



Ministering to Afghan Refugees

By Randell Merren

Imagine spending your life building up your business, working long hours, enduring the stress of being solely responsible for the success of this business and its ability to feed your family. Suddenly, in one day, your life falls apart when your family member is executed and your home and business are burned down to further intimidate you. This is just one of countless stories shared by Afghan refugees.

Other stories include accounts of the Taliban demanding Afghans turn over houses and land, or face death. Other accounts include family members lost to suicide bombers. Many refugees fled hundreds of miles on foot, children in tow, and arrived in camps or safe areas seeking to build a new life.

These are the kinds of stories that we hear on an almost daily basis. And this is where the Church of Jesus Christ finds its greatest opportunity and challenge: to fulfill the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself.

With the recent crisis in Afghanistan and the growing number of Afghan refugees arriving in America, it is imperative that Christians take time to understand something of

their background, status and struggles. We do this because we want to minister to them and eventually share with them the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Afghan Refugees: The Long Journey

Afghanistan is a diverse country consisting of more than 70 different ethnic groups and a total population of 38 million. Many of the ethnic groups come from the surrounding countries, like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The three largest ethnic groups are the Pashtuns, the Tajiks, and the Hazaras; the Pashtuns are by far the largest (42%).

The people of Afghanistan speak many languages, but the two main languages are Pashto and Dari. The Hazara tend to speak Dari along with Hazaragi, while the Taliban primarily speak Pashto. Religiously, the people of Afghanistan are 99.8% Muslim. The Hazara tend to be Shi'a Muslim and the Pashtun are Sunni Muslim. The Hazara are an ethnic minority in Afghanistan and have been the subjects of ethnic genocide for years. They are detested by the Taliban because of their ancestry and history—but mainly because they are minority Shi'a Muslims, while the Taliban are majority Sunni Muslims, as are most of the world's 1.9 billion Muslims.

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Until All Have Heard

How then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? – Romans 10:14

Mark Brink

International Director
Global Initiative:
Reaching Muslim Peoples



The whole world recently witnessed a horrific sight as crowds of desperate, determined Afghans ran beside a massive US military plane filled with refugees fleeing the country after the country fell to the Taliban. As the aircraft taxied down the runway of the Hamid Karzai Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, people were clinging to the sides of the plane while it took off, hoping for a chance to leave the country. Tragically, some fell to their death after the plane lifted off. For days, the scenes of chaotic, fearful crowds anxiously showing papers and pushing through Taliban checkpoints revealed their dread of living under Taliban rule. A bomb blast at the airport on August 26, 2021, took the lives of 13 service people and 170 Afghans, raising the threat level and risk for those hoping to leave. As a result of the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, over 120,000 refugees have fled

the country to other nations which now have to vet, process, and resettle the traumatized new arrivals. Some of these people will be our new neighbors.

These events, though horrific, provide an opportunity for many of these refugees to meet a Christian for the first time. At a recent meeting with a Muslim convert, she reminded us to share not only hospitality with them, but also the simple gospel message of Christ's salvation. She lived in the United States for over 20 years and not one Christian ever shared the gospel message with her. She gave these simple admonitions to Christians in their witness to Muslims:

1. Christians need to break the power of the enemy that tells them not to share the gospel with Muslims.
2. Share with Muslims that you have the assurance of your salvation, as Muslims fight tooth and nail to earn their salvation.
3. Islam distorts the Cross of Christ, so it is important to explain the power of the Cross.
4. In Islam, communication with Allah is a one-way conversation, so share about how the Holy Spirit speaks to you.

Reading the Word of God in their own heart language is one of the most powerful means for leading Muslims to Christ. With the influx of Afghan refugees into the West, Global Initiative is raising funds to provide Bibles in Pashto, Dari, and Farsi to churches and individuals who are reaching out to Afghan refugees in the United States. We have received a matching grant for the first \$5,000 we raise for this effort. If you would like to help buy Bibles for Afghan refugees, please visit www.reachingmuslimpeoples.com where you can easily give online. Otherwise, you can mail a check directly to Global Initiative at PO Box 2730, Springfield, MO 65801.

Join with us in praying that each Afghan refugee who receives a copy of God's Word would engage with a Christ-follower who can share the truth of Jesus that can set them free from the bondage of sin. Thank you for giving to this effort and for praying for the nation of Afghanistan and the Afghan Church at this crucial time.





