



# STAND ALONGSIDE SYRIAN REFUGEES

Small group prayer and discussion guide



# Dare to step into the margins.

We worship a God who loves us deeply—so deeply that He sent His only Son to walk among us. Jesus became flesh and dwelled with us. Not only that, He became poor and went into the margins—reaching out to those living in the shadow of oppression and injustice. Jesus identified with the oppressed and the excluded.

In Psalm 12:5 we read, “Into the hovels of the poor, into the dark streets where the homeless groan, God speaks: ‘I’ve had enough; I’m on my way to heal the ache in the heart of the wretched’” (The Message).

Jesus followed His Father’s heart—and we are called to follow in His footsteps.

This means reaching into the dark places, where poverty and injustice hold the vulnerable captive, and offering His hope—not only for the hereafter, but for the here and now.

Over the next four sessions, we’ll reflect on what the Bible says about hope, joy, faith, and peace in the midst of struggles. And we’ll explore the darker corners of our world, where the poor and the oppressed, the broken and the lonely dwell.

Because that’s where Christ Himself dwells.

May you hear His call in your life and follow where He leads.

## How to use this guide

This guide will take you on a four-session journey as a group. Each session, you’ll have the chance to read the story of a real-life refugee, examine Scripture, tackle some questions designed to stretch you and help you think on a deeper level, consider how to apply what you’ve learned, and pray for refugees together.

Use this guide as it best suits your group. You might wish to have one person read the commentary, then take turns reading the stories, Scripture passages, and questions. If you like, you can each note your responses in a journal, then come together to share your thoughts. When you pray as a group, you can take turns or have one person pray through the suggested prayer points—and then commit to continue praying throughout the week.

Let your goal be to grow in fellowship and faith as you examine the worst humanitarian crisis in the world today—a crisis that cries out for a compassionate response.

# Hope is hidden in the margins.



## Child refugees: Noor and Abdul hope for a better life

For many kids, sleeping outside is an adventure. But for 5-year-old Abdul and his 6-year-old sister, Noor, it's a necessity. After fleeing Syria with their parents and making an exhausting trek through Europe, they've been sleeping on the ground near the border between Serbia and Hungary. The border closed while they slept last night. Time will tell whether they'll be allowed to enter Hungary.

What draws them forward is the hope of a new life, in Germany or Sweden perhaps. The children's mother, Teasadi, was a teacher in Daraa, Syria, before the war. But death and destruction drove them from home—and keep them from going back.

Though Teasadi's mind is weighed down with worry, the children's vitality is a welcome sight. Noor and Abdul—along with their 10-year-old brother, Hamid, and 9-year-old sister, Zamzam—make a lively game of cracking walnuts they've gathered, stomping them, crushing them with rocks, and carrying the shelled ones in a plastic bag like trophies. Even though the family has so little, young Noor offers some of her hard-won nuts to others nearby.

Tonight, at least, the family has obtained a few tents so they won't have to sleep in the open again. Abdul carefully removes his tennis shoes before stepping in; although he is young, he knows this piece of cloth is precious, and for right now, it's home.

Noor and Abdul are old enough to know that their circumstances are dire. But they haven't lost hope for a better life, and that's what keeps them going.

### REFLECTION QUESTION

In this story, what stands out to you or touches you the most?



*The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. “The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in him.”*

—Lamentations 3:22-24 (ESV)

What does hope look like to Syrian families who have fled their homes because of violence?

A very similar situation took place in 586 B.C. when the entire nation of Israel was displaced after the fall of Jerusalem. Most who survived the siege of Jerusalem became refugees, exiled to faraway Babylon. Others were left to eke out an existence amid the charred rubble of a once-great city. To refugees and castaways such as these, Jeremiah's words must have seemed to ring hollow: *His mercies are new every morning.*

What mercies?

But Jeremiah was not living in denial. He was not painting a rosy picture in defiance of reality. His words appear in the book of Lamentations—a collection of poems mourning the loss of Jerusalem.

