



every day grace

MAGAZINE  
Issue No. 4



# WHEN THE STORM COMES



*Every Day Grace Magazine* is a publication of the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. If you'd like additional copies, please email [communications@nccumc.org](mailto:communications@nccumc.org).

Creating an issue on the theme of weather-related storms – whether from the view of the one who has lost or the one who reaches out to help – has to include the strands of faith and hope. We hope the rain and wind will stop before it blows our life and security away. We hope that our loved ones will be safe and whole. We hope that we can salvage not only our precious possessions, but also our faith and trust in the One who created and is still creating. We have faith that the sun will come out and dry and heal the earth. We have faith that new life will burst forth from the ruins, which writer Barbara Lacoste calls the “Second Spring.”

What we hope you will discover in this issue of *Every Day Grace Magazine* is that through loss comes gain, through loneliness comes bonds of friendship, and through hopelessness comes drops of grace.

We are grateful to the storytellers and believe these are sacred stories because they remind us that no matter where the journey takes us, there is beauty of spirit all around us. We are not alone.

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# Lessons from Kathy

by Brittany Johnson McIntyre

The signup hung on the youth bulletin board at Soapstone UMC in Raleigh, scrawled with the names of teenagers who wanted to go on a mission trip that summer. I hadn't been going to Soapstone for long. I wasn't raised in church and had never been on a mission trip before.

I was still getting to know the other youth in the church and wasn't quite comfortable in my own skin there. Going on a mission trip seemed like a pretty big gamble for my 14-year-old self. What if I went and hated it?



The trip would be to Kinston, North Carolina and would focus on working on homes devastated by Hurricane Floyd a few years prior. While Floyd hit the coast of North Carolina as only a category 2 hurricane, it caused devastating flooding and took the lives of 35 people. The storm had come and gone, but it left behind areas wiped clean of what once stood. Thousands upon thousands of homes were damaged or destroyed.

Somewhat reluctantly, I signed up for the trip. I hadn't put a lot of thought into how I might be impacted by the experience, other than considering that it might be awkward and uncomfortable.

Little did I know that this trip would have a momentous impact on my life. It would change how I viewed the world and would transform my perceived purpose.

Later in the summer, our team traveled to Kinston and stayed in an old National Guard Armory building. We lived together as a small community that week, sleeping in bunk beds, sharing meals and experiences, and finding silly ways to

entertain one another in the evenings.

On the first night, our task was explained to us: we would go to the home of a lady named Kathy and we would be painting the inside of her home. Simple enough.

Kathy was an older woman who lived alone and had lost her home in the floodwaters of Floyd. After the hurricane, she spent a considerable time living in her van, having nowhere else to stay. With assistance from disaster relief organizations, she was eventually able to move into a single-wide trailer. This was her new home, and she was beyond grateful for it.

We spent the week painting the inside of Kathy's home, focused on the task at hand. While we covered the walls (and sometimes, ourselves) in paint, our youth leaders encouraged us to take turns spending time with Kathy, sitting on her couch and hearing her stories.

This was pretty far out of my comfort zone. Painting was easy, but forming a relationship with Kathy required openness and vulnerability, something

I hadn't really prepared to experience that week. Initially, it was indeed pretty awkward and uncomfortable.

Where I was weak, though, Kathy was strong. She welcomed us into her home with loving arms. She shared with us her experiences during and after the hurricane. She proudly showed us the GED she had recently completed. She served us her home-baked 16 layer chocolate cake.

Kathy showed us hospitality, generosity, and love. While we had traveled there to serve her, she was the face of Christ to us. It was inspiring, and even life-altering, to receive so much warmth and friendship from a total stranger, and from someone who seemingly had so little. My worldview was turned upside down, and I came to realize that the world consisted of much more than just myself.

It's been 15 years since that trip. I still carry the trip to Kinston, and Kathy, with me every day. What initially began as me hesitantly writing my name on a bulletin board signup sheet, has transformed into a way of life, a way of love and of caring for others. I've since been on lots of other mission trips, and even spent my summers in college employed as a worksite leader, facilitating similar experiences for other church groups.

I now work in medicine and spend each day caring for, and building relationships with my patients. All of this has been influenced by the lessons I first learned in Kinston, from Kathy.

What I've come to understand is that while the painting work is important, it's not the physical act of restoring damaged buildings, or of treating physical disease that is essential. What is transformational is the bond formed when two human beings, each made in the image of God, outwardly have little in common and yet find common ground and offer love and care to one another. This truth stays with me each day, and I strive to find it in every interaction I have with others.

The storm may be strong and mighty, but once the wind and rain cease, it offers chance for community, renewal, and transformation. I am grateful for the love Kathy showed me, the changes she helped form in my life, and for continuing opportunities to share this same love with others.



When the storms of  
life are raging,  
stand by me;  
When the storms of  
life are raging,  
stand by me;  
When the world is  
tossing me like a  
ship upon the sea,  
Thou Who rulest wind  
and water,  
Stand by me.

**WORDS & MUSIC:**  
**Charles Albert Tindley**  
included in a collection of hymns  
that he published in 1905,  
New Songs of Paradise, No. 6



# Ride of Your Life

by Thomas Gates

Responding to my question in 2010, "Lord what can you do with a 59-year-old ditch digger?," the answer was, "Hang on. You are in for the ride of your life."

Hurricane Irene struck eastern North Carolina in August 2011. I was attending classes for commissioning as a home missionary and looking for ministry-related work. Sam Loy, with the NC Conference Board of Mission, called in October to ask if I could help with the recovery efforts from the storm. Two weeks later, I was in Aurora, NC, employed by the conference Disaster Response Program.