Muslim World News

Afghanistan: Taliban Tidings

Following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, and the Taliban's return to power, religious scholar Dr. Attia 'Adlan, a former Egyptian MP and current member of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), which is supported by both Qatar and Turkey, published an article on the IUMS website in which he defended the Taliban against its detractors.

It should be noted that other members of the IUMS published articles in a similar vein, in which they welcomed the Taliban's return to power and the expulsion of the Americans from the country.

An excerpt from 'Adlan's article: "I do not fear the Taliban. On the contrary, I fear for them. I am not concerned about [the fate of] Afghanistan under the Taliban or about the future or reputation of Islamic action. First, because the [Taliban] are admirable people, all of them graduates of Deobandi shari'a schools, known for their independence, ingenious teaching methods, sound education and rightly-guided curricula. ... The future importance of the Taliban's experience lies in the [fact that] the Islamic world needs a role model... which will restore its revolutionary [fervor] and renew its achievements, so it can begin the process of building: constructing an [Islamic] state, an economy and all the cultural systems. We are optimistic about this experience, welcome it and [believe that] good tidings will soon be coming out of Kabul."—MEMRI

Uganda: Filicide of Convert

The Muslim father of a 20-year-old convert to Christianity in Uganda killed his son for refusing to recant his faith. Kasimu Kawona in Kibuku District was not charged with the

August murder but a lesser charge of manslaughter because he killed his son in anger for leaving Islam.

His son, Tabiruka Tefiuro, put his faith in Christ in 2019. At that time, his father drove him from their home, and he went to Kampala, where he worked in a hotel. His mother later spent several months trying to convince him to return home to reconcile with his father, which Tefiuro resisted until consenting to come back on August 1.

Weeks after returning, Tefiuro refused to renounce his faith in Jesus, and was then attacked by Kawona, who used a knife, hoe, and rope to carry out the murder. "When I arrived at Kawona's house with other neighbors, we found the father outside the house," said Hassan Kwiri, the area chairperson. "He told us that he had killed his son who had disgraced the Islamic religion by becoming a Christian."

Muslims make up no more than 12 percent of Uganda's population, with high concentrations in eastern areas of the country.—*Morning Star News*

Uganda: Death for Apostate

Muslim relatives of a former Islamic teacher in Uganda who became a Christian set a trap for him in July, hiring killers to bury him alive in a large ant mound. Saban Sajabi, 32, had gained reputé as an itinerant sheikh, before converting to Christianity in 2015 and fleeing his village. In July, he was lured home under false pretenses and murdered.

Sajabi's wife, Sarah Birungi, witnessed his death. "Immediately two motorcycles arrived carrying three men each," she told *Morning Star News*. "They started beating my husband and then dragged him to a nearby anthill, dug into it and pushed his head inside, and he breathed his last."—*Morning Star News*

For many reasons, including ethnic and religious differences, Afghanistan's people are fractured, frightened, and fleeing. Even before the recent crisis, there were 2.2 million Afghan refugees in neighboring countries. Additionally, 3.5 million Afghans fled their homes and hid in different parts of the country. While the American forces and coalition partners have been able to evacuate 123,000 people, there are still many Afghans in danger. The United Nations estimates that half a million more will probably flee by the end of the year. This will put more pressure on neighboring countries already stressed by the number of refugees they host.

The Hope International Center

In October of 2020, the Lord led my wife, Mary Jane, and I (as U.S. missionaries)—in collaboration with Tom Engelsen, director of International Network—to open the Hope International Center in Detroit, Michigan. The Hope International Center is dedicated to expressing the love and character of Jesus Christ by serving the refugee communities of Syrian, Iraqi, and Afghan people who are resettling in the Detroit area. The majority of Afghans that we serve are Hazara. Unofficial sources tell us that very soon we could be receiving an additional 1,500 Afghans.

