying to make America what it always has been or what it used to be, then we kind of give up that opportunity to make it better and to improve it.

And I think there's this. I don't know if nativism is the right word for it, but there's this, this understanding of patriotism at times that you almost had to ignore the good or ignore the bad. And I don't think that's what patriotism actually means. And I don't think that's what our founding fathers would have wanted.

They were very aware within a couple of generations of the problems that existed within America. And they saw those as problems to be overcome. rather than as flaws to stress out about. And I think we could take a similar approach today, whether it's issues of immigration or just what American culture should be in general.

I mean, we're a nation of like 330 million people now. That's a very large pot and we should be able to, there should be ways to combine, to combine cultures in ways that highlight the best of all of it. And I think it also reinforces when we do that, it reinforces this idea that every culture has something to offer.

And that the people that come here, it's not that their culture or the place they're coming from is completely devoid of value. It's that they see it's desirable for them to be here. But that doesn't mean they have to reject everything that they've left. And I think, especially when it comes to combining cultures, that that's an important perspective.

Everyone has something of value to offer.

[00:10:04] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, I think, I think that's a really good call out and also a good reminder of some of our colonial history, if you will that we had these 13 colonies, but these 13 colonies were very distinct in and of themselves and that they had come from different places and they had come for various reasons.

But they were often very unique and very distinct in their own culture, their own history, their own mindset. And sometimes pretty exclusive. It was, it was not an easy thing if you go back and study that period of our country, that it was not easy to try to get these distinct colonies that ultimately became you know, the first original States, it wasn't easy to get them to come together.

And there were many people who thought it was not going to happen. If you remember that part, we had the, the articles of confederation you and I are a part of a faith legacy that included, you know, a particular person who got kicked out of the colony slash state of Massachusetts and went down and established the very first Baptist church in America and Providence, Rhode Island.

Because they wouldn't let him practice his faith the way he wanted to and thought he should in the colony of Massachusetts. So he just had to leave and go start somewhere else. And so there were very, very real differences, very real, real tension. Even in those days when we were trying to figure out how to even birth a country that might be able to work together beyond the, the differences beyond the unique cultures, beyond the different backgrounds that all of these people had just for our audience sake, want to take a moment and just say, we, we decided to have this conversation for a couple of reasons.

One is. Obviously there are lots of big issues every single day in the news relative to immigration and to border security and all of those kinds of things. We also are realizing we, I wasn't aware of this until we started planning this conversation that June the 20th is what is called world refugee day or global refugee day.

You can read more about this on the UN's website. And I know that just by mentioning the United Nations for some people, that becomes a trigger to other kinds of confrontation. The United Nations is far from a perfect entity and institution in and of itself. That would be a whole other podcast, at least for sure.

But there are some interesting facts and stats that you can find on that website. If you just Google global refugee day, what it'll find, what you'll find on the UN website is the statistic that says that every minute 20 people leave everything that they have behind in order to escape war.

Persecution or terror. Ryan, I'm just wondering, had you come across that kind of number before? What's your reaction to that kind of statistic?

[00:13:03] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** I hadn't, I did not realize it was that large. I mean, you hear about it in the news all the time, but it's always a little difficult to know the line between the news making stories and the news reflecting reality. And it sounds like that is the story of anything they're underselling the reality of it.

And I think part of that might just be because it's such a consistent issue. It's easy for us to get a little bit of fatigue with it. And you, you mentioned that like, This podcast will be coming out on World Refugee Day. And I think that's part of why days like that are important is that there is a chance to come back and remember it's like, okay, yeah, this is just because I've stopped hearing about this issue doesn't mean it's gone away.

And I think that's a big part of it.

[00:13:47] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So I, I know you and I were battling this around before we started recording, but can you give us a little bit more frame of reference, like where did world refugee come from, who established, who decided, or who does decide these kinds of things? You know, I, When I was thinking about this and learned that there was a world refugee day, it made me think of what happens when I get up in the morning, I'm listening to the radio in the place where I live.

They always call out that it's this or that kind of day. It can be national hotdog day. It can be, you know, national, a cup of coffee day. It can be all different kinds of things. Mostly pretty trivial. But for those that have ever dealt with refugees, I have a good friend that lives up in the Chicago area and he and his wife just wanted to try to get involved in, Helping those that are vulnerable.

