

Opportunities Abound

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ONE OF THE MOST significant changes in our world has been related to refugees and displaced people. Unless you have been on an information fast, you realize that we are in the largest refugee crisis since the end of WW2. Most of us don't remember how huge the shifts of population were in Europe in the early 1940s. The churches of that day banded together to meet the massive needs of displaced people whose cities had been destroyed. Today in Syria alone, 7.6 million people have been displaced and 3.8 million have sought refuge in other countries. And many are responding to the truth of the gospel.

For years, we have wanted to see Muslims come to Christ in places like Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan. Before the first gulf war in the early 1990s, it was rare to gain access to these places. There were some workers who did—often serving in areas of medicine or development, though some were focused on establishing a church. Very quickly, however, Iraq opened up, at least in the north. Then it “closed” and more refugees came. Afghanistan has a similar story. But even as recent as five years ago, there were no wide “open doors” with the Syrian people. It was the last of the countries to “fall” to the so called “Arab Spring.”

Many prayed, and while no one would have wanted people to suffer, as millions have, many Syrians are open and coming to the truth. Two mission leaders I know visited Albania recently. They were meeting with workers who

serve the Albania church and do church planting. Naturally, their work has been “interrupted” by Syrian (and other) refugees coming through their country. One day, while visiting a group of refugees, one of the leaders began to speak in Arabic to them. The other leader knows Farsi and spoke that to another group. All those nearby “perked up” and gathered to listened.

Please note: Local UN leaders told them there they were the only ones in the area who could speak the language of these refugees other than drug dealers and those involved in human and sex trafficking.

In the last year, I have shared with any believers who will listen—and especially challenged those who know Arabic—to get over to Europe as soon as possible. We have heard of plans by the governments of Europe to help settle these refugees in ways that will help them to adjust well and be contributing members of society. They are looking for those with language experience for help to do this with excellence! *Please pray these doors of opportunity will be opened by believers with the right language skills.*

Unfortunately, some Western Christians have called for our border to be closed to Syrian or any Muslim refugees. It doesn't matter to them that the U.S. has a 2-year detailed government vetting process for any refugee. They still say, “if one slips through...”

Is that how believing followers of Jesus should respond? We should have

a healthy concern for living in peace. But if we fear for our own lives or how people coming into our nation might change the way we live, our self-centered response does not ring true to the word of God. Paul commands us not to fear. Fear is a sin that demonstrates a lack of trust in God.

This is a time for true believers to unify, not bicker. The opportunities are unprecedented. I encourage you to go to places around the world where refugees are, even if you only speak English. Frontier Ventures is sending a team this summer.

Be sure to work through an established agency and your church. If you can't go, or you are mobilizing or sending others to go, work through your church to help settle refugees where you live. There are many tools and resources available to help you, your pastor and your church do this well. Agencies like Christar (www.christar.org) have been working in refugee work for years and has been expanding that work to meet this special opportunity.

The best evangelical organization I know, especially in the U.S., is World Relief. Here, they work in conjunction with the government to help in resettlement efforts. They also work around the globe. See: www.worldrelief.org

You also can get practical suggestions for what you can do right where you are by visiting: wewelcomerefugees.com, a joint ministry of several Christian relief and refugee organizations. 