



Reflections  
for home and  
life groups.

# A REFUGEE JESUS

CWSOPERATIONREFUGEE.NZ



**Christian  
World Service**  
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# A REFUGEE JESUS



Thank you to the Right Reverend Richard Dawson of Leith Valley Presbyterian Church in Dunedin who prepared the following reflection for your home or life group. CWS has added additional questions linking to Operation Refugee. You are welcome to adapt it to your group.

*Begin with a warm welcome and an opening prayer.*

## **Matthew 2:19-23 The Return from Egypt**

"After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child's life are dead.'

So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene." (NIV)



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I once lost my passport in Singapore. I was in the airport waiting in line to board and I looked in the place I usually kept it and it wasn't there. Passports are everything in airports. Without them you can go nowhere. You cannot continue. You cannot go back. You are, literally, a nobody.

It's a scary feeling, not being able to prove who you are, having no status, having no power and... having no way to recover these things. Where would you start? Who do you speak to? Airports are usually not bad places to get lost in because there are usually some helpful staff to put you on the right track but a lost passport is a dead end street for most people.

I will never forget the feeling of having absolutely no idea why it wasn't in the place I always put it and then, the feeling of complete embarrassment when I found it in my back pocket! I'm not sure why I put it there. I would never normally do that and that's why it took me the best part of 10 minutes to find it. 10 minutes doesn't sound long but it was, for me, 10 minutes of absolute terror.

**That feeling of powerlessness and hopelessness is life for refugees, and it must have been a feeling Jesus was familiar with because He became one.**

Joseph, Jesus' father is warned in a dream not to stay in Judea but to flee to Egypt. By the time the family returns, Jesus was likely to be about 3 years old. Being so young he may not have remembered life in Egypt but when he grew up he would have had strong memories of dislocation and uncertainty.

The decision by his father to go 65 km north to the town of Nazareth in the territory of Galilee may also have meant the family spent some time setting up a new life. One can very readily understand Jesus growing up as a refugee.



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**In relating to refugees, we need to understand that there are always two things they are having to cope with all the time.**

1

## **The grief of what they've lost.**

Refugees have always left behind something they cherished and were committed to, even if they willingly left a very violent and dangerous place. Refugees worry about family, friends and the home they have left behind. So, grief is mixed with relief is mixed with regret is mixed with hope. All these feelings will be constantly rising within a refugee and creating a mass of conflicting emotions.

### **Questions**

- Can you recall a situation where you felt deeply conflicted feelings?
- What was it like?
- What difficulties did this produce when it came to deciding the right thing to do?
- Did you feel understood?

2

## **The intense work required to understand what they've come to.**

Refugees are constantly trying to work out how things work in this new context. The language, the expectations, the unspoken requirements are, for the most part, a mystery to refugees who may constantly have to work out and work at demystifying these things. They may feel embarrassed to ask for help if, indeed, there is a local to ask.

### **Questions**

- Have you ever been in a place/context where you didn't understand how things worked?
- What did that feel like?
- Were you able to relax?
- Did you ask someone about something you didn't understand?
- How did it feel when that experience finished and you were able to go back to a place you understood better?

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There is a broader context here, one in which Jesus is also a refugee. Jesus comes to us having left his Father to be one with the human race. In many ways His whole mission requires him to be a refugee living, as it were, in a foreign or far place.

## Questions

- What 'home country' did Jesus leave to come to us?
- What was foreign about the human life he lived?
- What was 'homely' about the human life he lived?
- What was a major difference between the cause of Jesus' becoming a refugee and most refugees today?

See [cwsoperationrefugee.nz](http://cwsoperationrefugee.nz) for more information.



*"Whoever welcomes me  
welcomes the one who sent me"*

*Matthew 10:40 (NRSVA)*

# A REFUGEE JESUS

*"I was a stranger and you welcomed me..."*

*Matthew 25:35* (NRSVA)



With these words Jesus challenges us to reach out to people from another place. Rather than look after the community that is familiar, Jesus says we must go further and encounter God in someone who is different from us.

- Who are the strangers that you have met?
- Can you share a story of providing hospitality to a stranger or of responding to the needs of displaced people?
- Is there something your group could do together to welcome refugees?

## OPERATION REFUGEE

Operation Refugee is a time to pray, walk and eat for refugees and displaced people. You might like to organise a Gathering, eat rations or walk to raise funds for emergency supplies, food, education and medicine for refugees.

The money you raise will help displaced people sheltering from conflict, violence and persecution in neighbouring countries.

**The United Nations' most recent figures report a staggering 100 million people are displaced. The highest number on record. Through supporting local partners and churches we can share God's love for each one.**



# A REFUGEE JESUS

## *Closing Prayer*

Loving God

We live in your world where people are hurting because of violence and war.

Their lives are filled with pain and suffering –  
Some may not make it through the day.

We pray for the mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children and grandparents who have no food or shelter, who lack medicine and protection, who pray without ceasing.

Wrap them in your love and keep them from harm.

Teach us how to love the stranger, to stand alongside people who have sought refuge, to look for you in their faces.

We pray with them for peace in our world.

In the name of the one who comes as the Prince of Peace.  
Amen.



With thanks to ACT Alliance, Community World Service Asia, and FCA for photos.

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