

FIRST PERSON: Christmas hope that puts broken pieces back together

*By Shawn Hendricks
The Baptist Paper*

A familiar spotlight returned to the sky near my home in early December. The spotlight sits at the base of the newly rebuilt outdoor nativity scene on the property of First Baptist Church Hendersonville, Tennessee. The glow of the light was a welcomed sight after it suddenly went out a couple weeks before Christmas last year, when about a dozen tornadoes hit the central part of the state.

Tornadoes snapped trees, powerlines and damaged homes and businesses – and at least six people lost their lives from the storm. Today, some businesses are still closed, and some homes remain damaged. The church's nativity scene was among many things destroyed. A church member who has since passed away had constructed the nativity out of wood, painted each piece white and decorated them with tinsel that sparkled at night.

While the destroyed nativity scene was a minor loss compared to the deadly destruction that night, it still serves as a reminder of how God restores broken things – and protects.

On the night of the storm, about 800 people had gathered on the church's campus for their annual Christmas program. I was planning to go that night but ended up seeking shelter in my house. While the storm rolled onto the church property, those inside also thankfully remained safe as a tornado narrowly missed the church building. Some in the area weren't as fortunate.

Trusting when there are 'no answers'

Pastor Bruce Chesser shared in a video the next day how times of crisis and tragedy don't often seem to make sense, but God has a plan. "There are times in our lives when we just have to trust the Lord," he said. "It could be a car wreck, it could be disease, it could be the death of a child. And there are no answers. There's no answer. Sometimes we just have to trust the Lord and say that He knows what He's doing."

Restoring broken pieces

A year later, on Dec. 3, Chesser posted a picture of the newly rebuilt nativity scene. He thanked the group of men who took the remnants of the old nativity and restored it. "Their hard work has given us a beautiful reminder of how God takes the broken pieces of our lives and puts them back together."

Many others still continue to struggle to put the pieces of life together following a year of more storms and worldwide conflict. Many survivors of the remnants of Hurricane Helene that hit the Southeast in September remain displaced in places like the mountains of North Carolina. Thankfully, Baptist Disaster Relief workers across the country have helped provide food and needed items to those who have lost homes. Churches continue to help distribute needed items to help people in the area stay warm as temperatures drop this month.

A simple outdoor nativity scene made of wood is among the reminders of a God who provides hope and shelter for a broken people. It's a hope that no tornado or any storm can wipe away.