

SPIRITUAL PREPARATION FOR DISASTER RELIEF

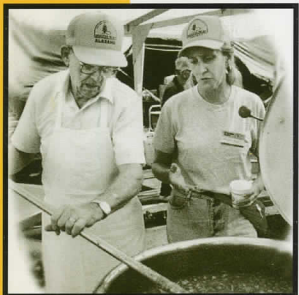
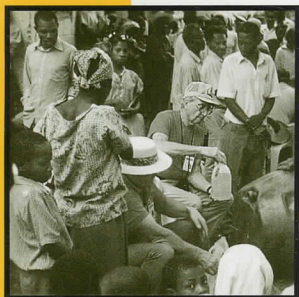


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INTRODUCTION

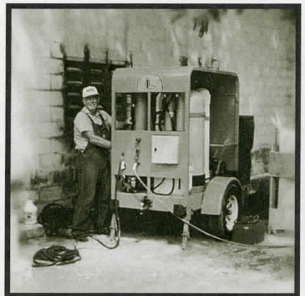
Disaster relief is very hard work. There will be long hours under difficult conditions and not much rest. Eighteen wheelers will need to be unloaded, hundreds of meals cooked over hot stoves, and never enough people to do the work. There will be numbers of people who need to share their stories of fear and loss.

The trip to the disaster site will be long. You will arrive tired and fearful of the conditions and work. Can I do the work required? Do I have the stamina? Will I last? Who will I work with? Who will be in charge? Can I get along with them? When time comes to leave the disaster site, will a replacement come? Can I trust them to keep the work going? Will they be sensitive to the victims like I am? Will I be able to forget those faces? Will what I have done make a difference?

All of these questions will be asked by a volunteer. They are often summed up in, "Am I ready for this?" Years of experience have taught us that the preparation needed most and often overlooked is spiritual preparation. A volunteer sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leadership and willing to follow His direction will accomplish much.

God will use the disaster relief ministry to accomplish more than we can dream. He will do God-size things in His time. Only eternity will tell all that God has accomplished with just a "cup of cold water." The cup of cold water may have expressed itself as a meal, repaired roof, cleaned yard, a child cared for, a sympathetic listener, or clear presentation of the plan of salvation.

The key will be the disaster relief volunteer's willingness to be prepared. Yes, he or she must be mentally and physically prepared. But please remember disaster relief is more than just the physical service rendered. The goal



is always to have a spiritual impact upon the people and community affected by a disaster.

Spiritual preparation is not a option. A life prepared for service can be used by the Holy Spirit. There must be a day-to-day walk with the Lord. During the time of preparation, you should spend time with God also. Being sensitive to the Holy Spirit will provide a disaster relief volunteer many opportunities for service. God will open doors of opportunity. You will be used by the Holy Spirit in ways you may not understand or even know. You join thousands of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief Volunteers preparing for and responding to the call to minister to people who are caught in a disaster.

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This booklet is written and compiled for the purpose of providing suggested devotions to aide Disaster Relief Volunteers in preparing spiritually. The writers of these devotions have a background and responsibilities in disaster relief. It is our desire that these devotions help you prepare for the service you will be called to perform.

The devotions use the Seven Realities of *Experiencing God: Knowing And Doing The Will Of God*, by Henry Blackaby, as a foundation. The Seven Realities are used by permission of the Baptist Sunday School Board, SBC. Scripture is taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

Please use the seven Preparation Devotions the week before you are to leave for the disaster relief response. If you do not have that much time to prepare you will want to do two a day (morning and evening). Use the seven Participation Devotions during the time you are on site during a disaster relief response. You will want to continue to use your regular devotional materials while on site as well as participating in the team devotions.

The seven Process Devotions are designed to be used during the week following a disaster relief response. Processing the events, activities, words, and people of a disaster relief response may be difficult. Sharing your thoughts and feeling with someone is imperative. It is suggested to meet with other team members for discussions following a response. If it is not possible to meet with other team members, find someone with whom you are conformable and share with them. This person may be a friend, pastor, deacon, or Sunday School teacher.

Should you not be available to respond to a disaster, make it a point to pray for those who are responding. Always remember

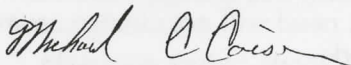
by name volunteers you know, as well as Southern Baptist volunteers, state and national leadership. American Red Cross, other volunteers organizations, government leaders, and victims should be remembered as you pray daily.

Please allow me the privilege to pray for you now.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the love You have expressed for mankind. Thank You for not abandoning our world to sin. Thank You for allowing Jesus to be sacrificed upon the cross. Thank You that we can experience salvation because of the cross. Thank You for calling us to ministry. Please prepare these precious volunteers for the service they are about to embark upon.

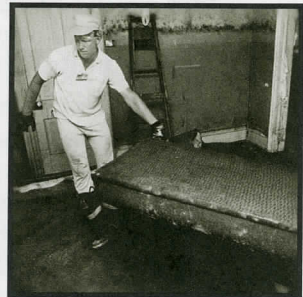
Give them strength, wisdom, courage, and discernment for the task they perform during the disaster relief response. May they bring honor to our Lord, Jesus Christ. Upon arriving home, may their reflection upon the response be used of the Holy Spirit to strengthen their walk with You. In Christ's wonderful name. Amen.

In Christ's Service,

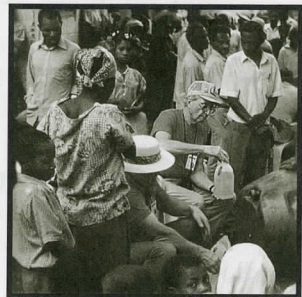


Mickey Caison

Adult Volunteer Mobilization Manager



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PREPARATION

DAY 1: *God Is Always At Work Around You*

James D. Williams, Baptist Medical/Dental Fellowship

Background: Isaiah 45:7, Psalm 147:15-18, and Proverbs 3:25

Key Verse: Isaiah 45:7: "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things."

Key Thought: God is in control.

6 There are not many constants in this world. Change is a fact of earthly existence. However, there are some essential, abiding, unchanging truths which we can count on:

God is in absolute control of this world.

He is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.

The church which Jesus established will last.

He will continue to call out the called and send forth the peoples of God—the Laos—to share the gospel with earth's people. The Great Commission will not change. The need for authentic ministry to persons in need will not change as we join God in His reconciling work.

In the midst of the chaos of life, it is "good news" that we serve a God who is "forever making all things new." He is in control of this world and the affairs of men. He even knows the number of hairs on our heads.

We can be absolutely certain that history is under the control of but one God. Because of that it will have an ultimate unity of purpose. That is, God is at work in His world "reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

God's control of events is beyond our finite understanding. His providences remain secrets that are hidden from us. God's prearrangement of circumstances for His children is a discovery, which we make as we are obediently responding to His commands. When we are faithful in following Him, He promises "I will go before you."

So, God is the primary force in history. Everything that happens, favorable or unfavorable, good or evil, success or failure, prosperity or disaster, is working together to accomplish God's ultimate intention. This in no way denies the human factor in events, but the part men play is always subordinate to the overall purpose of God.

One may honestly ask the question, based on Isaiah 45:7, "does God create evil?" The primary thought in this verse is the oneness of God. The evil which God creates or allows is not moral, but physical like disasters. All of it is to make men aware of God's power in the universe. In the two verses preceding the key verse, the prophet Isaiah makes it plain that history, like creation, witnesses to the oneness of God so that all men everywhere may know that there is one God.

When disaster happens, you and I are called to represent creator God. We are privileged to demonstrate His overarching redemptive purpose and point people to the ultimate hope that He has provided through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Then, and only then, can finite creatures make sense out of disaster.

God has put you in a special place of ministry as a disaster relief volunteer. Recognize that God is at work in disaster. Look for ways He is working. Most of all, seize opportunities to share God's plan of salvation with others. True followers of Christ are those who believe, contrary to the law of physics, that we stand straight when our center of gravity is outside ourselves. If you allow the living Christ to be the center of your life, God can use you as His partner in any situation. That is my prayer for you, with thanksgiving that you have been willing to serve Him in times of disaster.

