

Thankfulness That Leads To Action

Lord Why have You been so good to me?

I just saw a car insurance commercial recently where these two guys are upside down hanging by the shoulder harnesses in a flipped over car, smoke barreling out from around the wheels and the agent is happily telling the driver about how great it was that the guy had “vanishing deductible” and he won’t have any out-of-pocket expenses related to the accident. Then he says something like, **“When you consider everything, it’s really been a pretty good day”**. I think that’s how we often feel at Thanksgiving. We look back on the year and take all things into consideration to conclude we do have some good reasons to be thankful. Then we pass the turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy and start looking forward to Christmas and a better go-around next year.

Nothing in my life has challenged my prospective about the matter of thankfulness more than trips that have taken me to areas of our country ravaged by devastating natural disasters. This past April and October I had the opportunity to travel with two teams to New Orleans (NOLA) to help in an on-going effort with TouchGlobal Crisis Response helping people of the city still recovering from Katrina. I also made a June and August trips to Madison Alabama with other caring folks to help people put their lives back together after a rash of tornadoes in their town. To be there and see the destruction and stand with families that have lost just about every worldly possession in their life is very sobering to say the least. Then to realize we are there to somehow help encourage them and make a difference in their lives Wow, it’s quite an adventure every time!

I was talking in June to a grocery store check-out lady in Alabama and I asked her how she made out with the tornado. She recounted how happy she was that she didn’t seek refuge in her bedroom when the tornado came because the front wall and the back wall of that room both had large holes in them about the size of a car. Turned out, her new car that had been parked in front of her house in the driveway was found among the debris in the back yard. All indications were her car went right through her bedroom. There was an elderly lady we helped finish cutting down trees and moved them out to the street for FEMA to pick up. She shared with us how she survived the tornado in her bathtub with a mattress pulled over her. She was so joyful as she told us that God spared her clothes and Bibles she gave away which were in two closets that remained standing. The rest of the house was completely destroyed.



While in NOLA this fall a neighbor right around the corner from a home we were helping to rebuild explained what it was like when the levees broke and the city filled with water. One of our team members named Cindy recounts what he shared with her. ***“What touched me the most was hearing from John? John was a fairly young man we met our first day out walking. As he shared of his Katrina experience when he told of hearing his neighbors cry out for help from the rooftop of their house, the water rapidly rising in the utter darkness of a city without power, it went on and on. I can still feel the sadness and chill I felt as he recalled the eventual silence that came. His neighbors were no longer pleading, they were no more. We stood there listening and looked across the street as he pointed to the place these neighbors once lived. All that was remaining was a vacant lot and John's 6 year old, horrifying memory that he will no doubt re-live in his mind for the rest of his days.”*** Part of the grieving process for many folks involves talking about the trauma that they have endured. I believe that as Cindy stood there and listened to his heart wrenching story she was able to share in this man's pain and let him know she hurt with him and cared about what he had been through.

People need to know we care before they care to hear what we have to say. My friend, Dr. Michael Sprague, shared in his book **Disasters: Betting The Farm On God in Life's Storms** this truth, ***“What people really want to know is whether we promote hate or love. I'm convinced if we are not in the compassion game to some extent; it's hard to be in the evangelism game at all because many will not even give us a hearing in today's culture.” “We have seen more people saved through the good deeds/good news approach than any [other method]”.***



When in NOLA our friends at TouchGlobal have us host what is called a “block party” often in front of a house we are helping to rebuild. We cook up hot dogs, play music, give out chips and bottled water. We go around the neighborhood and invite people to come. As we were walking down one of the streets about a block away from the event a car with a man and woman in it pulled up in a driveway just ahead of us. We stopped and invited the folks to the party. They thanked us but were unable to come. We asked if there was anything we could pray with them about. Somewhat stunned they said yes there is, ***“We just came back from making funeral arrangements for a family member”.*** We held hands and

prayed with them right then and there. They were very grateful and felt God brought us along just at the right time to encourage them. Back at the block party a team member from a Pennsylvania team shared the Gospel with another young man and he placed his trust and faith in Christ. We never know what divine appointments await us when we go on a crisis response trip. *Ephesians 2:10*

Here's what another dear lady from our team named Wendy shared after she returned from our fall trip to NOLA, ***"What I liked the most was the combination of actually helping with the physical needs, along-side of the walking around the neighborhoods to pray with people you passed by, or share God's love with, or just pray for the neighborhood. My faith has really been revived by having an opportunity to do what I have been hearing in sermons to do for about 30 years. I have grown tired of being told to serve those in need but not seeing an avenue to do it. I know there are lots of needs right around me, but I did not see how I could step in to help. This gave me a start, and I now feel more confident to serve God in similar ways locally. But yes, I definitely want to go again, especially because I felt an open door to share the love of God, even in miraculous ways, which I think is a result of God's grace to these people, and their grateful reaction to the helpful responses of Christians serving to help in the ongoing crisis which has followed hurricane Katrina. I'll never forget the time where we gathered in a circle and held hands to pray with a local Christian man to have more friends and fellowship, and the presence of God came upon our group and we all felt such love for each other. Who would have expected this to happen on a street corner of New Orleans? Or to casually have a conversation with a gang member with the tattooed tear drop beside his eye, as if we were old friends? Thank you for the opportunity to experience such things, and may God continue to draw the people of New Orleans to Himself"***.



I recently stumbled across something I wrote about a year after Katrina when I returned from an earlier trip to the Gulf Coast. I have to say I still felt this exact same way a few weeks ago when I arrived

home from our last trip. ***“I pulled up to my house Saturday night after spending a week with people that lost just about everything they ever owned including in some case, friends and family members. My week in Mississippi included seeing an endless display of collapsed houses, crushed cars and trucks and destruction everywhere I turned. Then I pull up in my driveway and became overwhelmed to see how I still had my house, my cars, my wife and family, all of my wonderful friends (Yes, you are one of them) and I have to ask the Lord with tears in my eyes, Why have You been so good to me? Thank you Lord for all the blessings You have given me and continue to allow me to enjoy”.*** It's sad but sometimes it's necessary for us to leave our comfort-zone and spend time in someone else's disaster-zone to realize how blessed we really are.

Thank you for allowing me to share some of the things I am thankful for this Thanksgiving Day. Also, thank you to the 39 people from 6 churches that joined us on trips with TouchGlobal this past year. I would love to have many more folks consider joining us on a crisis response trip this coming year. The next one most likely will be at the end of April. Be looking soon for an announcement about that trip. Lastly, if you would like to have me or a member of the [TouchGlobal](#) staff come and share with your church about the ministry opportunities that abound in wake of devastating disasters, please contact TouchGlobal@efca.org.