
HOW TO FACE DISASTERS

A SERIES OF BIBLE STUDIES TO STRENGTHEN CHURCHES
AND COMMUNITIES FACING DISASTERS



*Paz y
Esperanza*

“HOW TO FACE DISASTERS”

Series of bible studies to strengthen churches and communities facing disasters

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Based on the experience of Peace and Hope Foundation in serving the humanitarian, emotional and spiritual needs of the victims of the earthquake in Ecuador on 16th April 2016; and based on the methodology used in the series of bible studies, **“Healthy Families, Free from Violence”**, produced by Peace and Hope Foundation in April 2016.

Dedicated to the huge number of pastors and leaders that daily face challenges in accompanying and caring for the victims of disasters.

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INTRODUCTION

On the 16th of April 2016, an earthquake of 7.8 on the Richter Scale hit Ecuador, leaving close to 700 people dead, 9 missing, 6,274 injured, 28,775 placed in shelters, 720,000 affected, thousands of buildings destroyed and 6 provinces in a state of emergency: Manabí, Esmeraldas, Guayas, Los Ríos, Santa Elena and Santo Domingo.

Peace and Hope, through alliances with churches and local institutions in Manabí and Esmeraldas, provided humanitarian, emotional and spiritual support to the people, which consisted in the implementation of community kitchens where those affected by the earthquake were fed for 2 months, the delivery of food kits for families, hygiene kits, water filters, psychological, emotional and pastoral support to the communities affected by the disaster, as well as training for children in the prevention of child sex abuse in the context of disasters. Peace and Hope also got alongside small initiatives to help improve the economic outlook of those affected by the earthquake, as well as provide motivation for the local church and communities to prevent and reduce the risks of future disasters through specialised training sessions in risk management and how to mitigate the effects of disasters.

To this end, and with the support of the Integral Alliance (including Tearfund, World Relief and World Renew), these bible studies have been produced in order to help the communities and people affected by such disasters to face aspects such as pain, sorrow, confusion, desperation, and a loss of hope. They also provide an opportunity to reflect on complex issues such as: “Why me?”, “Is this the judgment of God?” and “What do I do now?” Finally, they address how to plan for natural disasters in terms of mitigating their effects and reducing the risks.

This guide is designed to be worked through in family or church groups. Each study starts with a real-life story or testimony, followed by an invitation to discuss the topic through feedback questions and hypothetical situations that the readers should consider and respond to. Then follows a bible passage which provides the main teaching for the topic, together with background information to place the passage in context. There is a further opportunity to reflect on what this passage may be trying to teach us followed by a challenge on how to “put into practice” the lessons learned and apply them to our daily lives. Finally, there are suggestions for prayer points in order to encourage the group and promote a dependence upon God during difficult times, as well as space for making additional notes on anything that has had a particular impact us or on things which the Lord may have been speaking to us about individually.

We hope that these bible studies are a useful tool and make a profound difference in the lives of all of those who use them.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

- **Role of the facilitator:** The facilitator should familiarise themselves with the themes dealt with during the specific study, ideally having read through and delved into the bible passages for each session, and should try to lead the session in a dynamic way which encourages participation from all.
- **Time for prayer and intercession:** It is important to separate a time specifically to pray and ask God for his wisdom and direction/leading through the bible studies, as well as interceding for those who will be participating in each session.
- **Time:** Each study should last approximately 45 minutes.
- **Time management:** It is important that the facilitator is aware of the time and manages it to ensure that the study is lead in a planned and structured way. Equal time should be allowed for all to participate and the facilitator should ensure that they encourage those who may be more reticent to share their thoughts as well, to avoid any single person dominating the conversation.
- **Open dialogue:** The facilitator should attempt to generate trust within the group and an understanding of the overall objective, encouraging the participants to open their hearts and speak honestly, actively listening to whoever is speaking.
- **Final prayer:** After thanking the participants for their willingness to engage and active listening during the session, it is suggested that the session is concluded with time for personal reflection and prayer, thanking God for his guidance and help.

BIBLE STUDY 1

GRIEVING

① STORY

“My name is Celeste, mother of José Luis, who worked in the shop ‘Everything Stationery’ in the building Felipe Navarrete located in Tarqui, Manta. On Saturday 16th April, like every other day, he left to go to work when the earthquake struck. I was at home and immediately thought about him. After a number of hours without any communication with him, I was told that the building where he was working had collapsed. Four nights passed without me knowing anything about what had happened to him, yet I still held hope that he would be found alive. I was desperate, but then came the news I’d been dreading: he had been found dead. It was more than I could take. All that remained were memories of his last words. There are people that say to me I should dry my tears and move on, but this pain is so strong, HE WAS MY SON! One can bury their parents or a sibling, but you can never be prepared to bury a child. That hurt so much. I don’t know if life will start to have some meaning again, but I can’t stop crying. How am I going to overcome the pain of him no longer being here? Of course, every father or mother deals with this kind of pain in their own unique way depending on their family history, past experiences and the closeness of their relationship with their child. To lose a child doesn’t just mean that they are no longer physically with you, but also that the dreams and plans you had in mind for them are gone.”