And so he went and did some research and found some refugees that had made their way from Venezuela and we're now trying to reestablish their lives in the Chicagoland area. And he just kind of conveyed some of the struggles and, and situation that this family is facing. They have a very big language barrier that just makes everything difficult.

Those kinds of things. So that's a window that I've had recently into this reality. But give us a little bit of the background as you understand it about where June 20th as global refugee day came from.

[00:15:17] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** Thanks. I didn't know much about it before I started researching it, but it started in 2001 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1951 decision from the UN Convention related to the status of refugees. And that convention is where we get a lot of the, the kind of the global understanding of what it means to be a refugee, some of the laws that I think we might get into later surrounding just the global treatment of refugees.

And so that date in 2001 was meant to commemorate that, but it actually, also, traces its origins back to the 1970s when an organization called the Organization of African Unity established Africa Refugee Day on June 20th. And that was meant to honor those who've been forcibly displaced throughout the continent of Africa.

And the UN worked in conjunction with that group for a while. And then I've seen Somewhat I don't know if conflicting reports is the right word for it, but there's a bit of there's a bit of uncertainty regarding whether when the UN created World Refugee Day, they did that with the blessing of the Organization of African Unity, but it's It's unclear if they kind of, if African Refugee Day became World Refugee Day or if they just work in tandem with each other, but either way they serve a similar purpose in terms of wanting to highlight the, the plight of those who are forced to leave their homes for any number of circumstances.

And what's made, I think what makes those days important for us to remember today is not only as a good reminder of the fact that this is still an issue, but just of, of how long suffering this issue has been, and that it's refugees, like, the idea of refugees dates back throughout, you can trace that throughout human history, so this is not a, a modern problem, and I think it can be easy to, to forget that and lose sight of the historical context of it, and so days like this are a good opportunity to remember that as well.

[00:17:08] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, I think it's a great call out and really becomes can become a good reminder trigger, if you will, to just pray you know, we can, The great thing about prayer is, is you can pray about anything and everything and you can pray about global things that you're not that well connected to or don't feel like you could have any significant part in.

You can still offer up prayers for that situation. I was reading just today out of one of the news sources that I follow, a story about what's going on in Sudan and that the description of that crisis is becoming so large. That they're calling it not just a humanitarian crisis. It may be a regional collapse of the entire structure of society because of the civil war that is going on and has been going on the last couple of years in Sudan and again, images and reporting just giving us some insight into just how desperate.

A situation can become. And I think we're, we do ourselves no favors to think, well, that's the way it's always been in that part of the world. It'll never be anywhere, anything other than that. And something like that could never happen. To a country like ours or to these more established, what we like to refer to as quote unquote, first world pro or first world countries.

I just don't think that's the case, Ryan. I have a good friend of mine who has been serving as a missionary in Croatia. And in the area of Sarajevo. And I'm old enough to remember when the Olympics were in Sarajevo and it was just this beautiful celebration of the winter Olympics. And then that whole region became a war torn region in basically a, a cultural fight between two

different cultures and, and really just obliterated so many of the things that were beautiful about that part of the world.

So, you think, would you agree with me? That's kind of foolish to think that. This kind of a thing can't happen anywhere. It could even happen here if, if we were in the right set of circumstances.

[00:19:19] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** Yeah, I mean, I think it's a problem and endemic to humanity versus humans in a particular region. And what makes the country what's going on in Sudan even more tragic is that so many of the people suffering there fled to Sudan as refugees from a previous genocidal conflict. And I think it's a good reminder, I get later in a bit, we'll probably talk about some of the issues going on with, you know, kind of What we do in America with those who are seeking asylum here and are rejected, but it's, it's, I think it's a good reminder that just because a place doesn't, seems like it's okay now, doesn't mean it'll always be that way.

I think you're right. I mean, and the fact that it could be that we don't have to look that far back into our history to find examples of that. I mean, ideally, there are aspects of American life and law that would keep that from becoming an issue. But I think it would also be naive to think that there is not room for tragedy within the two ends of that spectrum.

And I think that's, it's part of, like, well, what's going on in Sudan is unspeakably horrible. I, that doesn't necessarily lessen the horrors that can go on in any number of places that may not be that bad, but are still bad, but are still pretty awful. And I think what you were talking about is a good reminder of that.

