

Seven Bible Principles for the Care and Nurture of Refugees

You won't find the word "refugee" in the Bible. But you will find refugees! Some of the most important people in scriptures were refugees.

- Jesus and his parents slipped into Egypt to escape Herod's infanticide.
- The Israelites were delivered from Egyptian tyranny into the promised land.
- Early church believers poured out of Jerusalem to save their lives and consequently the gospel reached new corners of the world.
- The Apostle John was exiled in Patmos and wrote the book of Revelation.

All fled their homeland because they were singled out by leaders within their own country as targets for persecution. In other words, they were refugees!

Time after time, God has taken the tragedy of forced migration and used it to work out His purposes. He took extraordinary interest in refugees. He still does today. He's working out plans and purposes for Cambodians, Burmese, Sri Lankans who have been fleeing their country for the last twenty years, for the Mozambicans, Sudanese running for their lives in Africa, and for the Cubans who fled Castro and made it to the shores of Florida.

God has not left us to guess as a nation or as His people how we are to treat these people so close to His heart. The crowning passage that declares God's concern is in Matthew 25. When we stand before our Lord on the day of judgment, He'll ask us how we treated people who graphically fit the description of a refugee. Strangers, the hungry and thirsty, those in need of clothes, those who are in prison, and those who are sick - each characteristic strikingly parallel to a twentieth century refugee.

Then the King will say to those on the right, "Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Matthew 25:34-36,40

Numerous Bible passages describe how God wants us to treat refugees -the strangers, the poor, the aliens, and the sojourners in our midst. Seven key principles describe God's abiding concern for refugees.

1. God loves, protects, and provides for refugees.

- He watches over them. Ps. 146:9.
- He provides refuge for them, a shelter from the storm, and shade from the heat. Ps. 9:9, Is.25:4.
- He shows no partiality to natives of a country. Refugees and natives have equal status in His sight. Deut. 10:16-19, Num.15:16.
- He defends their cause, providing food and clothing for them. Deut. 10:16-19.
- Jesus announced that the essence of his ministry was to help and serve people in refugee-like situations. Luke 4:16-2

2. God expects his people to love refugees and to give freely of their resources to help them.

- Love refugees as you love yourselves. Lev. 19:34, Deut 10:16-19.
- Treat refugees fairly and stand up for them when others mistreat them. Ps. 82:4, Ex. 22:21, Lev. 19:33, Zech. 7:9-10, Deut. 23:15.
- Share your food, clothing, and shelter with them. Is. 58:6-11, Luke 3:10, Mt. 25:31-46.
- Invite them into your homes. Heb. 13:2. Is. 58:6-11, Luke 14:12-13.
- Set aside part of your income to help them. Lev. 19:10, 23:22, Deut. 24:19-21, 14:28-29, 26:12, Gal. 2:10, Ja. 1:27.
- Sell your possessions to help them if need be. Lk. 12:33, Mt.19:21.
- Encourage them. Is. 1:17.

3. God views our compassionate treatment of refugees as a fundamental indicator of true Christianity.

- When believers stand before Him on judgment day He will ask them how they treated refugees. Luke 14:12-13, Matthew 25:31-46.

4. God expects the nations to rescue refugees, to take them in, and to treat them just like her native born.

- Rescue refugees from persecuting nations. Is. 16:3-5.
- Give shelter to them from their destroyers. Is. 16:3-5.
- Never return refugees to their oppressors. Let them live with you. Deut. 23:15.
- Give them a choice as to where they can live among you. Deut. 23:15.
- Treat refugees just like you do your own citizens through your laws and regulations. Treat them fairly. Lev. 19:34, 24:22, Num.15:16.
- Set aside part of your income to help them. Deut. 14:28-29, 26:12.

5. God promises to bless the family and nation who take care of refugees.
 - He blesses them and the work of their hands. Deut. 24:19-21.
 - He answers their prayer. Is. 58:6-11.
 - His glory is their rear guard. Ps. 41:1-3, Is. 58:6-11.
 - He strengthens them physically. Is. 58:6-11, Ps. 41:1-3.
 - He satisfies their needs. Prov. 28:27, Is. 58:6-11.
 - He protects them. Ps. 41:1-3.
 - He will repay them at the resurrection of the righteous. Lk.14:12-13, Mt. 25:31-46

6. God promises to curse the nation and people who mistreat refugees.
 - The judgment and curse of the Lord is on a nation that withholds justice from the refugee. Deut. 27:19, 24:17, Ez.22:9f, Mal 3:5, Ez. 16:49
 - The Lord will not answer their prayers. Pr. 21:13
 - He who closes his/hers ears to refugees will receive many curses. Pr. 28:27
 - You show contempt toward God if you oppress the poor. Pr. 10:31.
 - A nation's right to its land is predicated upon treating refugees well. Jer. 5:5-7

7. God views our care for refugees as a concrete expression of love and service to him.
 - When we take care of refugees, we take care of the Lord. Mt. 25.

Source: Exodus World Service