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Refugees, the Syrian Crisis, and a Christian response

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God has called His followers to engage in the refugee crisis by exhibiting empathy towards the refugee, walking alongside the refugee, and leading them towards healing and wholeness. Throughout this paper I will bring an awareness of the refugee crisis. I will discuss the refugee situation in general, and then focus specifically on the Syrian refugee community. I will show how we, as followers of Jesus can love, engage, and journey with the Syrian refugee community. I will bring clarity to what a refugee is, sharing statistics, stories and history. Throughout the paper we will gain an understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis and learn how God calls his people to respond to this crisis. I will use examples from scripture, books on the refugee crisis, experts in the field and my own personal experiences.

Today, there are approximately 65 million forcefully displaced peoples in the world, and 22 million of those are refugees.¹ A displaced person is someone who has had to flee his or her home as a result of political, economic, or religious oppression. The displaced people, although having left their home, still resides in their own culture and country. There is still the trauma of having to leave their homes, but not the difficulty of starting over in a new culture or country. This has been the case for a community that friends of mine work with in Cambodia. A small community was living in a slum when the government came to forcefully evict them. One early morning in 2007 the government came, rounded up the people in the slum, stuffed them in trucks and dumped them in “the new land.”² They moved 140 families from the slum to this new piece of land. There were no houses, no jobs, no schools or medical care. Overnight, these families became displaced and desperate. This is an example of what has happened to over 30 million people in our world today.

A refugee is in a bit of a different situation. A refugee is someone who has had to flee their home for the same reasons stated above, but they do not remain in their own country. The refugee is one who has had to flee to another country, with a different culture, language and government. People are fleeing their countries enmasse due to internal conflicts lasting longer, and conflicts happening more frequently. The UNHRC, an authority on the refugee crisis, describes a refugee as:

¹ Jenny Yang, “Case Studies in Theology & Justice,” Kilns College, Bend, OR, February 19, 2018.

² Melanie Chan, personal interview by the author, Feb 8, 2018.

“A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries.”³

Matthew 25 tells us that those who will spend eternity with the Father are those who welcome the stranger. In many ways, the refugee who is coming across borders and into our country is the “stranger.” These people have different customs, beliefs, religion, clothing, language and accents. They look like strangers and in many ways are unknown. It is my conviction that we need to welcome these individuals and families coming in to our country.

Imagine having to leave the United States for a new land because of persecution. Imagine entering this new land and not knowing the language or culture. Picture not knowing how to open a bank account, set up a mobile phone plan or even how to read the ingredients on the groceries you purchase. Then realize that there is no one to help you because you are not welcomed in your new home; instead, you are treated like an unwanted stranger. This is the case for so many refugees coming to the USA. We truly should be walking alongside those coming into our country, teaching them to shop, pay bills, set up bank accounts and helping with daily needs. I have seen this assistance do wonders in the relationships I now have with my refugee friends. Small acts of kindness have opened the doors into their lives. Today, because of these small acts, that only inconvenience me a little, I am seen as a brother by my predominantly Muslim refugee friends. Even though we share a different faith, culture, and language, we are slowly becoming like family.

In 2015, more than 300,000 refugees and migrants attempted the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean to a land of freedom and promise. When we talk about refugees and migrants in this statistic, there are a lot of similarities between the two, but they are slightly different from each other. Migrants fleeing their homes, but

³ “What is a Refugee. ”<https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee>, UNHRC, October 25, 2016, accessed April 27, 2018.

they are not fleeing persecution like the refugee. They are moving from one country to another, fleeing poverty or seeking better opportunities.⁴ Whereas, the refugee is also fleeing persecution and violence. In 2016, the United Nations Refugee Agency, (UNHRC) reported that 300,000 people seeking refugee status, crossed the Mediterranean Sea. Of those, 3740 had lost their lives on the journey, which is just a few less than the 3771 who lost their lives on the journey in 2015.⁵

