

MAGNOLIA MINDS: 'When Disaster Strikes' sounds like a PSA. It is, sort of...

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We live in a fallen world, and it's never more evident than when we view disasters – both physical and personal.

We stand by helplessly and see cataclysmic forces of nature wreaking havoc. As a Mississippian, I'm way too familiar with tornados and hurricanes alike. I'd also put the implosion of the Titan submersible as a natural disaster, even though the wisdom of even getting on that thing is debatable.

Personal disasters? Illness, loss, heartbreak? For sure. We all face trials that test our resolve and faith, but how should Christians respond when disaster strikes?

The Bible, that timeless beacon of our faith, gives us guidance. This passage has always been one I'm not comfortable with: rejoicing in sufferings. Really? It's in there, though. Romans 5:3-5 tells us, *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts (ESV).*

As Christians, our first response to personal disasters should be to stand firm in faith. Disclaimer: That isn't always easy. This faith doesn't deny the pain or the suffering we experience but allows us to see beyond the immediacy of our circumstances, recognizing them as part of our earthly journey.

Remember, we're pilgrims and sojourners, and life is a real journey fraught with peril. Consider the story of Job, a man known for his patience amidst suffering. I can't get away from this guy.

Job's life was stricken with disaster. He lost his children, wealth, and health in quick succession.

Think you got it tough? Job 1:20-21 records his response to the personal disasters that engulfed him:

Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said: *'Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord'* (ESV).

Job's resilience in the face of such tremendous personal disaster sets an example for all Christians but before you put Job up on some kind of pedestal reserved for superheroes, don't forget: he's a human, just like you and me.

Secondly, we are reminded to seek comfort in God's presence and promise. I've used this Scripture several times at graveside funeral services, but it's always appropriate when dealing with hard times. Psalm 46:1-2 proclaims:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea (ESV).

When disaster looms, we must lean on God and draw strength from His enduring love and unwavering presence.

Here's another and if you're a control freak, this one hurts. We must acknowledge our human limitations and surrender control to God. Proverbs 3:5-6, a passage worth memorizing, says:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own

understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight (ESV).

Personal disasters often leave us grappling for control, but as Christians we find solace in the sovereignty of God, knowing that our lives are in His capable hands.

Finally, we are called to love and serve one another, especially in times of disaster. Galatians 6:2 instructs:

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (ESV).

Christians should respond to personal disasters by extending hands of help, offering prayers, and providing comfort to those in need. Read that again: we are servants. Don't forget it.

Take the example of the early Christian community, as depicted in the book of Acts. When a great famine struck the entire Roman world, the believers in Antioch chose to send relief to their brothers living in Judea (Acts 11:27-30).

Their collective, compassionate response provides a blueprint for us today, teaching us that disaster response is not just about personal resilience but also about communal solidarity. We need each other.

Personal disasters, whether physical or personal, can be profound opportunities for spiritual growth and community building. As Christians, we are invited to respond with faith, hope, and love.

Look beyond the immediacy of your trials, seek comfort in God's presence, acknowledge His sovereignty, and bear one another's burdens. In the face of life's storms, these responses not only sustain us but also fulfill our higher calling as followers of Christ,

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