

A PASSION FOR REACHING OUT TO OTHERS

It is easy to turn our eyes away from the gruesome images we see in the media. It is also easy to criticise those who are fleeing their own countries in search of a better life. But if your heart is right with God, and you have Jesus in your life, how can you possibly not be moved by the suffering we see daily?



THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA AND ELSEWHERE

One morning in November 2011, one of our colleagues did not turn up for work. I often had breakfast with him, and he always struck me as an incredibly neat, soft-spoken and humble man. We found later out that he received a call from his wife in Syria, saying that because of the war there, she and their child had to flee for their safety. He left the country in the middle of the night, leaving everything behind, to get back to Syria. I do not know what happened to them. I saw on television the bombing of Homs, Aleppo and other places, and the terrible scenes of children running around, scared, injured and bleeding. It ripped something from my heart, imagining how I would have felt if they had been my own children.

In the years to follow, there has been a stream of displaced Syrians and Iraqis fleeing across the border into Turkey and on through Europe, and some to the west. We were quick to criticise them for fleeing to the very countries we believe they so often criticised, but what else could they do? Today there are massive refugee camps in neighbouring Jordan and Lebanon for those who could not go to Europe. And the worst is the suffering of innocent children who were not in any way responsible for the war in Syria. Winters are unbearably cold in a tent, and so in the country where I work, there was an action to raise funds to purchase blankets. It was published in the local media. I donated. I hope the little bit I gave could let one child sleep warmly.

I see the photos of these displaced people and I look at the children, who try to put on a brave face and a smile, but which hide unbelievable terror, fear and hardship. What future can these children have? A famous clarinet player from Syria, Kinan Azmeh (www.kinanazmeh.com), took a trip to one of these refugee camps, handing out flutes and teaching basic music skills to groups of children. The joy on their faces I will never forget, seeing the video online. For just a moment, they did not have to look up towards the sky and listen for the inevitable sounds of rockets raining down on them and the explosions that follow.

What chance do most of these people, young and old, have? They are oppressed by their own government and rejected by many others. How sad is it that countries either bordering Syria (Jordan and Lebanon), or some European countries, had to take care of these people alone. When they reach our shores, are we going to shun them because they are foreigners? Are we going to look at them as possible problem seekers? They need the love of Jesus as much as anyone else, maybe even more, given what they have had to endure.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

May the Lord our Father through the Love of Jesus Christ, His Son, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, open your heart to the problem and your pocket to donate through official channels to bring an end to the suffering in Syria.