② DISCUSSING THE STORY

Grieving is a natural response to these types of incident, whether it be related to earthquakes, landslides, floods, hurricanes or other types of natural disaster or personal loss.

1. When reading the story, how do you feel?
2. What kinds of emotions do you think Celeste was feeling?

③ WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? READ JOB 1: 1-22

1. How was the relationship between Job and God?
2. What was the scale of his loss?
3. How did Job personally suffer?

④ REFLECTION

What a tragic day it is for Job. Everything that he once held dear to him is gone in the blink of an eye. His livestock and servants are murdered, and then his children are killed when the house of his oldest son collapses due to a 'mighty wind'. The very first thing that Job does when he experiences this terrible loss is to release his grief. He tears his robe and shaves his head, both ancient traditions to express pain and sorrow, as well as humility and grief. Then he cries out to God. The scope of this kind of tragedy has the power to produce a huge range of emotions in us, which often start with shock and denial, but also leading to anger, worry, sadness and depression. We need to learn from Job. Some of us find it very difficult to grieve, and often we suppress our feelings deep down and pretend they're not there. But this often leads to long term emotional stress. Job is quick to express his emotions and pour out his heart to God. Matthew 5:4 says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." In addition, we only need to take a look through the Psalms to see the example that King David sets. He is constantly pouring out his heart to God. Psalm 62:8 says, "Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge." If you are experiencing loss right now make the decision to release your grief first so that God can begin to heal your heart.

⑤ RESPOND

1. What areas of your life are affected most by grief?
2. What false ideas are there that prevent us from releasing our grief?
3. Are you happy to share your emotions with God in the way that David did? If not, what is stopping you?

6 PRAY

1. Pray that the Lord would help us to deal with our grief in a healthy way, following the examples of Job and David.
2. Ask the Lord to show us others who are grieving so that we may be able to comfort and support them in their time of need.
3. Pray specifically for members of your group who are experiencing grief right now.

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BIBLE STUDY 2

SEEKING REFUGE

① STORY

“My name is Edith Aurelia Ama Garcia and I’m from Manabí. My husband and I have lived for 40 years in the parish of Chamanga. I encountered the Lord in a place called Beche, and it was there that I gave my life to him. Some time after, I had to come here to Chamanga. I’m happy, the Lord has given us a job in a business selling coconut snowballs (a popular type of confectionery in the local area), and it’s a huge blessing for us. When the earthquake struck I wasn’t here, I was in Quevedo where my sister lives. At 7pm the house started to move, and the son of my sister was saying to her, “Mum, let’s get out”, but my sister was saying, “No, nothing’s going to happen.” But he grabbed her and took her out into the street, and I left with them. We stopped outside and everything was moving. My sister was scared and shocked, and it seemed like we weren’t going to make it through. I wasn’t afraid, but my sister was scared and was squeezing me tightly, whilst I cried out to God saying, “God have mercy, only you are God almighty.”

My house is affected, it’s pretty much destroyed inside, and we’ve had to move out. Just outside the house we’ve put up a plastic sheet and we’re living under that. The rooms inside the house are damaged, as is the front of the house. My husband, children and I are sleeping outside. Despite this I feel joyful, happy to see the wonders of my God, to see and meditate on his mercy. He is so strong and mighty, and the Lord in his word says, “I will never leave you, I will never forsake you.” Every day he will be with us. I give thanks to God, for he is strong and mighty.

② DISCUSSING THE STORY

1. What was Edith’s reaction during the earthquake?
2. In whom did she put her trust?
3. Despite everything that has happened because of the earthquake, where does her strength come from, and what is her perspective on life?

③ WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? READ PSALM 46: 1-11

1. “God is our refuge and our strength.” What are the characteristics of a place of refuge?
2. “God is our ever-present help in times of trouble.” Are you able to identify with this scripture? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

④ REFLECTION

“There was a contest where whoever painted the picture that displayed peace in the greatest, most compelling way would win the prize. There were all of these paintings of very beautiful, peaceful sceneries, such as the sun setting over an ocean, and palm trees blowing in the wind. All so peaceful. There was a pasture scene with these rolling, lush, green hills, a white picket fence and a beautiful lake in the background. One was a winter scene with fresh snow and a small log cabin. You could see the fireplace through the window, the majestic mountains in the background. It looked so warm and cosy. But the painting that won first prize was a picture of a huge storm with lightning flashing across the sky, rain coming down and wind blowing the trees. It looked just the opposite of peace. But over in the corner in the cleft of a rock was a bird in her nest tucked away. Underneath her outstretched wings were six of her baby birds. In the midst of this huge storm, they were just sitting there as calm and as peaceful as can be”. (Joel Osteen)¹

This is a great picture which helps us to understand the words of the psalmist in Psalm 46, in particular the first verse: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” At the times when we feel most helpless, God can be our refuge and strength. He can be the one that we can find rest in, despite the storm that is raging around us. To ‘take refuge in’ God means to trust him, which is a key theme in the psalms. And he is worthy of our trust, because he is powerful enough to take care of us. Often we can end up placing our trust in other things to help us through difficult times, such as friends and family, money or even insurance policies. But they can only ever get us so far, and they certainly cannot provide us with the

¹ <https://www.joelosteen.com/Pages/Blog.aspx?blogid=8>

deep inner peace that the Lord offers. We need to make the decision to take refuge in the Lord, put our trust in him, and shelter under his wings as we see out the storm.²

⑤ RESPOND

1. Are there other things in which we put our trust, aside from God? How can you take refuge in God during difficult times?
2. Are you experiencing a storm in your life right now? What do you need to do to find the peace of God?