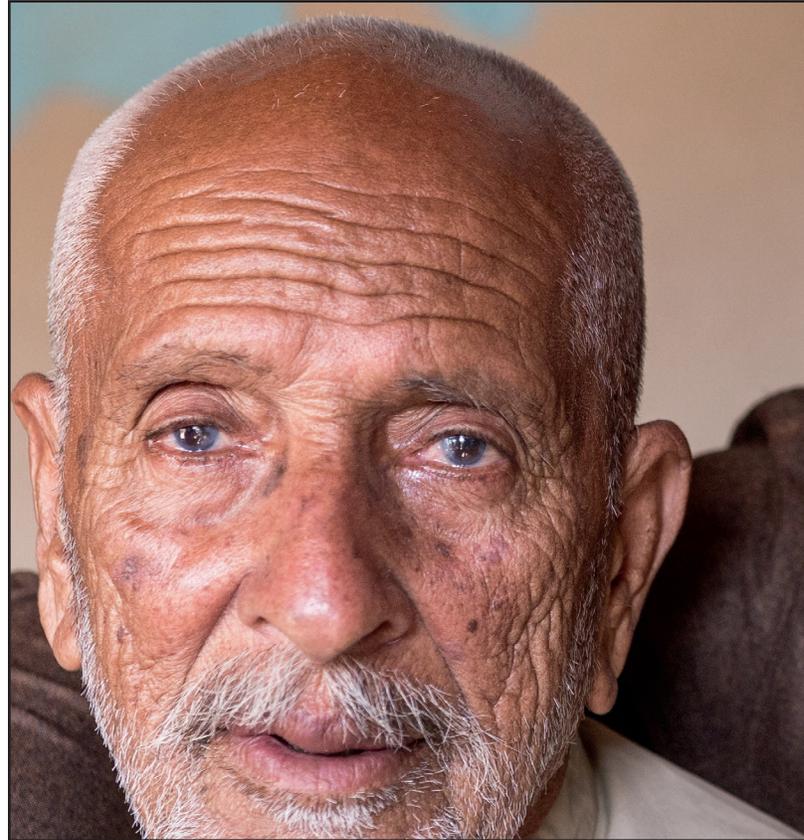
At Hope International Center in Detroit we attempt to engage Afghan refugees when they first arrive. During the initial contact stage we build relationships by simply getting to know them, providing for some of their basic needs, serving them in practical ways—and drinking lots of tea!

For the long term, our team provides English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, citizenship classes, tutoring for students, and general cultural mentoring as a way to bring them hope.

Afghan Refugees: Facing Major Struggles

At Hope International Center we recognize the enormous obstacles facing Afghan refugees. When Afghan refugees attempt to enter a new country, their first struggle is to prove their legitimate refugee status. After proving legitimate refugee status, they often have to spend years waiting for a country to welcome them. Subsequently, a plethora of new struggles await them, including:

- *Post-traumatic stress.* Many Afghans struggle with post-traumatic stress because of the violence they have seen and the struggles they have had living as refugees.
- *The pain of loss.* As Afghans have fled for their lives, they have often had to leave behind their parents, broth-



ers, sisters, and extended family. They have also left their jobs, businesses, and all that is familiar.

- *The challenge of starting over.* Moving and starting over is difficult for anyone. However, for refugees, it is even more difficult because they have to learn a new language and culture, develop new friends, find a home, and get a new job.
- *Survivor's guilt.* The guilt of being able to come to a safe environment while others they love are still in Afghanistan or a refugee camp is difficult to handle. This is often made more difficult as their families contact them and ask them to send money or to help them find a way to join them.

Key Aspects of Our Ministry to Afghans

Our ministry at Hope International Center has shown that the first months of a refugee's arrival constitute the most intense period of adjustment—and that the role of ministering to them is at its most critical point. A friendly smile, a warm greeting, and expressions of Christ's love make a deep impact on a new arrival. Effectively ministering to Afghans requires action in the following areas:

Afghan Refugees

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- Assist them in finding healing from all of the past hurts they have gone through.
- Find practical ways to assist them in their transition to their new lives in America. This may include teaching them English, helping them find jobs, and general assistance in learning how to live in their new country.
- Develop new communities where they can love and be loved, and where they can not only receive help, but give help to others.
- Help them understand the grace, peace, and forgiveness that Jesus has to offer through a relationship with Him.
- Let them feel like they are contributing something to the relationship. This often takes place by letting them be hospitable to you, or when they can, serve others with you. This is very important because as refugees they have lost everything—including honor and self-respect. Allowing them to give back and serve in some capacity is often the first step to empowering them to live full lives.

