

I am a chaplain for the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team and I just recently spent a week at the Cove in Asheville, NC, training for how to minister people who experience natural disasters. While there I heard Erwin (pastor of Moody Bible Church in Chicago) talk about his book, *Where Was God?*. As I was listening to him speak I was thinking, you know, this is hardly just for people who experience a natural disaster. This is just as much for those who have been through personal disasters in their life and questioned why God allowed it to happen. In fact, this question is not one that just recently popped up on the scene – it's been around since the very first book of the Bible was written. Psalms 10:1 says "Why, O Lord, do you stand far away and why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" You see, in the past two millennium millions upon millions, and perhaps billions of godly people have lost their homes, have lost their jobs, have lost their possessions, and have lost family members. Many of them have lost their very lives because of the ruthless deeds of evil leaders, and so the question, where was God?

In the Bible, God used natural disasters to accomplish his purposes...

· In Nahum chapter one, Nahum prophesies the Lord's destruction on the evil nation of Ninevah. Verse 3 says

"The LORD is slow to anger but great in power;
the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.
His way is in the whirlwind and the storm,"

His way is in the whirlwind (aka, the tornado)...His way is in the storm.

· The entire book of Job relates a story where God gave Satan permission to do whatever he pleased with Job, as long as he spared his life. Satan inflicted the damage, but God had a purpose and a plan. In the end, Job remained faithful to God and his eyes were opened to the greatness of God. He became a broken and useable vessel, and the rest of his days were blessed by the Lord.

· In 1 Samuel 14, Jonathan was fighting a losing battle with the Philistines, so God sent an earthquake and the victory went to Jonathan and the nation of Israel.

· In Acts 16, Paul and Silas were in chains at midnight in prison singing songs of worship to the Lord. Suddenly, God caused the earth to shake, knocking the chains off and opening up the doors. Because of that natural disaster and their response to it, they led one of the jailers and his entire family to the Lord.

Sometimes, natural disasters are just the result of the groaning of the earth under the curse of sin...

· In Genesis 3:17 when Adam and Eve partook of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge and evil, God showed up and put a curse on the ground, which is another word for creation. At that time, the ground started moaning, and Romans 8 says that creation still is groaning as it awaits redemption because of the garden curse. And so it's not just mankind that God is redeeming. God is redeeming creation at some point. And these earthquakes, cyclones, hurricanes, tornadoes, hail, and fire are part of the earth groaning from under the curse placed on her by God.

So, what does God teach in the midst of natural disasters?

1. Our Stuff is Irrelevant

As a chaplain of natural disaster, I've never seen anyone searching for a television or favorite shirt among the rubble. The few days following a catastrophic event they are desperately searching for what is most important – their family and friends. Relationships are far more valuable than stuff, and a natural disaster brings that into perspective. Don't spend your life hoarding possessions and wealth which will pass away. As Matthew 6 says, "store up your

treasure in heaven”.

2. Our Heart is Evil

Of course, there are many believers and non-believers alike who respond to a natural disaster with a tremendous amount of love, generosity, sacrifice, and support, but at the same time we get a glimpse of how wicked and evil the human heart is. There are those who take advantage of others when they are low and crushed already. There are those who come in and loot, rape, kidnap, and murder during the aftermath and chaos of a natural disaster. In the midst of a catastrophic event we see just how wicked the human heart is and the reality that everyone on this planet needs redemption.

3. Our Life is Brief

Hebrews 9:27 says “it is appointed for man once to die and after that comes the judgment.” So whether it’s by natural causes, old age, cancer, tornado, or car accident, it’s irrelevant. The cause and age of death is not the important factor. Where you are going to spend eternity is. Natural disasters take away complacency and bring in a sense of urgency. Survivors are shaken to the core and realize that if they had died they would not have gone to be with the Lord in heaven. They realize that their life really is brief and that they need to get right with God and receive Christ as Savior. For some, it may take a destructive tornado or flood to bring a person to that point.

So, when you go through a natural or personal disaster, you have a choice – curse God or surrender to Him and His purposes. Are you willing to say “God, I’m tired of asking ‘where are you’? and ‘what are you doing?’. I just want to surrender to you, and Father, here I am. I’m not going to curse you, I’m going to bless you. I’m going to trust you, and though you slay me, yet will I trust you. Have your way in me, Lord. Life, death is all about you.”