⑥ PRAY

1. To experience the peace of God during difficult times.
2. For faith so that we can always put our trust in God and in his promises, and not in our own strength.

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² <http://www.westpres.org/daily-devotions/god-is-my-refuge/>

BIBLE STUDY 3

BRINGING HOPE IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS

① STORY

“It was very sad and painful. We were rehearsing with some musicians in the church, there were my two children and my husband, when the shaking began. We fell to our knees and could not stay stood upright. It was a horrible thing, as a mother the first thing I did was cover my children - I threw myself over them - I said even if I am hurt it doesn't matter to me. The lights went out and, though we managed to leave the church, we were afraid of the lamp posts and overhead cables falling on us. People announced a tsunami warning so we ran with all our strength to our house and continued walking towards a high place within the city, to a plane. Everyone was there with what they were wearing, some without shoes. We spent all night enduring the rain, we covered ourselves with a parasol. We kept calm and reassured our children. They were very frightened, and even now they can't be alone, they are afraid. The next day we toured the city and it made us sad to see that many people were left with nothing, houses and fallen buildings, many people died. Of what was Bahía, nothing remains, everything was destroyed. There was no communication, no light, so we were left wondering about people. We are currently working with the community, sharing the gospel, and people began to gather in the church. We speak as an area affected by the earthquake,” commented one of those affected by the earthquake, Andrea Carranza Jiménez, leader of the evangelical missionary church “Aguas Refrescantes” – Bahía de Caráquez.

“Our lives as a pastoral family have changed a lot, as spouses and parents, it has been a blessing; many people opened their hearts to the Lord and are receptive to the word of God. We have served as spiritual help; we are identified with the city, serving him. On 17 May we had been married for 13 years and, as we were so busy serving, we forgot our anniversary! God is great and has allowed us to pass through this ordeal, he gave us strength to help people. I feel satisfied and pleased to serve the Lord in this way. I never imagined that I had it within me, this service, to give, to

motivate people, to give myself completely to people and the community fully. The Lord has awakened this love and passion for people," says Andrea, excited.³

2 DISCUSSING THE STORY

1. What difficulties do you think Andrea has faced since the earthquake hit?
2. In what ways has Andrea been able to bring hope into her community during this time of tragedy?
3. To whom does she attribute her strength?

3 WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? READ 1 SAMUEL 30: 1-19

Background: David and his band of 600 men fled from Saul, the king of Israel who was continually hunting after David, and escaped to the land of the Philistines. After finding favour with the king they were given the town of Ziklag to settle in (1 Samuel 27). At that time the Philistine army gathered to fight against the Israelite army, but although David and his men pledged their allegiance to the Philistines, the king is not willing to take the risk that they might switch sides during the battle, so he decides to send them back to Ziklag.

1. How did the men feel when they arrived back at Ziklag? What was the extent of their loss and who did they blame?
2. What did David do in this time of deep distress? (v.6)
3. What do you think it means to 'strengthen yourself in the Lord'?
4. What was the outcome of the story?

4 REFLECTION

Upon arriving back they find that the Amelakites had brutally attacked Ziklag, burning it to the ground and had taken their wives, sons and daughters with them. What a scene of disaster. Homeless and not knowing whether their families were still alive, these war-hardened men were devastated and 'wept aloud' until they had no strength left to weep. And David didn't escape the severity of the disaster, his two

³ <https://pazyesperanzaecuador.wordpress.com/2016/05/23/blog-post-title-3/>

wives were also taken (v5). Yet it gets worse for David, as his men clearly blame him for what has happened, to the point where they turn on him and discuss whether they should stone him to death!

But in the midst of all this, there is a key moment in David's life. He chooses to 'strengthen himself in the Lord'. He puts his trust and hope in God which starts a chain of positive, life-giving reactions. His faith increases as he focuses on the magnitude and power of the Lord to overcome his difficulties. This increase in faith leads to hope, with darkness being pushed aside to be replaced by light. This leads to a change in perspective and an increase in his confidence in how God will take care of him.⁴ And so he seeks God for a way of rescuing the people and possessions, coming up with a brave and daring plan and receiving confirmation from God that it would be a success (v8).

Isaiah 40:31 (NIV), says: "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

This story of David is a great example of the truth of this scripture. God is bigger than any problem we might face in our lives, and he is always able to bring us hope and strength in the midst of our difficulties. So perhaps instead of telling God how big our problems are, we need to be telling our problems how big our God is! Psalm 42:11 (NIV), says: "Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God."

⑤ RESPOND

1. Share with the rest of the group an example of a time when you 'strengthened yourself in the Lord'. Contrast this with a time when you did not strengthen yourself in the Lord. What was the difference?
2. Why is it often hard to be hopeful during tough times? What do you need to change to be able to see things from God's perspective?