The Middle East hosts more refugees than any other region worldwide, with Turkey hosting the most. Many of the refugees in Turkey are from Syria, 2.5 million to be more precise. Per capita, Lebanon is home to the majority of refugees, as one in every four people in Lebanon is a refugee. The developing world, specifically Africa and Asia, are hosts to 84% of the world's refugees, with children making up 51% of these statistics. Since 1980, three million refugees have been resettled to USA.⁶

How are we to respond to such a global injustice? Jesus spells it out clearly in the scriptures. Matthew 25:25 tells us that we should respond with Christian hospitality. Jesus, talking about the final judgment says, "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me."⁷ Then, over in Hebrews, the author says, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."⁸ In this section of scripture, the word "strangers" is pointing back to Abrahams encounter with the three men. When Abraham was old, three men came to him with a message. They told him that his wife Sarah was going to have a child. Abraham brought water to wash the men's feet, had bread baked, and invited the three strangers to a meal.⁹ The strangers were sent by God, to bring a message to Abraham.

In San Diego, where I live, I can't help but lean into the above scriptures. I have seen this hospitality from the Syrian community to me, and I've seen it from many of my

⁴ Somini Sengupta, "Migrant Or Refugee? There Is A Difference, With Legal Implications," New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/28/world/migrants-refugees-europe-syria.html>, Accessed April 27, 2018

⁵ "Mediterranean death toll soars, 2016 is the deadliest year yet." UNHRC. <http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2016/10/580f3e684/mediterranean-death-toll-soars-2016-deadliest-year.html>, Accessed April 19, 2018

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Matthew 25:35, ESV.

⁸ Hebrews 13:2, ESV.

⁹ Genesis chapter: 1-15, ESV.

friends in the Syrian community. For the past 18 months I have been working with the Syrian refugee community. I have had meals in people's homes, prayed with families, and been a part of events celebrating our new neighbors. In all this, I have learned so much about faith, hospitality, Godliness and Jesus from the Muslim community. I was a stranger in their lives, and they welcomed me as family. They were strangers in my life, and out of obedience to scripture I loved them, and a friendship began.

My family used to live in Hawaii. There is a phrase that the ancient Hawaiians used that is one I try to live by. The phrase is "we take care." The meaning is that when you see someone who has a need, you take care of them. If you have more than you need, and your neighbor, whoever they may be has less, you take care of them. You give of your abundance to help meet their need, and they do the same for you. It is a powerful act of hospitality that is so needed in our society right now, specifically with the refugee who is among us.

Why are there so many Syrian refugees around the world? It all began in 2011, when the Syrian war started. "In March 2011, four children in the southern city of Der'a scrawled on a wall "It's your turn, Doctor"— a not so subtle prediction that the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, a British trained ophthalmologist and self-styled reformer, would go down in the manner of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, the Mubarak regime in Egypt, and eventually, the Qaddafi regime in Libya. But Syria's story would turn out differently."¹⁰ The four graffiti artists were arrested and for two weeks no one knew where they were. At this point, the protests began. The protests spread to other cities inside of Syria, and thus began the seven-year war that we are still very much in the midst of today.

The war has left millions displaced and living under refugee status. An estimate from 2016 says that over 470,000 Syrians have been killed at the hands of President Bashar al-Assad since the war began.¹¹ The Syrians are being oppressed by their own government because they didn't fall in line with President Assad's ideals. "Even before the conflict began, many Syrians were complaining about high unemployment,

¹⁰ Tabler, Andrew. "How Syria Came to This." The Atlantic. April 15, 2018, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/syria-chemical-weapons/558065/>.

¹¹ Boghani, Priyanka. "A Staggering New Death Toll for Syria's War- 470,000." PBS. February 11, 2016, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/a-staggering-new-death-toll-for-syrias-war-470000/>.

corruption and a lack of political freedom under President Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his late father Hafez in 2000.”¹² The government did not like that people were complaining, protesting, and demanding for President Assad’s resignation, so Assad clamped down on it all, and as a result, violence came, which spiraled the country into civil war.

