PRAY for THEM

Week One: Pray for the Refugee Children

THE STORY OF THREE SYRIAN BROTHERS

For over five years the historic city of Aleppo has been pounded. It has been hit with barrel bombs and chemical weapons from a harsh regime; it has faced down ISIS fighters and Russian planes. And its children have suffered like few others on the planet.

Watch the story of three young brothers from Aleppo tell their story as they arrive in Greece after a long, hard journey: **http://tinyurl.com/pftwk1**

THEY ARE NOT ALONE

Despite the horrors, Wahid, Yuseph and Khalid embrace hope and embody resilience. Yet their journey toward healing and a regained sense of home brings its own challenges.

It's a journey so many refugee children must travel. According to UNICEF "the Syrian conflict has affected 80% of Syria's children--8.4 million young lives have been shattered by violence, death, fear and displacement.[1]" And 51% of the world's refugee population are children below 18 years of age.[2]

Many of these children have witnessed violence; have had limited-to-no access to education and medicine; and have experienced days--if not months—on the move. Some have been separated from their family. All have been displaced from their communities.

YET WE PRAY WITH HOPE

And all these children have a God who sees their struggles and loves them dearly. Scripture tells us that God is close to the brokenhearted[3]. And Jesus shows us a God who pays attention to and welcomes children[4].

This week we are invited to pray for Wahid, Yuseph, Khalid and the other refugee children around the world. We pray with both urgency and hope.

---

[1] www.unicefusa.org
[2] http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php
[3] Psalm 34:1
[4] Matthew 19:14

"Speak out on behalf of those who have no voice, and defend all those who have been passed over. Open your mouth, judge fairly, and stand up for the rights of the afflicted and the poor." Proverbs 31:8-9, The Voice

DAY ONE: PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Children face a line-up of physical challenges as refugees. Many are malnourished, have limited access to water and they are more vulnerable to diseases. Some boys and girls have been badly injured by bombings or even burned by chemical weapons[5].

Besides these challenges, there are those children who have experienced sexual abuse. Some have been trafficked, taken as sex-slaves or sold as child brides. Others have been forced into "survival sex" in exchange to get their basic needs met (i.e. food or shelter).

And here's the deal, these little ones are in the most critical time of their physical, mental, and emotional development. These disruptions can have long-term consequences.

PLEASE PRAY: The situation is so dark. Yet, God's light can pierce these children's blackest night. As you pray for the physical protection and wellbeing of refugee children today, reflect on the words of the Psalmist David. He was a shepherd-youth and later king who experienced dangers from wild animals, vicious warriors and jealous enemies…and yet he knew God's loving protection and provision.

"*Even in the unending shadows of death's darkness, I am not overcome by fear. Because You are with me in those dark moments, near with Your protection and guidance, I am comforted. You spread out a table before me, provisions in the midst of attack from my enemies; You care for all my needs, anointing my head with soothing, fragrant oil, filling my cup again and again with Your grace. Certainly Your faithful protection and loving provision will pursue me where I go, always, everywhere. I will always be with the Eternal, in Your house forever*." Psalm 23:4-6 Voice

DAY TWO: MENTAL WELLBEING

Wahid, Yuseph and Khalid haven't been to school in five years. Wahid has never been. When he was old enough to start his country was already in the throes of war.

Refugee and internally displaced children throughout the world experience significant gaps in their education. Even when they're settled in a host country many struggle to pay for the cost of school materials and transportation. Those that make it back into school often have to deal with language or dialect differences. And some face bullying—not only from children but teachers as well.

[5] To learn more, see http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b84c6c67.pdf

Beyond formal education, children need opportunities to cultivate their curiosity and mentally develop through play. Unfortunately these key components of mental wellbeing have often been diminished for refugee children.

PLEASE PRAY: God reveled in giving us minds. And the minds of children work so hard to make sense of the world around them. Please pray these refugee children will get a strong education—formally and informally—and that they will experience peace of mind. God desires these children—and all of us—to experience this perfect peace.

"*You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you."* Isaiah 26:3, NIV

DAY THREE: RELATIONAL WELLBEING

The three Syrian brothers, Wahid, Yuseph and Khalid, made the frightening boat voyage from Turkey to Greece without their mom. She was back in a refugee camp in Turkey. She wasn't able to travel because she had recently given birth. As the boys crossed the sea and thought they would drown it was their mother they longed for.

Fortunately for these brothers, their mom was able join them after a little over a month. However, for some refugee children they get separated from their parents indefinitely. And there are others who have seen one or both their parents die. Often the oldest siblings suddenly find themselves as the caretakers for the younger ones. Their grief of being separated or orphaned is compounded with new weighty responsibilities placed on them.

Then there are the children who have been stolen by ISIS and other terrorists groups to be sex-slaves or child-brides or taken by traffickers and treated only as property.

PLEASE PRAYER: God has designed families to create a sense of safety and peace for children and ultimately to image His love. When families are shattered by war and violence, it exposes the brokenness of our world like few other things. Please pray that the children who have been separated from their parents will be reunited. And those that have lost parents will be deeply comforted. And please pray these children will know God's love in ways that permeate their very identity.

"*My loved ones, we have been adopted into God's family; and we are officially His children now. The full picture of our destiny is not yet clear, but we know this much: when Jesus appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him just as He is*." 1 John 3:2, Voice

DAY FOUR: EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

While many of these refugee children have escaped the physical dangers of violence and war they can't outrun the emotional wounding. The trauma from these experiences can haunt them for months and years to come.

One of the most emotionally challenging scenarios for youth is to live in a refugee camp for an extended time. This tends to compound fear and shrink hope for a better future. Children who grow up in refugee camps tend to have a heightened vulnerability to depression, anxiety and even suicide[6].

PLEASE PRAY: Everyone needs comfort and hope to deal with daily losses. However, these refugee children need such support in spades. Please pray that they will get all the resources they need—from a loving community to effective counseling—to help them heal. Children are extremely resilient; so there's great cause for hope. Please also pray that they will reach out to God to receive the strength and comfort only He can give.

"*On the day I needed You, I called, and You responded and infused my soul with strength*." Psalm 138:3, The Voice

DAY FIVE: SPIRITUAL WELLBEING

According to the UNHCR, "On average 24 people worldwide were displaced from their homes every minute of every day during 2015 – some 34,000 people per day"[7]. And over half those displaced are children. That's more than 12 a minute…more than 17,000 a day.

This kind of disruption can shake the most sturdy amongst us—rattling us body, mind, soul…and spirit.

PLEASE PRAY: When you've seen a world of hate it can be so hard to believe in a loving God. Yet, none of these children have been marginalized from God's gaze or left out of God's good plans. Please pray these children know the transforming love of Jesus that encourages their hearts and minds and enlivens their spirits.

But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children." Matthew 19:14, NLT

[6] http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b84c6c67.pdf

[7] http://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7