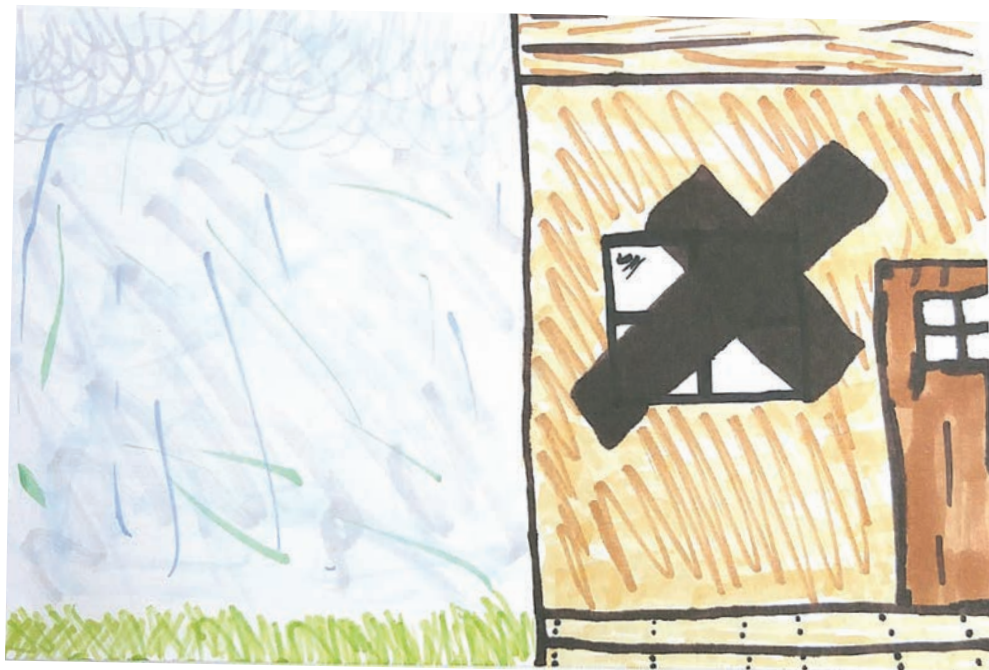
I worked as a construction coordinator, utilizing great volunteers from across the US and Canada, repairing, and in some cases, totally replacing, homes of families damaged by the storm.

I transitioned from disaster response work in 2013 to work with the Conference Board of Mission construction group, assisting churches within the North Carolina conference with

renovation and construction projects.

Outfitting shower trailers for the Disaster Response Program, used by volunteers during their recovery work, is something else I've been able to help with. The onslaught of Hurricane Matthew this year has called for these units to be utilized again.

"Lord what can You do with a 59-year-old ditch digger?"



Storm drawing by  
Rosslyn Koch

# Vehicle of God's Love

by Sandy Nash

Over the years, you have probably heard the story: the bell clangs, and the fire department horses and Dalmatian dog are called into action. The firemen slide down the brass pole and away they fly to respond to the needs of others. The horses' gait falls into lockstep to move the fire apparatus as speedily as possible. The Dalmatian sits next to the fireman, ready to act as a service dog to calm crying children whose house is burning, look for people who might not be easily found, and generally watch out for his firemen buddies and be part of the team.

To me, these are the disaster volunteers rolled into one. Hopefully they have the desire to do their part when called on, be trained to do their job, and be willing to wait patiently until called upon to do whatever is necessary.

I've been volunteering since age 12. At age 2, when I sat on the little chairs in Mrs. Little's Sunday School class, she always told me how much Jesus loved us and all the people in the world, how He cared for us in times of good and bad, and how He was always there for us. When Mrs. Little did

her felt board presentations, Jesus always looked so kind, like the best friend in the world. We sang *Jesus Loves Me* and before we left, we placed our offering in a wicker basket. This offering didn't come first in the scheme of things. We didn't pay Him to love and care for us but rather as a thank you offering because He did. That is how I view volunteerism.

I've been blessed to have lived a comparably safe and secure life, so I am ready to help others whose lives have not been as sheltered as mine. With them, I can share my Christian perspective, either by praying with them or sharing scripture and a meaningful thought, or praying alone for them – later – and waiting for God to lead me in their behalf. Volunteering during a natural or man-made disaster brings you to your knees.

Preparatory prayer is needed when you first hear about a disaster you might feel is coming and that the results of which might consume your coming days. It is prayed as you pack and head for the place you will be serving. Never can you be totally prepared by a training course you've taken

or an experience you have encountered on a similar trip. The reason: a disaster doesn't exist on its own; it exists to affect people, places and things, each one very differently.

Of course you pray for safe travel, but being able to accept and internalize what you see when you arrive is a matter of immediate prayer.

Sometimes you will pass some of the damage as you get close to the area. Other vehicles (RVs, trucks, buses, vans, cars) going in your direction give you a sense of support that you aren't the only one that the Lord has called.

Going to a man-made disaster, like 9/11, you can't begin to believe what man can do to man. I flew into New Jersey on a beautiful spring day, went to orientation in the bustling area of Greenwich Village, and then was transported to Staten Island. There, I would be working at a landfill named Fresh Kill – it was the name of the people who sold the land for the landfill.

The next morning, we were taken to a desolate area at the end of a service road.



When I looked to the left, I saw a non-stop row of burned-out cars, trucks, fire equipment, ambulances, and taxis. When I looked to the right, I saw a giant mountain of clothes and shoes that had been randomly chosen by the World Trade Center workers, clients, and visitors who had come to work that fateful morning in September.

In the midst of everything was a giant air-filled building with several tractor trailers attached. Here, the workers were to eat and rest during their lunch times and breaks from their dismal assignment: to recover anything they could from the debris brought by barge from Ground Zero.

My job was to help feed the crews and give them some verbal support, a prayer, a tract, or just a hand on their shoulder. In that minute, I knew that God knew just where he had sent me and my duty was clear.

And others were there who knew their purpose, too. Who had set up a home in the area and was building a dam? A great big beaver! The caveat: he was corralling the water left when exiting vehicles were washed down to remove contaminants. God knew just where he had sent him and his duty was clear. How amazing is our God!