Heavenly Father, thank You for being in control of the world and my life. Please prepare me for the opportunity to minister during disaster. Help me recognize and seize the opportunities to share Your love with others. I yield to You and wish to be used in any situation. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PREPARATION

DAY 2: *God Pursues a Continuing Relationship With You That is Real and Personal*

Laddie Adams, Oklahoma State Brotherhood Director (retired)

Background: Deuteronomy 31:8 and 1 John 3:1, 16-18

Key Verse: Deuteronomy 31:8: "The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

Key Thought: God's loving relationship sustains us.

8

As you prepare to go to a disaster-ravaged location, be aware that the Lord has gone before you. His promise is that He will be there when you arrive and will accompany you in your service. He will not fail nor forsake you. We need to remember His promise in the midst of bad conditions and insufficient physical resources. The elements (wind, water, fire) may have suddenly become unusually turbulent and seemingly out of control. Remember that the One who spoke to the wind and calmed the waves, dispelling the storm and the fears of His disciples, is the same One who speaks peace to your heart and promises to be with you.

Jesus is the One who not only declared His love to us but demonstrated it for us on the cross. He exhorted us (see 1 John 3:16-18) to demonstrate our love for Him as we minister to our brethren in need.

God came to walk with us following the April 19th, 1995, bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Tornadoes, floods, and fires are rather frequent in our state. On occasion, we may have a few injuries or even a fatality, but never 169 deaths and more than 400 injuries in one disaster.

It left most of us in a state of shock. As trained responses to disaster automatically fell into a pattern, we began cleanup, feeding, counseling, and caring for families of victims as the needs surfaced. Assistance came from every direction. The most pronounced help came from God. He ministered through helping hands, sympathetic hearts, and interceding prayers. News accounts written or broadcast by those from out of the state carried stories of rescuers and family members of victims who attested to God's strength and help in their trouble and distress.

The world focused its attention on Oklahoma City and its residents for the first hours after the explosion, and it saw faith in

God demonstrated and spoken of boldly. One New York writer said, "Residents spoke openly of their faith in God in terms that might be embarrassing in other parts of the country."

God pursues a continuing relationship with us that was both real and personal. The victims of disaster that you serve will need a warm heart and a helping hand, a shoulder to cry on, and an attentive ear. Remember that the strength you have is not your own but divinely provided. He, the giver of life itself, is with you! He tells you not to be dismayed, discouraged, or disillusioned.

The source of love is our sustenance (see 1 John 3:1). We have been called "sons of God" because His love reached out to include us in His family. We are encouraged to demonstrate that love, not just in word but in deed. We can do that because He is with us, and that unending relationship is very real and personal (see 1 John 1:3).

Heavenly Father, thank You for going before me and not forsaking me to the ravages of this world. Thank You for the demonstration of Your love for me. It is my desire to demonstrate my love to You and those affected by the disaster I will serve in. I cannot do this in my own strength. I yield to You, Holy Spirit. Use me as You wish. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PREPARATION

DAY 3: *God Invites You to Become Involved With Him in His Work*

Bob Dixon, Texas Baptist Men Brotherhood Director

Background: Philippians 2:13-15 and Ephesians 2:10

Key Verse: Philippians 2:13: "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."

Key Thought: Join His purpose.

10

The Bible reveals that God always has been involved in the world. He has never been absent from it or what is taking place in His story (history). When we read the Bible, we read of the redemptive activity of God in our world. We see that He chooses to take the initiative and involve His people with Him. He chooses to work through them to accomplish His purposes. Yes, disasters are in the plan of God to bring a people to Him. Now He has invited you to join Him in His ministry to extend His kingdom and to bring glory to Him.

Isn't it great that He has not left you alone to accomplish His purpose? The Lord Jesus, according to the eighth chapter of Romans, is now at the right hand of the Father praying for you. If that were not enough, that same chapter tells us that the Holy Spirit has a new assignment on this side of Calvary! The Holy Spirit is your constant companion. He will be your teacher, your guide, your comforter. You will be sensitive to His leading and through this opportunity of ministry that the Father has invited you to, you will bring great glory to Him. Does not He teach us that when they are hungry, we are to feed them; when they need clothes, we are to give them clothing. Therefore, as much as you do it to every victim in the aftermath of disaster you are doing it unto Him. You would certainly think that is enough, but Hebrews 1:14 tells us that God has created angels to serve the saints in their ministry. He created an angel to serve you in this ministry to which He has invited you.

You are now carrying out the Great Commission. I like to refer to it as co-mission for truly that is what it is. He has invited you to be on mission with Him. We certainly do not have an option. On the other side of the cross there is a possibility that there could be an option. You have heard it said, "Here am I Lord, send me" but not on this side of Calvary. The Lord Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you"(John 20:21). You have become a part of a great army that will be volunteering to be on co-mission with God throughout the whole world.

He has been developing your character and sharpening your skills for just such a day. As God's obedient child, you are in a love relationship with Him because He loves you and wants to involve you in His work. He will show you where He is working so you can join Him. Go in His power.

Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your involvement in our world. Thank You that I do not have to stand by and watch You redeem our world. Thank You for the commission to go into our world. I yield myself to Your leadership. Make me to be who You need today. Here am I, send me. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PREPARATION

DAY 4: *God Speaks to You by the Holy Spirit Through the Bible, Prayer, Circumstances, and the Church to Reveal Himself, His Purposes, and His Ways*

Bob Simpkins, Former Kentucky State Brotherhood Director

Background: Acts 16: 6-10

Key Verse: Acts 16:9-10: "During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them."

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Key Thought: God speaks!

Disaster circumstances are never exactly the same. Previous experiences by the most dedicated sometimes will not provide adequate direction. All the training courses, good as they may be, fall short of clearly defining the necessary action. Because of being on a mission assignment from the Father, nothing less than a word from Him will meet the need. We need a fresh new word from the Father. How do we hear from Him?

When we await a fresh new word of direction, the love relationship we have with the Father determines our availability to receive an answer. It is critical to our assignment that we keep prayerfully close in communion with the Father. Many times the very situation causing us difficulty holds the answer to the direction the Father is moving.

One man in our disaster unit clearly felt the direction of the Father to be in charge of cleaning the pots and pans for a feeding operation. Amos had always chosen this assignment and had been the best possible worker. He is an individual who just will go until he is ready to drop. It just isn't in him to take needed breaks.

On one occasion, Amos was emptying dirty dish water into the designated drain system. This required that he carry the water around to the opposite side of the building where the feeding unit was set up. As he rounded the corner of the building, he saw a young man setting on the curb near the drain. Being in the right love relationship with the Father, Amos placed the pans aside and joined the Father in addressing the need of this young man. In just a few moments, Amos was able to lead this lost individual to receive a love relationship through belief in Christ.

Making preparation to be a useful volunteer on the Father's mission of disaster relief is no easy task. By making ourselves available and using a little energy, we can make all the necessary physical preparations. We can enroll and complete course after course and that we should do. However, with all the wonderful training designed to physically respond to disaster victims, we still would not be fully prepared. In fact, we would lack the most essential element to be equipped as the Father desires.

In today's focus passages, Paul and party were on a mission pilgrimage. They were very aware of the marvelously redemptive work they had been doing for quite some time. Even on such a mission as this, even with the deepest of commitment, sometimes it is difficult to understand the will of God. At such a time nothing short of a fresh new word from the Father will suffice. That was just exactly what happened to Paul and his companions. When they determined to take the Word of truth into Asia, they were not allowed entrance. Later they were detoured again. Finally, in a vision, the Spirit of Christ chose to speak a fresh new word of direction and invitation to the mission party. They had a church invitation to ministry through a man from Macedonia who appealed to them to come over and give the needed assistance. Immediately, the new direction was known and they set out on the assignment.

God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways. In Paul's situation, the Father chose to speak through the need of the Macedonian church and the circumstance of a vision. A great lesson is available to us from this story.

Heavenly Father, thank You that You speak today. Thank You that Your Holy Spirit is alive and well. Even in the middle of a disaster, I can rely upon You to speak! I am committed to hear You. Help me hear You. It is my desire to do Your will Your way. I understand I must know You to know Your will. Speak Lord for Your servant listens. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PREPARATION

DAY 5: *God's Invitation for You to Join Him in His Work Always Leads You to a Crisis of Belief that Requires Faith and Action*

Tommy Puckett, Alabama State Brotherhood Director

Background: James 2:14-17, Hebrews 11:6

Key Verse: James 2:17: "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

Key Thought: Obedience requires faith.