⁴<http://www.foundationsforfreedom.net/References/OT/Historical/1-2Samuel/1Samuel29-30/>

3. Are there people around you suffering from hopelessness? Who are they, and how can you help them to receive strength from the Lord?

6 PRAY

1. For the faith to put our trust in God during difficult times.
2. For light and hope to overcome any darkness and hopelessness that we are facing.
3. For eyes to see any opportunities in front of us where we can help strengthen and support others, through prayer or practical help.

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BIBLE STUDY 4

IS IT THE JUDGMENT OF GOD?

① STORY

“After seeing the sunrise on the Sunday and being impacted by the scenes of disaster caused by the earthquake the previous night, the comments were wide and varied, and the question that was being repeated was, “What happened to you?”, and the stories were varied, on the street, on the beach, in my house etc. Rumours of a tsunami or an even stronger repeat earthquake were on everyone’s lips, and we weren’t lacking in people saying, “This is God’s fault...” I responded to a particular person saying that it wasn’t God’s fault because he is good, and she turned and stated, “If he is good, why did he allow this? A good God wouldn’t do this to us.” I could see that this person was one of the many that wanted to blame God for everything, but was not willing look at other reasons as to why it might have happened. She seemed to be very far from knowing the good God that the Bible speaks of. I tried to explain to her that the earthquake was a result of natural causes, and that through it we should see God at work, showing his mercy in the midst of everything. She kept thinking for a minute or so, and then turned to me and said, “God cannot do this to us, so many deaths, so many houses destroyed and material losses....no. God is punishing us, his wrath has been poured out over us.”” *Pastor William Castro, Bahía de Caráquez.*

② DISCUSSING THE STORY

1. What stories have you heard about the cause of the earthquake or about another disaster that you know of?
2. What is your opinion?
3. How do you react to people who have a different opinion to you?
4. When thinking of the Bible, are there any disasters that come to mind?

③ WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? READ LUKE 13: 1-5

Background: Are disasters a punishment from God?

At times in the Old Testament we read of disasters which appear to be the direct judgement of God as a result of sin and disobedience (for example the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Tower of Babel). However with these examples we need to remember that it is God's overwhelming desire bring us sinners back into relationship with him through his amazing love and mercy. Psalm 103: 10-11(NIV) says: "He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him."

If an earthquake or natural disaster were to be sent for the sins of mankind surely it wouldn't be limited to just one place, since we are all sinners!

Let's look at what Jesus has to say on the subject.

1. Jesus refers to two events that take place. What are they?
2. What is the response of Jesus when he is asked (indirectly) if these things happened as a punishment from God?
3. What is the main message that Jesus wants to share with the crowd? (v.5)

④ REFLECTION

In the time when Jesus lived it was popular thinking that disasters, diseases and illnesses were a direct judgement from God for sin. In John 9:1-2 (NIV) we read the following: "As he (Jesus) went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" It was common to associate an infirmity directly with a sin that had been committed. However Jesus is quick to dispel this theory, implying that one cannot simply attribute an illness or disaster as a punishment from God. He replies, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." He then goes on to miraculously heal the man, using the opportunity to give a taster of his desire to make all things new as the Kingdom of God advances.

In the passage in Luke 13, Jesus is quick to say that it wasn't the fault of the Galileans that Pilate had them killed, neither was it the fault of the 18 when the tower fell on them. It is interesting to note that often when Jesus is asked a direct question, he will reply with a parable. However in this situation he answers directly with a 'no', seemingly making it crystal clear to everyone listening that it was not their fault, but also highlighting how precarious our existence is. However what Jesus places the most emphasis on is not 'why' it happened, but rather that unless his listeners repent, they too will perish. He gives the conversation an eternal perspective, making it clear that regardless of what disasters may come our way, the most important thing is that we repent of our sin and restore our relationship with God, before it's too late. He emphasises the suddenness with which death comes. Just as Pilate's and the tower's victims did not have the luxury of choosing when they would take their last breath, likewise the unrepentant will suddenly find they have delayed too long and lost themselves.

2 Peter 3:10 (NIV), says: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare."

Pastor William Castro finishes his story in this way: "'It could be worse," I told her. "The real judgement of God will be far worse, this earthquake should really move us closer to God, given that the end is coming and is inevitable. One day Jesus will come and we will see him in all his majesty, he will start the Great Tribulation and there won't be any way out. You and I should search for God with all our hearts and give our lives to him.'"

⑤ RESPOND

1. What reasons are there for disasters occurring?
2. Why does God allow these disasters to occur?
3. Can any good come from disasters? If so, what?
4. Jesus calls us to repent of our sins and restore our relationship with God, before it's too late. Do you need to make a decision to turn from your sins and follow Jesus? If so ask your group leader to help you with these steps.

6 PRAY

1. For love, patience and understanding with those whose views are different to ours.
2. For eyes to see the good that can come from the disasters we have experienced.
3. For the capacity to help others who are experiencing the pain of a recent disaster.
4. For those who don't know Jesus to repent of their sins and follow him.