Prayer time comes in many ways while working with other volunteers and those you are serving. One time, in the aftermath

of a flood, I saw a volunteer who had worked many hours for her church. We were set up in their parking lot. She was the "go-to" for everyone coming down the sidewalk one way and I served the same for those coming the other way. I know all she needed was someone to give her a hug and inquire about her health. That was more meaningful to her than any prepared prayer card.

When working with many families who are the victims of disasters, the greatest prayer is silence – maybe holding their hands, touching their shoulder, letting them cry on your shoulders, and allowing them to verbalize their sorrow for their loss or tell you how mad they are at God and man.

After a day on site, you often sleep somewhere in a church, on the floor, or occasionally, when we took our motor home, in a real bed. There you relax, reconsider what you have done, how God has used you as a vehicle of His love to His people, and how blessed you are to be on His team.

Add a new dimension to your active prayer life. Volunteer!

*Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.*

*Romans 12:12-13*



# Blessings in Multiple Forms

by Mike Ward

Katrina made landfall in Mississippi a year to the day after Hope and I moved there for her first appointment as bishop. We were on the coast in the days following the storm, and returned regularly during the months and years that followed.

I figured that I could be most useful in recovery by sweating it out alongside other volunteers. I put myself through college doing maintenance at an apartment complex. That means that I know a little about a number of construction tasks, and not a lot about any single one of them.

That said, I could haul relief supplies, and in the recovery stage, I could handle a shovel, clean out muck, tear out wet insulation, and spray down gutted frameworks with disinfectants. And I'm not bad with sheetrock. So we spent a lot of time on the coast helping with home repair.

The blessings came in multiple forms. We spent time around incredible people. There were pastors who set aside their own losses as they worked tirelessly with their congregations and their communities. There were faithful and determined folks

who moved us by their witness as they reassembled their lives. There were heartbroken folks who just could not recover, at least not in those environs, and they left for new lives elsewhere.

There was hospitality from people who were in no position to host others, but did so anyway. One couple, as we gutted and re-walled their home, made us a different bayou feast every night...prepared in their FEMA trailer! And there were volunteers from everywhere. They came and they kept coming...and Methodist volunteers helped over 75,000 households.

My contributions were modest compared to folks who really knew how to handle tools. I hope that I made a difference as a volunteer, but I found that I could also be useful in other ways. I was a faculty member in the College of Education and Psychology at The University of Southern Mississippi. The RAND Gulf States Policy Institute gave us a grant to study the impact of Katrina on schools. We dug into lessons learned about preparation and response for schools in disasters. We inquired about the impact on teachers and school services. For me,



the most meaningful research occurred when I looked at the storm's impact on displaced students. The results weren't surprising: displaced kids had lower achievement, were more likely to drop out, and had worse behavior than their non-displaced peers. What was unsettling is that these problems persisted, and even increased, in the years following Katrina.

I'm convinced that research like this is useful well beyond the statistics that are produced. What matters most is that we learn something that can help others. I'm hopeful the lessons we gleaned and shared from the experiences of students, educators, and families have made and will make response and recovery a little easier in subsequent storms.



# The House That Peanut Butter Built

## by Tommy Gilbert†

In August 2011, Hurricane Irene blew through much of the Caribbean and the east coast of the United States. According to Wikipedia, Irene is "ranked as the seventh-costliest hurricane in United States history."\* But to one family in Pamlico Beach, North Carolina, rebuilding their house was just a matter of about 200 jars of peanut butter.

The house, occupied by a mother and her young daughter who longed for a purple bedroom, suffered devastating damage from flooding. As Director of Disaster Response Field Operations for the NCCUMC, I assessed the damage and determined that the house could be rebuilt, if it were reconstructed on pilings. The mom had received \$16,000 from FEMA which she kept in the trunk of her car for safe-keeping. She had also gotten a loan from her boss for \$14,000 to help with rebuilding expenses.

I calculated her available funds and determined they were adequate to cover the \$40,000 rebuilding costs. So our team tore down her house.

Later, I called my daughter, recounting the story and basking in the joy of helping someone. But then my daughter did the math – correctly. "Dad, \$16,000 + \$14,000 = \$30,000. Where's the other \$10,000?"

Sometimes silence can be like thunder.

When I called Cliff Harvell, Conference District Response Superintendent, and told him about the problem, Cliff offered no respite: "You tore down the house and you've got to come up with some money."

When my stomach stopped churning, I went out to eat with my wife, my burden weighing heavily on me. When the dinner bill came, it was about \$50 for the two of us. That's when I got the idea.

"If I can get everybody to stay home and eat peanut butter sandwiches for one meal and give us that \$50, we can raise the money."

It took about six months and 200 peanut butter dinners to get to \$10,000. Sticky checks appeared from everywhere, including from work teams who were already rebuilding the house. And soon the young daughter slept peacefully in her new purple bedroom.

To this day, the family remains in the house that peanut butter built. I don't know whether the daughter's bedroom is still purple, but I do know that I am now using a calculator.

\*Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. Wikimedia Foundation Inc. Updated 12 December 2016, at 01:36 p.m. Encyclopedia on-line. Available from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane\\_Irene](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hurricane_Irene). Internet. Retrieved November 2016.

# Top Four Worst, and Best, Ways to Help After a Disaster

## by Susan Kim

When disaster strikes, often we see heart-wrenching images on television. People have lost everything. Their homes are swept away or lie in a tangled heap. Their belongings are ruined.

We immediately want to help – a good intention that stems from compassion for our fellow human beings. However, be certain to couple your compassion with good judgment on the best ways to help disaster survivors.

Here are the top four most common pitfalls into which helpers fall after a disaster – and what they should do instead.

Resist the urge to jump from your couch and drive to the disaster site. When Hurricane Sandy struck the mid-Atlantic, scores of people decided to drive to New Jersey, New York and other affected areas. The result? Clogged interstates, a worsening gasoline shortage, and volunteers arriving in droves and diverting the attention of emergency

personnel. What to do instead? When you watch or read the breaking news about a disaster, respond immediately – with prayer or a cash donation.

