

FOCUS ON FAITH

Stephen G. Derges, Pastor of Bridgnorth Baptist Church



“WHAT” AND “HOW” RATHER THAN “WHY”

Over the past 3 weeks the plight of the people of Haiti has gone from the top of the news agenda to much lower down the pecking order. How easy it is for our minds to be totally shocked by the scenes of suffering we saw on our TV screens to becoming almost immune to the needs of millions of people that will be affected for the rest of their lives by the devastation that occurred in just a few seconds.

Hopefully none of us could have failed to have been moved by what we've seen in the news but all too soon we begin to focus on other priorities that vie for our attention. How many of us these days give a thought for those still trying to recover from the Indian Ocean Tsunami that caused so much loss of life and damage back in December 2004 – yes it was more than 5 years ago!

... if we don't start asking the right questions nothing is ever likely to change

The stories of survival in Haiti have been wonderful and the resilience of people in crisis situations is amazing as is the generosity of individuals and governments in trying to alleviate the pain, anguish and distress the Haitian population is currently going through. It takes very special people to drop their normal responsibilities at a moment's notice and fly thousands of miles to a disaster area to help and we should praise the specialist rescue teams, the medical personnel and charity workers who willingly serve in this way.

All too easily though the majority of us can feel we've done our bit by making a donation through the Disasters Emergency Committee or some other charity. Please don't think I'm being cynical about it – we need to put our hands in our pockets at a time like this – but perhaps it's time we started to consider what else we can do.

When natural disasters strike quite often the question on some people's minds is “*Why does God allow such things to happen?*” Pat, easy answers are both inappropriate and, in my view, insincere. For instance there is no reason to believe those affected by earthquakes, tsunamis or other catastrophes are being punished or that in some way “*they deserved it*” – after all those suffering are no worse than the rest of us. But whilst the world is a beautiful place it can also be very dangerous and millions of people around the world don't have a choice about where they were born or have the resources to move from places of potential harm.

Here in the UK we are so fortunate to live in a relatively safe environment although of course we are affected by some inclement weather phenomena such as floods and even the very occasional tornado or minor earthquake. Perhaps we should review whether that places a greater responsibility

on us, as members of a global race, to have more consideration for those who do not enjoy the privileges we have.

So for me the question is not so much about “*why it happened*” as “*what and how*” we learn from the situation and specifically the changes that occur as a result.

There are a plethora of issues that need to be addressed:

- Whatever we believe about the causes and effects of global warming, there is no doubt that millions of people in “delta regions” across the world will be adversely affected by rising sea levels
- Here in the UK for many years we've built homes on river floodplains and now wonder why there is an increase in flooding
- Our natural resources, especially fossil fuels, are running out and we all know that is bound to affect our lifestyles
- Millions around the world have insufficient food, clean water supplies and ineffective sanitation facilities leading to premature death and debilitating illness that could be avoided
- Malaria kills 1 million people annually – that's one person every 30 seconds – yet could be virtually wiped out if enough mosquito nets (which literally cost pennies) and suitable drugs could be provided

Haiti was already a financially bankrupt nation due to man's greed, corruption and inability to govern effectively – 80% of the country are already living on less than \$2 per day yet because they were predominantly “*out of sight – out of mind*” the people were left to get on with it. Now they – like countless others around the world – are faced with additional burdens.

The apostle James wrote two centuries ago, “*If people say they have faith, but do nothing, their faith is worth nothing.*” Is this a wake-up call for us again? How long will we ignore the plight of fellow human-beings who are suffering?

It's time to stop asking “*why*” and start asking “*how can I help?*”; “*what can I do?*”; “*where can I go?*”

The answers will be different for all of us but if we don't start asking the right questions nothing is ever likely to change!

To find out more about the Christian faith and resources available plus information on local Churches together with contact details, please log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk.