

The story of a Syrian refugee girl

By Mike Burnard

Beirut is a city of extraordinary contradictions. You are confronted with the exuberant wealth of a few and the expansive poverty of the rest. “There are simply no more Middle-class people in our society,” the one Pastor told us.

And, so, we found ourselves in a shopping mall on the last day of our visit to Lebanon, buying last-minute gifts and reflecting on eight amazing days in this strategic nation. As we ordered our coffee in one of the local restaurants, a small chubby girl came in, holding two wilted flowers in her hand. We immediately identified her as a refugee child – one of the 660,000 school-age Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. She wasn’t asking for money, she was selling her two wilted flowers with the hope that it would open a pocket or two. She looked Syrian both in the way that she dressed and the trauma that was so evident in her big brown eyes. She didn’t say a word – walked up to us (the only Westerners in the Restaurant) and simply stuck out her hands and presented us with two flowers that did little to reflect the beauty she carried inside of her. Our hearts immediately turned to the One holding the one holding the flowers.

I tried to start a conversation in my limited Arabic. *Sabah al-khayer. Keef halik? Ma ismek?* (Good morning. How are you? What is your name?) The big brown eyes just stared at me – empty and motionless, not blinking. *Ma ismek?*, (What is your name?) I tried again, desperately trying to put a name to a beautiful face. *Isma Mike!* I proceeded as I introduced myself and then asked a third time. *Ma ismek?* Still not a word - that spoke so much. Helen moved over, put her arms around her and gave her a tight motherly hug. The young girl stood motionless – seemingly fearful of love and cautious to open up to new strangers with the memory of how other strangers destroyed her village, her dreams and her life.

She turned around and walked over to Grace, our Lebanese friend. Grace has an amazing sweetness that invites people in and the little girl relaxed. *Ma ismek?* Grace asked. Then came the answer, *Isma Waheed (Vahid)*, which, translated into English simply means, “I am lonely”.

Our hearts broke. Her name is the embodiment of her life. She, like so many other refugees and displaced people across the globe are “Waheed” – they are lonely.

Unnecessary to say that we bought the two flowers and spoke a prayer over her life. We paid way too much for what the flowers were worth but way too little for what her precious little soul is worth. We knew the soul of Waheed was bought on the cross when Jesus died for the one carrying the flowers in Beirut - and we wish we could tell her that. But we pray for Waheed and we tell our Father that she is out there, lonely and afraid. Bless her, oh Lord, Sweet Sweet Rose of Sharon.

Ps. The picture below is obviously not the picture of Waheed. I did not find it appropriate to photograph her in her time of need. But when we got back, I searched the internet for the chubby face of a little Syrian refugee girl that would represent Waheed the best. And this is it.

Isn't it time we change how we see Christianity?

Mathew 19:14 Jesus said, "Let the children come to me and do not stop them, because the Kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