Don't give the shirt off your back. Did you know that donations of used clothing are commonly called "the second disaster?" When clothing piles up at a disaster scene, it must be stored, hauled away or sorted by volunteers who could better use their time helping disaster survivors. Instead, cash donations help disaster survivors purchase needed items from local businesses, which boost an economy weakened by disaster.

Don't believe that recovery takes only a few days. Well-intentioned donors often give money or relief-supply kits only while a disaster is prominent in the news headlines. In fact, for a major disaster, recovery can take years. If donations dry up after a week or two, responders no longer have the resources to help disaster survivors. Those survivors feel forgotten,

and their recovery doesn't progress.

Don't forget your own disaster preparation and training. If you want to respond in a safe, helpful way, seek disaster-response training and learn how to prepare yourself so you can respond should the need arise. Preparing can be as simple as forming a plan with your neighbor, or as involved as becoming a specialized responder who serves on a United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) Early Response Team.

The next time disaster strikes, put your compassion into action through prayer, cash donations, relief-supply kits, training and volunteering. You will help disaster survivors around the world.

Susan Kim is a freelance writer and regular contributor to UMCOR.org. Article reprinted with permission from Interpreter, March/April 2014. Interpreter, [www.interpretermagazine.org](http://www.interpretermagazine.org), is a publication of United Methodist Communications, Nashville, Tennessee.



# Signs of GOD Amid the Destruction

by Barbara Ann Carlow Lacoste

There were signs with Hurricane Katrina. I should have known with the very first sign.

We were making our way home from our evacuation trip, traveling roads that were closed and violating curfews. We were hearing of Katrina's destruction on the radio on the journey that seemed to take forever. We didn't know if our family members and neighbors were alive or dead. Then the information on the radio indicated that the water had come up all the way just under the Tchoutacabouffa River bridge.

My then 4-year-old daughter Elena reached from her car seat to grasp my arm and she told me, "Don't worry Mommy. It'll be OK. We have Jesus in our hearts."

Driving through my neighborhood in the days and weeks that followed Katrina, each house had its own sign – be it spray-painted onto the house itself or otherwise posted for all to see.

We had been told by various sources that what was left of our homes might have to be demolished due to impending

mold contamination if not for structural instability.

We had all painted our house numbers, our insurance policy numbers and sometimes our FEMA numbers prominently onto our houses in case the many inspectors came while we were at work. We wanted to be sure what was left of our homes could be easily found and identified as ours. But these aren't the signs I am talking about.

Some flew American flags. Others wrote "Katrina sucks." One neighbor, in a religious vein, wrote, "Grace like rain pour over me." Directly across the street was posted, "Everybody's got to believe in something, and I believe I'll have another drink."

Inside the house, we found many signs – messages to us probably from God himself. While most of our furniture had left the premises (and our property and in some cases, our neighborhood), our refrigerator lay on its side atop about three feet of debris.

It was bashed in, leaking awful fluids from the spoilage inside, and beginning to rust. However, my favorite refrigerator magnet was still firmly affixed to its host. The magnet is a smiling blue cat with the words, "A smile is a little curve that can straighten a lot of things." Outside, prominently entangled in the gardenia bushes, was my daughter's pink plastic "peace sign" necklace.





While all the destruction to the coastal burial sites left so many wondering about the state of their loved ones' remains, we found the funeral booklets from my mother-in-law's passing away just three weeks prior to Katrina, still on the mantle, undisturbed. Other framed pictures and many heavier items from the mantle were never found and the furniture in the room had washed out of the house. The picture of my smiling mother-in-law on the cover of those paper booklets was prominent on the mantle.

Elena located my "past-present-future" necklace in the debris. It is a small gold bar with three diamonds on that bar, so her finding it was very unlikely in the massive debris. I told her as we "mucked" that this was certainly not the future that we had planned for her, but that this would somehow be a much better future. This disaster had forever changed what we had envisioned our paths to be and had forever changed us. This new path would cause us to meet people we would never have otherwise met and learn things that we could not have learned without Katrina. Those around us represented God's own hand as they gave their vacation time, their energy and their sweat to come from North Carolina, Alabama and many other states to help people they didn't even know.

These angels salvaged, mucked, cleaned, cleared and re-built with their compassionate

hands. We were then blessed with many other blessings – high on this list was the blessing of less stuff. There is nothing like seeing a pile of debris about 30 feet long and 12 feet high at your curb to let you know you had too much stuff. We lost so much because we had so much. We have a lifestyle that is beyond the dreams of those living in Central America and many other underprivileged areas.

We had so much and were so richly blessed, but we still had so much even following Katrina. We had our church and our faith and we remained richly blessed. Our every need was met. We also had the blessing of staying with merciful friends who took us in – small children and all. We had the blessing of staying with many good parents and appreciated all the parenting tips they could muster in these difficult times.

We moved back into our home on Aug. 29, 2006 – Katrina's one-year anniversary. We invited many of those who helped us during the year for dinner that night, including the preacher who blessed the house. There were 28 guests for dinner that night.

God wanted us to keep our senses of humor as we sifted debris. Prominent within our debris was a framed print of Winslow Homer's "Hurricane." It is no longer a favorite! Another print that could not be located was Winslow Homer's "High Tide." Has anyone seen it? This print has also lost



favor with me. I replaced it with a print of a couple dancing after the tide has all but left the beach. The man and the woman each have someone helping them, holding umbrellas over them. This for me symbolizes the joy of rebuilding and all the help that the volunteers rendered to us personally and to the Gulf Coast. The print is by Jack Vettriano.