14 Ever since the beginning of time, when mankind fell in the Garden of Eden, he has been promised that he would endure hard times, whether it be the sweat of his face, the pains of birth, or the tragedy of loosing a home.

Disasters will happen. That is an absolute fact. When man sinned in the Garden of Eden, disaster struck when man was run out of his God-given home in the garden. It continued when one brother, Cain, killed the older brother, Abel. Disasters continued throughout the Old Testament in different forms. The first type of a disaster is always startling but even in the familiarity of disasters, no one ever gets used to it. The flood during Noah's time was heart wrenching because it was a destruction that brought an end to human life with the exception of Noah's family. This disaster did not come without warning. The people were warned by Noah that God was going to send a flood, even as the ark was being built. Still, no one believed.

Disasters came in the form of famine during Joseph's time. Warning was given about the famine. Some heeded the warning and some did not. Disasters have affected mankind throughout history and will continue even in the future. They affect evil people as well as godly people. Disasters are an absolute.

Preparing for disasters is absolutely necessary. The Bible gives us case after case of God inviting us to join Him where He is already working, which includes the preparation for such an event. The Father never asks His children to serve where He does not provide them with preparation for that service opportunity. The question is, do we stand around trying to think of all the reasons we could not or should not do the task He is leading us to do? Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time. He walked with God. When God told Noah in Genesis 6:14, "So make yourself an ark . . .," Noah, as a righteous man and knowing of the conditions of the world at that time, may have reached a crisis of belief. As verse 22 of that same chapter indicates, Noah showed faith and moved into action. "Noah did everything just as God commanded him." A disaster of that magnitude could

have brought a response, "You got to be kidding, Lord"! or "Are you sure there is such a devastation of this magnitude?" Noah prepared as the Lord had commanded him.

Joseph was another of God's servants. When put into the position of leadership, he was told by the Father of the impending disaster that would fall on Egypt. The message came in the form of a dream by Pharaoh. Now the crisis of belief was on the part of Pharaoh rather than Joseph. Pharaoh questioned those who recommended Joseph to interpret his dream. But his response was in faith and then put into action to get Joseph to tell him what the dream meant. God worked through Pharaoh, sharing his dream with a prisoner to receive an answer. Pharaoh moved from crisis of belief to faith by putting Joseph in charge of preparing the nation for the oncoming famine. Joseph was the means by which Egypt was spared. This also included sparing the Hebrew children.

When preparing for an oncoming disaster, we will encounter a crisis of belief. That belief may be, "we have plenty of time to get ready." He wants us to have faith and move into action immediately. Preparing for disasters is absolutely necessary.

Disaster preparation confirms a need to respond. Preparing in faith will never be futile. Our God will provide an opportunity to move into action following our applied faith. That is an absolute. Noah acted on God's request and sure enough he was ready and able to handle the disaster. Pharaoh acted in faith and made Joseph the overseer of the land. Joseph acted in faith to His Lord and prepared the land for the famine. He knew the need by the people would be met and that the only true God would receive the honor and glory.

Preparation required faith and action. His children today must apply these same biblical truths in order to meet the unforeseeable needs of the future. Meeting disaster needs with the hand of Christ must be an absolute by His people.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your control and involvement in our world. I know sin is present in mankind and in me. Thank You that Your plans cannot be destroyed or prevented. We have prepared ourselves, equipment, and plans. Now we step out in faith and commitment to You. Lead us! Use us ! Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PREPARATION

Day 6: You Must Make Major Adjustments in Your Life to Join God in What He is Doing

Harry Black, Executive Administrative Team
Arkansas Baptist State Convention

Background: Psalm 15:1-5

Key Verse: Psalm 15:1-2: "Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart."

16 Key Thought: Responding to God requires continual adjustment.

The call came about 1:40 p.m., in the middle of an important meeting. "A disaster has struck. We need a mass-feeding team. Can you be ready to go in 24 hours?" Volunteers from around the state were put on alert, with bags packed, waiting by the telephone. The 24 hours stretched into 36, then days. Before we ever served a single hot meal, we were worn out by the tension of waiting to "go." Why can't disasters come at convenient times? Why can't disaster response be easy?

Ministering to people's needs in times of disaster requires continual adjustment. No matter how well you plan, no matter how well you train, disaster response will test your ability and willingness to adjust. Flexibility is a necessity! So if adjustment is the rule rather than the exception, and flexibility is the plan rather than the response, how do we keep from sinking in the quicksand of uncertainty? Where is the foundation that brings stability and security in disaster relief?

Psalm 15 speaks of just such a foundation in the midst of flexibility. In the first verse, we find a hint that the writer understood the necessity for continual adjustment combined with the need for stability. He asked, "Lord, who may dwell in your tabernacle? Who may abide in your holy hill?" The Amplified Version captures the subtlety of the original language in its translation: "Lord, who shall dwell (temporarily) in Your tabernacle? Who shall dwell (permanently) in Your holy hill?" He wondered who is worthy to stand on the solid foundation of an everlasting relationship with the Almighty God and dwell permanently with Him? Who is worthy to see the work of God, have the privilege of adjusting to His activity, and dwell temporarily with Him? The one who is worthy will experience both.

Verse two describes the qualifications of this worthy one: he

walks uprightly, works righteously, and speaks truth in his heart. Once again, these qualifications reflect the need for both stability and flexibility in our lives. Notice the three actions described. "Walks" is a word that means "lives" or "behaves." It is the way we live our lives. "Works" is what we do. "Speaks" is what we say. All three of these words imply movement, action, and adjustment. Henry Blackaby writes in *Experiencing God*, "You cannot stay where you are and go with God." In responding to disaster, there must be mental and emotional adjustment, as well as physical. There must be flexibility.

The psalmist focuses on stability as he describes the ways in which we are to walk, work, and speak. We are to respond uprightly, righteously, and truthfully. These responses establish the unchanging foundation of disaster relief. They are the spiritual, moral, and ethical qualifications of one who is worthy to dwell in God's presence. To walk uprightly is to live blamelessly before God by following His will and His ways. To work righteously means "to be right" in our interaction with others. And to speak truthfully is to declare what is true and right as authenticated by God's Word. Where and when we act in response to disaster will always demand flexibility. How we respond spiritually, morally, and ethically will always demand stability.

There is good news for those of us who struggle with change and flexibility. The psalmist testifies that he who does these things shall never be moved. For those who pay the price of adjusting to join God in what He is doing and for those who embrace flexibility to minister in Jesus' name, there is the reward of stability and security in God's eternal plan.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the privilege of approaching You. Please forgive my sin. Help me be upright, righteous, and truthful. I desire to be used in ministry in the aftermath of disasters. Make me flexible. Use me as You please. Amen.

Date Used _____ , _____ , _____ , _____.

Comments And Your Reflections:

PREPARATION

DAY 7: *You Come to Know God by Experience*

Don Hargis, California Men's Ministry Director

Background: Matthew 25:31-46

Key Verse: Matthew 25:40: "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'"

Key Thought: Christ demands obedience.

As you prepare for your up-coming missions trip to help victims of a disaster, remember that those you are helping may not speak English; they may not be of your race. They may have some cultural ways that are offensive to you. They may smell bad, look dirty, or dress strangely, but these are the people Jesus has commanded His children to help.

Jesus calls us to help those who are in need. We don't raise questions or play the part of skeptic. We simply help anyone Jesus brings our way. The question arises, how do we prepare to aid people who offend us culturally and personally?

The answer is found in the life of Christ and in a man who exemplified Christ. His name is Francis of Assisi. He was born to wealth and prestige, but he was not happy. He felt that life was incomplete.

While out riding his horse one day he met a leper, loathsome and repulsive in the ugliness of the disease. Something or "Someone" moved Francis to dismount and throw his arms around the poor sufferer. While in his arms, the face of the leper became the face of Jesus. Remember that you are in the midst of pain and suffering, to serve the Lord Jesus.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your love of all the world. Keep me from being judgmental in my attitudes toward those I am called to serve. Help me to see suffering as You see suffering. Use me to meet the needs that are within my abilities and resources. When these run out please allow Your Holy Spirit to use me as Your servant. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

LET'S GET TO WORK

You have spent time preparing for the disaster relief response. You have studied, prayed, and planned the work you will do. You have set your travel plans. You have secured the means for your responsibility to be fulfilled while you are gone. Your departure is at hand, maybe even tomorrow.