For Jeremiah, hope was steeped in heartbreak.

Jeremiah's God did not always lift people out of hardship, but He always entered into it. God could be found among His people in exile.

You may be thinking, “This Scripture is about Israel; it doesn't apply to Syrian refugees.” It's important to remember, as Peter realized in Acts 10:34, that God doesn't show partiality. In fact, He healed Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, at a time when the Syrians were Israel's enemy (2 Kings 5). God loves everyone He's created—and so must we.



*This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”*

—Jeremiah 29:10-14

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What kinds of plans did God have for the Israelites in exile?
2. What did God say He would do if they called on Him and prayed to Him?
3. What did the Israelites learn about God’s timeline for bringing rescue?
4. How can this offer hope for the modern-day refugee? How does it offer hope to you?

Throughout the Bible, God has always promised hope to those who trust and follow Him. In the New Testament, God entered into hardship with us, giving us hope in an even more profound way: He took on flesh and blood and became one of us.

*He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

—John 1:10-14

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important that God became human?
2. God came to live among us, as one of us. How does this impact the way you live?

God is with the poor. He is with the brokenhearted and the refugees in the midst of their lament. He dwells with the oppressed, showing them new mercies each morning and demonstrating His steadfast love.

God’s heart is broken by oppression and poverty—and as beings made in His image, our hearts should break too. But it is not enough to be brokenhearted. To offer hope, we must enter into people’s suffering. Concern that does not lead to compassion changes nothing. But if we see and hear their cries, *and then act*—we as the people of God can bring hope and transformation to people in the harshest places in our world.

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## APPLICATION

What can you do this week to share God's hope with others?

## GO DEEPER

Share about a time when you didn't know what to do or where to go. How did that uncertainty feel?



## Pray for refugees and displaced families

More than 6.6 million people have been displaced within Syria, in addition to the 4.3 million Syrians who have sought refuge in other countries. Half of those who have had to abandon their homes are children, fleeing with little more than the clothes on their backs. These children and families need our prayers.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Ask God to protect those who have left everything behind in search of safety.
- Pray for them to seek God and trust Him to be their hope.
- Pray that God will move the nations of the world to seek compassionate solutions for Syria's refugees and displaced families.
- Pray for God to open your eyes to ways you can respond, and for your heart to be open to His leading.

# Faith takes us to the margins.



## A former refugee: Aida pours her heart into helping others

"I hated being a refugee," recalls Aida Sunje, a World Vision emergency communications officer in Bosnia and Herzegovina. "I felt like my whole identity was put into that one sad word."

Aida was 8 years old when she boarded the last convoy of women and children escaping her hometown. During the Bosnian War in the mid-1990s, her city came under heavy shelling. Aida's mom was pregnant at the time; she gave birth just a few days after they fled. That first night in a Croatian city far from home, Aida feared they would have to sleep in a park.

Two decades later, she stands in another park—this one in Belgrade, Serbia. It is packed with Syrian refugees. Aida can appreciate their plight in a way that few others can. Her childhood memories have compelled her to enter into a crisis again, to help children like 4-year-old Yusef and his 11-year-old brother Almuseneh.

The two boys and their family walked all the way through Greece and Macedonia before reaching Serbia. Their shoes were completely worn out; Yusef's feet were covered in blisters. They spent nights sleeping in the park without even a blanket to cover themselves.

Aida will never forget the families she has met in Belgrade. "I saw physics professors, farmers, dentists, students, engineers, retirees—women, men, and children escaping the horrors of war. And all I wanted to do was hug all of them and tell them everything will be all right, because I know too well how they were feeling."

Aida is determined to be part of the answer—to put faith into action and bring hope to those fleeing war—because she remembers what it was like to be in their shoes.

### REFLECTION QUESTION

In this story, what stands out to you or touches you the most?