I don't think there is anyone who wasn't touched by another sign that we had scattered about the Coast. It was the blooming of tall, wild sunflowers suddenly in the most unexpected places. It was also the simultaneous blooming of flowers and plants out of their season. We had azaleas ablaze while the Easter lillies bloomed. The United Methodist Church referred to this as the re-greening or Second Spring. In part, it was a time for our spirits to be revived after all the grief and suffering. I believe simply this was God's way of giving us a much-needed hug. Have faith. Cheer up. Expect the unexpected. All things are possible.

My husband was able to locate one of our Christmas decorations amid the debris weeks after the storm and promptly posted it – a likeness of Santa's face with the word "believe." It became our mantra and remained posted for the entire year it took us to re-build our home and for most of the year following our move back home. The lessons of the signs still hold true.

P.S.

Thanks to the many volunteers who came to Heritage United Methodist Church in D'Iberville, Mississippi to help re-build our own home and a total of around 700 homes in our area. The North Carolina Methodists were extremely phenomenal in their outreach as an extension of God's own hand to us during that time of rebirth, renewal, and recovery.

Winslow Homer's painting "Hurricane"



## Helpful Resources

### Meeting God in the Ruins

A devotional guidebook for disaster response volunteers. This resource can be used by an individual or in a group setting.

Free to download.

[resources.elca.org/Disaster\\_Response-Meeting\\_God\\_in\\_the\\_Ruins\\_1.html](https://resources.elca.org/Disaster_Response-Meeting_God_in_the_Ruins_1.html)

### New Every Day

A 40-day devotional guide book or survivors of natural disasters.

[resources.elca.org/Disaster\\_Response-New\\_Every\\_Day\\_Forty\\_Devotions.html](https://resources.elca.org/Disaster_Response-New_Every_Day_Forty_Devotions.html)

### Disaster Distress Helpline

800.985.5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746 or [disasterdistress.samhsa.gov](https://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov)

# BEEN BLESSED

by Scott Phillips

Saturday, October 8, 2016  
Hurricane Matthew strikes North Carolina

1:18 p.m.

Received text message from my wife who is home with my 3-year-old son:

"We have a tree down on the house. We are ok."

1:39 p.m.

"Cross that, we now have 2 trees down on the house."

1:40 p.m.

"No, 5 trees down, all from the neighbor's yard, it just took our back porch."

I was not there. I thought it would be a cool experience to go to a football game with my 10-year-old son. Figured he could complain to his kids someday about the time his dad took him to a football game during the middle of a hurricane. Unfortunately, cell service is not great at the stadium and it was halftime before I got these messages.

In my defense, I had checked the

weather that morning and we were only expecting 20-30 mph winds in Sanford, and a lot of rain. We have been through much stronger storms in the past and the numerous oak trees surrounding our house had stood firm. This time we were not so lucky, but we are blessed.

I grew up in the small town of Halifax, NC. Everyone knows you in Halifax, and you know everyone. My dad was a volunteer firefighter there for over 40 years. As a kid, I thought it was great to be able to ride on the fire truck with him. We used to wet down the stage at the outdoor amphitheater on summer nights before First for Freedom. He would let me turn on the fire hydrant to fill the fire truck's tank after we were done. When I was 16, I used to go to fire calls and take photographs. When I turned 18, I joined the fire department and served for over five years during and after college when I was home. I was also a member of S.A.V.E.S. (Student Assistants Volunteering in Emergency Situations) while at NC State University. We rode with Public Safety Fire Inspectors and answered fire

and emergency medical calls on campus.

During those years, I thought it was very exciting to be a firefighter/first responder. Riding in emergency vehicles, responding with lights and sirens, putting out fires and treating injured people was thrilling. One December 26, we were called to a structure fire at a home outside of town. The home was well off the road and not close to a water source. When that happens, we set up a dump tank. One truck pumps water from the tank while another truck runs back and forth to the closest hydrant. I vividly remember standing in front of this burning home as my hose ran out of water. I waited for more water, helpless, as the home burned in front of me. The family was not physically hurt as they were not home when it started. They arrived while we were trying to fight the fire. There was nothing we could do to save their home or anything in it. I noticed the remains of the family's Christmas tree, as everything they owned was turned to ash. I went home that day and looked at my family's tree and all of the presents we had exchanged but could



not stop thinking about that family and all they had lost.

Twenty years later, I am having similar experiences with homeowners on an almost weekly basis. I work as a large loss insurance adjuster and mostly handle fire claims throughout the United States. I have worked in North Carolina after Fran and Floyd, New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, Beaumont, Superstorm Sandy and numerous other locations after disasters both large and small. I have met thousands of people from all walks of life in, what is for many, the most desperate times of their lives. I have talked to people who tell me they have a little wind damage, only to arrive at their home and find that half of the house is missing. I have others who tell me through tears that they have devastating damage, and when I arrive, I see a water stain on their ceiling.

A less-experienced-me would get upset at the latter. With two decades of work, Early Response Training (ERT) with UMCOR and a very helpful continuing education class in managing psychological trauma, I know that one of the most important things anyone can do for someone who has been through a disaster is to LISTEN. No one responds to a disaster the same and no one should ever attempt to change someone else's feelings. This is their home, the place most of us feel the safest. When damage has been

done to your safe place, it is a very personal, emotional experience. You cannot change what they feel, but you can provide a supportive, helping environment for them to vent.

I had many emotions as I drove home from the football game. I was finally able to get my wife on the phone and confirm she and my younger son were okay. She said she was on her way to church. She said she wanted to go someplace she felt safe. Church is an obvious sanctuary, plus it doesn't have large trees within striking distance. Thinking back on this time and the next few days, I realized how many blessings we had received.

When my wife could not reach me, she called our friend Neal. He and I started as adjusters together and I had always told her to call him when I was traveling if something happened to the home. He had called a contractor, who had already been by my house and determined there was no way to get a tarp on the second story during the storm as the other trees around my house were whipping around. Several trees fell later that afternoon and evening on my neighbors' homes.



