

# FOCUS ON FAITH

## HANDLING DISASTER

Someone once said that Christians are always answering questions no-one is asking. That's a trifle harsh in my opinion but I understand what is meant by it. There is a tendency for some people to think of Christianity as being old-fashioned and out of touch with today's reality. After all, in our modern society, isn't a year a lifetime, let alone the 2,000 years since the Christian faith was founded?

But over the past few months, one question keeps cropping up that many people want to know the answer to – *"What is happening to our world?"* And from a faith perspective it can be a difficult one to deal with, but I'm going to give it a try!

Our television screens are filled with acts of terrorism, ethnic cleansing and war. Natural disasters, famines, accidents and traumas of all kinds seem to be occurring with increasing frequency and then there's the impact of global warming, rising sea levels, pollution and the destruction of the ozone layer. Many are wondering what it all means, where it will lead to and especially what can be done about it – if anything.

**Jesus has been there - He literally bears the scars**

Last year when the Tsunami hit South East Asia there were theories doing the rounds that this was God's way of getting the attention of Muslims. So were Hurricanes Katrina and Rita pay back time on America for their involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan? I don't think so for two reasons.

- Firstly I don't believe God acts like some ancient tyrant exacting vengeance on His disobedient subjects. Although the Bible clearly says that there will be a day of final reckoning when God will judge the way we've handled life especially if we've rejected His salvation, I don't believe natural disasters are His way of taking it out on us now - today.
- Secondly, natural and man-made disasters aren't respecters of persons. The Tsunami and the Hurricanes brought devastation to rich and poor, male and female, young and old – people of every ethnic, cultural, racial and faith background. The London bombings and 9/11 didn't discriminate either.

Christians aren't exempt from tragedy just because we're believers whilst those who haven't signed up to our faith don't automatically get more than their fair share of problems or dealt a bad deck of cards. That said, sometimes the consequences of our actions do revisit us.

Natural disasters and accidents happen. Misguided people perpetrate evil actions. Selfishness, ambition and greed often cause suffering to the poor and the disadvantaged. Consumerism together with our striving for more and better standards of living, result in trade-offs with the world's natural resources which then become depleted.

So are there any positive outcomes? I can think of at least two:

- In times of disaster and difficulty many acts of kindness are shown – often to complete strangers. Bad things happen to good people, but good people happen to bad things. Comfort, support and the provision of physical and financial resources demonstrate our concern for others going through a difficult time. Lasting relationships are formed from many adverse situations.
- And I also believe that at times of personal tragedy many people begin to wonder whether their so-called *'three score years and ten'* is all there is. That maybe there is a God and an after-life and if so, what can be done about it? It's like an internal reality check.

The old Negro Spiritual goes, *"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen; nobody knows but Jesus"*. And that's the key. God is not remote – He's been here, walked the earth, dealt with difficulties, disasters, disappointments and tragedies. Jesus – God's only Son – had to deal with the stigma of a supposedly illegitimate birth, the death of His earthly father at a relatively young age, hostility from the authorities and finally false accusations, ultimate rejection and the cruellest death imaginable. Jesus has been there – He literally bears the scars!

As I've said before in 'Focus on Faith', life is all about choices. We choose how we deal with difficult and tragic situations. We choose how we react when relationships and careers fall apart. We choose our response when others less fortunate than ourselves suffer and are hurt in either a natural disaster or by the unscrupulous actions of others.

And we decide whether we believe or not in the God of love who wants all of His creation to enjoy a relationship with Him. The Apostle Paul wrote that God doesn't want anyone to lose out on His offer of salvation (1 Timothy 2: 4). And He also told the Corinthian Christians, *"Now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation."* (2 Corinthians 6:2).

It's worth taking some time – today – to think through the implications of the choices we're making.

If you'd like to talk to someone about these issues, log on to [www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk](http://www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk) where you'll find information and contact details of local Christian churches. Or alternatively, drop me an email using the link on the website – I'd love to hear from you.



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