

COMFORT AFTER CHAOS

Story by Christmas M. Beeler
Photos by various sources

BELIEVERS SPARED, MINISTER AFTER NUMEROUS TORNADOS IN SEVERAL STATES

In early February, at least 82 tornadoes ravaged several states in the U.S. during a two-day period, killing at least 57 people and injuring hundreds of others. Gathering from across the country, believers from several Calvary Chapel churches stepped up to help in relief efforts.

Benjamin Ferrell crouched in a protective position on his bathroom floor with his three roommates at Union University, a Christian school in Jackson, TN. Though there had been a party atmosphere earlier—with students dancing in the rain and others daring each other to sleep outside despite tornado warnings—the young men had scrambled to the most secure part of their college dorm room after watching a tornado suck the glass, panes, and blinds out of their window. The ground was shaking, a loud rumbling filled their ears, and the power had gone out. In the dark, each young man began praying. “God, please protect us, keep us safe. We pray that Your will would be done no matter what—even if You want to take our lives,” Benjamin prayed. A few seconds later, the rumbling stopped. The four young men walked outside that night, February 5, to see what the twister had done to the rest of their campus.

The sky was a brilliant green. They heard a young man screaming, “Oh my gosh! Waters Commons is gone! It’s gone!” Sure enough, the gathering place for students had been flattened to rubble. Students, firefighters, and staff sifted through concrete, debris, and bricks for hours to release those buried underneath. Miraculously, all 13 of the trapped students were rescued; 51 students suffered serious injury, but all survived.

Benjamin’s father, Phillip Ferrell, pastors Calvary Chapel Memphis. Going home to Memphis for a week, Benjamin realized he didn’t have any clothes. He said, “It was a new feeling—kind of a relief, to realize I had nothing. ... My priorities have changed.”

The next Monday, Benjamin headed back to Jackson with other Calvary believers to help with relief work. There he met Sergio Babich,



Earl Wise helps clear debris from a house in Jackson, TN. Earl drove down from New York February. He met the CC relief team, worked alongside them, and accepted Christ as his

a former CC pastor who lives in Jackson and was coordinating volunteer assistance. Sergio and Katie Babich left California last year in order to be closer to their family in Jackson and because the climate is better for Katie’s chronic illness. Sergio is praying about whether the Lord would have him start a fellowship there.

Curt Hencye of CC Sarasota, FL, has helped provide aid after several disasters in the U.S. and abroad. He also came to Jackson to help. Because of Curt’s experience, city leaders

asked Curt and Sergio to organize volunteers and relief work. “We worked on 17 different homes,” Curt recalled.

Salvation and Encouragement

Earl Wise, a young man from New York, had driven down on his own to help. Earl worked alongside Curt, Sergio, and other CC volunteers for several days, sometimes asking them questions about God or the Bible. On Earl’s last night with the team, Sergio sat down with him and asked, “Do you want Jesus in your life?” Earl said that he did, but

he wasn’t sure how. “So we prayed together, and he received Jesus,” Sergio recalled. The believers prayed together for Earl before he left, and Curt has kept in touch with him.

Curt recalled a Christian family whose home had been damaged. After the storm, the wife lost her job, and the family had gotten on their knees, asking God what to do. The next morning, Curt and the other volunteers showed up and offered to repair the roof. The family was greatly encouraged that God had answered their prayers.

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Calvary Chapel volunteers attach a tarp to a roof to keep out water and wind damage after a tornado destroyed several homes in Jackson, TN.

Helping Neighbors in Oxford, MS

After a tornado destroyed several homes in their community, a small group of Calvary Chapel believers in Oxford, MS, reached out to their neighbors in Christ’s name. Though the fellowship no longer meets in a church building since the pastor stepped down, some in the community commented that the small group had provided more assistance than larger churches in the area.

Two sisters, Elizabeth and Laura Johnson, were at home the evening of February 5, when the tornado hit. “We had been listening to weather reports all day. They ended the tornado warning, and then it happened,” said Elizabeth Johnson. “It was so loud; it sounded like a train. I jumped up and said, ‘The train’s coming! We have to get to the middle of the house!’” she said, chuckling. “My sister said, ‘What train? What are you talking about?’” Laura ran to the window and saw the huge funnel cloud barreling toward them. They dashed to an empty fire-place and huddled for safety.

