

While I was deployed to the Middle East in 2022, I was assigned to be the senior Army Chaplain and Religious Liaison (for Non-profit groups coming into the camp to provide aid) in an Afghan refugee camp. Each day I would go and check on our "Guests" during different activities. One of my stops was at the recreation building (a metal warehouse) during the women and children's recreation time. One of the Non-profit groups I supported would come and provide activities for the women and children.

I had been at the camp for a little over seven months, I only had six weeks left before I went home. This one particular day started like all of the rest. I helped set up activities, talked to some Afghan friends, and tried to make small talk with the children through broken Dari and English. As things settled down and activities started, I walked through the giant building praying for the people inside. All were now homeless, without a country, and desperately wanting to come to the United States. My walk was interrupted by a tug on my pant leg. I turned and looked down and standing before me was a little Afghan girl about four years old. She was tiny. I must have looked like a giant in a green suit (I'm 6'4"). She held up her arms as if she wanted me to pick her up...so I did. She then hugged my neck tightly as she settled in. Within minutes, she was asleep. She slept for at least an hour. When she woke, she leaned back, looked me in the eyes, smiled then hugged me, then climbed down and scurried off.



(this photo was from the first day)

The next two days the same thing happened. I held her, she slept, she hugged me, she scurried off. I was becoming concerned. What do her parents think? Am I breaking some sort of Afghan social mores or laws?

On that third day her mother finally approached me. Through a translator, she explained that right before they left Afghanistan, the Taliban broke into their home in the middle of the night with guns, yelling, looking for her husband (who was in hiding somewhere else). Since that experience, the little girl had not slept through the night. It was only while I held her that she would actually sleep. As I tried to hide my tears, I promised the mother I would be there every day until I left so the little girl could sleep.

Over the next six weeks, my arms were the sleeping place for that little girl. Every day, I would go find her, I would hold her, and I would whisper prayer over her as she slept. Most of the time we were in a noisy warehouse with so many distractions. Still, she would sleep.



My experience with my little friend reminds me of how we should be with our Heavenly Father. Like the little girl, we are often traumatized through our experiences in this world. We are seeking someone that can help us get through. Although it can be intimidating to be vulnerable, we know He can help. All we have to do is tug on his pant leg and ask to be held. The loving arms of Jesus will pick us up every time and give us all of the rest and comfort we need. 1 Peter 5:10 says, "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered for a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast."



This photo is the last time I held her. I cried the entire time so I faced the wall so that people wouldn't see my tears. My Sergeant Major snapped this photo without me knowing :)

The little girl and her family made it to the United States and now live in California. I am in regular communication with her parents. We are making plans for me to visit later this summer or this fall.