Now you will just trust the Heavenly Father to provide you the opportunity to be faithful. He will honor your preparation and availability. Trust Him!



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Remember the logo for Southern Baptist Disaster Relief? I would like to remind you of the significance of the different images. The arch of the Southern Baptist Convention represents our worldwide link. The wheat is a symbol of the physical help you will give. The fish is a symbol of the spiritual help you will give. The state name declares your state Baptist convention is a part of the team.

By wearing this logo you are declaring your participation in the organization that has invested more than 28 years in developing this very special ministry. You have chosen to involve yourself in serving Christ in the crisis by "sharing a cup of cold water."

May God bless you as you minister in His name the next few days!

PARTICIPATION

DAY 1: *God Is Always at Work Around You*

Jim Brown, Florida State Men's Ministry Director

Background: Romans 8:28, 35-38

Key Verse: Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose."

Key Thought: God is at work in daily ministries.

20 I don't know why it is but it seems like for many of us our immediate and daily focus is on accomplishing things in the future—out there somewhere. Even though future goals are necessary and important, sometimes we miss out on the blessings that are right underneath our very own noses. We are so consumed in looking for what God is doing or going to do "out there" that we fail to realize that he is always at work around us—where we are and in the normal traffic patterns of our lives.

This misdirected focus may also manifest itself in the midst of a disaster. Yes, it is true, that in the midst of a crisis our principle ministry is to the victims of that particular crisis. However, all too often we fail to realize that God may be wanting us to minister to unsaved, confused, depressed, and/or struggling non-victims who are directly or indirectly working alongside us.

God reminded me of this when I was working in a Rwandan refugee camp as part of the Florida Baptist refugee relief effort. We were working alongside of Tanzanian and Rwandan International Mission Board missionaries in providing ministry to the constant and critical needs of more than 45,000 refugees. We never ran out of things to do, even though we were constantly running out of time. Every day was a busy day.

It was not too long after we arrived that I noticed, from time to time, some of the other refugee workers from other organizations, such as the UNHCR and water development engineers, would visit our ministry team during brief breaks we had in the day. In the beginning stages of our relationship-building process with them, we discussed various issues related to how best to coordinate and meet the needs of the Rwandan refugees. However, it was not too long after our regular visits had begun, that I realized God was wanting us to minister to these individuals as well, even though there were thousands of ministry needs "out there!" These workers may not have been physical victims of the Rwandan situation but they were spiritual victims of a

much more severe eternal situation. The Lord was able to speak to them through our actions and through our words. I experienced changing lives and changing attitudes of many of those other refugee workers.

In your "busyness" of disaster relief ministry in the realms of "out there," don't ever lose sight of the fact that God may also want to use you right then, exactly where you are. Pray that the Lord will help you increase your spiritual sensitivity so that you will be able to recognize better (1) where God is working, (2) what God is doing, and (3) how He wants you to join Him and participate with Him in touching lives.

As Steven Curtis Chapman has appropriately entitled one of his songs, the Christian life is truly a "Great Adventure!" God is always at work around you, and His deep desire is for you to join Him.

21

Heavenly Father, Your work is awesome. I marvel at how You work. Thank You for not giving up on us. I need spirit eyes today. Help me to see what You are doing here in this crisis. Lead me to those You wish to touch today. Keep me from being too busy to join You in Your activity today. I want to participate in Your touching lives of these you wish to draw to Yourself today. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PARTICIPATION

DAY 2: *God Pursues a Continuing Love Relationship With You That is Real and Personal*

Rick Patchin, Former Georgia Disaster Relief Director

Background: 2 Corinthians 1:2-6

Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 1:3: "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Key Thought: God's loving relationship provides comfort.

22

Nine times in the gospels Jesus is spoken of as "being moved with compassion." In each occasion, His compassion is followed by action. Compassion is "love in action." The Father shows us His compassion each day and comforts us in our times of trouble. John 3:16 tells us that God loved us so very much that He did something about His love and sent Jesus to earth to provide our salvation.

When asked by a television reporter why we came to help in a disaster, I could only say it was because of the love Jesus has for us and the love we have for those who are hurting. I don't believe compassion is something that is natural within us as human beings. I believe it is expressed in our lives because of our relationship to a compassionate Father. The key verse today points out that God is the Father of compassion and the God of comfort.

It had been a difficult week. It was our first big disaster and the first response of our two feeding units. The Kilpatrick unit had borrowed the five fish cookers they were using on Sunday afternoon and began cooking at Miami Dades Community College by 4 p.m. on Monday afternoon. Both of our units were now working together and we were cooking about 9,000 meals each day. The hours were long and tiring, but we were learning about God's compassion and comfort.

Wednesday evening late we were attempting to have a debriefing and devotional. All the team members were not in yet. I sent out someone to tell the others to come on in. The response was that they could not come at that time because they were sharing the gospel with several volunteer workers. God's compassion for those victims of the disaster brought us comfort as we saw Him at work in the lives of these workers.

Three of the victims from the shelter had been up all night helping the unit director unload an 18-wheeler. They were load-

ing cans of water from the 18-wheeler to a small pickup truck and bringing it to the work area. I had been able to see the work from my cot as the truck lights hit my eyes as they passed. I had to drive 15 hours to another assignment the next morning and had tried to sleep. As I got up and packed for the trip I went around to the work area to check on Chris, the unit director. He was seated with three Spanish-speaking men in a circle. I listened to discover that he was sharing the good news of Jesus Christ to the man in the middle in English, and this man was sharing in Spanish to the other two men. God's compassion for these men was being shared by our unit director. Comfort comes in the morning when you see the compassion of God exemplified in another brother.

God is always seeking to have that love relationship with all persons. That love relationship we have with Him will provide the comfort we need in the troubled times of each day.

23

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus Christ into our world. Thank You for pursuing me with Your love. Thank You for giving me salvation. Please use me to pursue a love relationship with those I am called to serve. Use me as a means to love those I come into contact with today. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PARTICIPATION

DAY 3: God Invites You to Become Involved with Him in His Work

Thurman and Carol Stewart, Illinois Disaster Relief Coordinators

Background: Luke 10:25-37

Key Verse: Luke 10:37: "The expert in the law replied, 'The one who had mercy on him.' Jesus told him, 'Go and do likewise.'"

Key Thought: Ministry to my neighbor.

24

Day 3 is a very pivotal time for a team, especially the first response team. Typically, a day or more of travel (20-30 hours) is followed by the tensions and uncertainties of set-up (i.e., where, who, how long, what type of food, community, the role and relationship of support groups; American Red Cross, Voluntary Organizations Active In Disaster, and organized local Baptist volunteers). The first meals, usually a noon and/or supper meal, are served. Resources and man power have been sufficient. Now for the big day, the request comes in for 1,000 meals at noon, 2,000 for evening, and double that for Day 3. Propane will be depleted by noon; water has been nearly exhausted by the sanitation required; we have no ice. Deliveries are delayed or confused. The victims are not nice any more; they cross the yellow tapes; they don't wash their hands. They don't understand that this is not a distribution center for "gifts-in-kind", ice, water, clothes! They are "non-Anglo" and don't speak English. Are we yelling yet? Obey . . . the . . . rules . . . Are we turning on coworkers, coordinators, warehousing personnel and logistics, and other volunteers? Perhaps these feelings are not voiced, but they exist and begin to be reflected in our ministry attitude.

Day 3—the fatigue, lack of sleep, the hygiene practices, diets, and other problems of discipline and habits are apparent. The sleeping quarters give a new meaning to sleeping under the stars and in water beds, (as in Hurricane Andrew in Florida in 1993) in church pews, no roof, and mightily rains, out-house showers with natural water temperature.

As in the case of the Levite and the Priest, we can fall into the trap of dehumanizing the victims and deifying our rules, routines, administrative procedures, and the policies of our program. We no longer readily see the victims and their needs as opportunities to demonstrate loving care, (a partner in clean up

and reconstruction, a cup of water in Jesus' name, tender acts of child care).

It is important at this time to experience God in His leadership, remembering He has invited you to become involved with Him in His work and to see the kingdom message illustrated in our test by the Samaritan (v. 37), the outsider. He did not succumb to the traps of religious piety, rules, routines, and program policies. He saw the victim as a real person in a tragic crisis, not his fault, not our fault, "who fell among the robbers," and demonstrated true caring by His touch and His personal ongoing concerns. "Whatever he needs" was his policy. He was able to turn a day filled with crises and uncertainties into a day full of hope and promise.

