

WORSHIPS TO HELP FAMILIES AND YOUTH GROUPS EXPLORE REFUGEE ISSUES

Before your child or teenager starts to think about creating an art project for the ADRA competition, why not spend time as a family exploring some of the issues related to the experience of refugees during your family worship times? Here are some ideas.

PRAYING FOR REFUGEES

Praying through a story

Search this week's news stories for any stories about refugees. Read the stories together. Print or cut and stick a news story about refugees onto a large sheet of paper and then write sentence prayers for their needs all around the story.

Praying for those making difficult decisions

One of the most difficult challenges for refugees is the choice they have to make between staying in a place where they are in danger or making a dangerous journey to another place that may or may not be safer. They have to leave their homes, communities, friends and loved ones. Sometimes the journey is very expensive and very dangerous.

Different refugees – Different needs

Think about the different groups of people who may be travelling as refugees. What are their challenges and special needs as they move around in all weathers, perhaps with very little shelter or supplies?

- Babies
- Young children
- School age children
- Teenagers
- Young people
- Parents
- Older people
- People who are ill or disabled

Choose one of these age groups, list their needs, and think about how they might be feeling as they try to make their way to a safe place. Then pray for them. Or find a picture of a refugee in one or more of the age groups and write a prayer for their needs.

All kinds of emotions

Imagine that you are a refugee running away from a dangerous place and making a long journey to safety. What are some of the emotions that you might be experiencing? Hope, fear, sadness, frustration, confusion, stress, exhaustion, peace, worry, etc.? Write each emotion on a different card. Place them face down on the table. Pick up a card and pray for all the refugees that are experiencing that emotion at the moment. What Bible verses help you when you have that emotion? Use the Bible verses to inspire your prayers. How might God help them with that feeling?

In God's hands

God cares about all His children, everywhere. He is especially concerned about those in danger and those who are sad, struggling, alone, or frightened. Learn about the experiences of some of the refugees in a specific situation, place or context. Draw around your hand and imagine it is the hand of God. Draw some refugees in the palm of the hand and gently place them in God's hands, knowing that He is caring for them. Pray that the refugees will experience the peace of God in their hearts. Pray that they will feel how truly close He is to them, and how much He loves them.

Praying for softened hearts

- Take a piece play dough, salt dough or clay – something soft that you can shape with your hands. Form it into the shape of a heart and feel how soft it is. God wants us to have soft and kind hearts, hearts of flesh, and not cruel hearts that are hard like stone (Ezekiel 36:26).
- Think about some of the people that the refugees will meet on their journey. Some will be kind and welcoming, some might treat them badly, some are officials with specific responsibilities to carry out, some will be uncertain and won't know what to do or say.
- Hold your soft heart. Pray for the different people who will meet the refugees on their journey. Pray that these people will have soft hearts and be especially kind and welcoming to them.
- Now take your soft heart and press objects into it to make a pattern or design that reminds you of the experience of refugees in some way. Let it dry out, paint it or decorate it, and use it to remind you to pray for refugees.

WORSHIP IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILIES AND YOUTH GROUPS

Biblical refugees

Many people in the Bible were refugees in different ways. Noah's family; Jacob running away from his angry brother; Joseph when he was sold into slavery; Joseph's family when they moved to Egypt because of the famine; the Israelites when they fled Egypt; Naomi and her family who moved to Moab because of the famine in Bethlehem; Ruth, who left Moab to move back to Bethlehem with Naomi; and Mary, Joseph and Jesus. Which other Bible characters had to travel to a different country, or run away to a safer place because they were in danger?

Choose one of these stories, read it together, act it out, or create a scene from the story with things you have in your home. Then choose some of the following questions to discuss:

- What were the dangers for the person in the place that they left?
- What were some of the dangers they encountered, or could have encountered on their journeys?
- What were some of the potential dangers they might face in the place to which they travelled?
- What might have helped them to settle when they arrived at their destinations?
- Were there any people who were kind to them and helped them to settle in their new country?
- If you were one of the refugees in this Bible story, what would you have liked someone to do for you?
- Create a piece of artwork, poetry, or drama that expresses the dilemmas faced by refugees when they have to balance the dangers of where they are living, with the dangers of a difficult journey and the potential dangers in the place to which they are going.
- Close with one of the suggested prayer activities.

Refugee Psalm

Read Psalm 71. This has been described as The Refugee's Psalm. Read it in a Bible translation suitable for the ages of your children or teenagers.

- What does this psalm help you to understand about the experiences, thoughts and feelings of refugees? If you were to write a refugee's psalm today, what would you include, and why?
- Try writing a short psalm for refugees together, perhaps writing a verse or two each, and then putting them together. Emphasise the loving care that God has for refugees.
- Or create some pictures to illustrate Psalm 71.
- Or make a PowerPoint presentation using the words of Psalm 71 and photographs that are copyright free, from www.unsplash.com. You could show this at church on World Refugee Sabbath.
- Or create a mime/drama to illustrate Psalm 71 with your friends and make a video of it.
- Plan something practical you can do together to care for the refugees in your area. What would you like someone to do for you if you were a refugee? Maybe there are children who would love to have some of your nice old toys, or some good clothes you have outgrown. Maybe there is a young person in your school who is a refugee and who needs a good friend. Find out if there is an organisation caring for refugees near you and ask what they need.
- Choose one of the prayer activities to do together.

Jesus was a refugee

When Jesus was just a baby – his family became refugees. Mary, Joseph and Jesus had to escape to Egypt very quickly because Jesus' life was in danger. Read the story in Matthew 2:13-23.