[00:20:38] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, I think it's, I think it's a great reminder that, you know, peace is something that we need to value that we need to put a premium on. And not take it for granted. It's also something that we need to realize is a gift to the, to the degree that we have healthy peace and unity in our lives and in our neighborhoods, our country, that that's something that if we received it from others, that it ought to be something we're enormously grateful for.

Something that we ought to be reminded of has to be pursued by every generation that we have to keep working on. Especially in the environment that we're in right now as Americans with so much strife, so much partisanship so much tribalism that seems to be characterizing various parts of our lives that we have to, we ought, we ought to come back to a place of valuing peace and working for it and then doing what we can to protect it because you know, peace is fragile in some ways. Not in every way, but it is fragile in some ways and needs to be prized and developed and protected everywhere that we can. Ryan, we talked, we talked earlier. One of the things we wanted to try to do was to bring some nuance to this conversation and not not paint with so many, so much of a big brush or a broad brush.

You've written on this. Your dad's written on this. Others have contributed to our website. Along these lines. One of the things that has just been helpful as a reminder and as well as an educational experience is to realize that there are, as the UN uses this term, people who are forcibly displaced and they're not all the same.

There are people, there are a lot of people who seek to migrate from one place, from one region of the world, one country of the world, they try to do that just voluntarily because they want to. Live in a different part of the world. They have family in a different part of the world. They look at an, a job opportunity in a different part of the world.

That's one form of immigration. What we might call a peaceful and voluntary immigration. And most countries of the world have processes and ways for people to do that. May not be simple, may not be fast, may not be inexpensive, but there are legal and formal ways of doing that. We're spending more of our time today talking about the issue of refugees and illegal immigrants in particular.

Can you kind of tease that out a little bit in terms of not painting? All of these people and their motivations with a broad brush. And what's the difference between, what's the difference between an immigrant and a refugee and an illegal immigrant? What are those distinctives?

[00:23:24] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** Thank you. I think that's very important to keep in mind because we do tend to use those terms interchangeably a little too much. Refugees, as you said, are those who at least by the UN classification, a refugee is someone who essentially does not have the option of staying home in their home country and have a good chance of surviving either through political persecution, religious persecution usually some form of their life is being endangered by someone else.

Importantly, stuff like poverty is not seen as a problem. a qualifier for refugee status. And I think as we think about that in the context of what's going on at the border in America, that's very important to remember. But at the same time, there are, it's a bit of a nebulous line there because poverty in and of itself can lead to other types of life threatening circumstances that may qualify you for refugee status.

And I think that's what makes things so complicated, especially in America today. But immigrants, like you said like you said, are those who They're do not, they're not forced out of their country they choose to leave and they are usually, you're considered an immigrant for as even if you, interestingly, even if you become a citizen of the country you move to, you're still considered an immigrant if it's not the country you were born in.

And so that's why we think of sort of first generation Americans being those who were born in America. And illegal immigrants are those who do not qualify for refugee status and are not

granted asylum as a result of that, yet still enter the country without going through that immigration process.

And what's going on with the Southern border, what makes that so difficult and what President Biden was trying to target, I think, with his latest executive order is that increasingly, people have recognized that distinction and in some ways it's incentivized them to pursue refugee status, even if they know they don't qualify.

But again, all of this is also, I mean, I didn't know a lot of this stuff before I started researching it. And I would imagine the vast majority of people who are trying to cross the border, to what extent they do understand that distinction, they're probably learning it from, there's a strong chance that they're not necessarily getting the entire truth in terms of what it is.

And so I say that just to highlight, I don't think everyone who's trying to cross the border, even illegally today, and claim asylum is necessarily trying to be nefarious in their motivations there.

[00:25:49] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, and that's something that I think the average person may just not even think about. They, you know, like I said, if you're not in proximity to this issue, because you don't live along the Southern border or another border in the world where you know, hundreds of thousands, hundreds, if not thousands of people are trying to cross in from all kinds of situations.

You, you just may not even be paying attention to this very much, except when you hear something on the news, you see images on the television and it's being talked about in some way by a politician or in some other way as a crisis. And you know, even the term refugee is different from and distinct from immigrant.