Disaster relief is evangelism through love—using the hands to reach the heart. Disaster relief, like no other Southern Baptist ministry, has the opportunity to show this hands-on multicultural love and caring ministry so mandated by the Lord. It helps us experience personally "who is my neighbor?" Jesus said the neighbor is the one who showed mercy. And Jesus said, "Go and do likewise."

Heavenly Father, I know You love me. Thank You. I know You love those who have experienced this crisis in their lives and community. I see You at work here. I hear Your invitation to "go and do likewise." I yield myself today to love and minister like the Samaritan did. Use me to share the message of hope today by my actions and words. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PARTICIPATION

DAY 4: *God Speaks by the Holy Spirit Though the Bible, Prayer, Circumstances, and the Church to Reveal Himself, His Purposes, and His Ways*

Wayne Vann, Former Michigan Disaster Relief Coordinator

Background: Matthew 11:28-30

Key Verse: Matthew 11:28: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

Key Thought: God speaks to give comfort.

26

It was a sunny but very cool day in March with snow still in piles along sidewalks. The sun was doing a fine job of melting the ice and snow except for those areas shaded by the buildings and trees. I walked to the backyard to toss some debris into the trash can and when I turned to walk back I stepped into a small puddle of water from the melted snow. Beneath the water was a thin layer of ice not yet melted and . . . yes . . . you know what's coming. I suffered a spiral fracture to my tibia and fibula. The doctor said "You not only broke the slowest healing bone in the body, you broke it in the slowest healing spot." And so my new lifestyle began in a hip cast. It was two months of lying flat on my back before graduating to a knee length cast. It was six months after the injury that the cast came off entirely and I had a cellulitis infection, for which I had to be hospitalized for one week. My leg had to be cleansed every two hours around the clock. After being released from the hospital, I had to take therapy treatments at the hospital immediately.

A week later, I was walking along the hall, on crutches, when a man driving a floor cleaning machine came around the corner. Something opened under the machine, sending mud and water across the floor. My crutches went up in the air; I came down on my injured leg. They moved me right into emergency, put me back into a cast, and the process started all over. Those who knew me were amazed at how I seemed to "keep going." My circumstances drove me closer to God in prayer and in His Word. During those most trying times, I was able to move through those mountainous difficulties with a sense of comfort.

From church members I received words of encouragement and love. One member gave me a poem entitled, "He Drew Me Aside," by Alice Mortensen. This poem helped me to realize my need for quiet time with the Father. The last line says, "I needed the quiet, so He drew me aside."

From God's word I received His promises of comfort. In Philippians 4:11 Paul says "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." After he learned to be content in every situation, Paul went on to say in verse 13 "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." I once asked Byrd Adams, a friend who is a motivational speaker, to give me an encouraging word for the day. He paused a moment, then he replied, "You can accomplish more than you think you can if you will only relax." This did not seem too profound to me until the Holy Spirit applied what the apostle Paul stated in Philippians. It was then that I realized, to relax is to be content. To accomplish much is to do all things through Christ who gives strength. As I began to find contentment in my situation, God brought me comfort and peace. It was during this time in which I sensed the purpose God had for me and God's call into ministry. Since that time, God has spoken to me so many times in my life. However, I must remind you, it is not automatic. We must be involved in pursuing our relationships with Him.

27

God speaks to give comfort. When downtimes come, He wants us to fall further back on Him, pray more earnestly, surrender more completely. "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." So great and so constant and unvarying is this love of God that we find in Christ that nothing, no matter how formidable, can separate us from it. Tuck this tremendous promise close to your heart, insert it deeply into your mind, and never forget it. Keep close to Christ and His loving protection and help will follow you all the days of your life. He will give you rest. The restlessness of life is quieted. What a promise!

Heavenly Father, thank You that You are a God who cares. Your love is so apparent to me. You are always there. You give wonderful, refreshing, loving comfort. Thank You for those You have used in my life to bring Your comfort to me. Please use me today to bring comfort to those I am called to serve. Help me bring Your peace to their life. May I exemplify Your love and compassion. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PARTICIPATION

DAY 5: *God's Invitation for You to Work With Him Always Leads You to a Crisis of Belief that Requires Faith and Action*

Joel W. Phillips, Georgia Disaster Relief Feeding Coordinator

Background: Acts 9:10-18

Key Verse: Acts 9:17: "Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'"

28

Key Thought: Obedience requires action.

During the relief operation following Hurricane Opal, one of our feeding units was at Pine Mountain, Ga. On the afternoon before we were scheduled to close the feeding operation, we were asked if we could send a unit to Alabama and set up a feeding site at Tuskegee. I was faced with a difficult decision. Should I shut down the Pine Mountain operation and move that unit, or should I call up another unit? Did we have the equipment and manpower necessary to respond to this request? What should I do?

I took a few moments to reflect on several truths I discovered while working through *Experiencing God*. Henry Blackaby wrote, "God will never give me an assignment that He will not enable me to complete," and "Any assignment from God is an important assignment." Suddenly, I realized that I needed to be obedient to God. He was asking us to go and serve meals and drinks to people that truly needed our assistance. Obedience to this important assignment meant that we would go to Alabama!

In our focal text, Ananias was faced with a faith crisis. He was given an assignment by God that required action on his part. The difficulty lay in the fact that the man he was to minister to was a known antagonist who hated Christians and the church. Humanly speaking, Ananias should have stayed at home. Anyone in his right mind knew to stay away from this man called Saul. However, Ananias realized that the assignment from God was important, and that God would enable him to complete this task.

Obedience equals action! When God gives us an assignment, he expects obedience from his children. The assignment is

always important, and remember, that God will enable us to complete the assignment. In the case of Ananias, he was able to lay hands on Saul, and God allowed Saul to see and become a new creature in Christ. This Saul later became the great missionary, Paul, whose driving purpose in life was to spread the gospel. In the case of responding with the feeding unit, we prayed and asked the unit to move. That unit was able to shut down in Pine Mountain, Ga., and in a matter of hours was set up in Tuskegee, Ala., ready to serve others in Christ's name. Thus, their action showed that they were willing to be obedient to God. As we consider our assignment today, remember that obedience means action—action in the name of Christ. Will you show your obedience to God by your action today?

Heavenly Father, I ask that today You enable me to complete the assignment that You have given me. I realize that I can do nothing without You. Help me to serve others in Christ's name and share the good news of eternal life with all who will listen. Keep me safe this day, and help our team to honor Your Son in all that we do. In Jesus' name. Amen

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PARTICIPATION

DAY 6: *You Must Make Major Adjustments in Your Life to Join God in What He is Doing*

Jim Albers, Missouri Men's Ministry Director

Background: John 14:10-15

Key Verse: John 14:15: "If you love me, you will obey what I command."

Key Thought: Life's adjustments to God's command.

30 Two days and 1,500 miles of travel brought an already exhausted team of disaster relief volunteers from western Missouri to the southern tip of Florida. This was a willing and obedient team of 15 from my church. Some were retirees on limited incomes, others sacrificed their vacation time, and a few took leave without pay to join God in the relief of Hurricane Andrew victims. But any adjustments made in preparation to go to Florida would be overshadowed by what would lie ahead for us after we arrived.

No matter what great sacrifices you may think you have already made for God there will always be one more need, challenge, or test placed before you to reevaluate and then to exercise your love for the Lord and increase your faith in Him. Jesus told His disciples, "I tell you the truth. Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. . . . If you love me, you will obey what I command."

An obedient servant is a flexible servant. Because of his faith, he does not do the works of the Father independent of Christ but totally dependent upon His Spirit. Christ said He would answer prayer and would send the Spirit. An obedient servant is also a loving servant. Your love for Christ is the atmosphere in which all commands of the Lord will be honored and adjustments made to join Him.

We had been serving in the relative safety of south Miami for the first half of the week. Suddenly the request to move our unit was relayed to us. We had heard of the shootings and lootings that had become a part of the aftermath of the hurricane. Our women were afraid for their safety, and the men were concerned for their well-being. At first we refused to move, more afraid than full of faith.