After seeing my wife and son at church, I went home and started assessing the damage. One 80-foot oak had uprooted and landed in the attic on the front 2-story section. The other trees had crushed our screened porch and deck on the back of the home. Water was pouring in the roof and through my sons' bedrooms into the living room ceiling below. I tried to set up totes to catch what I could and move some of their items to try to protect them. Nothing else could be done until the wind and rain stopped.

We spent that night at church, joined by others who had sought shelter as they had trees block their driveway. I went back



home that night to empty the totes and helped my neighbor get into her home as, later that afternoon, she had two trees come down on her roof. She was able to confirm there was no leak. She knew a local tree person and said she would make a call to see when they could get out.

At this point, we had limited cell service, but we were able to check on family and friends to confirm they were okay. The day after the storm, we returned home to assess its impact. The two boys' bedrooms, which had recently been re-done, were ruined. Our backyard was full of uprooted oak trees. The screened porch, deck and fence were destroyed.

Our first visitor to check on us that day was a friend and fellow ERT member from church. This was followed by the entire clergy staff at church who was going around checking on members. We received numerous messages from friends and family, offering any support they could provide. Neighbors stopped by and checked on us.

Our next-door neighbor had reached the tree company and they arrived by noon and started working on the tree on our roof. My contractor was there to get the roof tarped immediately and set up drying equipment. We did not have power yet, but it would be back on the following day. If you have ever called a contractor or a tree person

after a storm, you realize the blessing we received by having them both there the day after the storm. It would take three more visits over the next couple of weeks for the tree company to finish getting the trees off the porch and fence. They were busy getting trees off houses first.

By Monday, I was receiving updates from the Disaster Response Committee at NCCUMC. I am a District Disaster Response Coordinator for the Fairway District and responsible for assessing damage and coordinating the conference's response in my area after an event like this. Prior to the storm, I had reached out to the State Emergency Management coordinators in the counties of the district. I started getting messages about people with trees on their homes who did not have insurance and needed help. I went to assess these homes and realized how lucky we were. We have insurance and already had a tree off the house and the process started with the contractor. Two of the homes had significant structural damage.

I was contacted by the Disaster Response Committee about help available from the Western North Carolina United Methodist Conference. The following Monday, we had a tree cutting team of Early Responders staying at our church, working on getting trees off these houses. It is true, when a disaster strikes, you can always find people

willing to help, the same willingness to help I have witnessed in so many prior disasters.

We were fortunate in our area that we did not have the flooding that devastated so many communities further east. As my wife and I set up a bedroom for our boys in the den, we counted our blessings that we still had a home. The stresses of dealing with the disruption of your normal routine can be draining. That week, we received another blessing from our church family. One of the staff stopped by to deliver gift cards that had been donated from our church family who had heard about our situation. It was a much needed lift for us.

For anyone who has ever thought, "Well, this isn't much, but it is what I can do right now," I can assure you it means more than you will ever know to someone who has been through a disaster. We have been blessed.

*The recovery efforts from Hurricane Matthew in Eastern North Carolina will continue for many years.*

*Go to [nccumc.org/disaster](http://nccumc.org/disaster) and find out what you can do to be a blessing to someone.*



# WASHED OUT THE BACK DOOR

by Kelly Barr

At six years old, Isaiah stands about three feet tall. He is thin and full of energy, and he has some big brown eyes that are full of curiosity. Fittingly, Isaiah goes by the name "Tiny." Tiny has a 7-year-old brother named Dominique who is much bigger in stature and will readily tell you that he is the "best athlete in the world." Dominique loves to hit a

baseball and has been nicknamed "Bam" for the way he hits the ball. Bam never walks anywhere; if he is moving, he is at a full run.

On October 8, 2016, Tiny and Bam, along with their mother and grandmother, huddled together in their cramped, 600-square-foot home, listening to the rain slamming against the roof. They could hear and feel the wind howling around the window frames getting

louder by the minute. Early on the morning of October 9, an earthen dam at a pond about a mile north of their home was breached after 14 inches of rain strained an already weakened structure. As the pond water rushed south, it filled another pond forcing a hole in that dam as well. Suddenly a wall of water rushed southward and engulfed the family's home. The water rose quickly in the living room from one inch to three feet in less than 15 minutes. Tiny's mother scooped him up in her arms and waded uphill to a neighbor's home. The floodwaters had come so quickly that there wasn't time to take any possessions other than the clothes on their backs.

One month later, a family of five is crowded together in a one-bedroom home. As I stand with Tiny's grandmother, Alice, in front of her former home, tears stream down her face. "It ain't much," she tells me, "but it was mine. I want to go home." The sheetrock walls and flooring have been torn out of her home. The wooden bones

of the home's skeleton are visible. Fans are running at each end of the house in an attempt to dry the wood. I have spent many hours inside the home, assessing need, working with teams to tear out wet materials, and spraying for mold.

Each evening on my way home to my warm, comfortable home, I stop by to see this family of new friends. I talk with Tiny and Bam about what went on at school that day and spend a few minutes playing baseball or kickball with them. I can find Alice walking around the outside of her home, picking up a stray piece of trash left over from the tear out, or just looking around. Today, Alice throws her arms around me and weeps on my shoulder. She whispers in my ear, "God is so good to send you to me to help me get my life back."

I cry with her at that statement as we embrace in the small yard. It will be many months before Alice and her family are back in the house, and I will walk with them every step of the way.





Just down the road from Alice stands another small home that fell victim to the floodwaters. Bobby and Elizabeth are a septuagenarian couple who lived in the home for the span of their 54 years of marriage. They raised four children in the home and entertained grandchildren. Here too, you can see the bare studs in the wall and the floor beams in the process of drying.

Elizabeth has told me, "You can't imagine what it is like to see 54 years of marriage wash out of the back door." I drive by the home of Bobby and Elizabeth almost every day as well. I do not usually find them at the home, Bobby's radiation treatments for his cancer (diagnosed a week before the storm) conflict with my scheduled "drive by." I will never forget how Bobby cried when our team finished tearing out the home and told the team, "God bless all of you. If it wasn't for y'all, we would never be able to go home." Like with Alice and her family, I will walk every step of the way with Bobby and Elizabeth until they are safely back in their homes.

