

Pastor: Japan Quake Victims Need 'Amateur' Relief

✖ In the wake of Japan's earthquake and tsunami, opinions of how best to help the disaster-stricken nation recover are now emerging.

As Pastor Eric Foley sees it, those opinions all have one thing in common: the mistaken belief that amateurs need not apply.

"Donate money and leave the work to us: That's the mantra disaster relief agencies chant in the media in their quest to raise funds," says Foley, who is also a non-profit consultant. "But contrast the revolution of common people in Egypt with several failures by professional relief agencies in addressing recent disasters: It's time to take seriously the peerless contributions that can be made by ordinary people."

Foley warns of what he calls the "non-profit/donor complex"—the insistence on the part of non-profits that real ministry work should be left to those who have received professional training while "amateur" donors are relegated to the silent and passive role of providing ample, unquestioning financial support.

"If we are to believe what non-profits say in the media, average people have no active role," says Foley. "But little publicized is the reality that most disaster relief efforts end up relying on amateurs anyway. That's why in Haiti the Red Cross implemented what they called an 'Innovative Text Cash Transfer Program' that essentially gave cash to locals recognizing that there really are disaster relief functions best left to amateurs."

Foley is not denying the importance of professionals but rather recognizing a new role for them: training ordinary

people to provide valuable help when disaster strikes. His new book, *The Whole Life Offering: Christianity as Philanthropy*, serves as a comprehensive training manual through which ordinary Christians can learn to do what he calls the “heavy lifting of ministry” that is often ceded to professionals.

“Amateurs indeed do—and should—apply. They’re capable of creating change in ways that non-profits can’t imagine,” Foley says. “The same thing that happened in Egypt can happen in big and small ways around the world—and in Japan—if non-profits will change their focus from being professional providers of social services to equipping and enabling ordinary individuals to do extraordinary things.”

Photo courtesy Samaritan’s Purse.