I wonder how much even the average citizen that doesn't live in proximity of these issues even thinks along those definitions or thinks about those lines. It's somewhat interesting to me and was educational for me in any way that there is actually a definition, a United Nations global definition of what a refugee is compared to an immigrant.

And that's important. But like you said, I go back again to this friend who is trying to help this family from Venezuela, who has, has made their way into the United States. I doubt that that family had much, if any, knowledge that there was something called refugee status. That they needed to think about that that needed to be factored in before they made this decision that, you know, their circumstances were so dire and so dangerous that they needed to get themselves as well as their children.

out of this environment and to try to start their lives over in some way. I was also just interested to discover again, doing some research on the United Nations website that the 1951 convention

actually came up with a list of what they called the rights. Of refugees, they kind of call out both the rights and the responsibilities of refugees, which is the other side of this conversation.

That even when your situation is dire, even when you feel that you're in danger, that you're being oppressed or persecuted because of who you are, because of your religious beliefs, things like that, that doesn't relieve you of certain fundamental responsibilities when you're trying to get to a better place, when you're trying to get to a safer, more secure place for yourself and for your family.

I just was wondering, I wanted to get your reaction when. When you see these things. So the UN website again, references 1951 convention, some of the rights, global rights of refugees. These are some of those that call out the right not to be expelled, except under certain strictly defined conditions the right not to be punished for illegal entry into a territory, the right to work, the right to housing, the right to education, the right, the right to.

Practice freedom of religion, the right to public relief and assistance, the right to access courts the, the freedom of movement within that territory and the right to be issued identity and travel documents. When you, when you see that kind of a list, Ryan, does that sound like an appropriate helpful way for nations like ours and nations around the world?

Is that, would you say that that's a. Would you say that that's undergirded by biblical principle? Might be a good way for me to ask that.

[00:29:22] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** That's a good way to think about it. And I think kind of the principle you see underlying a lot of those is just the reminder of the basic humanity that is shared by everyone who's created the image of God, and we don't have, like, it is unbiblical to ever forget or try to diminish the fact that God loves every person who's trying to immigrate, every person who's seeking refugee status, they are not, and as Christians, we're not given.

I don't know. We're not given the option of seeing them as somehow second class citizens. We're not given the option of treating them as if they should be grateful just to be here. I mean, even if maybe that's the case that they should, I think there's reason to believe that, and I think that can be expressed at times.

But I think what I love with that list of rights is just a call for the nations receiving these refugees to remember that That they are of value, and they're of worth, and I think that is a very biblical concept. What are your thoughts on that?

[00:30:26] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, I just was thinking through that. And number one, it just was, I was educated, but also the more I thought about it, I thought it was great that. world leaders were trying to get on the same page with these issues. And, and like I said, what I, what I

started to sense underneath this was that Christian idea, that very biblical idea that every person is made in the image of God and therefore inherently of value, and then other passages of scripture that start bouncing around in my head around that obviously the story of the good Samaritan.

Which we often very narrowly interpret as just an individual one on one kind of responsibility. When I think Jesus certainly intended it to be that way, but it had much wider application. We, we struggle at times because we didn't live 2000 years ago. We weren't living in the Jewish culture and the mixed culture that Jesus was encountering.

But it would have been startling if we understand the Bible correctly, that Jesus would have been in Samaria in the first place, that he would have traveled through that territory when many Jews would not do that, they considered it reprehensible to be anywhere near a Samaritan or to be in that part of the world.

But Jesus not only went there, he ministered to people very directly there. He did miracles there and he told several stories like the good Samaritan, where he made intentionally a Samaritan, the hero of that story. And he did that on purpose, not simply to tell us that if we see somebody that, you know, has had a car accident on the side of the road, we should pull over and help them.

It certainly means that, but it means much more than that. And it means that even at scale, and I think sometimes Ryan, that's where we. Don't follow out the teaching of Bible truth as far as we should. We're like, well, it just applies to me in my personal life and to the personal opportunities that I might be able to influence or to give money to, or to invest some of my time or something.

It absolutely means that, and we're going to get around to that, land that in a moment, but we need to understand that it applies on a larger scale, on a national scale, on a global scale. And when I read something like this list coming out of the 1951 convention, what I see in that is I see the themes of biblical truth.

