

How God Used a 6-Year-Old Girl to Lead This Hardened Muslim to Christ

Six-year-old Abby unzipped her Barbie backpack with a twinkle in her eye. Pulling out her *Case for Christ for Kids* book, she gripped it firmly and thrust it before Omar's face, barely reaching up to his chest, inquiring, "Omar, do you know about Jesus?"

A bright white grin flashed across Omar's dark Somalian face as he folded his six-foot frame and got down on his knees to take the book from Abby's little hands. "No, Abby, I don't. You can tell me about him, then?"

I stared incredulously at this scene, looking back and forth at my wife, Melissa, our brave young daughter, and this kind man who had been taught his whole life that Christians were his enemy. Our family had been ministering to them for nearly a year, and I been fervently praying for a chance to share the gospel with Omar and his family. Little did I know that Jesus would use my precocious young daughter to open the door.

More Surprises

Steve admittedly fell into refugee ministry by accident. He and Melissa sought out places they could take their three children ages 10 and under and go serve people in need. Surprisingly, they found one dead end after another as most agencies did not allow children to participate in service until their teen years. Then he stumbled across Lutheran Social Services and its refugee ministry. Their first family they were matched with was Omar's. He and his wife had children similar ages to those of Steve and Melissa, and a new ministry for the Hubler family began.

Within a year's time, Steve and Melissa would be working with seven different churches and over 300 volunteers, adopting and caring for refugee families all across Maricopa County, Arizona, in 2014. The gospel was being shared, families were becoming assimilated, Muslim families reported Jesus appearing to them in dreams, and God worked mightily, even bringing refugees from many different countries together for church celebrations.

Staci, a volunteer under Steve's ministry, shares the miraculous story of her children hosting a lemonade stand in their neighborhood to raise money to take their refugee family to the zoo. A patron of the stand approached them with a card from her Christian Farsi-speaking church. Within a week, their Muslim refugee family attended this church and heard the gospel!

By 2016, things changed. The temporary tide of American politics trumped the work of the eternal kingdom.

A Political Firestorm

American politics and media began to sow fear and put pressure on those who served these displaced people. People left the churches they had attended for years in protest against helping the refugees. Steve lost support for his church planting ministry. Media stories of violence in the areas where the refugees lived caused families to no longer feel safe going to visit their adopted families. Social media rants against the refugees caused those serving to feel insecure in their faith communities about their passion to help them. And slowly, steadily, the volunteers backed away and the ministry died.

Steve recounts, "Over and over I heard the same arguments, 'Better to be safe than sorry, I just can't take my family over there anymore.'"

"The irony of it", Steve continues, "is that the neighborhoods

in which the refugees were placed actually got better after their arrival, not worse.” Over the course of the ministry, Steve worked with refugees from more than 11 different countries. Many of them had worked for the U.S. government in their native lands, helping to fight against terrorists. Sadly, when they reached America, they faced a new kind of terror: isolation, racism and hatred. “I knew of several Christian refugee families who were denied jobs simply because of where they came from,” Steve sighs. “The automatic assumption if someone was from Afghanistan or Syria: They are terrorists.”

Steve wrestled with both the American and the Christian church’s response to these families whose lives had been absolutely devastated. He says, “These refugees came over here legally, sanctioned by the US government for asylum. I get the fear. I get the fact that other refugees are coming illegally. Handling the processes and protocols for these people is a government decision, and we all need to vote our conscience. But once they are here, once they are in my community, standing right in front of me, I’ve been commanded to share the gospel with them, just like any other person, from any other country, anywhere in the world. They are part of the Great Commission, and Jesus called me to ‘Go!’”

A Christian Response

Not sure you’re ready to get involved? Here is something every Christian can do to help: Stop ranting your political opinions on Facebook. “The best thing the church can do is take their political frustrations and policy desires to a positive venue and off of social media. Discuss your concerns with your congressmen and senators. Read up on the issues and present your case to the lawmakers who create refugee and immigration policy, but as a Christian, don’t rant on Facebook. The world is sick and tired of hearing Christians yell and scream about issues and actually doing very little to help anyone.” The end result? Our hypocrisy shouts louder than our outrage over the

inhumane conditions under which refugee children suffer. How can we tell the world that we follow a King who loves the world but rant with anger when more people to help and love are placed in front of us? Steve's advice: Save your politics for the political arena; show your love to the world.

The Department of Health and Human Services reports that over 75 percent of the immigrants trying to cross our borders illegally are unaccompanied minors. They are detained until given a trial to be placed with a family member here in the states or returned home. Most come from Honduras, Guatemala and areas of Mexico escaping recruitment or torture from drug cartels. Scared and alone, they are placed in detainment centers. Children who come with their parents are placed here as well, while their parents are incarcerated, waiting to appear in immigration court. Many other refugees are here by government sanction. The refugee crisis isn't going away, so the real question is, "What, as the church, are we going to do about it?".

With no hesitation, Steve states, "As followers of Christ, we have to take the initiative. Jesus never said, 'Build a building and wait for them to come,'." "He said, 'Go!'." If you're ready to make a difference beyond "raising awareness" or voicing your concerns directly with lawmakers, Steve suggests working with an agency or church that currently ministers to refugee families. They can match you with a family that has children similar in ages to your own, provide translators if no one in the family speaks English, and give you some simple common-sense do's and don'ts for when you visit them. They can also make you aware of tangible needs that can be met without interacting directly with refugee families. The most important thing is to acknowledge their physical and emotional needs, smile and show up. Just like Steve and Staci's stories, you never know how God will open the door to share the gospel!

Below are some agencies to help you get started:

Lutheran Social Services:

Some of these national organizations can help direct you to local agencies where you can directly make a difference. Many churches have refugee ministries already in place, and you can partner with a neighboring church if your faith family does not currently have one. We'd be a pretty unexplainable church if we left politics on the capitol steps and took the gospel to the ends of the earth, which, due to the current refugee crisis, happens to be thousands of people right around the corner. {eoa}

*Former senior pastor and church planter, **Dr. Steve Hubler** is committed to catalyzing new ministries that mobilize God's people for God's harvest. He is currently on staff with Church Resources Ministries, an international mission organization based in Anaheim, California, empowering leaders and coaching churches to create impactful discipleship opportunities and live out the Great Commission. He and his wife Melissa, along with their three children, reside in Phoenix, Arizona. You can connect with Steve and find out more about his ministry at .*

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