

Japan Pushed to the Limit with Triple Threat

✖ Two strong tremors shook Japan Wednesday. These join the dozens of aftershocks that continue to unsettle the displaced after Friday's quake and tsunami.

However, the nuclear crisis is what really has the government worried. The radiation from damaged nuclear reactors in the Fukushima complex complicates Southern Baptist disaster relief efforts in Japan, according to one member of the assessment team. Jeff Palmer, Executive Director for Baptist Global Response, says, "We've looked at plans for helping in the earthquake areas. The tsunami areas are fairly well closed to private volunteer organizations. The Japanese government is handling that, and on top of that, those are in the radiation areas."

The scope of the damage is in the billions. A wide swath of the country lies in ruins. Within the government restrictions, Palmer explains that "a lot of us are focusing our response on those peripheral earthquake-affected areas which are requiring food, shelter, and help for folks who are being evacuated or have left the area."

Events are unfolding on a minute-by-minute basis, which means planning needs to stay fluid. The Japan disaster relief situation is unlike any other in recent history, noted Pat Melancon, BGR's disaster management specialist. Palmer says, "We're all scrambling to come up with an effective plan for the immediate, because it is basically chaos—everything we're getting from our Japanese partners, everything from our assessment team right now. But that's the nature of a huge disaster like this."

Palmer goes on explain, "You'll have the disaster event, and

then you have the responders. You go in and basically rescue, help. Then you'll move on to a recovery/rehabilitation phase which means getting them stabilized, getting them back. And then we'll start development."

With three disasters converging in one country, each response plan has a direct impact on the other plans. Palmer says eventually, everything will be addressed. Even with the crisis so fresh, BGR is keeping an eye cast to the future. "This is a long term response. We're just starting to see a semblance of normalcy after over a year in Haiti of getting things back, getting homes, and getting people back to life. Japan is going to be this bad, or worse."

BGR is working primarily through Japanese Christian partners. They are providing the resources those partners need to effectively execute the relief strategy. For the survivors, spiritual moorings have been shaken. Palmer notes that "as our folks go in, they will be sharing their lives, one-on-one, helping people and also giving their story on how God has made a difference in their lives, because in anything like this, people lose hope. People lose that focus, and we have a great message of hope that is found in the Gospel."

Although there are limitations to where they can help, he says, "We will respond and help people where they are hurting. At the same time, we will also offer them a hope that is found in eternal hope, a hope that is here and now as well as later and beyond, a hope that is found in Jesus Christ."

There are many ways to help. Usually it's: Pray, Give, or Go. Palmer says right now, it's more effective to say, "Pray, Give, and Wait, because of this complex humanitarian event with the tertiary radiation."

Palmer ends with this request: "Pray for Japan as a nation. Pray for the victims, the survivors, the emotional healing that needs to take place. Pray for the responders that are

able to be there—the Japanese government. Pray for the country, that the comfort of Jesus and the hope of the Gospel could come forth into their lives.”