- Imagine that you are Joseph and Mary, and you have a small baby. You only have a few minutes to pack what you need for your journey and to make your home in a foreign country. What would you choose to take with you?
- Set a timer for ten minutes. Run around your house and look for some of the things that Mary, Joseph and Jesus might have needed. Bring them back to your family. Look at what you have all chosen. Can you carry everything? Is anything missing? What else might you need? What could you leave behind? What are some of the things that you can't take with you, and that will be very sad for you to leave behind?
- Fortunately for Mary and Joseph, the wise men had just given them very expensive gifts. Perhaps they sold these and used the money to help them travel and settle in Egypt for a few years?
- What do you think it would be like to move to a foreign country for a few years, for your own safety? Imagine you are Mary and Joseph arriving in Egypt. Your clothes are different, you don't speak the language, you don't have many things, and you have a young child. You don't know who to trust, and you don't understand the culture. How would you learn all the things you need to learn? What would help you to settle quickly and adapt? How would you learn the language? What would be some of the kindest things the local people could do for you? How would you let them know that you are trustworthy too?
- What have you learned about Jesus' family, and about refugees, by exploring his story?
- What do you like best about the story? What is the most important message of this story for you? What does this story tell you about God's love?
- Draw your own picture of Mary, Joseph and Jesus travelling to Egypt. Or write a journal entry from Mary or Joseph that they might have made during the journey
- Many great artists painted pictures of Mary, Joseph and Jesus escaping from Bethlehem to Egypt. Search online for some famous paintings of "The Flight into Egypt". Look at some of these pictures. How realistic do you think they are? What are they taking with them? What can you learn from each of the pictures?
- Search for some photos on the internet of refugees travelling today. How are these different from the old paintings? Look at one of the photos of the refugees and imagine the stories that the people could tell you. Write their story or write a poem that describes their feelings and their hopes. Or use one of the photos you have found to inspire a piece of artwork.
- Close with one of the suggested prayer activities.

The Sheep and the Goats

Read the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew 25:31-46. Think about this parable in relation to the story of the refugees.

- Find out about refugees in your country and read about their story and their needs. Or look for an interview with a refugee in your country on the internet that you can watch or listen to.
- How can you be “sheep” and help to provide safety, food, clothing, and friendship to the refugees in your area? Know that whenever you do something to help and support a refugee, you are doing it for Jesus. Choose at least one of your ideas and put it into practice.
- Make a poster of different ways that you can support a young refugee person or a family. Share it with your church community and look for a good project that you can do together. Some churches have offered free language classes for refugees, a social gathering time where they can come together for food and fun, or they have sponsored a refugee family by helping them find good accommodation, work and things that they need.
- Create a drama or mime with your youth group, using the parable of the sheep and the goats, to highlight the need for caring for refugees.
- Use the parable of the sheep and the goats to inspire your prayer together. Each person can take one of the ways in which the “sheep” helped others and use it to inspire a brief sentence prayer for refugees.

Jacob’s mixed emotions

Many refugees have to flee from their homes and countries because it is not safe for them to stay. In the Bible Jacob had to run away from home because he had lied to his father and tricked his brother. Esau was so angry that he wanted to kill Jacob, so his mother sent Jacob on the long and lonely journey to her brother. Read the story in Genesis 27 and 28.

- Imagine how Jacob felt when he knew his brother wanted to kill him. Draw or create something to express his fear.
- Imagine how he felt as he said goodbye to his family, never knowing if or when he would see them again. Draw or create something to express his sadness, and uncertainty.
- Imagine how he felt when he woke from his amazing dream! Draw or create something to express his hopefulness and joy.
- Read a story of a refugee and think about their emotions when they are living in danger; when they have to leave everything behind, even the people they love; and when they experience the kindness of God and others on their long, risky and challenging journeys to safety.
- Create something that expresses the different emotional experiences of a refugee. Divide a sheet of paper into sections that express the different emotions. Create a sculpture that expresses different emotions. Or write poetry.
- Close with one of the suggested prayer activities.

Hopes and dreams

Every refugee has hopes and dreams. They have made a difficult choice to leave a place that is very unsafe for them, make a dangerous and risky journey, and start to make a new life in a different environment and culture. It is often their hopes and dreams of a better, happier and safer life that helps them to make these difficult decisions and gives them the determination to persevere through all their challenges.

Think about these Bible characters, and what their hopes and dreams might have been. (Noah’s family; Jacob running away from his angry brother; Joseph when he was sold into slavery; Joseph’s family when they moved to Egypt because of the famine; the Israelites when they fled Egypt; Naomi and her family who moved to Moab because of the famine in Bethlehem; Ruth, who left Moab to move back to Bethlehem with Naomi; and Mary, Joseph and Jesus.)

- Invite each person in your family or group to choose one of these characters, or another Bible character who was a refugee.
- Spend time thinking about the different hopes that these people might have had, and how these hopes helped them when they faced challenges, dangers and discouragements along the way.
- Stars are like hopes that guide us on our journey, just as they guided the wise men to Jesus. Cut out some large paper or card stars. On your star, write some of the hopes of the Bible character you have been thinking about.
- What hopes do you have? How do they guide you, and how do they help you when you face challenges and setbacks? How are your hopes similar to, or different from, the hopes of the Biblical refugees, and refugees today? Write your hopes on the other side of the star.
- Share your stars with each other. Talking about the hopes of Bible refugees and refugees today, and how they might be similar, and different. Talk about your own hopes too, and how they help to give purpose and direction to your life.
- Make a collage of stars, dream-clouds, colourful kites, etc. that express some of the hopes of refugees.
- What practical things could you do as a family or group to help some of the refugees hopes become realities?
- Close with one of the suggested prayer activities.

Ideas prepared by Karen Holford – Family Ministries Director of the Trans-European Division