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BIBLE STUDY 5

HELPING WITHOUT PREJUDICE OR DISCRIMINATION

① STORY

Pastor Karin de Salazar lives in Guayaquil and since the earthquake has moved with her family to Chamanga, in the province of Esmeraldas, to serve those affected, giving them free food.

“We have come here from Guayaquil to share food with those that are in greatest need in the town of Chamanga. What you see here is a typical Ecuadorian dish, called ‘fanesca’, it’s something that the people really like. Today we prepared between 1500 and 1800 servings, approximately. We want to share with the community that is going through this difficult situation. Chamanga is a zone that was destroyed by the earthquake on 16th April. They don’t have food to eat, many have been displaced and find themselves in the shelters, and it’s these people that we’re feeding. We thank God that he is providing all we need to be able to share with the community. We believe that the best thing is to be able to share the love of Jesus Christ with the people, not solely with words, but through actions. To share with your neighbour, to love your neighbour as you love yourself. One of our duties as Christians is to be able to support those that are hungry, with those that are in need. The early church was characterised by sharing with people, with believers and non-believers alike. I believe that this is our work as Christians. To share with our brothers and sisters, to share with the people. Many have taken an interest in finding out more about Jesus, and indeed we have seen people accept the gospel message of the Lord, because we are seeing the love of Jesus Christ in action, not only through the food that is being given to them, but also through spiritual comforting.”

② DISCUSSING THE STORY

1. In what ways did Pastor Karin help those people that were affected by the earthquake?

2. In what ways would this help have 'cost' Pastora Karin?
3. What was her motivation behind helping those in need? Do you think that she only helped Christians?
4. In your opinion, what do you think it means to love your neighbour as yourself?

③ WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? READ LUKE 10:25-37

Background: The story takes place on the road between the city of Jerusalem in the mountains and the city of Jericho, about 20 miles away in the Jordan river valley. The terrain between the cities was rough, desolate, with few inhabitants and a hot-spot for robbers. The robbers at times used tricks like having one of their number appear injured by the side of the road. When someone stopped to help, the others could attack him easily while he wasn't paying attention. Different types of people are mentioned in the story. The person who is robbed is understood to be a Jew, and the priest and the Levite are Jewish religious leaders who have a good knowledge of God's laws. The final person in the story is a Samaritan, a person from the province of Samaria. The relationship between the Jews and Samaritans was very similar to the relationship between Jews and Arabs today, or to any relationship marked by strong racial or cultural prejudice. The Jews considered Samaritans as social outcasts, untouchables, racially inferior and practicing a false religion. They avoided any association with Samaritans, travelling long distances out of their way to avoid passing through a Samaritan area. Any close physical contact, drinking water from a common bucket, or eating a meal with a Samaritan, would make a Jew ceremonially unclean - unable to participate in temple worship for a period of time. The Samaritans responded quite naturally with strong dislike or hatred for Jews.

1. Look at the reactions of the people in the story. Why might we have expected the priest and Levite to help out? What reasons do you think they might have had for walking by on the other side?
2. How would you have expected the Samaritan to react when seeing the Jewish man in need? Why?

3. Why do we sometimes 'walk by on the other side' when we come across people in need in our everyday lives?
4. If you have recently experienced a disaster, can you think of a similar situation where an individual or group in need in your local community was neglected when they needed help?

4 REFLECTION

Jesus is in the midst of a conversation with an expert in the law, with the expert seeking to test him, asking him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus turns the question back on him, asking what the law says, to which the expert replies, "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, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" He then goes on to ask Jesus who his 'neighbour' is, and Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan.

This story is a very familiar one, with most of us having heard it at some point in our lives. Yet each time we read it we continue to be challenged as we read of the selfishness and prejudice displayed by the priest and the Levite and as we relate it to similar examples in our own lives. Yet Jesus is calling us to follow the Samaritan's example with our own conduct. We are to love others (v27) regardless of our race or religion and to be there for them in their hour of need. Love has the power to break down walls that have been built up over decades and generations, and this is especially possible when we experience a disaster in our community. Make the decision today to lay down your prejudices and to love your neighbour as yourself, and just watch as God uses you to display his light, love and goodness to the world.

5 RESPOND

The lessons we can learn from this story are:

- a. We are to set aside our prejudice and show love and compassion for others.
- b. Our neighbour is anyone we encounter; we are all creatures of the creator and we are to love all of mankind as Jesus has taught.

- c. Keeping the law in its entirety with the intent to save ourselves is an impossible task; we need a saviour, and this is Jesus.

Questions:

1. In what ways, as a church, do we express our prejudices? Can you think of any times the church has avoided helping a person or group of people because they are not Christians?
2. In what ways could your church work together with other organisations of different beliefs, race or ethnicity to support people in need in your community?
3. As an individual, how can you make sure you are ready when the opportunity comes to be able to help someone in need? (e.g. the Samaritan had time to help, skills to assist in the first aid, money to put him in a hotel for the night, favour with the hotel manager that he would cover any extra costs at a later date etc.)

6 PRAY

1. For forgiveness for the times when we have ‘walked by on the other side’ and ignored the needs of the people around us.
2. For help to go out and live as the Samaritan did.
3. For the church to be united in showing the love of Christ to all without discrimination or prejudice.