I see the theme of, of every person being valuable and. Having having a right to this kind of attention, this kind of care. Even though it may not be easy for us as a nation to figure out how to do all of that. But if, if we were to, it kind of turns around the golden rule in some ways, like if we found ourselves needing to get out of a desperate situation and get to another country, would we want to be treated this way, would we hope that people would take us in?

And would extend to us this kind of dignity so that the undergirding of the of these ideas has that in it, I think, and a wide application of a global application of what James says when he says, you know, if, if you see your neighbor in need, hungry and in need of cover, if you just say to them, be well and be fed and send them on their way that's You've completely missed what God would want you to do.

And we can miss it on a personal level. We can miss it on a, on a national global scale as well. And so I, I don't know if there were Christians specifically involved, but it sure looked like they were bringing Christian principle into the conversation.

[00:34:19] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** And I think they were, if you think about the historical context of what was going on in 1951, I mean, they were coming out of World War II and the atrocity of the Holocaust. I mean, it was how bad things can get when in a nation was abundantly clear and very much in, in their collective conscience. And I think that It's not enough in our collective conscience today, like what you referred to before, like we've kind of been lulled into this false security that what happened back then can never happen here.

But I mean, you don't get a West, I guess, Germany in the 1930s and the night was not, I mean, that was in a lot of ways, a cultural standard that would not have been all that unfamiliar to most of the rest of Europe. And. I think it's a good reminder that, you know, we throw around the word Nazi way too often and way too liberally in our culture today, but it, that the Nazis are a good reminder of the fact that any culture can, can fall to that, to the level where they would forget.

And a lot of it goes back to just this idea of when we forget that every human has inherent value, then it gets a lot easier to go down that road. And so I think that's another thing that. Another point that we can make with the refugee crisis today is just, it should be a just a chance to remember that, where that road inevitably leads, if we go down too far.

[00:35:40] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And I think, you know, and this just ties in, you know, so many different ways. I was in a meeting just last week when we were having a discussion about, you the problem in the crisis of abortion, not only in our country, but around the world, and the, everybody was introducing themselves, it came to me and somebody had a follow up question and said, why, why are you here?

Where, why do you care about this? And I, I said, what I've learned from your dad and others, which is, is if you give up this idea that every human being is valuable and bears the image of God, then you can. You can start to excuse almost anything once you've given up that position, once you've given up that ground and whether it's the unborn or the immigrant or the refugee the same truth applies.

Every person matters. And we could and we should think deeply about the responsibilities that a refugee or an immigrant would have somebody that wants to move or is so fearful and so in danger that they feel they must move. That means that they do have responsibilities. They have a responsibility not to act in criminal ways when they get into another country or another territory.

They have a responsibility to do what they can to provide for their own needs. They have responsibility in various ways that need to be understood and appreciated. And they can never

adopt the mentality that we talk about often here, that the ends justifies the means we ought to do everything we can.

If we are the community and the country receiving them. To honor them and to take care of them in appropriate, dignified, and biblical ways. But they have a corresponding responsibility to that. I wanted to see if you caught this word. I had never seen this word anywhere in my life that I know of.

But it calls out this thing called refoulement. In the discussion on the UN website about refugees. What does the word refoulement mean?

[00:37:42] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** I had to look it up as well. But it refers to basically the, the principle that a state cannot forcibly return a refugee or asylum seeker or immigrant even to a country where they're likely to be subjected to persecution or face sentence. The same situation that forced them to flee in the first place.

And so, it's, it's essentially this, this idea that we can't just send everyone home if they are actually a refugee coming again, coming out of the 1950s, it would have been the idea that it would have, if this had been around, it would have been illegal to send Jews back to Germany. And I think that was kind of the idea behind it.

Like us, we have to put in place that that's not okay. And I think what makes it difficult is that if someone is like, Even if someone leaves their nation by choice and they're not granted the status of refugee, it also means we can't send them to a place that's worse than where they left. And when we, a lot of times there's this There's this growing mentality of like people that try and cross the border.

It's like, well, I don't, I don't care where you go. You just can't stay here. And I think this principle kind of calls us to, to view the situation a little more holistically. Again, it doesn't necessitate that we welcome everybody or that we have open borders or anything like that, but it does mean it does require us to think about the bigger picture and to see a general human problem versus just how it affects us.

