

Where Is God When Disaster Strikes?

Disaster doesn't care who you are or where you live. It doesn't care about your name or your job. In times of tragedy, the church body makes all the difference. As hurricanes Maria, Irma and Harvey have devastated the United States and Puerto Rico, author Todd Burpo knows how important the Body of Christ can be in the days to come.

Burpo is the author of *God Is for Real*, which answers some of life's most difficult questions. Here's what he told Charisma Media about the church's role in disaster relief.

Why is it important to be part of a believing community, especially during a disaster?

The church is God's first-responder team. Nothing can come alongside a person in the middle of a disaster with more comfort, understanding, and empathy than a loving family. And Christ wants all of us to have that kind of support from the church (John 15:12-13).

When my 21-year-old daughter calls me "Daddy" today, it moves me—my heart, my attention, my energy and my finances. My whole being smiles because my grown-up "little" girl still knows how special she is to me. And nothing causes me to respond to one of her crises faster today than that desperate cry for daddy's help. That same word was what Jesus chose for us to use in the Lord's Prayer: "Daddy" or "Abba."

The church is at its best when it functions as God's family, with Christ leading in love. Most healthy church families don't even wait to be called to function as God's first-responder team, when one of their own is hurting. Healthy churches are the ones running to help one another. It's like we can hear our heavenly Daddy sending us to meet the cry of

another one of his cherished kids.

How has the church/Christian ministries helped its own people and communities during natural disasters?

I do think that “how much” might be the better question.

Churches and Christian ministries have not only always given to their own but have led the world in giving to others outside the walls and boundaries of their own churches, communities, and countries.

The church’s response to Christ’s call to serve the “least of these” has even caused our country to become a global leader in giving to all people. Our Christian heritage is what has forged the foundation for brotherly kindness that this country extends to the world. From tsunamis and earthquakes and from droughts and wars, Christians have always been leaders in responding to everyone, everywhere with needs. It never quite seems enough for all the needs in the world today—but that’s why we need a big God to fill in the gaps in our efforts.

Many believers attend church virtually now. When it comes to needing help, how can this be a hindrance?

Jesus prayed for all of us to be in relationship to him, his Father, and to each other. He wanted us to be so close that he used the word “one” (John 17:21).

That kind of “closeness” demands face-time. It demands personal feelings, hurts and dreams being shared and prayed for by a church family. When a friend that close asks for help or asks you to assist him or her in helping someone else, you just can’t say no. It would be much easier to change the channel on a TV set or move to another virtual message online.

However, media used for God can have a powerful reach and still make a difference. Many virtual churches probably have the advantage of spreading mass information to bigger numbers

of people quickly. A willing and generous heart can be used by God whichever way He reaches it, but I would encourage all people to find people that can truly know your face and so you can shake hands with them and give a hug, or even get a hug when needed.

How have you seen God move during the storm?

I have seen tornadoes “hop” over houses and towns that were directly in their path. Hurricane winds have lost strength or changed courses. People and resources have poured into devastated communities to help complete strangers rebuild. And I have also seen people pulled from piles of rubble alive and sometimes almost unscathed.

These are all examples of God responding to prayers of His people. Even though these interventions don't happen at every disaster in the same manner. I don't believe that they are coincidental. God has spared so many of us. Car wrecks have been averted, fires flickered out, floods washed away and diseases cured. God does still move in the storms of life.

I love what James said about what he learned from the prophet Elijah: “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man accomplishes much” (James 5:16).

This world is definitely not heaven yet! Jesus told us that storms and disasters in this world are coming against all of us at one time or another.

Rather than blaming or pointing fingers at people who are suffering from storms, Jesus focused on promising to help people survive and even thrive in the midst of storms (see Matt. 7:24-27).

One of my greatest pleas for people who attend church is to take Jesus home with them. If our houses are going to weather the financial storms, repel the divorce storms and guide our kids through the teenage storms, we just can't visit Jesus at

church once in a while.

Parents always find that it all starts by having an active prayer with children at home. They need to teach their children the Bible at home. And they need to love each other like Christ would at home, too. And that love then changes the world. {eoa}

If you feel led to donate to hurricane relief, check out one of these Christ-centered charities: Convoy of Hope, Samaritan's Purse. For more options, [click here](#).

Todd Burpo is the author of the #1 New York Times best-seller *Heaven is for Real* and the new book, *God Is for Real* (FaithWords, September 2017). Visit Todd online at [.](#)