

Partnering with God

Prayer as a Crisis Response

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God invites all of us to join in crisis response through prayer. In recent years, prayers for unreached and unengaged peoples have increased, along with crises and disasters in many of the same places. We don't pray for crises to happen, yet the increase in man-made and natural disasters has caused millions from unreached peoples to become refugees in places with Gospel access and openness.¹

We don't presume a direct cause-effect relationship in the following story, which has been peer-checked and cross-checked by trained local researchers. Yet, we can say that the prayers of the righteous do have a mighty impact.

Hakeem, a Syrian carpenter, was working 16 hours a day to feed his family and maintain the property built by his father. He shared, "The earthquake destroyed our house and killed my wife and four of my five children. We lost everything."

With tears in his eyes, Hakeem continued: "One night, I was sitting over my destroyed home, looking up to the sky and talking with Allah. I said, 'Why did this happen to me and thousands of people here?' Inside, my heart was screaming. For the next hour, I stared into the night sky and kept asking this question.

"Suddenly, I heard a voice say, 'Hakeem.' I turned around but did not see anyone. The voice spoke again, 'Hakeem, I am Jesus.' Then I saw a face as bright as lightning talking to me. He said, 'Your house is in heaven, not here on this earth; don't be sad.' As He said this, I felt like a child being hugged by his father. My body felt at peace for the first time in a long while. Then He left. I thought, 'It was a dream.' My soul said, 'No, it's true.'

"Two days later, some people came to help us. They were feeding children and caring for us in the pain, and I felt the same feeling of a hug from these people! So I shared with them what I had seen. The team said,

¹ See "Movements Responding to Crises" article on page 8.

‘Tonight come to where we are gathering and we will tell you more about what you have seen!’

‘I waited eagerly for the night to come, and I took my only remaining son with me. They showed us the Jesus Film. In the middle of the film, I shouted, ‘Stop the film!’ and asked how to accept Jesus. The face in the film was the same one who had spoken to me two days previously.

‘This is how the Lord Jesus accepted me into His kingdom. Now, my son and I are meeting with all my tribe and my wife’s tribe. We are spreading the news of what happened to me and encouraging everyone to watch the film and follow Jesus. Please pray for us.’

Through prayer and Kingdom-Movement efforts uniting globally, more than 100 million believers have come together to pray for people in the Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu worlds to turn to Jesus. Following the earthquake last February in Turkey and Syria, many felt disillusioned, discouraged, and without hope. Yet through this tragic event, many thousands have come to Christ, and healthy, reproducing churches have been planted. Hakeem’s story is not an isolated example. Numerous similar accounts have come from new believers among Unreached People Groups after they have experienced disasters.

Walking the streets of Lebanon after the blast in 2020, I (Mary) felt like I was walking along the shore of an ocean of miracles every day, as people’s prayers were being answered 24/7 in unexplainable ways. Local people closest to the blast recounted how they had mysteriously survived, thanks to a God they did not know. John Robb, a disaster-response intercessory leader with World Vision for many years, shared that through reconciliation prayer, he and his teams have seen at least nine civil wars cease among people previously far from God. People have testified how miraculous powers of intercession have led to peace, through repentance and people turning back to God during crises. During several crises, prayer has literally changed the front page of national news headlines overnight!

As disasters continue to occur, prayer can play several strategic roles. From stories like Noah, Joseph, and the church in Jerusalem, we see that prayer can lead us

prophetically in how to prepare for things to come. Genesis 6 describes God’s order to Noah to prepare for a coming disaster. *So make yourself an ark...* (Gen. 6:9-22). Jesus referred to that event in warning His followers to be ready for His return as well. *As the days of Noah were* (Luke 17:26). After a long journey of highs and lows, Joseph began preparing for a disaster because of a dream God gave to the leader of a nation. Joseph spent seven years preparing an entire nation, then seven years leading the nation through the disaster response, which also led to reconciliation with his family.

God uses disasters and crises to build His Church. The church at Antioch was birthed from believers who fled because of persecution in Jerusalem. Then, when the church at Antioch became aware of an impending disaster, they sent money to other churches to prepare before the crisis happened. They led a regional disaster response from Antioch (Acts 11:27-30). Many more accounts in Scripture instruct us about preparation. Consider Proverbs 6:6-8; Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 24:42-44; Mark 13:32-33; Luke 21:36; 2 Timothy 4:2; and Hebrews 11:7.

Whether or not people are prepared, disasters strike and many are left with an overwhelming number of decisions to make in a short period of time. A useful response strategy can be birthed from prayer, as prayer bathes the entire effort. We see in 2 Chronicles 20 an occasion when multiple nations waged war against King Jehoshaphat. *Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah.* All of Judah came together, with entire families, including the children and little ones, to pray. In response to their prayer, the Lord prophetically gave them a unique strategy: to put worshipers at the front of the army. As they praised God on the frontlines, God caused the armies of the enemies to turn on one another and for the news to spread to all the surrounding nations. Such victories continue to happen today! Prayer leads to strategic insights into how to respond, *as nation [rises] against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, with famines and earthquakes in various places* (Matt. 24:7)—which happen to be taking place 24/7 and in need of 24/7 prayer.

We currently have a *kairos* moment, as we witness an acceleration of wars, rumors of wars, plagues, famines, and earthquakes in various places as Jesus predicted. Could this acceleration be one of the ways God answers our prayers for the last remaining least-reached peoples? As snapshots of disasters appear on the news, specific prayers can be increased for the nations. Many local Kingdom Movement leaders said the increased attention on the Middle East after 9/11 led to increased prayer, which fueled breakthroughs among Muslims across the region. Global media attention can spotlight those the Lord wishes to reach and showcase His wonderworking power.

How then shall we pray for those who are suffering? God can use suffering to shape individuals and also to bless, contingent on their response. Praying through Scriptures on suffering can change the world. As Isaiah describes it, *The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary* (Isa. 50:4). A helpful guide is the Prayer Cycle on Suffering that facilitates one hour of prayer in 5-minute increments. This can be used to pray for others in suffering, crisis, or disaster, or when you are in that season yourself. Several other resources are listed below. Equipping God's children to pray for those in crisis, disaster, or suffering simultaneously disciplines them for their own response to suffering when it comes.

Whether we pray as one affected in the middle of a crisis, as a prayer strategist on a crisis response team, or from afar, we know that *The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit*

(Ps. 34:18). Brokenness is often felt most acutely during disasters. Those may be some of the greatest moments to experience God at work, as He comes close to the brokenhearted. Paul wrote to Titus, *Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good in order to respond to urgent needs and not live unfruitful lives* (Titus 3:14). May this ring true of all we do, including our prayer, that we may effectively respond to urgent needs, and not live unfruitful lives.

Further resources:



Pray using live maps of disasters taking place globally: GodinCrisis.vision/m247 (click around the map for more details to inform prayers for the disciples and churches that live in or near the crises).



Suffering Blog Series by Curtis Sargeant, with Scriptures on suffering to use in prayer.



www.prayerstrategists.net—for prayer strategists embedded in crisis-response teams.



www.110cities.com and www.10days.net are some of the global prayer movements that include prompts for interceding on crises, disasters, and Kingdom Movements.



www.prayer.global—a website and app that is interactive with location-specific prayer fuel for all 4,770 states in the world, including Scripture prompts to pray for disciples' response to suffering. 

