

Bible Studies

REFUGEES

Written by Marike Blok

Presented to the organizations working together in the Relief Fund Refugees:



Introduction

Worldwide there are more than 60 million refugees today. Many of them have fled wars, violence or oppression. Large groups of people are leaving their homes and countries and travel through the world in search of a safer or better place to live. This does not leave us unaffected. We are being confronted with refugees, not only via the media but also in our cities and villages.

These three practical Bible studies will help you to talk about this issue, to learn what God teaches about this in His Word, and to bring into practice what you learn.

Acknowledgement: There are many related subjects not covered by the lessons.

Lesson 1 Valued by God

1. Introduction

When you hear or read the word 'refugee', what do you think? And what do you feel?
Have you ever met a refugee? Share your experiences in the group.

2. Why do people flee their home and country?

People flee for many different reasons. This was also true for people in the Bible.

Read together:

Exodus 2:1-12, 15 | Ruth 1:1-2 | 1 Samuel 22:1-2 | 1 Kings 17:2 | Acts 8:1

In each of the above Bible passages:

- Who is fleeing?
- What is his/her reason to flee?

Which of these reasons for fleeing do refugees have today?

3. God hates injustice

Refugees often flee because of war, dictatorship, persecution or discrimination. The refugee crisis is part of broader systems of injustice.

Amos 5:10-13, Psalm 98:9: How does God react to injustice?

Amos 5:14-15, Micah 6:8: What should be our reaction to injustice?

Matthew 5:6-7: What does God promise to those who promote justice?

4. God brings restoration

God wants us to stand up for justice even though we cannot solve all global injustice. Revelations 21:1-4: What will God do to bring complete restoration to the world?

One day God will fully restore peace and justice in His creation. God has already started His restoration work. Throughout the world's history He has shown His care for His people.

In the next sections we will discover how God shows His care for those who leave their homes to become aliens and strangers in foreign lands.

5. God's care for strangers – Old Testament

Look again at the names you have written down in §2. How did God show His care for each of these persons?
How does God care for strangers according to Deuteronomy 10:17-19 and Psalm 146:7-9?

In the Bible, strangers are often mentioned in the same lists as widows and orphans. Why do you think this is so?

God often takes care of people through other people

Strangers are often mentioned in the laws for Israel in the Old Testament. These strangers were people who lived in Israel but were not themselves Israelites. The strangers in Israel had rights and duties.

Together, make a list of the rights and duties that are mentioned in the following texts:

Deuteronomy 1:16-17 | Deuteronomy 16:11 | Deuteronomy 24:14-15, 17-19 | Deuteronomy 26:12 | Leviticus 19:33-34
Leviticus 25:35 | Numbers 35:15 | Jeremiah 22:1-5:

Which of these rights and duties were new to you?

Deuteronomy 27:9 and 28:1-2: How do these texts show that God takes His commandments regarding care for strangers seriously?

6. God's care for strangers – New Testament

In the New Testament there are no specific laws regarding strangers or refugees. But we can find a lot of teaching about our attitude towards our neighbours. Jesus commands us to look further than our own families or inner circle of friends.

Matthew 5:43-48: According to Jesus, how do we become children who look like God the Father?

Just like His Father, Jesus did not only love his 'brothers'.

To which strangers, or even enemies, did Jesus show His care? Together, make a list with examples.

God often takes care of people through other people

Jesus takes the way in which people care for strangers seriously. What does Matthew 25:34-36 say about this?

What does this passage mean for the way you respond to refugees?

7. Conclusion

Genesis 1:27, Psalm 8:5, Psalm 139:14: What are human beings called in these texts? How does God value people?

8. Our plan

Do you know any organizations or individuals who help refugees in your community or country?

Before the next lesson, gather information about these organizations or individuals.

What do they do with or for refugees? Do they need any help or support?

Prepare to share this information during the next lesson.

At the end of this lesson, pray together that God will give you open eyes and open ears to become more aware of the refugee situation and of the help already offered and still needed around you.

Lesson 2 Welcomed by God

After last lesson

Were you able to find information about organizations or individuals that work with refugees in your community or country? What do these organizations or individuals do? Do they need help, and if so, what type of help do they need?

1. Introduction

Everyone wants to belong or to fit in.

Share with each other: Have you ever experienced a situation in which you did not belong, or where you felt like a stranger? How did you feel at that time?

2. Strangers on earth

God commanded Abraham to leave his country and his family. He moved to Canaan, the Promised Land, but he did not have a permanent place to stay there.

Genesis 23:2-4, Hebrews 11:8–10: In what way was Abraham a stranger [alien]? What did God want to teach Abraham through this?

Hebrews 11:13-16: What helped Abraham and the other persons listed in Hebrews 11 to live as foreigners / strangers on this earth?

Should we compare ourselves to Abraham? Why or why not?

According to Philippians 3:20: Where is our citizenship as Christians?

What has God always been, according to Psalm 90:1?

Matthew 11:28: What does Jesus promise to those who flee to Him?

3. God's blessing through strangers

Joseph was a victim of human trafficking and was taken to Egypt against his will.

Genesis 39:5-6: How was Joseph a blessing to Potiphar's household?

Genesis 41:56-57: How did he later become a blessing to Egypt?

The young Israelite girl who worked for the wife of the Aramean (Syrian) army commander Naaman, had been taken captive against her will.

2 Kings 5:2-3: How was she a blessing to Naaman?

Ebed Melech was an official in the Judean royal palace during the time of prophet Jeremiah. He came from Nubia (present-day northern Sudan or southern Egypt).

Jeremiah 38:8-13: How was he a blessing to Jeremiah?

Jesus came from heaven to this earth. He came willingly, but He gave up much when He did.

He was a foreigner/stranger and a refugee. Luke 2:6-7, Matthew 2:13-14, Philippians 2:6-7.

John 3:16: What blessing did the world receive because Jesus came from heaven to earth?

Hebrews 13:2: Have you ever felt that you received more from your guests than they received from you? Share your

experiences in the group.

Think back to Jesus' words in Matthew 25:34-40 (see §1.4).

Have you ever seen something of Jesus in someone who was hungry, thirsty, naked, ill, imprisoned or a stranger?

Share your experiences in the group.

Discuss together:

- In what ways could refugees be a blessing to our society?
- In what ways could refugees be a blessing to our church(es)?

4. Practicing hospitality

In Romans 12, the apostle Paul urges and instructs his readers to live good lives, in accordance with God's will.

Romans 12:1: What is the motivation for a Christian to live a good life?

What does the word 'mercy' mean? Do you know other words for 'mercy'?

In pairs, make a list of all the activities that are mentioned in Romans 12:9-12.

Which of these instructions touch / affect you most, and why?

Romans 12:13: Hospitality does not come automatically, but is something we can develop.

Discuss together:

- How can you develop hospitality?
- How can your church develop hospitality?

Hospitality is welcoming others to share our place and possessions.

What does 1 Corinthians 4:7 say about our possessions?

5. Our plans

- In groups of three to four persons: Look again at the list with activities from Romans 12.
- Is there something in this list that you could do to make refugees feel welcome in your community?
- Write a small plan for the coming week. For example:
 - 'This week I will drink a cup of coffee with a refugee'
 - 'I will organize a collection for a refugee organization'
 - 'I will send postcards to the centre for refugees / asylum seekers in our community'
- As a group of 3 to 4 persons, how could you help each other or work together?
Pray for each other and for the plans.

Lesson 3 Welcoming in God's Name

After last lesson

Were you able to accomplish individually or with your small group the small plan you made?

How did it go? Did you encounter any obstacles in executing your plan?

Share your experiences. Together, pray and give thanks for the people you have met.