[00:39:08] **Dr. Mark Turman:** So let's go down that road for a minute. Cause I know you wrote on this not too many days ago and called out that principle as well, that there is biblical precedent, there is biblical affirmation to the idea of nations to nations, having borders to those borders being secure, which is one other aspect. I don't know that we would say it's the direct opposite.

It's just another aspect. Of a very big, very difficult reality and conversation. But talk about that for a moment. Talk about the biblical foundation. It is biblically affirmed that there can be and

should be borders and that there should be the rule of law and that there should be proper processes by which these things like immigration take place.

Talk about that a little bit so we understand it better.

[00:39:58] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** Yeah, I think if even going back to the Old Testament, you see, I think it's in Deuteronomy where God says that he's the one that sets borders and the, you see that principle come up throughout where at no point does the, does the Bible treat nations as if they shouldn't exist? This idea that, and that there's, that there are borders is never openly condemned.

And when you think about Israel and everything they went through, and you think about the nature, even within the Roman empire at a time when. You know, the Roman, throughout the New Testament, the Roman Empire was actively trying to expand and take over other nations and violate those borders. I mean, if God really didn't believe borders should exist, he had ample opportunity to say so, and he never does.

And I think, so I think that's an important principle to keep in mind, but also just from a practical perspective, those borders they have to be there because there's just, you know, Society doesn't function unless we can have without the rule of law. And scripture even speaks to how God is the one who is ultimately kind of sets people in power.

And while we can, that's probably a much larger conversation for how the practicalities of how all that works out. I think the very least it, it shows the principle that God, like governments don't exist in In opposition to God, like God doesn't wish the governments didn't exist. God doesn't wish the borders didn't exist.

There's this implicit recognition that they have to, and that that's not a bad thing. It's more just something that we need to figure out how to, how to address in a way that doesn't violate. God's will, because I do think scripture speaks very clearly to, as we said, that every human is created in God's image.

Every human is worthy of respect. Every human life is a person that God loves and that we are called to love in return. And so how we go about enforcing those borders, I think is where we get into some potentially trickier areas. Because that, and I think that's where a lot of the issues and a lot of the division within the nation, and even within churches today, is coming from is this.

Seemingly competing principles of We have to have borders and we have to enforce those borders, but we also have to honor God. What are your thoughts on how to do that? Well,

[00:42:11] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah, I think it's just a really good call out that, you know, in order for human beings to flourish, There has to be multiple levels of organization that start all

the way down to the family and go all the way up to national governments and that the world is, is in need of that and too complex to be managed any other way.

I keep hearing in the back of my mind, multiple references in the book of Proverbs to this admonition, don't move the ancient boundary. And a reference that I recall from act 17, where Paul is in Athens and he's talking about how God ordered where every person and nation would, would exist. And, and that there is an order that God is, is laid out and is laying out.

And certainly the decisions and actions of men and of nation certainly play into that, not saying that we haven't been a part of that both for good or for ill. But that we need that, as you said, we, in order for us to be organized and to not have just ultimate chaos and anarchy, we need these kinds of entities and organization into communities, into cities, counties, states, nations that, that kind of institutional organization.

And layers of authority within the organization of people is necessary for us to thrive and to thrive. Well, it's not a foolproof thing because human beings in their sinfulness are involved. But it's a reality that is absolutely needed and a form of righteousness that we need to continue to pursue and that we need to be a positive.

influence in again, it can be overwhelming. It can be really difficult to get our minds wrapped around it, which is something that ought to humble us and cause us in many ways to not only be compassionate to other people, other nations, and especially to people who are vulnerable as refugees and as People seeking to immigrate.

And in that conversation, it would be, I think, right for us to call out. There are people trying to come in and do us harm. Hopefully not many hope I would never go down the road and say majority, but we know that human beings, what they being, what they are being broken as they are, there are some people trying to get into our country or other countries.

and their purpose is to do harm. We have to do all that we can to try to identify them, interrupt them and stop them. But that's a reality. And that argument has validity at a certain level. But it also realizes that we have always in many ways been a country of compassion and of trying to make the world better, not just for us, but for others.

That's not simple in and of itself, but kind of going back to this idea of being humbly grateful for people that are in government, people that are in other nations, governments, people that are working in the nonprofit sector, trying to help with these issues. These are massive issues when you have.

