

5 Reasons Followers of Christ Seek the Protection and Welfare of Refugees

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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.



A Sudanese refugee church in Kakuma refugee camp

Forcible Displacement in the Bible

Followers of Jesus are motivated to seek after the protection and welfare of refugees because from start to finish, the biblical narrative clearly emphasizes that God is with forcibly displaced people, revealing himself to them, caring for them and often accomplishing his purposes through them.

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).

Divine Mandates Concerning the Alien

Followers of Jesus are motivated to seek after the protection and welfare of refugees because God cares for them and expects us to do the same.

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...*"

Jesus' Identification with the Refugee, the Returnee and the Stranger

Followers of Jesus are motivated to seek after 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 also 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.

Called to Live as Aliens

Followers of Jesus are motivated to seek after the protection and welfare of refugees because by serving them, we learn more about our own true identity and relationship to the temporal world.

The Bible instructs followers of Jesus to identify themselves as aliens and foreigners in the world. This attitude should disarm and replace xenophobia and prejudice against refugees with respect as their lives can help us better understand our own relationship to the world as temporary residents.

Forced Displacement of Christ followers

Followers of Jesus are motivated to seek after the protection and welfare of refugees because forced displacement is a significant and meaningful part of our collective story.

Jesus warned his followers that they would experience persecution and be forcibly displaced (Matthew 10:23). The first wave of Christian refugees is recorded in the Book of Acts in the New Testament. They were persecuted and uprooted specifically because of their faith in Jesus. Throughout the centuries and into the present day, followers of Jesus have experienced persecution for their faith, forcing many to flee their homelands. This predisposes followers of Jesus to care about the plight of all forcibly displaced people.

Conclusion

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, calling and privilege to seek after the protection and welfare of forcibly displaced people in the world.