At the end of the prayer, why not share hugs and embraces with your group and speak words of blessing and encouragement over one another.

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BIBLE STUDY 6

OFFERING HELP WITH GENEROSITY

① STORY

Testimony of Washington Reyes, a young Christian university student who went to Canoa in the province of Manabí to help serve people affected by the earthquake.

“On 16th April 2016 in Ecuador there was an earthquake that not only shook entire cities, but also strongly shook my heart, to the point that I decided not to stay in my home city and organise help from a distance, but rather God allowed me to travel to the disaster zone 24 hours after the catastrophe with provisions, clothes and above all the desire to help. I didn’t have a plan, nor did I know when I would return home; I went because I knew that if my Ecuadorian brothers and sisters were frightened and in need, it was my duty to be with them.

I travelled all night in a pick-up truck with 6 friends. We arrived at dawn in a town called Canoa, which was devastated. The physical, emotional and spiritual need was so evident that we decided to stay there for three days, in which we could communicate with congregations and acquaintances so that we could arrange for provisions to be sent to them, which arrived immediately.

When I returned home, I knew that I had to make a decision between staying at home and continuing with my life, or starting a long-term project of holistic help in that community, given that the resources were scarce. I prayed to God and felt a strong conviction to return to set up a “Family Refuge” to meet the basic needs of food and shelter, but also a hope in the hearts of the inhabitants of Canoa, that God had not forgotten about them and that Christ had died for their sins.

I presented the project to my local congregation, to organisations and friends who didn’t hesitate for a second in helping out and, thanks to the mercy of God, we were able to bless more than 60 people each day, free of charge, with food, personal hygiene products, and clothing, in addition to psychological and spiritual support, since the gospel of Christ was preached daily by the volunteers that arrived at the

camp to serve. Almost two months passed in which, day by day, God provided the necessary human resources and finances, while we continued walking in faith and obedience to the Lord.

The next step was to start a project of planting a church congregation that could be light and a spokesperson in a practical and visible way of a God who didn't cling to his throne, but came and approached us so we could know him in all his splendour. That God is now preached in this community where the inhabitants are not only rebuilding their homes, but also their hearts, with Jesus Christ in them."

2 DISCUSSING THE STORY

1. Have you received help in the past when you needed it? Share your stories as a group.
2. How did you feel after receiving this help?
3. Why do you think Washington decided to help in this way?
4. What lessons can be learned from the way Washington served the community of Canoa after the earthquake?
5. How would you define the word 'generosity'?

3 WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? READ 2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-7 AND PHILIPPIANS 4: 10-19

1. In the midst of great trials, how did the Macedonian churches react to the visit of Paul? (2 Cor 8:2-6)
2. In what way did the church in Philippi help Paul? (Phil 4: 14-18)
3. In what way will the church in Philippi be rewarded for their support of Paul? (Phil 4:19). In what ways is this verse often taken out of context?

4 REFLECTION

The apostle Paul speaks of the amazing *generosity* that he is shown by the churches in Macedonia, despite them being in the midst of extreme poverty and very severe trial. We can see comparisons when we look at the story of Washington and the work of his team to generously to support the people of Canoa and the surrounding region so badly affected by the earthquake. This kind of generosity is incredible to see and

makes a big difference to those people on the receiving end, but how can we make 'generosity' an integral part of our character and our default position when we come across people in need?

Firstly, it's worth noting that to be generous requires that we stop focusing on ourselves and we look towards the needs of others. We need to take on an attitude of service and servanthood, and no-one displays that better than Jesus himself.

Philippians 2: 3-7 says: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness."

We are to look to the interests of others and serve them as if we were their servants. What a challenging word! Practically speaking, when looking at serving others it is often helpful to look what we are able to offer (our resources) in terms of our time, talent and treasure.

Time: We are called to use our time wisely and faithfully in the service of others. We all have the same amount of time, although the amount we have spare to help others varies depending on our commitments and responsibilities.

Talent: We all have God-given talents and abilities with which we can serve others.

Treasure: Whether we have very little or very much, God is able to use our money to bless others.

If we choose to put into God's hands our time, talent and treasure, he will direct us in the ways that we can best show generosity towards others, and the light and hope that we bring will not only help people see the love of God, but God also promises to bless us in return!

As Isaiah 58:10-11 (TLB) says: "Feed the hungry! Help those in trouble! Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you shall be as bright as day. And the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy you with all good things, and keep you healthy too; and you will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring."

5 RESPOND

1. How do you show generosity in your daily life?
2. What can stop you from being generous?
3. Take a look at your own time, talents and treasure. What do you have that you could offer to someone in need right now? Thinking to the future, if there were to be another disaster, how would you use your time, talents and treasure to make a difference?

6 PRAY

1. For a heart of generosity in order to help those around us who are in need.
2. For an increased creativity to help us see the ways that we can use our time, talents and treasures for God's glory.
3. For an attitude of selfless service, as demonstrated by Jesus.