Ministering to Afghans, and earning the opportunity to tell them about Jesus, requires sensitivity to their religion and culture. It is helpful to keep the following points in mind:

- Muslims consider pork to be unclean; thus take a pass on serving them pork.
- Afghan men should not touch women. This includes handshakes, hugs, or even a hand on the shoulder.
- Showing or pointing to the bottom of your foot to an Afghan is an extreme insult; refrain from pointing your feet at a Muslim Afghan.
- You want to build a bridge to them that will allow you to share Jesus. Therefore, don't prematurely end your relationship by unnecessarily insulting Islam or Muhammad.
- Afghans are a very relational and hospitable people. When you visit them, plan to stay for an extended period of time. Take the time to sit down (maybe on the floor) and enjoy tea and conversation. You can bring them great honor by allowing them to be hospitable to you.

Opportunities for the Church

The number of refugees around the globe is at unprecedented numbers. For the Church, this represents a unique time to respond to the crises. It also may mean leaving our comfort zones and abandoning our prejudices in order to share the Good News with people who may not look like or think like us.

Acts 17:24-27 reads, “The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, *that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him*” (NIV, emphasis added).

This passage from Acts reveals to us that our loving God wants men and women everywhere to seek Him. God moves people to be in different places in the world at different times in order to deliver them from evil and also to bring them to a place where they can hear the Good News about Jesus.

Wars or civil conflict in recent years in Syria, Libya, Tunisia, and now in Afghanistan have precipitated millions of people fleeing their countries. Each of these countries has something in common—they are resistant to the gospel. Refugees from these countries are resettling in places where they can hear the Good News. The present refugee crisis is a strategic missional opportunity for the Church.

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In his book *The New Pilgrims: How Immigrants are Renewing America's Faith and Values*, Pentecostal scholar Joseph Castleberry posits that the arrival of refugees and other immigrants represents “the most realistic hope for revival and awakening in our time” (p. 99). While some local churches are engaging this opportunity, others are missing it. A 2016 LifeWay Research survey found that 8% of Protestant U.S. pastors said their churches are currently involved in serving refugees locally. When asked their views of immigrants arriving in the United States, a majority of evangelical Christians worried that they represent a threat or burden in some way. Only a minority said that arrival of immigrants represented an opportunity to introduce them to Jesus Christ.

Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan calls us to care for the battered, bruised, and those who are left for dead. He clearly indicated that the Samaritan acted properly by getting in the ditch and assisting the half-dead person. He then expressly said, “Go and do likewise.” In Matthew 25, Jesus identifies the righteous as “those who are found taking care of the least of these”—by providing basic needs, including “taking in the strangers.”

Providing Hope for Afghan Refugees

At the Hope International Center, we easily recognize a common characteristic of Afghan refugees: hope has been taken from them and they are desperately waiting for someone to restore it. Proverbs 23:18 captures the essence of the message that we wish to convey to Afghan refugees: “There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.” Isaiah 40:31 identifies the true source of hope: “But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.” Our desire is to point them to the ultimate hope-giver, Jesus Christ.

Sources

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Prayer Profile: *Turks of Kyrgyzstan*

Population: 48,000

Religion: 100% Muslim



Most of the 48,000 Turks in Kyrgyzstan live in Bishkek, the capital city. This small Turkish community gets together for cultural events and to socialize with other Turks. Though Kyrgyz is a Turkic language, it is not intelligible with modern Turkish. Most Turks in Kyrgyzstan are nominal Sunni Muslims; others are more secular in their beliefs, though they visit the mosque for special events. Though the Turks have both the Bible and the Jesus Film in their language, they remain strongly Muslim. Please pray that:

- Kyrgyz Christians will reach out in love and compassion to the Turks.
- God will raise up a prayer movement in the worldwide Christian community to intercede earnestly for the Turks and Kyrgyz people.
- Radio and television programs that share the hope of salvation will penetrate the hearts of the Turks.
- God will send dreams and visions to hungry hearts among the Turks.

*For additional information about Kyrgyz Turks, please visit: www.joshuaproject.net.



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Friday, November 5, 2021. Please pray for

...*Afghan refugees scattered throughout the world.* Pray for churches, individuals, and ministries who continue to provide assistance to them.

