

God Works Even When Door Doesn't Open

When chaplain Lewis Culpepper went to deliver a Bible to one of the homeowners he had been ministering to in the Hattiesburg, Miss., aftermath, he was a little disappointed no one came to the door.

Hmmm. How's that saying go? *"When God closes a door..."*

"The lady next door was washing her car," said Lewis, one of 10 Billy Graham Rapid Response Team chaplains ministering in the Hattiesburg area.

And so just like so many chaplain before him—who have gone out with one mission in mind only to have their best-laid plans changed at the last minute—Lewis took the opportunity to talk to the woman spiffing up her automobile.

It started off with small talk, but soon enough the conversation started heading down a spiritual path.

"We got talking about her faith," Lewis said. "She said she wanted to be a Christian but was struggling with how to do that."

If you don't know much about the ministry of the Rapid Response Team, know this: They are there to be an encouragement and support through prayer and listening, but most chaplains have a heart to hear the line that Culpepper heard on Tuesday.

"I want to be a Christian but I'm struggling with how to do that."

Lewis, a crisis-trained chaplain, took out the Bible and started explaining the basic Gospel message – the same one Billy Graham has preached all across the world for the past 60

years.

"We actually sat on her step with the sun shining on her," Lewis said. "We walked through the scriptures and she received Christ."

No, this wasn't what Lewis had in mind for Tuesday. But God had other plans.

'They've Been in a Daze'

Nearly 1,000 homes were damaged by the tornado that bounced through Hattiesburg last week.

As you drive down the road of Hattiesburg and neighboring Petal, you can't help but notice the randomness of which houses were saved and which were slammed.

"We've seen damage that's more like a basketball bouncing through the area," chaplain John McLain said. "We'll have damage on a few streets for a few blocks, then everything's OK. Then we get over to the next area several blocks over and there will be more damage."

The shock, in a lot of ways, is still fresh for these residents, but on Tuesday John noticed many snapping out of the glazed look.

"The people we've been seeing have been traumatized," John said. "They've been in a daze, trying to figure out what to do."

"(On Tuesday) they've been very, very receptive to us coming to them."

And for some, that's just having a listening ear as the regrouping begins.

"Just being able to talk through how they're feeling," John said. "The emotional and spiritual support we give while we're

here is basically being present.”

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