In the first two years of the war, the death toll was approaching 70,000 people. During this time, many Syrians were fleeing the country to bordering Jordan and Lebanon. On August 21, 2013, there was a chemical weapons attack on the Syrian people, and as a result more than 1300 people were killed just outside of Damascus. It’s safe to say that Syria had a problem on their hands. The Syrians had become an oppressed people, but God is the protector of the oppressed.

Statistics like mentioned above can be difficult to grasp, and even harder to feel empathy towards, so here is a story of my friend Amar, who came to San Diego two years ago as a refugee. Amar has a haunting story. He was in a café, in Syria, with some friends and his young son Hamza. Amar had been talking about the Syrian government and how they are oppressing the people. Amar is also a painter, and he was painting images of government crack downs. While they were in the café, men came in, arrested Amar and his friends, and left young Hamza to run home and tell the family what had happened. Amar was held in a small four by four cell along with the other men. There was not enough room for them all to lie down, so they had to take turns sleeping. He was repeatedly beaten, starved, dehydrated and forced to drink water out of the same bottle he urinated in, without it being washed out. Twenty-seven days later, Amar was released temporarily. He couldn’t walk, and he had lost 40kg. Amar immediately went home, got his wife and four children and fled the country, claiming refugee status in Jordan. He didn’t tell his family or any of his friends, for he just didn’t know who to trust. This is the story of many who now living in Syria and those coming out of Syria to the USA and other countries.

The Psalmist tells us, “Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, who’s hope is the Lord his God. Who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the

¹² BBC, “Why is there war in Syria?” BBC. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>. Accessed April 19, 2018.

hungry”¹³ When I look at God, the creator of humanity, the one who created men and women in His own image, I see a God who leans into the plight of the refugee, who fights for their cause and asks us, as His children, to do the same. This sounds all fine and good, but how does this happen on a practical level; how do we lean into the plight of the Syrian refugee, fight for their cause, and stand in empathy with them?

The first thing is that we need to have our homes and our borders wide open to the Syrian refugee community. Over the past seven years, the USA has opened her doors to over 18,000 Syrian refugees, over 15,000 alone in the year 2016, under President Obama.¹⁴ Emily Lazarus wrote a poem that is on the Statue of Liberty. Lazarus’ poem says, “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door.”¹⁵

This is the heart of God, and this is what our nation was built on, welcoming immigrants into our borders. In 2017, under President Trump, this all changed. On January 27, one week into Trump’s Presidency, he had an executive order signed. The order was titled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States." As a result of this order, all Syrians were banned from coming into the USA for 90 days.

People from across the country, including me and my five-year-old daughter, showed up at our local airports with signs and voices that protested the order. Communities all over the United States, both Christian and non, gathered together to fight for the refugee, and an end of their oppression. There was no dissention over faith, just a unified people fighting for justice and for the USA to live under the conviction that we hold as a nation, one that welcomes the huddled masses, yearning to breathe free. It was a beautiful event to be a part of. Then, one week later, a district judge in Seattle froze the ban. The ban was reintroduced a short while later and was also overturned by a judge in Hawaii. Today, we are still a back and forth about who and how many

¹³ Psalm 146:5,7, ESV.

¹⁴ Zong and Jeanne Batalova, “Syrian Refugees in the United States.” MPI. April 12, 2017, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/syrian-refugees-united-states>.

¹⁵ “Emma Lazarus Famous Poem.” Liberty State Park. <http://www.libertystatepark.com/emma.htm>. Accessed April 19, 2018.

refugees from Syria the USA will let in. So far, in 2018, the USA has only accepted eleven Syrian refugees into the country, according to a recent NPR article.¹⁶ Today, as I write this paper, the United States court will decide on passing President Trump's travel ban 3.0 proposal.

