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Natural Disasters

WE DON'T HAVE
TO BE AFRAID

The last days will be marked by many calamities and the rise of evil in the world. Against these threats the Lord and His prophets have given us counsel on how to be righteous and avoid spiritual pitfalls and evil. However, calamities—such as tornadoes, earthquakes, and tsunamis—seem to strike randomly and devastate the just as well as the unjust. These calamities terrify many of us. But I have learned that we don't have to be afraid of disasters. When we are grounded in the gospel and when we are prepared, we can weather any storm.

Before the Storm: Make Preparation a Family Priority

In September 2005, I was an Area Seventy serving in the North America Southwest Area, which included parts of the United States such as Houston, Texas. We learned that Hurricane Rita—the most intense cyclone in recorded history that had ever been observed in the Gulf of Mexico—was headed straight for us. I was asked to preside over the Church's emergency response in the area. We held daily conference calls with priesthood leaders, stake presidents,

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mission presidents, Church welfare and humanitarian aid representatives, and emergency response leaders. We talked about all kinds of things—whether the bishops' storehouse was in order, where people could evacuate, and how best to coordinate the recuperation efforts after the storm. It was a well-coordinated Church response and an inspirational experience.

One of the stake presidents in the area was impressed eight or nine months before the storm to encourage members of the stake to prepare. He indicated that he wasn't claiming to be a prophet but that the promptings from

the Spirit had been clear. Members of the stake followed the basic preparation strategies suggested by the Church. When the hurricane hit, no members of the stake were killed. Furthermore, because members had gathered needed supplies and had a plan in place, their circumstances were far better than they might otherwise have been. They had paid attention to that warning from the Spirit.

A similar situation occurred to my family and me. About three months before the storm, we were impressed to

Do you want to talk to your children about giving and receiving comfort during disasters? See the inspiring testimonies of two young survivors on pages 60–61 of this issue.

Previous page: Workers sort through the rubble of an apartment that collapsed during the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti.

People evacuating Houston, Texas, USA, before the onslaught of Hurricane Rita.

have our generator serviced. Many people in the area have small generators so that when storms come and electricity is lost, they can provide power to keep the food in their refrigerators and freezers from going bad. When we had our generator checked, we discovered it was not working. We were able to get it fixed well before the storm came. Our family, members of our ward, and neighbors all ended up using our generator after the hurricane hit. Fixing it turned out to be a great blessing.

This principle of preparation applies to individuals as well as families. Parents, you can have a powerful impact on your family by involving your children in preparation and in family prayers for the Lord's guidance. In other words, when your family considers its preparedness, the question, what should we do? ought to be a major part of your family prayer. You can also talk about these topics and share

ideas in family home evening. Then carry out those plans.

Moreover, the best thing parents can do is to live by these teachings. Someone once said that values are “caught” not “taught.” I found that to be true. As children see their parents seeking and following the guidance of the Spirit, they will learn how the process of revelation works.

During the Storm: Follow the Revelation You Receive for Your Family

As the storm approached, a major question we asked was whether or not people should evacuate the area. The Spirit directed me not to make a general recommendation for the whole area but rather to ask each stake leader, each bishopric, and each family to prayerfully consider the situation and receive their own inspiration as to what they should do. As events unfolded, it became obvious that the Spirit knew what was best for each individual family.

Leaders in one stake, for example, knew they were directly in the path of the hurricane and advised members to evacuate. The stake president and his wife evacuated to the home of his sister. Afterward, the hurricane veered, heading toward them once again. They had evacuated directly into the storm!

You might ask yourself, “What kind of inspiration was that?” But consider what happened. This stake president and his wife knew how to prepare a home for a hurricane, whereas his sister did not. They were able to help their relatives get ready for the storm, and when it hit, the damage was minimal compared to what it would have been otherwise. The Lord had guided them to do what was best.





A Mormon Helping Hands volunteer sifts through rubble in Joplin, Missouri, USA, after a tornado in May 2011.

In our family's case, we felt that we should not evacuate. So we stayed. Not only did we safely weather the storm, but we also were able to help other people in the area. Some of our married children were impressed to evacuate, so they left. Heeding the Spirit blessed each family, ward, and stake.

After the Storm: Let the Gospel Remove the Sting

Sometimes good people do suffer during calamities. The Lord does not eliminate suffering—it's part of the plan. For example, a stake center in the central United States was recently destroyed by a tornado. That tornado also demolished the stake president's home. He and his family lost all of their earthly possessions. However, that's all they were: earthly possessions. The loss was sad, but it was not an eternally damaging disaster. Sometimes what we think is important really isn't important at all. This realization is not necessarily easy to accept, but it is true, and understanding this provides reassurance.

The worst-case scenario in one of these disasters is that someone might be killed. That's a very sad thing. But since we know the truth, we know that even such loss is part of Heavenly Father's plan. We know what life is truly all about; we know why we are here and where we are

going. Because of this eternal perspective, the pain can be eased. Knowledge of the plan of salvation takes the sting out of death (see 1 Corinthians 15:55).

Long ago, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego did not know what would happen when they were tossed into the fiery furnace for refusing to worship a false god. They said to the king, "Our God . . . will deliver us. . . . But if not, we [still] will not serve thy gods" (Daniel 3:17–18).

Likewise, many pioneers of the restored Church were willing to attempt crossing the North American plains in the mid-1800s, even with the possibility of death along the way. The Book of Mormon describes good people being killed and teaches that they "are blessed, for they have gone to dwell with their God" (Alma 24:22).

In each case, individuals faced death with faith. For them, because of the peace the gospel brings, the sting of death was taken away. Although it is painful to lose someone you love and though most of us would hate to die because we have so many great things to live for, the fact of the matter is that everyone is going to die sometime. When you know the gospel plan, you know that death is not the end of the world. Your existence will continue, and family relationships can continue even after the grave has claimed our mortal bodies. In the overall scheme of things, death is not eternally devastating. As Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught: "We live to die, and we die to live again. From an eternal perspective, the only death that is truly premature is the death of one who is not prepared to meet God."¹ An eternal perspective is part of the peace the gospel can give us.

The Lord knows us. The Lord loves us. And the Lord wants to help us. Calamities will come, but we don't have to fear them. If we are willing to be guided and ask for His direction, the Lord through the Holy Ghost will help us prepare for, endure, and recover from any natural disaster. ■

NOTE

1. Russell M. Nelson, "Face the Future with Faith," *Liahona and Ensign*, May 2011, 34.