



Read Along: When Fear Comes to Church

**Pastor Paco Amador on
ICE Raids and the Call
to Love Our Neighbors.**

A companion to Good Faith Episode 200

Dear reader,

Over the next few months, we're going to take a deeper dive into a few of the most pressing issues shaping American life. Not in a rapid-fire, week-to-week rhythm, but spread across time, returning to each topic from multiple angles. We're starting with immigration, and for good reason.

Immigration has become a defining issue for certain political movements and has quickly risen to the top of our national conversation. Polls show the topic holding great sway in recent elections, social media is aflame with competing perspectives, business leaders are weighing in – and thoughtful, curious people of faith are wondering how to find the signal in the noise.

Our team began discussing the idea of an immigration-focused series several months ago. At that time, the national conversation was largely focused on what was happening at the border – who was crossing into the United States, where were they coming from, the strengths and weaknesses of the asylum system, the role of individuals and institutions in caring for these individuals and so on.

Now, the conversation has shifted in a fundamental way. Instead of focusing on the border, the dialogue is focused on what's happening in the interior of our country – who has a right to be here and why; if there are too many immigrants or too few; the implications for our churches and schools and economy; what role various branches of the government should play in addressing this issue and how.

It's a profound shift – and one we know has left many of our listening community feeling a sense of whiplash and, in many cases, grave concern. If this describes you, I'm especially pleased to invite you to encounter this content.

Today, we've released the first in what will be a series of conversations, all of which we aim to tackle with hope, humility, and curiosity. This episode invites listeners into a holy tension: the tension between fear and faith, persecution and revival, despair and gospel hope. Chicago Pastor Paco Amador offers a scripturally rich reflection on immigration, displacement, and what it truly means for the church to love its neighbors, especially when those neighbors are undocumented or fearful of ICE raids. I hope you'll find this conversation – and the guide you'll find below – thought-provoking and rich.

Glad to be joining you in this long obedience in the same direction,



Executive Director, Redeeming Babel
Host, The Good Faith Podcast

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On Migration

One of the theological through-lines of this conversation is the idea that migration isn't merely a modern issue. It's a biblical one. From the beginning, God calls people to move: Abraham leaves his homeland in Genesis 12. God's people are exiled and dispersed throughout the Old Testament. Even the birth of the church happens through movement, sometimes chosen and sometimes forced. ([Acts 8:1-4](#)).

Paco puts it this way: "Humans are the marriage between heaven and earth... and the glory of God was meant to move." In that light, migration is not bug but a feature – not a problem to be solved but a key element of God's redemptive work in the world. To be human is to be on the move. And to be the church is to be with those who are on the move.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Abraham's migration begins not with clarity but with a call: "Go... to the land I will show you." How does this model challenge our modern obsession with certainty and control, especially in how we view immigration and immigrants?
- Many Christians instinctively view the movement of people as a disruption to be managed rather than a pattern woven through Scripture. What theological shifts are required to see migration not as a crisis but as a possible carrier of divine purpose?
- Migration is often framed through the lens of national identity and sovereignty. But what does Scripture invite us to consider about our primary citizenship as members of God's kingdom? How should that complicate or clarify our loyalties?

PRACTICE TO TRY: YOUR OWN MIGRATION

- Take time to chart the major migrations in your own family's story – geographical, vocational, or spiritual. Include moments of exile, uncertainty, or redirection. Then, consider this: What parts of God's character were revealed in those journeys? How has your faith been strengthened and your life made richer as a result?

Fear Has Come To The Church

When Pastor Paco says, “I’ve never heard the word *fear* more,” he isn’t speaking metaphorically. Fear has seeped into the everyday life of his congregation: parents afraid to walk their children to school, workers afraid to drive to their jobs, families afraid to open the door. For many of us, fear feels like failure or faithlessness – but in Scripture, fear often signals the place where God’s kingdom draws near.

That’s why Paco turns to the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12), Jesus’ opening words in the Sermon on the Mount. There, Jesus blesses not the confident but the crushed – what Paco calls the “spiritual zeros.” In a city filled with people who are weeping, Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn.” To those starved for justice, He says, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” To the displaced and forgotten, He says, “The meek will inherit the earth.” In other words, fear and weakness are not barriers to blessing; they are the soil in which blessing grows.