This ban is intended to block people from seven countries, one of which is Syria and all of which are a majority of Muslims, from coming into the United States. The ban was put in play to protect the American people and not let any individual come in who may be a threat to our freedom. I agree and know that we should not let just anyone come into the United States. We need to protect the people living here, and we need to be responsible with who comes into our country. I also know that the vetting process the USA has in place is a lengthy one, one that looks deep into the people requesting to come. The vetting process weeds out those with terrorist ties and those who pose a threat to the country. A blanket ban, however temporary, is an injustice to those who are fleeing war, persecution, famine, and have no ties to religious extremism or terrorism.

Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, in his book *Atonement Justice and Peace* writes, "According to Aristotle and Cicero, the natural law of justice is summoned by the formula, 'to do justice is to render to each what is due.' This notion of what is due implies what is earned, owed or otherwise deserved."¹⁷ Natural law is moral duties discernible by reason. I would argue that our moral duties in regards to the Syrian refugee crisis is to continue processing Syrians coming from the Middle East. We need to continue putting them through the difficult vetting process that we have set up, and if they are approved, allow them into the United States. We need to love them and help them transition into life in the United States. This is one way that we, as children of God, can fight for the refugee and stand in empathy with them.

Supporters of President Trump's travel ban would most likely use the same natural law argument to support their position. Those in favor of the ban may argue that we need rendering justice to the American people by banning people who are from

¹⁶ Deborah Amos. "The U.S. Has Accepted Only 11 Syrian Refugees This Year," NPR. April 12, 2018, accessed April 19, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/04/12/602022877/the-u-s-has-welcomed-only-11-syrian-refugees-this-year>.

¹⁷ Darrin W. Snyder Belousek: *Atonement, Justice and Peace*. (Grand Rapids Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishers, 2012), 30. Accessed April 29, 2018.

those countries that are deemed as dangerous from entering the United States. I would counter their argument by going back to Emily Lazarus' poem, that our country became what it is today by welcoming those who are seeking opportunity, "the tired, the poor, the huddled masses, yearning to breathe free." We are a country that claims to welcome the wretched refuse, the homeless and the tempest tossed, not one of hate, fear and bigotry.

The Bible talks about welcoming our neighbor. Who does the Bible say our neighbor is? According to Luke, our neighbor is the stranger and the foreigner and those who are in need.¹⁸ One day, a lawyer came to Jesus and asked him what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responded by asking the man "what is written in the law?" The man responded by saying that the law tells us to love God and love our neighbor. To this Jesus responds by saying "You have answered correctly" The man then turns to Jesus and asks him who his neighbor is. Jesus looks at the man and begins telling a story, one that we know as the story of the Good Samaritan.

Jesus talks of a man who was going from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was attacked, beaten and half-dead man. A short while later, two Jewish men, at different times, walked by the bleeding, beaten and half dead man. Deciding not to help him for what seemed to be acceptable reasons, both men walked past. Then, a Samaritan who was at odds with the Jewish people decided to stop, inconvenience himself, and help the stranger that lay in his path. Jesus asked the lawyer who the one was who proved to be the neighbor. The man responded by saying "The one who showed him Mercy" To this Jesus responded by saying, "You go and do likewise."¹⁹ Jesus calls us to be like this man, to inconvenience ourselves on behalf of others, even those who look, act, talk and believe differently than us.

The authors of "Finding Refuge" say, "Ultimately we welcome refugees, even when it seems scary, not because we so trust the US government though the US refugee resettlement program has a strong record but because we trust in God."²⁰ When we, as followers of Jesus, welcome refugees, even when it seems scary, we walk

¹⁸ Luke 10:29-37, ESV.

¹⁹ Luke 10:37, ESV.

²⁰ Stephan Bauman, Matthew Soerens, Dr. Issam Smeir.: *Seeking Reguge: On The Shores Of The Global Refugee Crisis*. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016), 83. Accessed April 26, 2018.

in faith that God has called us to something that is beautiful, and necessary for our own personal flourishing. We walk in love, not fear, as the scripture tell us.²¹ This love, exhibited towards the refugee, will lead them towards healing and wholeness. God is letting the world come to us and is giving us the opportunity to be a light for him in places of darkness.