...*the Farsi Media Ministry Team* as they share the gospel using popular social media platforms. Thousands of Iranian Muslims are responding to their programs.

...*audio Bible distribution efforts* among Christians in Mozambique, where radical Islamist attacks have displaced 300,000 people. Christians declare, "These audio Bibles equip us to share the gospel with Muslims."

Friday, November 12, 2021. Please pray for

...*Saul, a Djibouti-based Somali Christian from a Muslim background.* He is seeing great fruit from his ministry among Muslims, but faces intense persecution.

...*an ongoing Bible translation project for the Biafada,* a Muslim unreached people group in Guinea-Bissau. There are a few believers among the 57,000 Biafadas, but the Bible is not yet available in their language.

...*Fatima's ministry in Iran.* She says, "I record 'Jesus' programs from satellite, put them on flash drives, and give them to Muslim families who have no satellite."

Friday, November 19, 2021. Please pray for

...*believers in northern Bangladesh.* In one village, Muslim religious leaders go from house to house, forcing former Muslims to renounce their faith in Jesus.

...*Saleh, a former Muslim in Ethiopia* who once lived on the streets and was not in his right mind; he yelled and spat at passersby. Saleh heard the gospel, was delivered, and born again. He now leads a fellowship of 100 born again Muslims.

...*missionaries in Bulgaria* committed to making Christ known among the Yoruk, Millet, and Turk unreached Muslim people groups living in Bulgaria.

Friday, November 26, 2021. Please pray for

...*a city in the United Kingdom* where "a great work of God has occurred." Many Muslims have come to Christ and become part of local churches.

...*three house churches for Christians from a Muslim background* in Uzbekistan that were closed recently due to pressure from local villagers. Pray for a way for these believers to meet again safely.

...*small "Jesus fellowships" of ex-Muslims* springing up all over Somalia. Of Somalia's population of 16 million, 99.6% are Muslim.

*I urge, then, first of all that requests, prayers, intercession and
thanksgiving be made for everyone. – 1 Timothy 2:1, NIV*



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Friday, December 3, 2021. Please pray for

*...The work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the people who receive “Megavoice Players” that have been loaded with gospel material in Arabic, Urdu, Farsi, and Bengali and will be distributed among diaspora Muslims in a European country.
...protection for three Yemeni house groups in Djibouti made up entirely of new believers from Muslim backgrounds.
...Chandra and Roni in Indonesia, who are recording the Gospels in the many unrecorded languages of Indonesia so that unreached Muslim language groups can hear the Word of God in their own language.*

Friday, December 10, 2021. Please pray for

*...the 11 Muslim unreached people groups in Sudan who have no known believers and no gospel resources.
...Muslim converts in an Ethiopian village who are experiencing miracles of healing. A blind lady had her sight restored and, as a result, twenty-seven Muslims chose to follow Jesus. Now six house fellowships are being established.
...clandestine house cell groups of Palestinian Christians from Muslim backgrounds.*

Friday, December 17, 2021. Please pray for

*...Christians in Burkina Faso. This past summer, Islamic militants killed over 130 civilians, including many Christians.
...the Church in Algeria to continue to grow in the faith even while largely forced to meet underground.
...a Christian worker living in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. He was charged with illegally importing 35 Bibles, 178 New Testaments, and two boxes of John’s Gospel, all in Farsi or Arabic.*

Friday, December 24, 2021. Please pray for

*...Christian workers in Prayagraj, India, trying to reach the 200,000 minority Muslims of their city.
...the Lord to use Christmas programs presented by local churches in predominately Islamic countries.
...the Kabyle Berbers in Algeria. More than 100,000 Kabyle Muslims have come to the Lord in the last 30 years.*

Friday, December 31, 2021. Please pray for

*...a growing number of local Bahrainis who have left Islam to follow Christ. Several are attending an Arabic-speaking church led by Egyptian pastors. Of Bahrain’s population of 1.7 million, 83.6% are Muslim.
...Muslim background believers among the Malay people of Malaysia.
...the small but growing Church in Libya made up of Christians from a Muslim background. In the last two years, the Church has doubled in size. Of Libya’s population of 6.9 million, 96.6% are Muslim.*

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