“We were directly in its path. It hit everything in a straight line toward us, and right before it got to us, it veered off into a little valley.



Toni New, center, of Billy Graham Rapid Response Team, prays with students at Union University after the tornado.

It made an ‘L-shape around us,” Elizabeth said. “God really protected us.” No one in their town was killed, although there was much property damage.



Photo by Elizabeth Johnson

In Oxford, MS, believers from a CC fellowship help clear debris from Maureen Kent's mobile home. Joining them are coworkers and friends from the University of Mississippi and the Naval ROTC program. Believers there testified of God's protection and provision.



Photo by Elizabeth Johnson

Volunteers filled seven dumpsters with debris at the home site in Oxford.

tornado warnings. "It completely destroyed her home," Laura said. Believers from the Calvary fellowship wanted to help Maureen, who was distraught over her loss.

Jeff McManus and Mark Davis, who take turns leading the Bible study, organized the clean-up. Jeff commented, "Maureen was kind of overwhelmed, so Mark and I worked it out." He leased a dumpster for debris while Mark, a USMC Major and Naval ROTC instructor at the University of Mississippi, rounded up several midshipmen to help out. Jeff added, "I told her the church could pay for it. ... I think God just had us in the right place at the right time." Jeff and Elizabeth also brought several of their coworkers from the university. From Friday afternoon to Saturday morning, they gathered six dumpsters' worth of debris.

A few days later, Jeff went to the nearby town of Abbeville to buy a dryer and a stove for a family whose home was destroyed. "People here don't make their needs known, but I heard about their situation and kept asking what they needed," Jeff said.

"Both [that family and Maureen] were astonished at how much our fellowship helped when their own home churches didn't really provide much for them—especially considering that we don't even have a

building anymore," Jeff said. "I feel like the Lord used us."

A week after the tornado, several believers from the CC fellowship met in Maureen and Elizabeth's neighborhood, sharing testimonies about how the Lord protected or provided for them. Then Jeff shared a verse from Philippians:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

"I felt like the Lord was telling us that ... He was going to take care of us," Jeff recalled. "That we should just keep praying about it, and He would give us the peace that passes all understanding." ☞

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Kenya Update: Ministering After the Riots



Photo by Jackson Compean

Hands raised, Pastor Ed Compean baptizes believers from Calvary International Fellowship in Githurai, near Nairobi, after post-election violence eased in Kenya.

While post-election violence in Kenya has dwindled in recent weeks, Calvary Chapel missionaries there report that believers are still busy ministering and sharing Jesus as the only real peace amidst the tense calm in the East African country.

Disputed election polls last December triggered widespread ethnic violence. Reports estimate more than 1,500 people were killed and nearly 500,000 were displaced during the tribal conflicts that made international headlines. Violence declined rapidly in April after the opposing political parties formed a coalition government.

"Everything is different since the violence," said Roger Chesebro of Disciple Support Ministries. With Bible institute campuses in the hard-hit Mathare and Kibera slums, many questioned the safety of holding classes. Leaders decided that God had placed the ministry there "for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14b), allowing them to minister to the more than 200 pastors and church leaders at the slums.

Because his ministry includes church leaders from different tribes, Roger occasionally stopped classes to allow students to worship and pray. "They would get on their faces

and cry out to God," Roger said. "It was difficult to get back to a learning environment, but it is needed."

Ministering north of Nairobi in Githurai, Pastor Ed Compean said, "Kenya's economy is trashed. We are seeing desperation like never before." Believers from his church, Calvary International Fellowship, are reaching out to the hurting community. He added, "The crisis has left the people with no work, no school, and no food; but the good news is that Jesus is drawing people to Himself in this crisis." God has added many who are being saved, necessitating a second church service.

A smaller, temporary uprising from the Mungiki tribe brought more violence in April. Many are still displaced from their homes. Pastor Ed said that people have been falling ill to typhoid, malaria, and other illnesses because they lack clean water and simple medicine.

More elections—this time for parliamentary and civic seats in Kenya—are slated for June. Local newspapers speculate that the elections could erupt in more violence between competing parties. ☞

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