

Megachurch Pastor Forced to Flee His Home as California Wildfires Rage

The term “scorched earth” is usually one we associate with a military policy that targets anything that may be useful to the enemy. As a resident of Southern California, more specifically, Anaheim Hills, the term has recently taken on a different meaning.

Earlier this week, my wife and I were given 30 minutes to evacuate our home of 12 years. To make matters more complicated, I was en route to the airport when I received the text from my wife asking, “What do you want me to pack in the car? I have to leave in minutes.”

My mind raced trying to determine what was important and irreplaceable. All I could think of was family photos and the flag that draped my dad’s coffin at Arlington National Cemetery. In the midst of the chaos and disbelief, our friends and neighbors rallied to assist us in our time of need.

The next day, I found myself sitting in another airport trying to process everything that had happened in the past 24 hours. At first, I reflected on our kind neighbors and how even in the worst of times we can see the good in humanity and love of God. Then my thoughts shifted, and I began reflecting on the chaos, both natural and man-made, that has affected our nation in recent days. I began to wonder if I had become numb to all the tragedy. I don’t even have time to mourn the fact that we had to evacuate our home.

Thinking about all of this, I found myself asking, “Where is God?” As a nation, we are facing an increase in lawlessness and what appears to me, an unusual number of natural disasters.

It's a natural human response to ask questions for things we can't understand or process. I get it; moral evil can be explained by the free will of man but much of the things we face (cancer, death, hurricanes and fires) are not a result of our free will. So where do I go from here? Either God or nature (which He created) must cause these physical evils. But these things seem incompatible with an all-loving, all-powerful God.

I'm left with what I call a "divine tension." I affirm the greatness of God and yet, at the same time wonder as the condition of the world.

C. S. Lewis captured my tension when he wrote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but [God] shouts in our pain: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

I admit I hear God better in the struggle than I do in its absence. Tears, heartbreak, loneliness and hurt all add to my humanity and character. My joy and peace is found in those little unexpected moments when my children call, my wife smiles, my friends rally to my side and I hear God say, "It's going to be OK. I got this one!"

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