*What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.*

—James 2:14-17

The apostle James addressed these words to the first-century church, where poverty and affluence existed side by side in a way few of us today can appreciate. In many of our churches in the West, socioeconomic classes don't readily mix. Most of us have never seen someone clothed in literal rags or on the brink of real starvation set foot in our sanctuaries. But while we may not see firsthand the kind of need James describes, it is no less real—and we are no less obligated to do something about it.

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*On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"*

*"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"*

*He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"*

*"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."*

*But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"*



*In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'*

*"Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"*

*The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."*

*Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

—Luke 10:25-37

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. The person left along the road is presumed to be a Jew. Yet the Levite and the priest—both Jews themselves—continue past him and do not help him. Instead, he receives assistance from a Samaritan, his cultural enemy. What is Jesus telling us about our neighbor?**
- 2. To which character in this story do you relate?**

At the end of this passage, Jesus says, "Go and do likewise," telling us to be a neighbor and demonstrate mercy to those in need. People who live in the margins today are our neighbors, whether they're just down the street or half a world away. The religious expert who interrogated Jesus about his moral responsibility wanted to define *neighbor* as narrowly as possible, thus limiting those he was obligated to care for. But Jesus wouldn't have it. He went to the other extreme, revealing that there is no one on earth who is not our neighbor.

True faith is not passive in the face of need. It does not look away. It does not merely wish for something better; it becomes part of the answer. True faith follows the example of Christ, who came into our world not as a conquering king but as an impoverished child from Nazareth—one who even became a refugee fleeing danger with His family (Matthew 2:13-15). As an adult, He walked among the poor. He did not just preach generosity; He fed the hungry and healed the sick with His own hands.

Faith demands more than the occasional act of charity. Christ calls us to reorient our lives around Him and His kingdom. If we are bold enough to not just believe Jesus but follow Him, we will find ourselves among the poor and the oppressed—listening to them, learning from them, carrying their burdens, and helping ease their suffering.

Active faith is the only kind that does any good—for us or for anyone else.

*... there is  
no one on  
earth who  
is not our  
neighbor.*

## APPLICATION

What can you do this week to help strengthen someone else's faith?

## GO DEEPER

1. Share about a time when you were rescued from something you feared. How did it feel? Did you recognize God's provision at the time or not until later?
2. What are the barriers that keep people from coming to the aid of Syrian refugees and displaced families?



## Pray for war-affected families

More than 240,000 lives have been lost since the Syrian conflict began in March 2011, and more than 1 million people have sustained injuries. The violence has yet to diminish. Syria needs our prayers.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for all those affected by violence—people who have lost loved ones, and people who have been injured themselves.
- Ask God to come to the aid of those who are personally suffering as a result of this conflict.
- Pray that God will move more people to act on their faith—to put what they believe into action and help their neighbors in need.
- Pray that God will help you give not just of your resources, but of yourself, that you might learn to love others as He loves you.



# Joy will come to the margins.



## One refugee's story: Samer dreams of joy

Samer\*, 14, dreams of one thing: joy. Not for himself, but for his mom.

Samer shares a 13-by-13-foot tent with his brother, his mother, and another family of six. They are refugees from Syria, living in an informal settlement in neighboring Lebanon. They've been without a proper home for two years now.

Samer's father died when he was young, and he is very protective of his mother. Since being displaced by war, Samer has been forced to choose bread over books, employment over education.

Samer tries to spend what time he can at an educational center set up by World Vision for refugees. "I know it's not a school, but I learned so much," Samer says. "I love learning. I wish I [could] live in a school."

But much of Samer's time is spent elsewhere, collecting and selling leftover vegetables from a nearby field. "Whatever I make is better than nothing," he explains. "All I want is for my mother to be happy." Samer puts on a brave face when she is nearby, but cries in private because he is not able to provide for her properly. "She is always sick and I will not accept that she begs on the streets," he says. "She is sick because she worries too much."

\*Name changed to protect his identity.

*"All I want  
is for my  
mother to  
be happy."*

—Samer

## REFLECTION QUESTION

In this story, what stands out to you or touches you the most?



*Celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. Be joyful at your festival—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites, the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. For seven days celebrate the festival to the LORD your God at the place the LORD will choose. For the LORD your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete.*

—Deuteronomy 16:13-15

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe the kinds of people that were to be included in this feast.
2. The guests were told they needed to be joyful at the festival. Discuss how difficult that would be if you weren't feeling joy. How would you be able to overcome this?

Every year, the people of Israel observed the Festival of Tabernacles, which doubled as a commemoration of their sojourn as refugees in the wilderness and a celebration of their annual harvest—neither of which would have been possible without God's provision.

It would have been one thing to celebrate if you had collected a record harvest. But imagine how difficult it would have been if, like the psalmist, you were in the middle of “the darkest valley”—if your crops had failed or if you had been driven from your home, for example.

God insisted that His provision, and His joy, were to be shared by everyone. And everyone was to benefit: not just established landowning families, but their servants and those at the margins of society—refugees, orphans, widows.

In some ways, the Festival of the Tabernacles was a foreshadowing of the birth of Jesus,



when—as John notes in the introduction to his Gospel—Christ came and dwelt among us (1:14). The Greek word John used can also be translated “tabernacled.” Christ came to live among us and to bring joy for everyone, especially the poor and the oppressed.

God is with them in their darkest valley, and that’s where we should be too—because joy comes to the margins when we share God’s abundant privilege with all.

When we feel alone, lost, desperate, and even afraid, God can bring us joy.

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*You turned my wailing into dancing;  
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,  
that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.  
LORD my God, I will praise you forever.*

—Psalm 30:11-12

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does God do with the psalmist’s mourning and mourning clothes?
2. Why does God give us joy?
3. How should we respond to God’s gift of joy?

Throughout the Bible, we see God taking delight in transforming mourning into joy. Rescuing the oppressed from slavery. Giving children to those well past childbearing age. Sending rain on a parched land. Bringing the dead back to life.

While He does not prevent sadness, He does not let it have the final word. Perhaps one reason God allows us to experience difficult circumstances is so that we might know the joy of being delivered from them.

God turns our hardship into joy so that we might share the same transformation with others. As Jesus said, “Freely you have received; freely give” (Matthew 10:8).



## APPLICATION

What can you do this week to bring joy to someone else?

## GO DEEPER

1. What kinds of worries and fears do you think you'd experience as a refugee?
2. How can we have more joy in our own lives, regardless of our circumstances?
3. What things in your life bring you great joy? How can you share that with others?



## Pray for Syria's children

Many school-aged children in Syria are unable to attend classes because they've had to flee or because their schools have been destroyed. In some cases, teachers and schoolchildren have been killed. Even those who escape to relative safety in other countries find it difficult to continue their education in an unfamiliar language or without the means for books, supplies, and uniforms.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Pray for children affected by conflict, that they might be able to resume their studies in peace and safety.
- Pray for mothers and fathers who worry for their children's futures, that they will find joy in knowing that God is with them.
- Ask God to help those who are struggling to keep up with their education under difficult circumstances.
- Pray that God will fill you with His joy so that you can share it with others and reflect His love through your own life.



# Peace will reign in the margins.



## A refugee's courage: Hardworking Eyad dreams of peace

"It's an interesting job," Eyad says, "no routine whatsoever. I can be in one place in the morning fixing a pump, and by the end of a day be in a totally different area installing latrines or digging a borehole."

Eyad is remarkably understated about the nature of his job. He works for World Vision in Syria, providing basic water and sanitation services for families displaced by conflict.

Eyad was originally an automotive engineer from Aleppo, Syria, but was displaced by the fighting as well. Instead of focusing on his own situation, he works tirelessly on behalf of his fellow Syrians. "You have no idea how hard it is for me to see my people living in tents," he says.

Eyad and his team are at constant risk. They try to avoid air strikes by working during times of the day when attacks are less likely to occur. Still, he has had some close calls. "One day my team and I were driving out to Azaz [in northwestern Syria] after fixing a borehole, and while we were out on the road, a missile from an aircraft landed about 500 meters away. I felt lucky that day."

