

Mizzou Football Team Helps Joplin Bounce Back

As an offensive lineman for the University of Missouri, Mark Hill knows a thing or two about getting physical.

On the Mizzou football field, he lives in the trenches.

But the redshirt freshman, who spent his elementary school years growing up in Joplin, Mo., could hardly imagine the physical labor that it would take to clean up and rebuild the city many of his family members still call home.

"It almost brought tears to my eyes as I was driving around, having to hold it back," Hill said. "Road after road, just gone."

On the evening of May 22, Hill was on a vacation in Texas when his phone started going crazy. Buzz after buzz, texts started flooding in about 30 minutes after the massive tornado tore through Joplin.

His family was all OK, but no word on anyone else.

The F5 Twister claimed 156 lives to date, making it the deadliest tornado in the modern era (since 1950), but Hill had no inkling at first of the devastation that had occurred.

"I thought it was one of those dinky little tornadoes that took out a few houses," he said.

The following week, Hill and 31 of his Missouri teammates loaded up in a team bus and drove four hours from Columbia to Joplin to lend a hand to the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team and Samaritan's Purse.

"It was completely voluntary," Hill said. "It was like they were helping me. This is my community as well so it's awesome

to see my brothers on the team coming to help me and my family and the people we know and love.”

To date, the 28 Rapid Response chaplains have prayed with over 3,800 survivors in the Joplin area, providing emotional support and spiritual care. The deployment is set to wrap up by this weekend.

“Having someone there to talk to means more than anyone picking up any amount of wood,” Hill said.

One of Hill’s teammates, Tigers wide receiver Terry Dennis could tell immediately that the comfort and prayer offered by the Rapid Response Team was making an impact.

“What the Billy Graham Association and this Rapid Response Team is doing ... it’s more than just the house, it’s more than just the people coming to volunteer,” Dennis said. “They’re offering the love of Jesus Christ.”

Hill concurs.

“You just have to go through the grieving process,” he said. “The ones who do have that relationship with God will put that in perspective of what’s important ... that I’m safe and my family is safe, but God protected me and He’ll bring us out of this.”

Dennis, who had a chance to talk with some of the survivors, wasn’t about to miss an opportunity to share his faith.

“I would tell the people look to Jesus Christ to anything you’re going through,” Dennis said. “He’s got the true answers to everything you need as far as love or health, just look to Jesus Christ.”

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