A deep, unsettled feeling came over us during our evening devotion. We had come to serve the Lord and Andrew's victims,

but to move to Homestead was more than we could handle. Our workload had prevented us from leaving our unit in order to ride the Red Cross vehicles into the destroyed neighborhoods to personally minister to the clients. But the last Miami meal was prepared, and the women were asked to venture out with the relief vehicles. Several hours later the vehicles returned with the women on board except now there was a difference that had come over them. When they saw the neighborhoods and actually served the clients their hearts were filled with compassion and their fears disappeared. Their crisis of belief was now replaced with an adjusted determination to follow God to Homestead. Instead of running from God to a safe haven they announced that they were ready to go to Homestead, and together we completed the task until the next team relieved us.

Through this incident, God taught us all the truth of 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God did not give us the spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." Allowing God to transform our fears into love was an example of life's adjustment to God's command.

Is there a physical, emotional, or spiritual battle raging within you or your team today that failure to make the appropriate adjustment or adjustments might jeopardize its continued participation in the activity of God? Right now give that needed adjustment over to God in prayer and be prepared to experience how God will bring upon you the needed adjustments in order to follow Him.

Heavenly Father, Thank You for being in control. You are omnipotent. You are knowledge and wisdom. I am willing to adjust myself and my life to Your will today. I love You. Fill me with Your love so that You may use me to show others Your love. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PARTICIPATION

DAY 7: You Come to Know God by Experience as You Obey Him and He Accomplishes His Work Through You

Choice Watson, On-Site Coordinator, South Carolina

Background: Philippians 4:13, 19

Key Verse: Philippians 4:13, 19: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength. . . . And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."

Key Thought: God is our source.

32

Disasters do happen. Many believe that as the end of time approaches and the second coming of Jesus draws near, that disasters will increase in frequency and severity. Certainly this is evidenced by the disasters of the past few years.

Victims are affected in various ways when tragedies occur. Some are tender and easy to minister to, while others are bitter and are difficult to approach. When we minister to the victims there is a need to realize where the victims are and minister to them from their perspectives.

As you and I, as volunteers, reach out to the victims of disasters, we must remember that we are responding to the needs of people in Jesus' name. Our attitudes in disaster response must be the same as that of Jesus and our actions must verify our relationship to Jesus. Galatians 6:2 instructs and motivates us, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." Your presence, as an outside person, ministers in an immediate way. It lets the victim realize and say, "someone cares for me."

Three areas that we need to be aware of when dealing with a disaster victim are the emotional, physical, and spiritual.

In dealing with the emotional need, a loving arm around the victim or a calm concerned voice will develop a bond of trust between victim and caregiver. When they know someone cares it will do a lot for them emotionally.

In the physical world of material things, the needs that are apparent can be more readily addressed. No matter which type unit you are trained for—feeding, mud-out, chain saw, rebuilding, child care, or some other unit—you have come to meet the needs of the victims. As you meet the physical needs of victims you strengthen that person emotionally.

Spiritual ministry is important because it helps tell the victims that while their lives are in a state of flux, there is a foundation on which they can begin to build the remainder of their lives. A question often asked of the disaster volunteer is, "Why did you come here?" The answer is, "To let you know someone cares about you and is willing to meet your needs. That someone is Jesus." The song writer said, "Burdens are lifted at Calvary." This is also true in disasters.

In our cooperate worship during these days, as well as in our individual worship times, let us remember we are here to lift burdens by giving a cup of cold water in Jesus' name.

Father, Thank You that all strength and power are in You. I know the people I come in contact with today are confused and disillusioned. Thank You for loving them. Help me to love them today and to tell them You care about them and can meet their needs. Please use me today. Amen.

33

Date Used _____ , _____ , _____ .

Comments and Your Reflections:

PROCESS

DAY I: *God is Always at Work Around You*

Van French, Ohio Disaster Relief Coordinator

Background: Isaiah 12:1-6, Psalm 27:13-14

Key Verse: Psalm 27:13-14: "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

Key Thought: God is at work in heartache.

34

We have returned to our comfort zone with our families, drained physically and emotionally. "I did not know the work would be so hard and the hours so long," may be the thoughts you have. "I just want to sleep for a week! When I could lie down the noise was just too much. I was in the room with all the snorers. I'm too old to sleep on the floor."

You would not be the first disaster relief volunteer to think that way. I believe we all have arrived home to only feel like this may have been the hardest thing we ever did. It is during these times that we begin to question the value of what we did. Was it worth it? Did we accomplish anything of value? Did we make a difference?

The memories of the disaster and the stories with the faces of the victims begin to come to mind. Your heart breaks all over again. Will they ever be able to get over this? Not just the physical needs, like the repairs to the house or the replacement of a job, but the emotional scares are so deep. How will those people ever get over it all?

You just cannot turn your mind off. You must understand your part in the overall process. You were a part of a team. God was at work before any of the volunteers arrived, and He will be at work after all of the volunteers are gone. You were a part of the overall work of God. His purpose may not be known to you but His activity did not stop when you departed the disaster site.

The psalmist said, "I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord. . . ." In the mist of all the heartaches, God is still at work. His purpose is to draw all people to Himself in redemption. God uses your faithfulness to Him and His service to draw some of those you came in contact with during the disaster relief response. You are not responsible for the response of others. You are responsible to be faithful and obedient to God. The Holy Spirit will convict, draw, and seal people to Himself.

You may not understand all of the activity of God during the disaster. Only eternity will reveal all that God has done as a result of the disaster and the response to the needs of the people

affected. Many times it will be months or years before some of the people respond to the witness given. That is all in God's hands, and His Holy Spirit is capable of handling it.

You can pray for the victims and caregivers that you came in contact with. Those special needs, as well as the witness you gave, can still be used of the Holy Spirit as the means to draw people to the Father.

You need to be studying God's Word, refilling your cup to overflowing, letting God reveal to you what He is doing around you. Just as you were conscious of God's leadership and activity during the disaster relief response, look for His leadership and activity now. You did not leave Him at the disaster site. He is present in your community and life. He is at work around you. You must join Him in His activity.

Where do I go from here? What will God have me do? Do I plan to go back to the affected site? Do I need to look for some other ministry? All of these questions are valid. How you answer them will depend on circumstance that may be beyond your control. But they are not beyond God's control. The question for you is, "What is God's will for me?"

You must go back to the reality—"God is always at work around you." Look for what He is doing. He will direct how you may fit into His plans. When you are in His will for your life, you will be ready for the next call to go. You will be a clean, full, and overflowing vessel to be used of the Lord.

Be careful not to live in the past. What is done is done. Leave it to the Holy Spirit. Be careful not to live in the future. Only God knows the future. He will take care of it. Live for today. Know that God is at work where you are. Look for His activity. When you find His activity, understand that it is your invitation to join Him. When you join God in His activity you will experience God.

Heavenly Father, thank You for being at work in our world. Thank You for working in my life. Thank You for the work You have done in the area affected by the disaster. Thank You for working through disaster relief. Please continue to draw those I came in contact with during the disaster relief response. I look for Your activity in my life and community and yield myself to do Your will. Please use me. Amen.

Date Used _____ , _____ , _____ , _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PROCESS

DAY 2: God Pursues a Continuing Love Relationship With You That is Real and Personal

Tim Bearden, Tennessee Men's Ministry Director

Background: Ephesians 3:14-19

36

Key verses: Ephesians 3:16-19: "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

Key thought: God wants you to know the fullness of His love.

Do you want to be effective in ministry through disaster relief? God wants you to be effective. That is why He sent you to minister to people just like He sent his Son to minister. To be effective for Christ means to know the fullness of God's love. To know the fullness of God's love is to know God and have a love relationship with Him. You have just been a part of a larger plan of God to build love relationships. You were a part of the plan in two ways. First, God has used you to help others build love relationships with Him. Second, God continues to pursue an improved love relationship with you.

Because of that love relationship, God wants you to be effective. Paul's prayer for the church at Ephesus in Ephesians 3 gives us a clue into what it means to be effective in our relationship with God. While Paul is talking to the church as a whole, he is also talking to the individual.

Outward appearances don't always show inner strength. On the event of his eightieth birthday, John Quincy Adams said: "John Quincy Adams is well; the house in which he lives at present is becoming dilapidated. It is tottering upon its foundation. Time and the seasons have nearly destroyed it. Its roof is pretty well worn out. Its walls are much shattered and it trembles with every wind. I think John Quincy Adams will have to move out of it soon. But he himself is well, quite well."