Tens of thousands all the way up into the millions of people in these huge conflicts that are affecting so many people and bringing about famine, bringing about all types of, of you know,

medical problems such as rapid spread of disease, those kinds of things. Some of these things are just so massive in their scale that you wonder if anybody can ever come up with a strategy to make them better, but we can.

And we have to believe that we can and try to find a way to do that. Ryan, one of the things that you mentioned in your article recently had to do with asylum. Can you kind of explain asylum to us briefly? And then how that sometimes is being abused. In a way that was never intended when the opportunity of asylum was created between nations.

Yeah.

[00:46:16] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** a good example of what you're talking about with the, the ease with which something that's good can go bad and how when we're trying to figure out laws we can't pursue, we can't make perfection the standard we have to achieve with them. Just making, sometimes making things better is good enough and all we can do in a situation.

I think asylum is something like that. It started off with this just desire to create a safe haven for people that genuinely need one. And I think what it's turned into, even there was a New York Times article recently, which referred to it as the loophole of the immigration system where people, the system is set up.

Well, prior to President Biden's executive order, at least it was set up in a way that instead of whenever someone would cross the border illegally, instead of running from immigration officers, they would actually just set up shop until they were arrested. So that once they were arrested, they would claim asylum.

And the way the system worked was they were given they were basically given a court date and then usually set free because the system was so overloaded with people claiming asylum that usually that court date was years in the future. And there's not enough there's not enough ways to house.

There's not enough ways to even just, you know, And the modern equivalent of an internment camp, even like that we saw what toward to an extent with a lot towards the end of President Trump's presidency where families are being separated and all that, and in large part because there wasn't room to house them as family units.

And so, the Biden administration's response to that was to just essentially let them go. And That's by no means a way of justifying separating parents from children or anything like that. That's a whole separate, much larger issue, but I think it's an example of how asylum has been abused and how it created a system that incentivized people to claim it, even if they had no intent of ever showing up for a court date.

Even if they knew that they weren't, they didn't qualify for asylum status, it was essentially a free pass into the nation. And then they could go where they wanted after that. So the current executive order has been, was intended to shut that down by saying that anyone, if we cross a certain threshold of 2, 500, an average of 2, 500 encounters a day over a seven day period, then every, the border shuts down between official ports of entry and anyone who crosses is not given that opportunity to claim asylum, they're just sent back.

And there are official ways there's an, an app that the government has created that through which you can schedule asylum appointments to where you can try and plead your case and try and go through official channels. And those are still active. And so it is possible to still claim asylum.

It's just the system is so backlogged and overwhelmed that most people, it's not a viable option for most people. And it's, it's difficult to know really what the best way to proceed with that would be because you're for, you're. The situation had deteriorated to the level that you were left with essentially just two untenable situations, options, either effectively shut it down completely, which harms so many people who legitimately need and seek asylum and might have a legitimate claim for it, or to let the system continue as it is, in which case it continues to be overwhelmed, it effectively, effectively functions as an open border, and It's just, that's not viable, and so that's kind of what President Biden's executive order was trying to do, was cause it, I do, there's a stipulation where if they averaged 1, 500 encounters a day over a 7 day period, then 2 weeks later the border could open back up, but since the President took office, there has never been a day that averaged 1, 500 or fewer, so it's effectively closed for the foreseeable future or until that is overturned in court.

But I think the nature of that highlights the complexity of this issue.

[00:50:09] **Dr. Mark Turman:** that's the next step that we're apparently likely to see, according to some reporting, is that. This, like it did under the Trump administration, this is going to go back into the courts relative to whether or not you can curtail asylum in any way. We went through this once before with the Trump administration.

We're likely to go through it again now under president Biden's order. Because again it, it illustrates a lot of things. One of the things that illustrates for me is. You can, you can be rightly intentional about what you're trying to do. You can even set up the right laws, but if you don't have the infrastructure to support the law that you're creating, then you're not going to solve the problem. And that's a lot of what you're referring to is, is we just don't have enough courts. We don't have enough people. We don't have enough places designated to where those who are seeking asylum can actually go through a proper process. And they can be dealt with in an appropriate way. We may have set up reasonably healthy laws and we may be well intended.