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BIBLE STUDY 7

PREPARING TO RESPOND TO A DISASTER

① STORY

In August and September of 2016, Peace and Hope Foundation, with assistance from Tearfund, began to run workshops in Manabí, Ecuador, on the subject of Risk Management. These workshops were aimed at training both church leaders and community leaders in how to better manage the risks and threats from possible earthquakes and other disasters in the future, and looked at various ways of seeing the threats, mitigating the risks, and preparing local people so that the potential loss of life is reduced as far as is possible.

Norman Molina, the course leader and Project Manager from Tearfund, said, “We are looking to strengthen Christian organisations in the response to the emergency. The church and the population in general tends to respond promptly, with passion and love immediately after a disaster. However, there are many weaknesses in the area of mitigation, works that should be considered over the longer term, which can reduce the impact or loss of life. And also the preparation before an emergency, actions taken before, during and after an emergency. It is our intention to train, shape and instruct the churches in these aspects.”

Sandra Masias, leader of the community “La Humedal” and attendee of the workshop, said, “We’ve done the workshop together as a community and we’re preparing ourselves for a new disaster. Hopefully there won’t be any more, but for us who have lost family members it is very hard, but we have to keep preparing so that this loss of life doesn’t happen again.”

Sonia Cabralo Vélez, a civil servant in Bahía de Caráquez, said, “I have been invited to the risk management workshop in which I’m very much hoping to be able to work to develop action plans for the community and the local church. I believe that the church, the community, everyone, should be involved in working and producing action plans for the well-being of this region as we face up to the effects of natural

disasters such as those that we had with this earthquake. We are ready as a church, as civil servants, as a community to offer our service in whatever way we can.”

2 DISCUSSING THE STORY

1. How important do you think it is to plan for disasters? Why?
2. If you have experienced a disaster, what difference might it have made if there were emergency plans already in place?
3. What do you think might be the benefits of being involved in a workshop such as this?
4. What are your views on planning in general? Is it biblical to plan, or should we simply trust God to meet our needs as and when they arise?

3 WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? READ GENESIS 41:14-40

Background: Joseph finds himself in prison in Egypt through no fault of his own. Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, has two dreams which he cannot understand and so he asks his wise men and magicians to interpret them for him. When they cannot, his chief cupbearer is reminded that Joseph has a gift for interpreting dreams, so he is brought before Pharaoh.

1. Who does Joseph give the credit to for interpreting the dreams? (v.16)
2. What do the dreams mean? (v.28-31)
3. When the dreams are interpreted, what advice does Joseph give Pharaoh? (v.33-36)
4. What actions does Pharaoh take? (v.37-40)

4 REFLECTION

In the story Pharaoh was troubled by the two dreams that only Joseph was able to explain. Joseph explains that the dreams mean there will be 7 years of great abundance throughout the land of Egypt, however they will be followed by 7 years of famine. The famine will be so terrible that all thoughts of the years of abundance will be forgotten. Therefore from the years of abundance, they need to store up food so that they will have sufficient during the famine. Joseph’s advice is that they store up one fifth of the harvest during the years of abundance, and that Pharaoh puts a

‘wise and discerning’ man in charge, supported by a team of commissioners, to ensure that everything that is needed is collected.

Not only is this story about God-given gifts to interpret dreams, it is about the importance of planning for disasters. The famine was sure to be a disaster, and we read that many other countries aside from Egypt were affected by it (v.57). However, on the advice of Joseph, Pharaoh chose to plan in advance to mitigate the effects, meaning that citizens of both Egypt and countries further afield were able to buy grain in their time of crisis.

In Genesis 6:9-22 we read about a similar situation with Noah and the flood. The flood is a huge disaster that will wipe out every living thing, aside from Noah, his family, and 2 of every animal. God issues Noah with plans to build an ark big enough to fit all the animals. Not only does Noah need to get the supplies to build the ark and then build it, he also has to get enough food for all of the animals and for his family. This was a huge task in and of itself. Noah couldn’t simply pop to the supermarket and buy all he needed. He and his family had to grow, hunt, harvest and store all of this food. Surely an all-powerful God could have just filled the ark with manna once it was built, but he specifically told Noah to plan ahead. When the flood came, they and the animals had sufficient to survive until the waters receded.

Proverbs 27:12, says: “A prudent person foresees the danger ahead and takes precautions. The simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences.” Here we are challenged to plan. To look at the dangers that may lie ahead and take precautions to either eliminate or reduce the impact of them.

⑤ RESPOND

1. Think about your home life; your house, family, pets etc. In what ways can you better prepare for any future disasters?
2. What could you do to encourage your church to plan ahead for future disasters?
3. Visit Tearfund’s ‘disasters’ webpage at <https://goo.gl/C9uMjO> and consider using some of the resources to either run your own workshop or put some specific disaster plans in place.

6 PRAY

1. That we would not simply be people that are 'reactive' to disasters as and when they happen, but that we would be 'proactive' and make plans to minimise the effect.
2. For those leaders in our churches and communities who have the responsibility for putting together plans to alleviate future disasters. We ask that the Lord would give them wisdom and knowledge to make the right decisions.