There is an inner strength among believers that Paul refers to in verse 16. That inner strength comes from a life that is Holy Spirit filled. Your strength, as you helped meet the needs of peo-

ple, came from the Holy Spirit's presence in you. A person whose life is filled by the Holy Spirit is one who is Christ-centered. Remember as God works through you, you are His physical body on earth. That is what Paul is saying in the first part of verse 17. If we are Spirit-filled and Christ-centered, then we love with God's love that is limitless and timeless and infinite. Paul says there is no place, anywhere, nor time where God's love is not present. Verse 18 in any version of the Bible you read talks about how wide, long, high, and deep God's love is. It is so wide it spans the universe, so long it outlasts time, so high it reaches to heaven, so deep it reaches to the deepest part of hell.

You have seen a lot of human despair but know that the love of God was there before you got there and his love was there when you left the scene to return home. Not only was His love in the despair, His love was at home with your family and friends.

God wants you to be effective. He wants your life to mean something. To be effective for God means to be Spirit-filled, Christ-centered, aware of the size of God's love. Paul says in verse 19 as he is ending his prayer that the ultimate sign of a love relationship with God is a life that is full of God. To be full of God is to open your life to Him. Our central act as an individual, as a church, is to build a love relationship with God. We love because he loves.

Heavenly Father, let me be one who is Spirit filled, Christ centered, full of Your love, filled up with You. Thank You for Your limitless love toward me. Amen

Date Used _____ , _____ , _____ , _____ .

Comments and Your Reflections:

PROCESS

DAY 3: *God Invites You to Join Him in His Activity*

Lloyd F. Jackson, Jr., Disaster Relief, Baptist General Association of Virginia

Background: Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-13

Key Verse: Ephesians 4:12: "To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up."

Key Thought: God's invitation is good.

38

Our journey of faith begins with a two-in-one characteristic—the invitation of God through Jesus Christ and our response. There are many aspects of one's faith experience: acknowledgment of status, confession, repentance, forgiveness, commitment. One element which should be foremost is the invitation of God. In His Son, God invites us in faith to join Him in His mission of forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation. Through His action and our response, we become in Paul's words, coworkers, partners with God. The invitation is to walk and to share.

In our journey we climb mountains and walk through valleys. We have mountain top experiences and days of despair. Our pilgrimage, like that of Jesus', is one of anguish and celebration. Thus, in our efforts to assist others, we experience a variety of emotions. The assurance we have and the assurance we share with others is that God in Jesus Christ travels with us. He has not extended an invitation to us and then left us alone. His challenge is for us to share life with him.

Occasionally we need to be reminded that one of the positive elements of God's invitation is that it is directed to us. We should be past the thought that God only invites or calls "full-time church related" persons. The artificial division between clergy and laity should not surface when God's invitation is discussed. God's invitation is to each person. A significant issue relates to how best one lives the response of faith. God invites us. In the midst of crisis, God's good invitation is valid.

God's invitation also acknowledges that each person has something to give. The skill or gift may vary but each person has something to contribute. Disaster situations demand a variety of skills and gifts. In no situation is one gift/skill more valuable than another. Each person gives what he or she is capable of giving. We accept, we rejoice, and we praise. Individual gifts merge to fulfill a mission, to accomplish tasks, and to respond to hurting

persons with good news of a God of love.

One of the unique aspects of God's invitation is that He asks for our help. We emphasize strongly a person's need for God but rarely acknowledge God's need of us. In no way does the statement minimize God. Nor does the premise elevate the created to the level of the Creator. Jesus' parable in Matthew 25 illustrates well the concept of need and help. We are charged with an awesome privilege and responsibility. God needs our assistance in order for His mission to be proclaimed.

A second part of God's need is that of fellowship. We need each other. We need God. God needs us. Fellowship is critical to life. James Weldon Johnson in his anthology, *Deep River*, retells the creation story. In the story, after the physical universe has been created, Johnson has God saying, "I'm lonely, I think I'll make me a man." God's invitation enables us to have fellowship with Him and He with us. We are needed.

39

Another element of God's good invitation and our acceptance of it is that we are empowered to be the God presence to others. Daily, in disaster situations, we represent God to others. The smile, the hug, the handshake, the plate of food, the tree removal, the replacement roof, the mud-out—whatever the action—we are the God-presence to hurting people. Through us, God is revealed in His love, glory, compassion, and power. We answer the "why are you here?" with the simple and profound "because God loves you and cares for you." Through us, God is present.

God's invitation and our response. Thus, we are reminded of commitment, response, and acceptance. We are coworkers with God. His invitation challenges us to go beyond ourselves with His word of hope, life, and encouragement. Let us not take lightly the invitation nor the response.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the forgiveness, restoration, and reconciliation You have given me. Thank You for the ministry of disaster relief. Please use my skills and labor today to bring honor to Yourself. May I share You and Your love with those I am called to serve today. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PROCESS

DAY 4: *God Speaks by the Holy Spirit Through the Bible, Prayer, Circumstances, and the Church to Reveal Himself, His Purposes, and His Ways*

Hugh Cater, Florida Disaster Relief Coordinator

Background: Philippians 3:12-14

Key Verse: Philippians 3:12: "Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

40 Key Thought: God speaks to encourage you.

After Hurricane Hugo, the Florida Baptist Feeding Unit was stationed in Manning, S.C. At one point, we were about to run out of paper plates, cups, and napkins (which would effectively put us out of operation), with no hope of immediate resupply. This need had become a matter of prayer in our daily meetings.

Because I was in charge of the unit, I went to every store in the county that was open (there weren't many) looking to buy enough paper products to keep the unit in operation for one more day. I also contacted local churches and asked for donations. I returned to the unit with 100 plates and no cups. I knew that with what we had, we could not serve even one more meal.

When I pulled into the parking lot where the unit was in operation, I saw a van with Georgia license plates leaving. I later learned that the van had left northwest Georgia the day before. It had been completely filled with paper products. We were able to operate for two days with the supplies that were donated. God had arranged to meet the needs before we were even aware of them.

In our efforts to minister to others in Christ's name, it is natural for us to feel that success or failure depends on us. We forget that, in reality, there are two things going on. First, the ministry we are so committed to is God's ministry and it is His power and will that matter. We are blessed to be His tools to accomplish His purpose.

Secondly, as God uses us, He develops and refines us so that we can be even more useful in His service. Because God is still at work in us we cannot have reached perfection, but are continually "under construction." The more He uses us the more we grow.

We know only too well that we are not perfect. We can approach perfection only to the extent that we allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us, rather than depending completely on our own abilities and resources. It is the daily strength and encouragement we receive from the Holy Spirit, God's Word, and prayer that enables us to be part of God's plan to reconcile our lost world. Rather than becoming independent, our development occurs as we become more dependent on God's immeasurable resources.

We also have the comfort of knowing that God truly is in charge and that His plans do not depend entirely on our abilities. We can contribute our best efforts to God's purpose, confident that His will cannot be defeated and we will grow in the process.

It is a joy to know that, through Christ's love, God will continue to improve us as long as we let Him. He can use even our imperfect efforts to accomplish His purposes. Pray that God will continue to use and develop you in His service.

Heavenly Father, Thank You for being in charge. Thank You for drawing Your world back to Yourself. I confess that I often take for granted Your involvement in our world and my life. Thank you for the ways You remind me of Your love and knowledge through circumstances in my life. Speak now for Your servant listens. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PROCESS

DAY 5: *God's Invitation for You to Work With Him Always Leads You to a Crisis of Belief That Requires Faith and Action*

John LaNoue, Texas Baptist Men Associate State Disaster Relief Director

Background: Philemon 4-7

Key Verse: Philemon 7: "Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints."

42 Key Thought: Faith brings you through.

After you have returned from the disaster event, there are always questions in your mind. "Did I do everything I could to help the victims? There was so much need and my part seemed so small, did I accomplish anything? What will happen to those I could not help? My resources were so limited and the need so great, should I have just stayed at home . . . et cetera?" These questions will occasionally cause grief, guilt, disappointment, and a depressing sadness. These creep up to the surface through your sense of rejoicing and victory that usually follows your participation in a disaster response.

When this occurs, you are having a crisis of belief, and you will find that only faith will bring you through. The key verse, Philemon 7, gives us a truth that should encourage you in your walk of faith. It will also strengthen your faith when you accept the facts that as you conquered the crisis of belief in preparing to go, which was "obedience requires faith," and conquered the crisis of belief while you were participating, which was "obedience requires action," you must now use your faith to trust the results to God.