When I was a child, I wanted to be a missionary. I heard stories of people travelling to the far corners of the world to preach the gospel to those who had not heard of Jesus. When I grew up, I started working with Youth With A Mission. It was then that I saw how hard it was to go to those countries, specifically ones that are closed to Christianity. Today, people from these hard-to-reach countries live 20 minutes away from my house. God's desire is for the Syrian, the Somali, the Iranian, the Iraqi and the other three countries that would fall under the travel ban to come to Him; and today, that can happen easier than any other time in history. We should not live in fear when people from these countries come to us, but approach them in love.

In the January 2, 2017 teaching from Kilns College, Sam Adams said, "When we open our country and welcome the refugee by letting people in, we create space and take a risk that we may be hurt. God did this for us. God created us, and took us in, and created in Himself the possibility of being wounded and hurt."²² God sent Jesus, the sinless one, into a world full of sin, to save us and show us the Father. This was a risk, it was a risk the Father took, and the risk didn't pay off, in the physical sense, as His son was killed by being hanged on a tree

As I stated above, in the first paragraph, we need to engage in the refugee crisis by exhibiting empathy towards the refugee, walking alongside the refugee, and leading them towards healing and wholeness. There is a great story in Bryan Stevenson's book *Just Mercy*, where a woman tells him, "You can't understand most of the important things from a distance Bryan, you have to get close."²³ This is exactly how it is if we want to engage with the Syrian refugee community, or any refugee community for that matter.

²¹ John 4:18, ESV.

²² Sam Adams, Lecture, TH501b Theological Frameworks for Christian Thought and Practice, Kilns College, Bend, OR, January 2, 2017.

²³ Bryan Stevenson: *Just Mercy*: (New York, New York: Spiegel & Grau Publishers, 2014), Location 222, Kindle.

When we get up close to the refugees, we see them more as people, and less like how society, or our current administration, tells us how to see them.

The two religious leaders who walked by the wounded man on the road treated him by how he looked, wounded, dirty, and near dead. I wonder if they believed him as already being dead, and since they were not allowed to touch dead things, according to the law,²⁴ they may have walked by with that in their minds. But the change happens with the Samaritan because he gets close. He gets close enough to see that it wasn't a corpse lying on the ground, but a living, breathing, creation of God, needing assistance. This is when change happens, when empathy kicks in, when we get close enough to see the person in front of us for who they are, Gods creation, not for who society may tell us they are.

In the book "The Wounds of Christ,"²⁵ Fredrick C. Bauerschmidt writes, "There is the wound of love, which is self-opening or self-emptying, a voiding of self-presence, the opening of opening. This is the wound of the Kenosis of the Logos in creation." Bauerschmidt goes on to say, "The wound of love is the antithesis of the wound of violence, and does not inflict the human pain of violence."²⁶

This, considering the refugee situation, shows that we, as the church need to be as Christ, who, "...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."²⁷

Jesus suffered the wound of love for us, his creation. He didn't suffer only for those who follow Him, but for all of humanity, even those who will never surrender their lives to His love and those, like Judas, who betrayed him. We, like Jesus, need to take risks and open our country up to the refugee, those who are different, the stranger, the Muslim. We need to see them as Jesus sees them, and walk in obedience to his example of getting close to the mess of humanity, and letting ourselves be changed by those we come in close contact with.

²⁴ Numbers 19:11, ESV

²⁵ Fredrick C. Bauerschmidt, "The Wounds of Christ," *Journal of Literature & Theology*, Vol 5, No 1 (1991): 87..

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Philippians 2:6-8, ESV.

