

Iraq Crisis Is Isaiah 60 Moment for Church

For far too long there has been a deferring of the church's responsibility to government or nonprofit organizations in the areas of disaster relief and crisis response.

But when disasters and crises happen, I believe it is one of the church's greatest opportunities. Isaiah prophesied that in the midst of the deepest darkness, the light of the glory of God would arise on his people.

Isaiah 60:1-3 says,

"Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the Lord rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.
Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn."

We know dark times are coming and not relenting. It's not a matter of if but when. My question to you is, should believers not be the ones to provide the answers and solutions to the darkest times and situations that are coming upon us?

When Isaiah speaks of light and glory, I believe he is referring to the presence of the Lord and the light of understanding to know what to do in the darkest of times. Light speaks of revelation—direct knowledge and wisdom from the Lord on how to respond and what to do.

Glory speaks of the beauty and protection of the Lord over his people. The protection and surrounding glory of the Lord is rising in and upon those who will stand for Him and step

out. There is no greater context to see this fulfilled than in disaster and crisis. I believe it's during crisis that ears and hearts are opened to the gospel, but the majority of the Western church is unprepared and ill equipped to know what to do in the context of disaster response.

Oftentimes, the leader in the midst of crisis is the one who stands up with an answer. Today, I don't hear the voices of Christian leaders when crisis breaks out. We've been silent. But, while cities and nations shake, I envision the church like the sons of Issachar (1 Chron. 12:32) who understood the times and knew what to do. In that spirit, we are calling forth a new breed of mercy missionaries to arise. I believe the Lord is raising up compassionate responders to bring His love and His hope to the darkest corners of the Earth.

The primary focus of churches and ministries is usually not geared toward disaster relief. If there is a branch dedicated to this, it is normally restricted in scope due to lack of training and certification, or is limited in influence by laws governing the separation of church and state. In most crisis situations or major catastrophes, many feel passionate and wish they could truly help.

First-response agencies such as police, fire and EMS typically are not equipped and staffed to handle major disasters. They may not be able to respond quickly to the immediate needs of victims due to communication interruptions, lack of access, or power failure. Government agencies such as FEMA, recognize volunteer organizations active in disaster relief as long as they are properly trained and networked with the National Volunteer Organization Active in Disaster.

As a solution to this, the organization I lead, Crisis Response International (CRI) exists to provide a framework for values and resources to come into influence and be delivered to otherwise off-limits areas. CRI focuses on creating teams of well-trained and prepared individuals who know what to do

and how to react to these situations and are able to bring hope and solutions where there is confusion and desperation. We also help avoid what disaster-service workers call “the second disaster,” as funds and resources get mishandled or spontaneously brought on to the scene, only to make more work for already overloaded volunteers. Our vision is to train mercy missionaries, mobilized in the spirit of night-and-day prayer, releasing great demonstrations of power, reaching the harvest in crisis and rebuilding cities on the Kingdom of God.

CRI quickly assimilates into the National Incident Management System and follows procedures for the Incident Command System (ICS), which is a prerequisite for all levels of emergency management and response—professional or volunteer.

This is why our teams in Iraq today are able to reach thousands with the gospel, food, shelter and medical treatment. While the mainstream media continues to focus on the dangers of ISIS, we are seeing the power and presence of God invade hundreds of lives every day for the last 10 months in Iraq. God has provided us with over \$75,000 worth of medical supplies to aid the efforts, Bible transmitters to reach potentially every Iraqi with translations of the Bible to their cell phones and teams of responders rotating in and out of the area.

Preparedness and the presence of the Lord with our teams has us working with the Ministry of Defense in Iraq and local officials are working with us to assure our safety and the good of the people we are helping. Officials have given access to CRI responders into the Mt. Sinjar region to bring relief to the Yazidis and other fleeing minorities—places no other foreigners are permitted to go. I say this not to boast but to encourage the church that this is indeed our hour. But the workers are few.

Not only do we need to understand the times we are living in, we need to know what to do. By equipping your church with such

skills as Trauma Counseling and Debriefing, Disaster First Aid, Grief and Loss, Light Search and Rescue, Spiritual and Emotional First Aid, Power Evangelism, Personal and Community Preparedness, Crisis Ministry, Deployment Operations and Protocol, we bring the hope of the gospel to the darkest parts of the world and see the wonders of God as He brings in the harvest. CRI also offers certification as a CRI Responder, which is a pre-requisite to becoming a *CRI Assistant Chaplain*.

I know you've felt like being a Christian meant more than attending church and watching a broken world on the daily news. Crisis and disaster is encompassing the Earth, and millions are affected every day. We were all designed for a purpose, and some of us were created to be the answer in these times of need.

To prepare yourself, your family and your church for the days to come, CRI is offering a five-day basic training this month in Madison, Ohio as well as an 11-week intensive academy in Nashville, Tennessee to prepare the church to reap the harvest in crisis. There are five specific weeks this fall that individuals can get trained and deploy immediately to Iraq with CRI. Register and get prepared today at .

Sean Malone is Director of Crisis Response International based out of Nashville, TN. CRI is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that resources, trains and mobilizes volunteers, churches and other organizations to respond to disasters and compassion initiatives around the world. CRI provides a model and framework for responding to disaster situations and delivering resources to areas that would otherwise be off-limits to volunteers. To learn more, visit the website.