

Editorial: Thousands of minors: What if Jesus tells us to feed them?

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What would you do if 3,000 people came to you, and Jesus told you to feed them? Most of us would do what the people did the first time this kind of thing happened.

“Just how are we supposed to do that,” they protested. They didn’t have enough food or money to buy it to feed all those thousands of people. “Just send them away, and quick,” they said. “Let them feed themselves.”

Of course, my question isn’t about a crowd of people clamoring for Jesus’ teaching and miracles. My question is about [3,000](#) unaccompanied male immigrants aged 15 to 17 who may spend 90 days in the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas, and the close to 1,000 immigrant youth sent to Midland.

What would you do if Jesus told you to feed them? Clothe them? Visit them? Care for them?

I understand it may not be as straightforward as that.

But wait

You might say I’m making a false comparison. The people Jesus fed didn’t cross an international border illegally, whereas thousands of unaccompanied minors are in U.S. Border Patrol custody for violating U.S. immigration law by how they entered the United States.

Does that mean Jesus wouldn't feed them or ask us to?

You might say Jesus feeding thousands in his day was then; this is now. We have government programs now and groups like Catholic Charities that ensure people are fed.

True enough. In fact, these programs and charities are just two reasons people all over the world see the United States as a beacon of hope.

Does our government relieve us of the responsibility to feed people if Jesus tells us to feed them? Do religious charities absolve us of personal responsibility?

You might point out there are rules and regulations at federal detention facilities and temporary "[decompression centers](#)." You can't just march up to a federal facility, push through the door and hand a bag of groceries to a detainee. Even organizations like Catholic Charities require a government invitation to be involved.

Again, true enough. But do rules and regulations negate our obligation to do what Jesus tells us to do? If it was a different situation, like [smuggling Bibles](#) into a closed country, would we throw up our hands?

On second thought

Maybe the problem isn't what Jesus commands. After all, we agree Jesus told us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned ... if we want Jesus to recognize us as one of his people and thereby avoid eternal punishment (Matthew 25:31-46).

Maybe the problem is the personal nature of Jesus' command, that he would expect us to keep his command at home, here, the United States.

Maybe we don't think we have enough to feed ourselves and someone

else's kids, too, which really is ironic. Why would Jesus—the one who more than once fed thousands—tell us to do something he thought we couldn't do? If he tells us to feed them, either he thinks we're capable, or he expects us to turn to him and let him work a miracle again.

Maybe we don't see the luxury we have of debating whether to be involved personally in caring for detained immigrants, because we're not the ones desperate to be somewhere else. We're not the ones risking our own lives and the lives of our children for the chance of staying alive.

Maybe we are forgetting what history teaches us, that someday the shoe will be on the other foot. Someday, it will be our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, or we ourselves—just as it was our parents, grandparents, great-grandparents or other forebears—who are willing to risk everything, maybe even violating immigration law, just to have a safe place to sleep.

A sensitive subject

Immigration is a sensitive subject, because immigration is a personal subject. It involves what we think about ourselves and other people. It touches on our sense of security and fairness. Who's allowed to move, why, when and where? Who makes the rules—those who were there first, or second, or third?

Regardless how anyone gets from one place to another—legally or illegally—the reality is people migrate because they have to, not out of boredom or curiosity.

“It cannot be overstated often or strongly enough: They are not coming for the so-called ‘better life.’ They are coming for life. Bare life. Just to live. As one mother said, ‘I just want to see my daughter smile,’” Rev. Dr. Helen T. Boursier, author of [*Desperately Seeking Asylum: Testimonies of Trauma*](#),

[*Courage, and Love*](#), stated to me in an email.

What would you do if Jesus told you to feed them?

British economist and Oxford professor Paul Collier wrote about immigration in *Exodus: How Migration is Changing Our World*, “There is a clear moral obligation to help very poor people who live in other countries.” He goes on to write, “Allowing some of them to move to rich countries is one way of helping them.”

A moral obligation, indeed. If the Bible is to be believed, if God’s word holds any authority, there is more than a moral obligation to help those in need, even if we disagree over who we should help, where and when.

The particulars about the who, how, when and why of immigration do not determine our response to Jesus, should he tell us to feed immigrants. As important as sorting out these particulars is—and they do need to be sorted out in the most just way for all involved—the obligation really is clear.

Jesus did tell us to feed them. Now, how will we do it? [You can find some ways here.](#)

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