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BIBLE STUDY 8

PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE DURING A DISASTER

① STORY

'A Hand of Peace and Hope in Manta'

Inside the neighbourhood "12 de octubre", on streets 105 and 106, one can still see the destruction left by the earthquake. The families affected are receiving support from the church through the project 'One Hand of Peace and Hope', in alliance with Peace and Hope Foundation, carrying food portions daily to more than 170 people, as well as food and hygiene kits, and psychological assistance for boys and girls in the sector. The church is keen to encourage the initiative. "The children recognise us, they call to each other, and we are giving them support on the streets, sidewalks and in areas of the districts most devastated. And they are starting to have hope; better times are coming in their lives, they are eager to start living again and I am teaching them how to keep calm in times of crisis", said Luz Morales, Psychologist at Peace and Hope Foundation.

"Through the programme "Jesus loves me and cares for me", and through games, exercises and drawings, we can help remove their nervousness and anxiety, as well as helping them understand more about their private parts and self-care," she added.

She is also training the Sunday School teachers, teaching them how to keep calm so that they have capacity to help keep the children calm, giving them the opportunity to express their feelings and process the pain, as well as teaching them about prevention of disasters and risks. And together with these church volunteers different shelters in Manta are being reached to give them psychosocial support too.

"When I am giving them words of encouragement, of hope, of purpose in their lives, and I see in their faces that their eyes are lighting up, that fulfils me, and I know the message has got through and that it will stay with them and they will remember it

in any given moment. Peace and Hope is working to promote peace, calm and the defence of rights, showing the love of God to each person,” said an emotional Luz Morales.

“We ran workshops with Peace and Hope, and prepared the church and young people to work with children in the prevention of sexual abuse. We are anticipating that, due to many of them sleeping in tents, there is danger of the children being sexually abused, so we are telling them what to do if they see any cases of abuse”, commented Pastor Walter of “Iglesia del Pacto de la Victoria” Church in Manta.⁵

2 DISCUSSING THE STORY

1. How valuable is the work of psychologists such as Luz Morales during times of disaster? Why?
2. Why do you think that cases of abuse against women and children often increase during times of disaster?
3. What do you think could be done to reduce the likelihood of abuse taking place immediately after a disaster?
4. When you see cases of injustice, when the strong take advantage of the weak, or the rich take advantage of the poor, how does it make you feel?

3 WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY? READ NEHEMIAH 5: 1-19

Background: The wall that surrounds Jerusalem is in a state of disrepair following the captivity by Persia, and Nehemiah has gained permission from the King of Persia to be in charge of the rebuilding process. He has come up against much opposition from many neighbouring groups, which has included insults and threats of violence, yet he is battling on and the people are working with all their might to rebuild the wall. Then he comes up against some injustices and oppression against the poor and vulnerable which are taking place within their own camp, instigated by the rulers of Jerusalem.

1. What disaster is taking place at the time of the story? (v.3)
2. What is the complaint of the poor people? (v.4-5)

⁵<https://pazyesperanzaecuador.wordpress.com/2010/06/29/ecuador-earthquake-a-hand-of-peace-and-hope/>

3. What is Nehemiah's initial reaction and subsequent response? (v.6-11)

4 REFLECTION

Those who had become rulers in the dilapidated city of Jerusalem during the captivity had used their power to their own benefit. They required those who had returned to the city after the captivity to buy back the possessions that were previously owned by their families. They were paying undue taxes and interest on things that should have been theirs. But Nehemiah put a bold stop to that practice by confronting the injustice and standing against it, thus bringing liberty to the oppressed. In fact, we read later in the chapter that he would not even accept the pay that was due a man in his position because he looked on the people with compassion and didn't want to add to their already heavy burdens (v.14-19).

Often in the midst of a crisis there can be a tendency for the poor and vulnerable to be neglected and forgotten about, and it is during these times that they are most vulnerable to being mistreated by those around them. We need to open our eyes and follow the example of Nehemiah, standing up and boldly pointing out injustices that we see, knowing that this is particularly close to the heart of God.

Isaiah 61:8-9 says: "For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed."

In the same way that Pastor Walter worked together with Peace and Hope Foundation to protect those children at risk of sexual abuse in their family tents, so we too have the opportunity to make a difference to ensure that no-one is a victim of injustice during a disaster.

5 RESPOND

1. This passage shows how people can be vulnerable to oppression during times of disaster and change. In what ways could the vulnerable be exploited in the aftermath of a natural disaster?

2. How could the church help to prevent exploitation after a natural disaster?
3. What could you do personally to support those who have been victims of exploitation during a disaster?

6 PRAY

1. For a heart of justice like that of Nehemiah, with an increased passion to help support and protect the poor and vulnerable in our society.
2. For insight and knowledge to prevent any cases of abuse or mistreatment that may be happening near us right now.
3. For wisdom to know how best to support those who have been victims of exploitation.

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Paz y Esperanza (Peace and Hope) is a Christian human rights organization dedicated to defending and promoting justice on behalf of persons and communities living in poverty or affected by different forms of injustice. Our actions are rooted in the belief that each human person is endowed with dignity because s/he is created in the image and likeness of God.

We are a fellowship of independent organizations in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, the United States and the United Kingdom united under a common vision, mission, principles, and values. We work together to bring about structural change in the places in which we work through the sharing of best practices and resources, and mutual accountability.

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