I will walk with Alice, Bobby, and Elizabeth not because I am an expert carpenter or social worker. I will walk

this walk with them because I am selfish. The feeling I get giving a part of my life to these families is indescribable. There is no doubt in my mind that the old adage, "It's better to give than to receive" is fact. These families are not the only families we have worked with, but they are the families that have touched me most.

My wife, children and I have taken seriously the admonishment of James, "If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:15-17 NRSV). We feel that we have been called, as Christians, to be the hands and feet of Jesus in this world.

My wife Julie, my daughter Chrissy, and sons J.P. and Robbie began working immediately after the storm getting food and supplies to those in need. They continue their work getting Christmas gifts for hundreds of children displaced by flooding. Like me, the other members of my family are richly rewarded by being able to share a little

of the blessings we have received with those in need. My family will continue to walk beside those in need to receive those blessings.

There are literally thousands of people like Alice, Bobby, and Elizabeth who remain displaced by the storm. There are hundreds of children like Tiny that spend their days in FEMA hotel rooms or homes of family or friends. These families have something in common: they have lost everything except their faith. So many times we have heard them thanking God for the blessing of a bottle of bleach or a pair of shoes. So many things that we take for granted are a blessing to families in need.

I often hear my wife say, "I'm tired. I need a break" and yet I see her continue, day after day, giving all that she can to help families. Alice, Bobby, and many like them have told us that those helping them were a blessing from God. In actuality, you will find that helping others recover is the bigger blessing. Especially in the storms of life, we can see the blessings of God. All you have to do is look.



# Shouldn't We Blame GOD?

by Belton Joyner

If we give God the credit for the good days—beautiful weather, calm family relationships, peace among the nations—why shouldn't we blame God when the storms break into our lives?

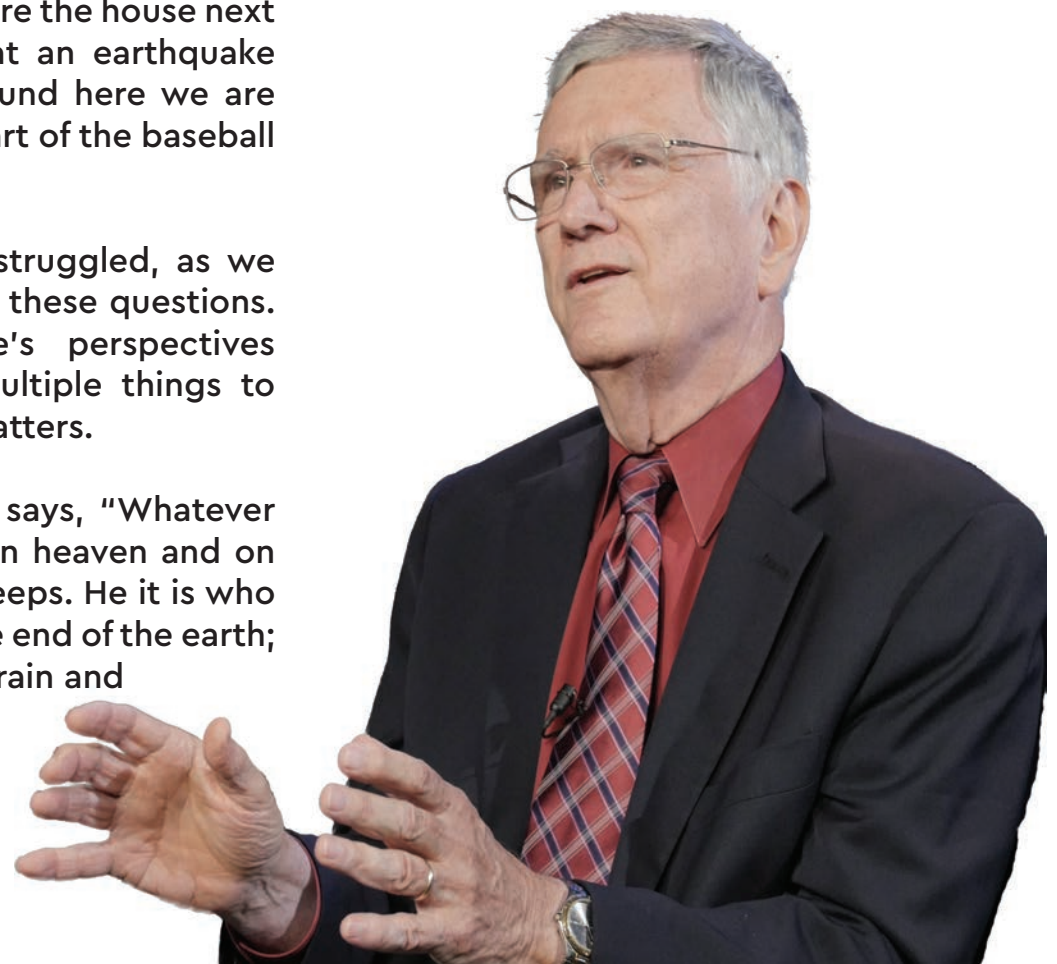
It's easy enough to spot the things in the human condition that can bring brokenness into the world: pride, lust, greed, envy—choose your poison. The storms that erupt from racism, sexism, classism can be explained by human sin. We can even understand that human judgment can lead to natural disasters. Think of oil spills, chemical leaks, and the environmental impact of pollution. What about global warming?

But, even after we have explained away some weather storms by naming the human component, we are left with the unexplained. Is it God's fault when a hurricane sweeps across our state? Is it God's fault when a typhoon

threatens entire islands of the Philippines? Is it God's fault when the lives of 85 million are disrupted by the sleet, snow, and ice of a winter storm? Is it God's will that a tornado rip apart one house and spare the house next door? Is it God's will that an earthquake devastate Nepal while around here we are more worried about the start of the baseball season?