For a community under threat, this truth is not sentimental. It’s survival. The Beatitudes announce that God’s kingdom belongs precisely to those who have run out of self-protection and can only cry out for mercy. They remind us that Jesus Himself began His ministry not with power, but with solidarity. He began with the fearful, the poor, the mourning, and the hungry. So when fear walks into the sanctuary, in a city like Chicago or in your own town, it carries with it some of the very people to whom the supreme blessings of the kingdom have already been promised.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Jesus begins His most famous sermon by blessing the broken, not the bold. What implications does this have for the way we see fear, not just as an obstacle to overcome, but as a location of grace? How might this challenge typical Western assumptions about strength, leadership, or spiritual maturity?
- The term “spiritual zeros” offers a raw picture of what it means to be overlooked or unwanted. Who are these people in your context – your neighborhood, your church, your extended family? Are there ways you unintentionally participate in their marginalization?
- If the Beatitudes are more than aspirational poetry – if they are an ethic and announcement of God’s kingdom – what would it look like to let them shape your civic imagination, especially around public policy or immigration?

PRACTICE TO TRY: LECTIO DIVINA WITH A TWIST

Read Matthew 5:3–12 slowly three times.

- The first time, imagine Jesus speaking these words to His original audience.
- The second time, imagine Him speaking them in today’s world – perhaps in Paco’s Chicago neighborhood or your own city.
- The third time, hear Him speaking directly to you. Then, write a few sentences answering this: If Jesus blesses the fearful, where might I need to bless – or be blessed – in my own life?

A Revival?

Perhaps the most unexpected turn in the conversation is Paco's description of revival. In the midst of fear, his church has seen more baptisms and weddings in two years than in the previous two decades. People are coming to faith, seeking discipleship, and asking to be married in the church. This isn't happening despite the fear but rather in the midst of it.

Acts 8:4 is a mirror: *"Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went."* The church grows not when it's comfortable, but when it is scattered, stretched, and tested. And while persecution is never something we celebrate, it often becomes the ground where new life emerges.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- The idea that revival might emerge through persecution rather than in spite of it is both ancient and deeply countercultural. How does this upend modern American assumptions about what flourishing looks like for the church?
- Paco's community is not just surviving but growing – in discipleship, in baptism, and in covenantal commitments like marriage. What might this suggest about the spiritual hunger created by cultural or political instability? How should churches respond? How might your church respond?
- In moments of national stress, churches are tempted to mirror the fear and reactivity of the culture. What would it take for your church – or for you personally – to model a different response rooted in joy, perseverance, and quiet courage?

PRACTICE TO TRY: A PLACE OF PAIN

- In silence, name one place of pain – yours or someone else's. Ask God: where might new life be stirring? If this pain involves something communal – church hurt, relational discord, political disagreements – ask God to do a new thing in that shared, embodied space.

Divided, but not Powerless

In this conversation, Curtis and Paco acknowledge a painful truth: the people fueling anti-immigrant policies and the people being most harmed by them often share the same faith. We are divided – not only politically, but spiritually, too. And the credibility of our witness is at stake. It's tempting to stay stuck in the weight of this heaviness – but even here, there is hope.

Throughout history, God has used fractured communities to reflect His grace. But this requires honesty, courage, and a willingness to name our complicity. It also requires listening deeply to those at the margins and letting their stories shape our theology, not just our charity.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Paco and Curtis both name the painful reality that many who support or remain silent about anti-immigrant efforts also identify as Christians. How do we hold the tension between shared faith and deep disagreement without abandoning either truth or relationship?
- What does it mean to speak prophetically to “your own side”? What might be gained – or lost – in doing so? Who are the voices within your tradition you’re most tempted to ignore? Where specifically do you need God to give you courage?
- What forms of silence or willful turning away do you see around injustice in the church today? Where might a holy disruption be required? What could your role in such a disruption be?

PRACTICE TO TRY: INTERCESSION

- Spend time in prayer for those you disagree with – perhaps especially those with whom you share community. Then imagine what it might look like for us to prioritize love over power, being faithful over being right, and being in relationship over winning arguments. Consider sharing your vision with someone, not as an argument but as an invitation to imagine something better.

Closing Examen: Love in the Time of Fear

Finish your time with this spiritual exercise, either silently or aloud:

- Who in my community is afraid right now? Where have I been tempted to turn away, rather than draw near?
- What fears do I carry? How can I bring them to God?
- What is one action I can take this week to love a neighbor, especially one who feels far from safety or belonging? Is there a specific thing God is calling me – specifically, and only me – to do right now?
- What does my personal witness look like in this time of turmoil and uncertainty? Where is God calling me to lean not on my own understanding but to rely on Him?

More Resources for You

- [World Relief: Responding to ICE in places of worship](#)
- [Evangelical Immigration Table: Resources for Your Church](#)
- [Women of Welcome: A Space to Equip, Engage, Educate, and Encourage](#)
- [National Immigration Forum: Building Trusted Relationships to create a shared vision of America for all.](#)