Yet Eyad is undeterred. He continues to work with local organizations to identify the most urgent needs and to complete vital water and sanitation projects under unimaginable conditions.

Eyad keeps going in the hope that someday there will be peace. "World Vision has given me a chance to help my people," he explains. "This is what gives me hope—seeing people from all over the world caring enough to help. There is still goodness in this world."

### REFLECTION QUESTION

In this story, what stands out to you or touches you the most?

*"There is still  
goodness in  
this world."*

—Eyad



*“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”*

—Numbers 6:24-26

This was the blessing that the priests of Israel were instructed to give the people. The peace they pronounced was more than just an inward sense of well-being. It was the all-encompassing *shalom* of God. It meant safety, welfare, and harmony with God and with one another.

It must have seemed like such an elusive vision then, as it does now. But this is what God’s people do: we speak an impossible blessing to a peace-starved world. And we don’t just speak this blessing with our lips. We pronounce it—we bring it into being—through our actions.

In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, we find the promise that peace will guard those who follow Christ.

*(continued)*





*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

—Philippians 4:1-7

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison. Given his state, what surprises you about his advice to the Philippians?
2. We are told we need one quality to be evident to all—what is that, and why?
3. When do you most feel the peace of God?
3. What does Paul say this peace is like, and what does he say it can do for us?

As we read above, peace in Scripture refers to more than a settled or restful feeling. It describes a state of wholeness in which all of our relationships are as they should be—with God, with each other, and with God's creation. (Notice a few verses before the promise of peace, Paul pleads with two members of the Philippian church to “be of the same mind”—that is, to be at peace with each other.)

To be a follower of Jesus—the Prince of Peace himself—is to wage peace in the hard places, no matter how impossible that may seem. When we promote peace over conflict, we create a hope-filled future for both ourselves and others.



## APPLICATION

What can you do this week to help create peace for those in your own life?

## GO DEEPER

1. Have you ever prayed for peace and seen God answer?
2. How can we be peacemakers and promote peace over conflict, both in our everyday lives and for our world?



## Pray for peace in Syria

The conflict in Syria has been going on for years now, with no end in sight. Children continue to live in an environment of fear and suffering. An entire nation of people has been scattered, forced to find refuge wherever they can—in a place that isn't their home, and where they often feel unwelcome. They need God's peace.

### PRAYER POINTS

- Pray that God will grant His peace to those who have experienced war.
- Pray for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Syria so that children and families may find safety.
- Ask God to stir the hearts of Christians around the world to pursue peace and justice for all those affected by conflict.
- Pray that God will open your eyes to those who are suffering, and to help you see where you can help. Ask Him to extend hope through you, making you His hands and feet through the power of the Holy Spirit.



# Reach out to those in the hardest places

Over the past four sessions, we've looked for God's presence in one of our world's hardest contexts. We've delved into God's Word to reflect on how He calls us to see the world around us. We've found hope among the poor and oppressed. We've been challenged to let our faith take us to the least, the last, and the lost. We've dared to dream of a world where joy and peace thrive among people living in unimaginable situations.

Thank you for opening your heart to those living in the margins of our world, for listening to their stories, and for praying for them. Please continue to pray for all those affected by the Syria crisis and to do what you can to make a difference.

Since the beginning of this crisis, World Vision has helped more than 2 million people by providing essentials such as food, clean water, critical emergency supplies, access to healthcare, educational support, and Child-Friendly Spaces to give displaced kids a safe space to play. But more help is desperately needed.

Consider joining World Vision's efforts to help by donating, raising funds, and advocating for Syrian refugees. Together, we can demonstrate compassion to our neighbors and share God's love with those in need.

[worldvision.org/helprefugees](http://worldvision.org/helprefugees)





World Vision is a Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. Motivated by our faith in Jesus Christ, we serve alongside the poor and oppressed as a demonstration of God's unconditional love for all people. World Vision serves all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

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