

Creative idea

For praying for refugees

“He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge” – Psalm 91:4

Throughout much of 2015-2016, desperate news stories of refugees fleeing conflict, persecution, hunger or poverty, and forced to make precarious journeys, have peppered our headlines in the UK – and entered our prayers as a result. Revisiting this issue again on World Refugee Day (20 June) at the point where the global figure for refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) has now passed 65 million – the highest figure since UN records began – reminded us once again of the vital need for the church to pray for protection, and inspired this resource.

Psalm 91 is a well-known prayer of thanksgiving and protection – a faith-filled confident declaration that a strong and compassionate God will respond to desperate pleas for help by bringing rescue, shelter and refuge. It’s a psalm that Christians in many desperate circumstances have prayed again and again throughout the ages. Although in many ways it is a conditional prayer based on the faith of the psalmist, it’s also a passage which demonstrates the heart of God for his children and their protection. So praying this psalm over refugees in situations of the most unimaginable distress felt entirely appropriate for them – as well as faith-building and helpful to us.

You can use this resource either individually or in small group or service settings. The only proviso is that the larger the group, the more you might need to organise or adapt this idea due to time. And although it was originally inspired by the refugee context, you could also adapt it to pray for many other individuals, situations and international contexts affected by danger, violence or persecution.

Equipment needed: Bibles (find a few different translations if you can), printouts of a wing picture or outline (one copy per person), pencils, coloured pens, a map of the world (or Europe and the Middle East), and a stack of paper feathers (use something like this as a template – <http://static.weddingchicks.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/freefeathertemplate.jpg> – print out several copies, then roughly cut round each feather to create a good number to share out).

NB. If you’d also like to share some stories of refugees fleeing to help people understand the issues at hand before they pray, you could either find some current news stories or go to the website of the UN Refugee Agency (<http://www.unhcr.org/uk/>) or one of the many organisations working to help refugees at this time. Although it’s a painful story to listen to, we used this powerful TED Talk by Melissa Fleming of the UN Refugee Agency to help us understand the plight of refugees crossing the Mediterranean:
www.ted.com/talks/melissa_fleming_a_boat_carrying_500_refugees_sunk_at_sea_the_story_of_two_survivors

To set up: Decide where in the world/which refugee people group(s) you want to focus your prayer on, then lay out the relevant map in the centre of the room/group so that everyone can see it, and give everyone a copy of the wing printout, a few paper feathers, a pen/pencil, a Bible and some coloured pens.

To run the session:

1. Slowly read Psalm 91 out loud, taking your time over these familiar verses. You might find it helpful to read it in a number of different translations to help people think through the meaning of each line.
2. Give thanks – either by praying together out loud or in reflective silence – for God’s faithfulness to his people and his protection and rescue for those in need.
3. Give everyone their wing printout and a pencil, and explain that you’re going to take a bit of time individually thanking God for his protection in each of your lives – then give people time alone to draw or write words and prayers of thanksgiving on the wing (if people are unsure where to start, suggest they use some words/phrases from Psalm 91 to start them off) and if they want to, to write out situations on the underside of the wing where they currently feel they need God’s shelter or rescue. (You might want to do this in silence or have an appropriate worship music playlist on in the background)
4. Next, explain that you’re going to use the promises and petitions of Psalm 91 to pray for God’s protection over refugees embarking on dangerous journeys – and that just as you have each spent time writing out God’s truth on your wing printouts, these are the same truths that you are now going to pray over refugees, each one a precious child of God in need of his rescue. (This would also be the best time to share any news stories, films or audio clips about your chosen refugee focus if you are using a specific account.)
5. Get out the printed feathers and coloured pens, then ask everyone to write out brief prayers for, or words they want to speak over, refugees and the whole refugee crisis on the front of each feather. (Again you might want to do this in silence or with some worship music playing in the background.)
6. When everyone has finished and you’ve all filled as many feathers as possible (or as time allows), gather round the map and one by one place your feathers down over the relevant part of the world so that you gradually create a wing shape. You might also want to give people to opportunity to read out the word or prayer on their feather as they place it down – or allow time for open prayer as part of this.
7. Finally as you all stand round the wing you’ve created, read out Psalm 91 again, committing all refugees to the protection and shelter of the shadow of the Almighty God’s wing.