Paul wrote, "Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints." The love he speaks of is the kind of love that results not in emotion only but in action. As Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." This is the kind of love you have demonstrated in your response to others in their time of disaster. When he writes about great joy and encouragement, it fully relates to the fact that you came to the victims in their need. Just your presence, regardless of what skills or resources you brought, was an encouragement. The statement you made by your presence was, "I love you enough to come, to be with you,

to help you if I can, and to join you in your suffering.”

What may seem like a small action to you, may have a large impact on the victims. Never judge the results of disaster response on the basis of only what you have seen. Trust God to reap a much larger harvest than you can imagine.

I offer an example from the aftermath of Desert Storm. The Lord permitted 12 Southern Baptist relief workers to feed a refugee camp of 14,500 Kurds. The Kurds were considered to be a people's group unreached by the gospel. The feeding operation ended its transitory activity, but God had some permanent activity in mind. It seemed like such a small thing only to feed them when they were homeless, had lost many family members, and were wounded, crippled, disfigured, destitute, and helpless. In the time since that 1991 event, my Kurdish translator has become converted and leads the Kurdish Christians in his city. The "Jesus" film has been translated into the main Kurdish language. There is a Bible school in northern Iraq, and a converted Kurd is the school's founder. All of this occurred as a direct result of the effort which Baptists made to feed the Kurds when they were hungry.

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Believe God. Faith in Him will see you through as you process all that has happened and realize the victory God has won, a victory because of your faith. You must trust the Lord, in faith, to minister to those whom you could not help and to continue helping those to whom you did minister.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the wonderful privilege of serving You. Thank You for the process You used to call us and use even me in this work. Somehow in Your love, please use every part of the work to touch lives for Yourself. I am so small, the work seemed so little, and I could not help so many. In faith I leave it all to You. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PROCESS

DAY 6: *You Must Make Major Adjustments in Your Life to Join God in What He is Doing*

Jim Didlake, Mississippi Disaster Relief Director

Background: 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Key Thought: Serving requires adjustments.

44

In 1985, Mexico City was rocked by back-to-back earthquakes. Each registered over seven on the Richter scale. The resulting needs were staggering, and when Southern Baptists were called for help, the response was quick. The Mississippi unit joined in the operation with a team excited about the prospects of a unique feeding ministry to a sister nation. However, no one expected how quickly the change in assignment responsibilities would develop. A team of 12 men left believing that they would be a vital part of an ongoing major feeding operation. In 16 days of response, they never had opportunity to prepare a meal. Their job became support and daily witnessing as they watched Mexican nationals operate the Mississippi unit.

This was most likely one of the greatest lessons that disaster response teams have learned. We must always be flexible to adjust to the task God provides since He knows best. That task may be one we never expected or dreamed of, but He knows the plan He has set in motion.

In 2 Corinthians 5:17, we are reminded that in Christ we are new creatures. We are changed personalities that must become pliable to the will of God. How true this charge is to disaster relief ministry. People who are suffering are looking for those who cannot only provide personal assistance, but help them understand the questions that they must face in recovery.

Perhaps verse 20 of this chapter best prepares us for what we must become. We are to be ambassadors for a Savior who loves in ways we can only share when we become a reflection of Him in a daily lifestyle. As a disaster response team member, this places an awesome responsibility on the way one serves and the way one is seen in the disaster situation.

For all who have ever served, it is common knowledge that each disaster experience is unique and brings its own unusual

demands. Our actions and relationships are taxed by the variety of needs, the unusual suffering of the victims, and the overall stress of the disaster experience. We may easily become so caught up in the needs around us that we push ourselves to the limit. The danger then arises of being a negative rather than a positive witness. Relationships can break, nerves become frayed, and the changed Christian can suddenly again reflect images of a life he or she had hoped was left behind.

It is in this distress time that we must remember that as each disaster demands adjustments in response, Christians must become flexible in relationships to their work and to their fellow workers. In this atmosphere, the true aura of an ambassador must come to the surface. For in a time such as this, the reflection of Christ we present is the impact our ministry will have on the community we serve.

45

As we prepare and respond we must constantly remember that our witness depends on our daily walk. We must even in disaster response remember to put our Bible study, prayer life, and personal devotion as the priority preparation for our service.

Paul reminds us that we in Christ are new creatures. The victims around us need those new creations to touch and minister in their lives. Christ needs them as His representatives and we need them for it is here that we find what it means to be like Him who is our Savior.

I challenge you today in preparation seek to find where God is, then join Him in a ministry that will revolutionize both your life and the lives you will touch as you give your cup of cold water.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the experience I had while serving those affected by this disaster. Please forgive the sin (words, thoughts, and actions) that were not in keeping with a Christ-like life. May those lives I touched come to know the fullness of Your grace. I give today to You and desire to serve You. I am willing to adjust my life today to Your will. Amen.

Date Used _____, _____, _____, _____.

Comments and Your Reflections:

PROCESS

DAY 7: *You Come To Know God by Experience As You Obey Him and He Accomplishes His Work Through You*

Reggie Quimby, Alabama Disaster Relief Director

Background: John 14:25-27

Key Verse: John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Key Thought: May you experience God's peace.

46

Bringing closure to a missions/ministry project is sometimes difficult. The emotions that one experiences while working beside fellow volunteers when serving the needs of disaster victims are sometimes tough to handle. All of us have felt stress due to the situation in which we have had to work, as well as the long hours and difficult tasks we have had to perform.

I recall the day we were leaving Camp Dolenov in Iran along the border with Iraq where our task had been to help feed the Kurdish refugees. These two countries were fierce enemies and had been at war for eight years. The atmosphere was hostile. Yet, our mission was one of peace. As we left the camp, the Kurdish people, and even the Iranian soldiers, lined the dirt road to send us off with their expressions of thanks. Our hearts were filled with mixed emotions as we left, remembering how our team had struggled to get into Iran in the first place so we could minister in Jesus' name to the Kurdish refugees and to share Christian witness in Iran. Now it was time to return home. To be sure, the conditions had been less than appealing, sleeping in tents, listening to rounds of gunfire at night, being surrounded by armed guards every second of the day, uncomfortably confined to the surroundings of our tent compound. However, with firm confidence our team knew that the Lord was in charge of this project from the very beginning.

In the midst of all the difficulty the Holy Spirit was there to encourage us and comfort us. The Lord's peace in that isolated and volatile spot of the world was very real. He was the one who opened the door for us to go into Iran to minister, and He was the one bringing closure to this project. We had experienced victory as we fellowship with, trained, and worked along side the small committed group of Iranian Christians. Every moment

while we were there we were assured of God's presence and peace!

Wasn't it so with the disciples also? The Lord ministered to them in those last days as He prepared them for the closure of His earthly ministry. He was going to leave the disciples the presence of the Holy Spirit. They would experience His peace during the turbulent days surrounding His crucifixion, as the Holy Spirit would become their source of comfort and encouragement. Jesus told them, "My peace I leave . . . not as the world gives." Jesus' reference to the "world" signifies a temporal, superficial state of existence. His peace is the lasting "inner peace" that comes to many only through knowing Christ as Savior.

This same peace which is offered to you and me, helps us when our hearts are heavy as we leave a disaster site. The peace of Jesus sustains us in the face of fear and gives us the assurance of His endearing presence. The peace of Jesus heals our sorrow as we witness the difficult circumstances faced by victims of disaster. This same Holy Spirit also empowers us to share the Good News of Jesus Christ to those victims and to others we come in contact with during the days of disaster response. We can be assured that our efforts are not in vain. For as we leave, the Holy Spirit remains to do His work in the hearts of men, women, youth, and children. The time and effort that you and I have spent in planting the seeds of the love of Christ, through a helping hand, a radiant smile, or a cold cup of water in Jesus' name, we can steadily see the accomplishment of His plan of redemption and peace for the whole world.

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the peace that comes in my personal relationship with Jesus Christ. My thoughts still focus on the disaster victims. All the pain, sorrow, and grief was overwhelming. But I know the Holy Spirit is still at work. As You work in me please continue to work in my fellow team members and the victims who were served. Amen.

Date Used _____ , _____ , _____ , _____ .

Comments and Your Reflections:

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