1. Introduction

The refugees we meet have often had a very difficult time. Many suffer memories of violence and war, pain from leaving their families and possessions behind, and fear over an uncertain and dangerous journey.

When we meet refugees, we are confronted with suffering and often despair.

In various Psalms, David shares how he felt when he had to flee from violence.

Psalm 56:1-3: How does David describe his situation?

Psalm 56:9-10: God does not solve David's problems immediately. What does God do?

2. God's love for us

As we saw in lesson 2, we can identify with refugees because we are also 'strangers on earth'.

Nevertheless, the strange-ness and different-ness of refugees can make us feel uncomfortable or even scared.

Do you recognize these feelings of discomfort or fear in yourself?

Do you know others who express discomfort or fear when they encounter refugees or when they talk about refugees?

Isaiah 43:1-7: What does God say in this passage to show His love for Israel?

Can God's words to Israel also comfort or strengthen us when we feel uncomfortable or scared? What sentence or word in this passage touches / affects you most? Why?

1 John 4:9-12, 19: In pairs, share in your own words what these verses say.

Our love and compassion for others start with God's love and compassion for us. God's love for us is unconditional. What good news!

Discuss how our response to caring for refugees communicates the Gospel.

3. Showing love to refugees

We can show love to refugees by:

A. Praying

B. Comforting

C. Helping

A. PRAYING

For yourself

Ask God to give you love and wisdom as you respond to the refugee crisis.

Is there something that you specifically need from God in order to respond to the refugee crisis? Write this down.

For enemies

Oppressive regimes, violent groups or human traffickers are often viewed as enemies.

Refugees are sometimes also portrayed as enemies or as a threat to our country or our wealth.

For others, the enemies are those who hold a different (political) position on refugees / migrants than themselves. Within a society people can feel strongly divided due to their different opinions.

Matthew 5:43-48 and Proverbs 25:21-22: What do these verses teach us?

Do you know examples of people in the Bible who did this?

How did Jesus bring this into practice? Luke 23:34 and 1 Timothy 1:12-13.

Which enemies will you pray for? Write down their names.

For authorities

1 Timothy 2:1-4: For whom does Paul ask prayers?

Verse 2: Why does Paul ask for these prayers?

Verse 3-4: Why are these prayers important to God?

Make a list of (world) leaders and authorities for whom you will pray concerning their role in the refugee crisis.

B. COMFORTING

Has someone ever comforted you very well? How did he/she do that?

Has someone ever comforted you in an ineffective or unpleasant manner? How did he/she do that?

Together, make a list:

-What types of comfort are good / pleasant to receive?

-What types of comfort are not good / unpleasant to receive?

Listening well and giving comfort is not easy. In contacts with refugees, additional barriers for providing comfort may include language barriers, psychological traumas and distrust.

We can also comfort people (especially when they are Christians) with God's Word.

Well-known Bible passages that can help to comfort people include Psalm 23, Psalm 103:8-9 and Revelation 21:3-4.

Do you know other Bible texts that could comfort refugees? Make a list of Bible texts together.

C. HELPING

Have you ever received help from others? How did he/she/they help you? Was it easy for you to receive their help?

Together, make a list:

-What types of help are pleasant to receive?

-What types of help are unpleasant to receive?

How did the Good Samaritan provide help? (See Luke 10:25-37)

What can you learn about the way he helped? Is there something you would do differently?

Remember: We cannot take on the world's problems, certainly not alone. It is important to know your possibilities and your limitations and to work together with others.

4. Our plans

- Read together 1 Corinthians 15:58.

- What can you and your church do during the coming month to show love to refugees through your prayer, comfort and help? Write down your plan.

- Think about what God can do through your plan. Write down one change that you pray will take place during the coming month, by God's grace, because of your plan.

- Pray together for the people whose names you have written down in this lesson. Pray also for courage and faithfulness to accomplish your plan, and that it would make a difference for God's glory!