

Why Should Christians Be Concerned About Refugees?



Recently displaced children in Kakuma refugee camp, Kenya

The Bible is filled with exhortations to care for the needy, vulnerable, marginalized and oppressed. Followers of Jesus Christ are called to be humble people living lives marked by mercy, justice and hospitality. We have specific reasons to be highly motivated to seek the protection and welfare of forcibly displaced people.

From the divine banishment of Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:23,24) to the final book of the Bible penned by John while in exile on the island of Patmos, stories of forced displacement run throughout Scripture.

Sometimes the causes are simple and other times complex. Some people were forcibly displaced as a result of their own choices and actions (Adam and Eve, Cain, Moses, etc.), while others were driven from their homes in response to climate change/natural disaster (Noah, Lot), conflict (Hagar, Joseph), famine (Jacob, Abraham, Naomi), war/exile (the nation of Israel, Esther, Nehemiah, Daniel) or persecution (David, Jesus, Philip, Aquila and Priscilla, Peter, the early church).

The alien is often mentioned in the Bible together with the fatherless and the widow. They are revealed to be vulnerable people for whom God cares. God expects his people to care for them in tangible ways (including shelter, food, clothing, justice and hospitality). The Bible is filled with divine mandates for the people of God to welcome, protect and care for the alien. A small sampling of such texts includes Deuteronomy 10:17-19; Deuteronomy 31:12,13; Isaiah 58:7, Matthew 25:35, 36. They can be summed up with the words found in Leviticus 19:33, 34, *"The alien living with you in your land must be treated as one of your native born. Love him as you love yourself..."*

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Followers of Jesus are motivated to seek the protection and welfare of refugees because by serving them, we serve Jesus.

Political persecution forced Jesus and his family to flee in the night to Egypt when he was a young child. Upon their return, they did not feel it was safe to return to their hometown in Judea and settled elsewhere (in Nazareth). Jesus personally identifies with the refugee and returnee. They can also identify with him.

Jesus identified himself with the stranger to the point of saying that when we invite a stranger into our space, we welcome him (Matthew 25:35). In similar fashion, Jesus identified himself with the hungry, the thirsty, those needing clothing, the sick and the prisoner. Forcibly displaced people often experience all of these conditions.

In a time of multiple humanitarian crises forcing tens of millions to flee their homes and countries of origin, followers of Jesus Christ would do well to rediscover our God-given responsibility and privilege to seek the protection and welfare of forcibly displaced people in the world.