

“Katrina” By: Doug Warren

How can I help those suffering from the ravages of Hurricane Katrina?

I don't know how anyone can see the devastation brought about in the Gulf Coast and not be moved to want to help in some way. Yet, I find that the massive scope of the need leaves many of us asking not only what can we do, but also struggling with how little we are able to do. What I would like to do here is address two issues rising out of these questions: our response and a heart check.

There is much that we can do. Don't allow the massive need to squelch your participation. Let me suggest five ways for you to consider: **give, gather, go, partner, and pray**. First, give money to the relief efforts through a recognized charitable organization, church or synagogue. Some are asking whether monetary gifts are really needed in light of the billions being sent by the government. The answer is yes. With so many immediate necessities your gift through the Red Cross, Salvation Army, or other disaster relief agency makes a huge difference to real people with real needs.

Second, gather other needed materials to send. This may involve coordinating a blood drive; collecting bottled water, books, or clothes; even working with your children to donate things to other families. The idea is to find specific needs not being met and gather the appropriate resources together. You may not have thousands of dollars to give, but the critical items you gather may be worth more than gold to those who receive them.

Third, consider going to help directly. You may have needed skills in areas such as medical, building, logistics, or dozens of others. Please be sure to plan well before you go so your help is able to be the most constructive. Work with an organization with a proven track record in disaster relief and abide by their guidelines. Sometimes well-intentioned volunteers can actually do more harm than good.

Fourth, look for ways that you can partner with those in need. Some have offered housing or jobs to families who have been displaced. Others have linked their school, business, or church with a similar group in the affected area and formed a partnership to help that sister organization.

Fifth, pray. Call out to God for those in need and ask Him to comfort, heal, and protect them. He knows each and every specific need and every person affected. He is able to help and your prayers may be the instruments through which He brings healing.

Not only are our actions important, but so are the motivations for our actions. One of the things that I have noticed when there is this kind of tragedy is an overwhelming *need* to do something. I hope the five actions outlined above will help direct your desire to participate in constructive ways. At the same time it is significant for us to do a little reflecting and not simply busy ourselves with action. The same dynamics that make it so imperative for us to find concrete things to do are also powerful indicators of our necessities.

One of the things that is so unsettling about disasters of this magnitude is that they reveal our own frailty. When we see others who have everything washed away, it raises questions in our own minds and hearts about our own security. Some of our rush to help others is a way of avoiding facing that insecurity. It is not that this is the only or even primary motivation; a great deal of compassion and altruism are motivating factors too. But often our response is not just a desire to help, but a compulsion to do something that reveals much more about us than the disaster itself.

The crisis is an anomaly. At least that is what we tell ourselves. We have so much that helps us maintain the illusion of our self-sufficiency that we begin to believe it. Our jobs, homes, families, hobbies, friends—these act like props to make us feel that we have some measure of security. Seeing others stripped of them all can jar our sense of autonomy.

What is important not to miss at this juncture is for us to admit our dependency. So much in us resists that at all costs. Just stay busy and we won't have to face it. But God tells us that we are dependent creatures. We cannot add a single heartbeat to our lives that He does not give us. We cannot add a single breath. All that we have is a gift to us by His grace, not by our own making. Rather than running from the frightening prospects revealed by such disasters, this time is a moment for us to embrace the truth of reality—we are dependant creatures. Our need for God is not something to be embarrassed about, but the source of our greatest dignity and glory. By admitting our dependency we find the freedom to give to others, to do great things, not out of compulsion, but out of grace. When we recognize that we are the recipients of so much it emboldens us to give outrageously.

So what do we do to help? Do something, not out of guilt, but out of love, because you have been given so much. Whether you give, gather, go, partner, and/or pray, consider not just what you can do, but why and what that reveals about you.