

A Survivor's Confessions: Spiritual Lessons From Hurricane Katrina

As the Gulf Coast gears up for Tropical Storm Isaac, residents also remember the devastating Hurricane Katrina. Isaac is expected to take shore Wednesday, the same day that marks the seventh anniversary of Katrina.

Thankfully, Isaac—which is expected to be at least a category 1 hurricane when it hits land—is nowhere near the magnitude of Katrina. During this time survivors remember what was lost and appreciate what has been found. God has used the consequences of this disaster to not only rebuild faith in him, but our faith in one another.

On a restless night I still find myself asking, *Why did this happen?* Any event of unexpected devastation leaves people with this unanswerable question.

The National Hurricane Center reported there were at least 1,836 deaths from the storm and \$81 billion in damages across the Gulf Coast, including my hometown, New Orleans.

The horrifying realities of seeing a culture scattered and lives misplaced made it difficult to appreciate any spiritual blessings from the situation. In time, the brokenness of homes and hearts are very slowly being restored.

It's taken me the past seven years to have some of the greatest truths revealed to me as a result from the worst disaster. These revelations can help not only those who have suffered, but also those who witnessed the struggle.

The Importance of Security and Community

Leylah Cagle lived her whole life in New Orleans, not far from

the Mississippi River where one of the levees broke that night. The comfort of a home she spent 20 years of her life in was muddied by the mighty Mississippi.

Her father was able to restore their home off of Elysian Fields Avenue, and still lives there today. This week she will visit her old home again, with a bittersweet memory.

“It doesn’t matter how much time you have to settle in, or how many new memories you have made,” Cagle said. “This time each year we are forced to be reminded of the old house. Even though you may love the new house, it will never be that same home. “

The big step of recovery is restoring a new foundation. Safety and security are probably the toughest losses to regain after a major disaster like this. Fortunately, God moved through strangers to show no one is in this struggle alone.

It is still amazing to remember how so many people opened up their homes and resources to displaced survivors. Businesses, nonprofits, schools and more did what they could to give a little bit of security back to those who had it stolen from them.

Even today when I share my experience of Katrina, people still give a sympathetic smile or ask me how the recovery is coming along. I remember this sense of brotherly love almost every day. It’s a little reminder how God can build us in his way through each other.

Everyone Is a Survivor

My most recent revelation in this aftermath is how connected people feel to those who are rebuilding their lives after Katrina. This is because everyone is a survivor of their past. A natural disaster may not have been your catalyst, but every person has experienced some great pain in their life.

Quincy Jennings, Katrina survivor and small-business owner in

New Orleans, states it best.

“Tragedy doesn’t care if you are rich or poor. In the end, no one is better than the other.”

All survivors still struggle with finding peace after Katrina. Hospitality professional Chelsea St. Juniors mentions what the healing process is like for her.

“It’s a pendulum,” St. Juniors says. “Sometime, it’s good and it all seems OK. Then it swings back and you remember it all with the hurt.”

This hurt she speaks of is the foundation for the heart of a survivor. When shock and grief leave us felling broken, God’s grace can transform the heart to a new state.

The survivors’ heart answers the still, small voice pushing us to persevere through the difficulty—challenging the suffering to finding strength among the pain. It gives value to the greatest suffering.

Second Corinthians 12:9 says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (NIV).

Today we not only remember what we have lost due to Hurricane Katrina. Today we bittersweetly appreciate what we have gained.

Melody M. Austin, a survivor of Hurricane Katrina, is a freelance writer who focuses on harnessing creativity into productivity. Catch up on Melody and all her wordy adventures at .