

## Responding to Natural Disasters

by Coty Pinckney 5/24/08

On May 2, Tropical Cyclone Nargis hit Burma, leaving tens of thousands dead. Many more lost their homes and all their possessions. Today survivors remain in grave danger in the absence of shelter, clean water, and food.

Ten days later, a huge earthquake shook Sichuan Province in China, again leaving tens of thousands dead and many more homeless. In addition to lack of clean water and exposure to the elements, the aftereffects of the quake continue to threaten residents; dozens of would-be rescuers have died as buildings collapsed around them.

Yesterday morning, an aircraft laden with relief supplies worth over a million dollars took off from the Charlotte airport, bound for China. The supplies, purchased by donations to Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, include material for temporary shelters, water filtration systems, blankets, and medical supplies. I had the privilege of attending a gathering of local pastors prior to takeoff. I encourage you to give to these efforts, as we have done.

Why? Some might say, "Many, many others around the world give to help those who have suffered from natural disasters. Christians are the only ones who will give to spread the Gospel. Therefore, all our efforts should focus on the Gospel."

What is wrong with this argument?

Certainly the premises of that argument are correct. We must focus on establishing churches in all the people groups in the world. This is the missionary task given to the Church; if we do not fulfill it, no one else will.

But biblically, the question is not either/or. The question is not should we give to one cause or the other. We clearly must be involved in both. Consider these principles from Scripture (the texts are printed at the end of this document):

*1) Jesus felt compassion for the sick and the bereaved, and acted out of that compassion.*

Luke 7:12-15, Matthew 14:14

*2) We are to be like Christ in the world, mourning with those who mourn, weeping with those who weep.*

1 John 4:17, Romans 12:15

*3) We are to show special concern for the afflictions of our brothers and sisters in Christ, for in serving them we serve Jesus Himself.*

Matthew 25:31-46, Hebrews 13:3

*4) But we are to love all our neighbors as we love ourselves by the power of the Holy Spirit – and our neighbors include all those who cross our paths.*

Luke 10:25-11:13; see also my sermon on this passage at [www.expository.org/luke10b.htm](http://www.expository.org/luke10b.htm)

*5) In this way, we glorify God in the world.*

Matthew 5:16, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15,  
1 Peter 2:12, 4:11

Given these biblical truths, we surely should give to such relief efforts.

Furthermore, relief efforts may well open doors to spreading the Gospel to the unreached peoples of the world. Consider that one of the greatest barriers to evangelism is the myth of our immortality. We all, at some level, acknowledge that we are mortal; we know we will die. But we block out those thoughts most of the time. We say, "I'll think about death some other time" – and we say that day after day after day. Many, many people never seriously contemplate their own mortality.

But natural disasters change that. Many come near to death. Many more lose loved ones who had no idea they would die that day. Such survivors need much more than a blanket, shelter, and food. They also need spiritual help. By weeping with these who weep and by providing for their material needs, we put ourselves in a position to provide for their spiritual needs too – even at their request.

So I encourage you: Give. Pray. And may God choose to glorify Himself through these disasters, as His people, moved with His compassion, use His resources, in dependence upon His power, to show His love to those in need.

*Scriptures Cited:*

**Luke 7:12** As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. <sup>13</sup> And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." <sup>14</sup> Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." <sup>15</sup> And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.

**Matthew 14:14** When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

**1 John 4:17** By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.

**Romans 12:15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

**Matthew 25:31** ¶ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious

throne.<sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.<sup>33</sup> And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.<sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'<sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,<sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'<sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?'<sup>38</sup> And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?'<sup>39</sup> And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'<sup>40</sup> And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'<sup>41</sup> "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'<sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,<sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'<sup>44</sup> Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?'<sup>45</sup> Then he will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.'<sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

**Hebrews 13:3** Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

**Luke 10:25** And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"<sup>26</sup> He said to him, "What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"<sup>27</sup> And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself."<sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."<sup>29</sup> ¶ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead."<sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.<sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion.<sup>34</sup> He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.<sup>35</sup> And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.'<sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?"<sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."<sup>38</sup> ¶ Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.<sup>39</sup> And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.<sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell

her then to help me."<sup>41</sup> But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things,<sup>42</sup> but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." **11:1** ¶ Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples."<sup>2</sup> ¶ And he said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.'<sup>3</sup> Give us each day our daily bread,<sup>4</sup> and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation."<sup>5</sup> ¶ And he said to them, "Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves,'<sup>6</sup> for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him';<sup>7</sup> and he will answer from within, 'Do not bother me; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything'?"<sup>8</sup> I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his impudence he will rise and give him whatever he needs.<sup>9</sup> And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.<sup>10</sup> For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.<sup>11</sup> What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent;<sup>12</sup> or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?<sup>13</sup> If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

**Matthew 5:16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

**2 Corinthians 9:6** The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.<sup>7</sup> Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.<sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.<sup>9</sup> As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."<sup>10</sup> ¶ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.<sup>11</sup> You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.<sup>12</sup> For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God.<sup>13</sup> By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others,<sup>14</sup> while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you.<sup>15</sup> Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

**1 Peter 2:12** Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

**1 Peter 4:11** whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies--in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.