Bishop Greg Rickle, serves at the Episcopal Diocese of Olympia, Washington. In an NPR, *All Things Considered* interview, Rickle said regarding the refugee, "It is not about them being Christians, but about us being Christ like."²⁸ I love this statement. Jesus called us to welcome the stranger, not the person who looks, acts and talks just like us. Over the past 18 months, I have been trying to do just that, be Christ-like. My family moved to San Diego in January 2016. We were not sure what we would do in San Diego, but we knew that we needed to serve the Syrian refugee community in some practical way. A few months prior to moving, I saw an image on the news that left me, and others around the world, in a state of horror and shock. On September 2, 2015, a small inflatable boat, on its way from Turkey to Greece, capsized in the ocean just moments after leaving land. As a result, the body of a young three-year-old boy, named Alan Kurdi, washed up on the shore. Images of his lifeless body, lying on the sand, spread across social media worldwide and the refugee crisis became a reality. It was images like this that caused me to want to fight for the Syrian community, but I wasn't sure how.

I started by calling a friend who I thought may know someone who is working with refugees. I was introduced to David, an amazing man who is serving the refugee community. A few months later, in July, David, myself and a few of our friends hosted a Welcome to San Diego picnic for Syrian refugees who had recently come to San Diego. There were approximately 100 Syrians at the picnic, along with 90 volunteers. There was no agenda, there was no order of service, there were no speeches or teachings, just a good, old-fashioned American BBQ at the beach. We cooked over 70lbs of chicken and beef, had tables full of salad and coolers filled with water, juice and soda.

We hung a huge sign that said "Welcome to San Diego" and spent five hours getting to know our new neighbors. It was such a beautiful time. Up until that day, the only time I had seen Syrians was in the news. Pictures of grief, death, and destruction covered the Internet and my newsfeed with images of the horror the Syrian people were facing. Then, on a beautiful evening in July, I got to spend time eating a meal with these

²⁸ Will, James, "Episcopal Church Sues Trump Administration Over Travel Ban." *All Things Considered*, NPR, accessed April 19, 2018, <http://www.npr.org/2017/02/20/516292276/episcopal-church-sues-trump-administration-over-travel-ban>.

people on a beach in San Diego. One Syrian told us that it was the best day of his life. Another told us that his own community had not welcomed them into San Diego like the community he was a part of now. This is what I believe Jesus meant when he said “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”²⁹

Jeremiah 22:3-4 says:

“Thus says the LORD: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. For if you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their servants and their people.”

When I was a kid, I talked to missionaries who lived all over the world, serving people in the countries where they moved to. Today, those countries are coming to us. In the USA we have people from all over the world. The mission field is right here, on our doorstep. Since this is the case, and since God has called us to do justice and righteousness to the resident alien, we must make it a regular practice in our lives.

This can happen easily. Most major cities in the USA have refugees living in them, even some small towns have a refugee population. To go to the door of a refugee family and say hello is an easy step, which brings beautiful results. My friend David, who I wrote about earlier, says that when we welcome the refugee into our space it means so much to them. The Syrian community has a high value on hospitality, so to be welcomed by an American, invited to a meal, or going into their house for tea speaks volumes.

One of the obstacles we have to get over is the “us and them” mindset. The mindset that we, Westerners, have it all figured out, and that our new neighbors need us. While this may be true, in some instances, it is also us who need our new Muslim and Middle Eastern neighbors. As I mentioned before, I have learned so much about God, prayer and hospitality from my Syrian friends. One of the things I do in San Diego,

²⁹ Mark 12:31, ESV abbreviated.

is home visitations. I go to homes, once or twice a month, and have a meal with a Syrian family. When I walk into the home, I immediately feel welcomed and loved. There is never a shortage of food, and they always serve me first, and are genuinely concerned that I am being taken care of. I feel instantly a part of their family, and am invited in to sit, stay and eat as long as I want; there is nothing else going on in the evening other than hospitality and conversation. We, as Westerners, have a very hard time with this concept. We usually have a time limit when people come over or when we go to others' homes. We have an excuse to leave, somewhere else to be, or another agenda item to check off, but this is not so with the Middle Eastern community that I am friends with in San Diego.

