

Creative prayer idea...

...for catching God's heart for refugees

Use this prayer resource individually or in small groups to help you empathise with refugees and the challenges facing them; to remind yourself of God's heart for 'the stranger'; and to pray with deeper compassion and commitment for those forced to leave their homes and communities. **Each person will need:** a copy of this sheet, a pen and paper and access to a concordance or to a website like www.biblegateway.com – it should take about an hour to work through, but might last a bit longer if you are in a group and get into the discussion activity towards the end.

This resource includes exercises to help us imagine – to some small degree – what it might be like to go through some of the experiences faced by today's refugees and IDPs. Of course, it is impossible for anyone 'understand' what will be a deeply traumatic and unique experience for each individual and family affected, but our heart's desire in writing this resource is to grow a stronger heart for prayer – and welcome – in the UK church.

If you would like to pray more for refugees, you might like to look at our **prayer stations**:

<http://www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/prayer-stations-walking-with-refugees.pdf> and our **written prayer** - http://www.thesanctuarycentre.org/resources/written_prayer_for_refugees_based_on_psalms_126.pdf

Creative prayer idea for praying for refugees

1. Giving thanks for home

- **Take** a piece of paper and a pen.
- **Fold** your paper in half, and then in half again. And then unfold it again so you have four sections.
- **Title** one section 'home – material', one 'home – people', one 'local surroundings' and one 'people who make up your community locally'.
- **Jot down** under each heading some of things that create your sense of home. What and who are you thankful for? What is precious to you? What things around you where you live help you to feel 'at home'?
- **Spend some time giving thanks to God** for everything you have written down.

2. Facing the big picture

Ask yourself the following questions before reading any of the information below:

- How would you define a refugee and/or an internally displaced person?
- How many refugees and internally displaced people do you think there are in the world?
- What do you think the main causes of people fleeing their homes and communities are?
- Have you met any refugees? If so, what struck you about their stories?

Spend a few moments thanking God for the understanding and compassion he has given you so far.

Now ask him for an open heart and mind to receive more of his compassion as you seek to learn more, 'mourn with those that mourn' and imagine more what it might be like to be in their situation...

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- There are 45.2 million people 'forcibly' displaced worldwide. (England's population is 53.01 million)
- This huge number breaks down into the following categories:
 - 15.4 million refugees (at the end of 2012) – those who are living in another country.
 - 28.8 million internally displaced people – those who have had to leave their communities and flee to elsewhere in their own country.
 - 893,700 asylum seekers – who are hoping to make a new country their home but are waiting for their applications to be processed.
- Some people today are already being displaced for climate reasons, and this is predicted to increase – although in many cases this is temporary – but the vast majority have had to flee because of conflict and/or persecution. 23,000 a day became refugees for this reason in 2012, and 4.1 a second became internally displaced.
- Some of the recent conflicts you have undoubtedly been praying about – such as the war in Syria, the conflict in the Central African Republic and the 2014 insurgency in Iraq have created huge numbers of new refugees and IDPs.

All statistics are taken from UNHCR.

Offer the scale of this problem – and however your heart and mind are responding to it – to God. Ask for his help to:

- **see past** the numbers to the individuals.
- **overcome any sense of feeling overwhelmed** and restore the perspective of who he is.
- **remember** that the Holy Spirit is working everywhere. And that Jesus is interceding day and night for these people... Psalm 139 says there is nowhere we can go where God can't find us and that he cares for each of us so much he knows how many hairs are on our head. We can trust him with refugees!

God's heart for the frightened, the persecuted and the stranger

- **Turn over your piece of paper** and jot down what scriptures or ideas come to mind about what God's heart is for the frightened, the persecuted and the stranger. (If you would find it helpful, you could use a concordance or a site such as www.biblegateway.com to help you find some more.)
- **Now ring round anything** you have written which you think he wants our hearts – and actions – to mirror.
- **Remember** that God often talks about orphans, widows and strangers together... consider how many refugees might fall into two, or three of these categories... **Thank God** for his heart of love and welcome to you and to all these people.
- **Think about** Jesus' experiences in early life and in itinerant ministry. How might he understand what these people are experiencing? How might that inform his intercession? How might it inform yours?

3. Imagining the crises...

In turn, imagine each of the three fictional scenarios listed below – in your context (i.e. with the assets you have now and the help likely to be available to you in your support network and the UK) – and then ask yourself the same questions listed below for each one:

Scenarios

- a) You are facing an environmental disaster where you live – perhaps severe flooding. You are almost certainly going to see your property destroyed and are at risk yourself if you stay behind. But you should be able to return in the long term. Everyone living in your town or city is also affected.

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- b) A rebel group took control of a region elsewhere in the country earlier this year and wreaked havoc there. Now they are marching towards your community and the police and army seem to be only just slowing them down a bit. They will almost certainly reach you within a few days. If you stay you might be ok, you might not be – probably depending on how much resistance is put up. If you leave, it might be impossible to come back and claim your property later. But it looks like going to another region would be safe because the rebels are beginning to overstretch themselves. Everyone living in your town or city is asking the same questions...
- c) A rebel group who hate Christians have taken control of the UK. They are pledging total control and you have already received targeted threats because they know where you live. Only Christians are at risk and you have friends who have offered to shelter you, but you're not sure that's safe for the long-term.

Questions for all scenarios

1. Do you stay or go?
2. If you go, where do you go? And what do you take? (Look back at the list of things you made to be thankful about your home and community – what would be particularly hard to leave behind?)
3. How do you feel – both as you leave and when you get to safety?
4. What are you likely to be most worried about?
5. What are you likely to be praying about, and struggling to trust God for?
6. Who else in your community are you concerned about? Would you be able to help them?

Additional questions for scenario 2 or 3 if you decide to leave the country

1. Which country would you go to?
2. What would be the difference be between being a refugee in another country:
 - a) where you know people or don't know anyone and have to solely rely on the official structures.
 - b) where you speak the language or don't.
 - c) where you understand a bit more of the culture or don't .
3. How important would the welcome be that you receive there?
4. What would it mean to you to find other Christians in your new context?

How has imagining these stories given you insight into the experiences and feelings of refugees and internally displaced people? *If you are in a group, discuss your reflections together.*

Think about the fact that most real refugees and internally displaced people (80%) come from developing countries and are likely to have significantly less resources and/or international connects and support systems. And that many will also be recovering from major loss and/or trauma.

Offer your responses in prayer to God.

Finally pray that:

- He would keep showing you how to pray with compassion and hope for refugees and IDPs.
- He would make you a welcomer to strangers and show you how to point them to him – and the ultimate welcome and security that never shifts or shakes.
- He would fill you with his Spirit to give you also the courage to find your true home, trust and security in him – whatever your circumstance.