The biblical writers have struggled, as we have, to sort through all of these questions. The range of the Bible's perspectives suggests that God has multiple things to reveal to us about these matters.

For example, the psalmist says, "Whatever the Lord pleases he does in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain and brings out the wind from storehouses" (Psalm 135:7).



For example, Jesus says, "...He makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45b).

For example, Acts 27 and 28 contain a story, about a drastic wind that pounded the ship on which Paul was sailing. It went on for days and there was finally a dramatic crash of the vessel into a reef. All had to abandon ship, but they reached safety and "the natives showed us unusual kindness. Since it had begun to rain and was cold, they kindled a fire and welcomed all of us around it" (Acts 28:2).

Which is it? Is it a weather-wizard God who sends rain precisely where He wants it or is it a God who set in motion a system of weather that does not choose its recipients except randomly or is it a God who stirs the gifts of compassion to reach those impacted by storm?

The prophet Isaiah reports one thing God has said in answer to those questions: "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you" (Isaiah 54:10).

The apostle Paul acknowledges that the created order is in bondage to decay, "groaning in labor pains" awaiting the birth of freedom from that decay (Romans 8:21-22). Human sin has broken the harmony of creation (see Genesis 3:15, for example). God's intended created order has been the victim of human sin.

Jesus Christ is the total revelation of God. Remember John 1:14, 18? "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth...No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known."

God has the power to handle storms in any way God chooses, but when we look at Jesus, we learn that that power is not always something to be grasped (Philippians 2:6). Even so, what kind of chaos would surround us if we lost the predictability and consistency of natural principles?

One of my grandsons is studying at Florida State University for a Master's degree in meteorology. He has learned that for some persons, the complexity

of the universe points to a divine creator; for others, the complexity of the universe has explanations that do not include the providence of God.

Is God an absentee landlord? Is God a fickle distributor of weather? Is God helpless to do anything about what He started? Is God present in the consistent presence of new beginnings? Is God active in the caring responses of those who reach out to storm-shaken victims? Is God also experiencing the same hurt that shatters those hit by storms?

I conclude that our best approach to these questions is to hear what Isaiah heard from God: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

So, because of an ice storm I could not get out of my driveway to go to my sister's funeral. So, today has been an uncompromised day of warm and calm. So, the tornado ripped through Raleigh and missed my parsonage by half a mile. So, another time, a neighbor I barely knew showed up on his own



with a chain saw to ask if he could help get debris out of my yard. So, my friend from high school days died when he drowned in flood waters that lapped into his yard. So, I had food to eat when my house's power was off for a week.

It's a mixed bag, isn't it? Simple answers do not fit. God's mystery is always beyond my understanding, but I have the confidence that God's mystery looks like Jesus Christ... and that mystery has a happy ending. Thanks be to God.

*I Need You*

I'm broken inside  
And this pain in my heart  
I can't hide.  
When it seems that everything  
I love is gone,  
And everything that could  
went wrong  
When there's nothing else,  
I need you.  
Cause I'm crying and I'm torn  
My spirit is broken, my heart is worn  
And when it seems there's  
nothing left to do  
That's when I need you.

from the album "All Things New"  
written by Elizabeth Cumbest Byrd

# Changed Because of a Storm

by Elizabeth Cumbest Byrd

*"My outlook on who I am and what God has called me to do changed because of a storm. When Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, I was scared. I sat in the corner of my living room crying, wondering if my family was alive and trying to find hope. I started praying, and I picked up my guitar and sang a song that would be a new beginning for me." \**

**I was 15 when Katrina hit and was 16 when I released the CD - *All Things New* - with seven songs written about Hurricane Katrina. They are prayers set to music, praising God but also expressing fears and heartache.**

**I am now 25, a second-year seminary student at Candler School of Theology, and I am serving as a student pastor.**

\*From an interview published in devozine (January/February 2008, pages 43-45). © 2007 by The Upper Room. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

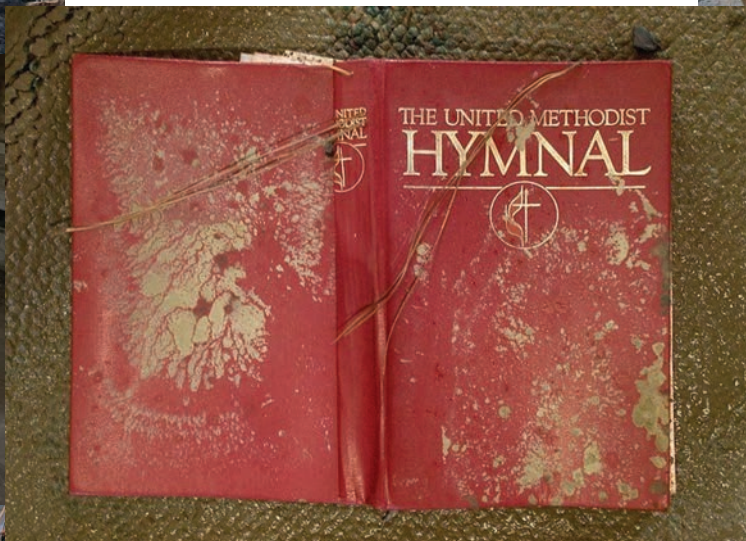






Even in the mud  
and scum of things,  
something always,  
always sings.

Ralph Waldo Emerson





In eastern North Carolina communities, wind and water destroyed our homes, scattered our possessions, shattered our cherished things, devastated our financial security and ravaged our neighborhoods. We are in need of help, receivers of mission generosity. It was our unwelcome task to grieve, to mourn and to move through this time toward tomorrow. There is no going around it, over it or under it. We are called to go through it to the other side where strong hope beckons and restoration waits.

*Hope Morgule Ward*





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*He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will  
continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope.*

2 Corinthians 1:10