Hebrews 13:16 says, "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." I see this verse lived out in the lives of my Syrian refugee friends. They are not worried about money or buying an excess of food, they are mainly concerned about hospitality and caring for the stranger, which in this case is me. I remember the first time I visited my friend Khaled. I was leaving the house, at lunch time, and was introduced to Midyan, Khalid's son, as he was headed to work. Midyan had two apples for his lunch, and immediately he insisted that I take one for my lunch. There was no concern for his own hunger, just a concern that I was taken care of. This act of kindness marked me. I do not often live this way as a follower of Jesus, to my shame. So, the more I spend time with my Syrian friends, the more I am inspired to live like Jesus. I never thought that I would be challenged in my faith by someone who believes differently than me, specifically by a notion I was taught that Muslims hated and wanted to harm Christians.

Mark Twain said, "write about what you know."³⁰ I know that God has called me to welcome the stranger. Micah 6:8 says that doing justice is required of us; it is not an option or a good idea, it's a command that, as Christ followers we need to take seriously and walk in obedience. A part of doing justice is welcoming the stranger. This is one of the things that I know, and it is the reason for me writing this paper. I believe that this obedience starts with empathy. Empathy is putting yourself in the place of the other,

³⁰ Mark Twain,. Goodreads, accessed April 19, 2018. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/55868-write-what-you-know>.

feeling with them, not feeling sorry for them. When we feel with someone, we become, in some way, one with them. This is where change happens, not just in us, but in those we are serving. Jesus, on the cross, had empathy for those who put Him there. “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”³¹ He wasn’t threatened by his captors, he loved them, and died for them. “For one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die, but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”³² This is the same call that God has on us, his creation, but it is to live for the refugee community, serving them and meeting their needs as if they were our own.

The war in Syria, according to a recent article in *The Atlantic*, “is now arguably the world’s largest humanitarian disaster since World War II. The death toll now stands at nearly half a million, though the UN has stopped counting.”³³ This statistic demands the response of all of us, including those who call themselves Christ followers. The minimum we can do is to pray. There is so much happening in the news today, and we see all of it on our Facebook feed and news apps. The crisis in Syria can be easily forgotten and replaced by events like Beyoncé’s performance at Coachella. But we don’t have to be drowned by what the media tells us to think about, we can and should be disciplined to stay aware of what truly matters. We can set an alarm on our phones that reminds us to pray for Syria. We can adjust our news feed to let us know when events happen in Syria, like the recent chemical weapons attack on the Syrian people, that left over 80 people dead.³⁴

Another thing we can do to get involved is give. Organizations like Preemptive Love Coalition, Steps of Justice and Bridge Builders Network are taking donations and getting funds to the Syrian people, both living in the USA and back home in Syria. These organizations can be trusted and are directly working with those who are living under the cloud of war in Syria and starting new lives back in the USA.

³¹ Luke 23:24, ESV.

³² Romans 5:7-8, ESV.

³³ Andrew Tabler.. “How Syria Came to This.” *The Atlantic*. April 15, 2018, accessed April 19, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/syria-chemical-weapons/558065/>.

³⁴ “Syria chemical attack: what we know,” BBC. April 26, 2017, accessed April 19, 2018. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39500947>.

Regarding the issue of slavery, William Wilberforce said, “You may choose to look the other way, but you can never say again that you did not know.”³⁵ This powerful quote can be transferred over to the refugee crisis. There is an injustice in our world, and it demands our response. We cannot say that we didn’t know, and I pray that we do not look the other way. As my thesis states, God has called His followers to engage in the refugee crisis by exhibiting empathy towards the refugee, walking alongside the refugee, and leading them towards healing and wholeness. Throughout this paper I have given a few practical ways that we can see this happen, and I’ve noted reasons why it is crucial that we walk along side, in empathy, with the Syrian refugee community.

³⁵ William Wilberforce, Goodreads, accessed April 19, 2018 <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/61653-you-may-choose-to-look-the-other-way-but-you>.

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