But if we don't build out the infrastructure behind that, then the the the The execution of those processes is not going to work. And we're going to find ourselves in the kind of crisis that we have right now.

[00:51:26] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** And what makes it so difficult with regards to asylum is that there's not a, even though the UN has an official definition of who a refugee is, or who someone who should qualify for asylum, like, what their circumstances need to be, the practical, real world enforcement of that is very difficult. And so it's not something that can be done quickly.

It's not something that can be done in mass. And that, that has created the situation we have today.

[00:51:54] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah. And, and, and a reason for us to again, approach this topic with enormous compassion and humility and with prayer as well as, as with a desire to be involved. And I just, as we get ready to close, Ryan just wanted to kind of wrap this up with that idea of, we wanted to maybe give our audience some ideas of, okay, I should, and I can.

And hopefully everyone listening to us will pray about this. I have a in my own life, just over the years, I've developed a, a system whereby I pray for a different continent and the countries on that continent, a different one every day, each of the first six days of the week. And sometimes it's just, you know, I'm even trying to learn more of the geography of the world by putting down, if I'm praying for Asia, well, how many different countries are there involved in Asia?

If I'm praying for Central America. What are those seven countries that I will randomly hear in one new story or another. So I'm trying to become more aware and and that way, if nothing else, I can be prayerful for what's going on in different parts of the world, realizing that there are people struggling everywhere and people full of hope everywhere as well.

But beyond something like that, in terms of a prayer strategy are there one or two other ideas you might have that people? Yeah. How can I be involved in making this kind of a problem better in the ways that God would want us to make it better?

[00:53:25] **Dr. Ryan Denison:** We have some articles on our website that lists some organizations that are attempting to do that, I think, and we might include those in the show notes of the podcast, but I, The one that stands out most is, I think, just learning to check how we think and talk about immigrants, and about, especially those who are here legally, I think is maybe the most, one of the more practical steps we can take, because it really does impact so many aspects of our witness.

And just how we view people in general, if we, as we've talked about, it's a slippery slope when you start to demean or diminish the humanity of people. And I think we've seen that in certain

segments of the church where we forget that, again, I've said this multiple times, it is where we forget that these are people God loves and calls us to love.

And so while we should absolutely pray for ways to do that, I think praying for nations is a wonderful way to do that. But on a more personal level, I think if this is an issue that God has a way for you to get practically involved in just praying and asking him what that is and then responding accordingly I think it's so important to include God in those conversations rather than just feel it perceived need or feel like you're called to do something and then go googling ways to do it.

I think the best place to start is just going to God and asking, Lord, you know, the people around me, you know, the people I'm going to encounter. If it's your will for me to be involved in this, please bring people my way and make me aware of opportunities to have the help and then give me the courage to do so.

And I think that is a prayer. All of us should be praying on a daily basis. And I think it impacts ways even beyond the immigration and refugee situation. I think in general, we could all do with a little more involving God in our daily lives, and I think this is a, an excellent reminder to do that.

[00:55:15] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, absolutely. Also makes me think of, you know, that we need to take our cues from what the Bible tells us about Jesus and his attitude toward every person, including those people who were culturally or even spiritually different from him. And as. One of our favorite authors, David, David Brooks recently wrote in one of his books that the call of Christ is for all of us to be compassionate, but also to be curious about other people as fellow image bearers and what we've developed in our world.

And for some reasons that are obvious to be able to point out, but what we've developed in our world is a sense of suspicion about each other rather than a sense of compassion and curiosity. And as Christians, that's an opportunity for us to witness and to turn that back, to model something different.

By the way, as you said, that we think and talk about and participate in issues around immigration and the needs of those around us and those people that we see up and down the streets of our neighborhood or our community who look, sound, dress differently than us. That we ought to be approaching all of them as people that God loves and that therefore we should love with a compassion and a curiosity that seeks their best.

Ryan, thanks for the conversation today. And also thank you to those of us listening. I hope that this has been a helpful conversation on a big, big topic that we'll explore more going down the road, but thank you for listening today. And if this has been helpful to you, please rate, review us

on your podcast platform and share this with family and friends, maybe it'll help them to be more equipped to think biblically and to act redemptively in their circles of influence.

As they live holy lives, seeking after Christ. We'll see you next time on the Denison Forum Podcast.