

China

Beijing ★

Earthquake



A believer talks to a little girl who survived the earthquake.

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Photos by Sherwood Patterson

While the Olympics got underway in Beijing, China, believers were ministering to earthquake victims in central China after a 7.9-magnitude earthquake killed nearly 70,000 people in mid-May. In August, two CC missionaries from Japan returned to the Sichuan Province to help local Chinese believers continue the work they had started together in June.

Responding quickly after the May quake, three men from Grace Christian Fellowship in Ome, Japan, traveled to China in early June to minister for 12 days. That team included Pastor Jonathan Wilson and missionaries Sherwood Patterson and Ted McCorkle. They were also joined for a time by Horizon missionary Rusty Birkland from Macau. The men ministered chiefly in

Chengdu, in the Sichuan Province—roughly 950 miles southwest of Beijing.

Aside from the casualties, nearly 18,000 people were missing, more than 370,000 were injured, and nearly 5 million were left homeless after the May 12 earthquake. While at least 1.5 million people have been placed in homes, numerous aftershocks contin-



Nearly 5 million people were left homeless after a May 12 earthquake in central China. In early June, CC believers brought supplies, encouragement, and crisis-intervention training to help survivors in Chengdu, in the Sichuan Province.

ued into August, killing nearly a dozen and wounding more than 100 others. Jonathan and Sherwood returned for a follow-up visit in July before they returned again with a team from Japan in August.

“Five years ago, we started a ministry in Japan called CRASH, which stands for Christian Relief, Assistance, Support, and

Hope—with the aim of helping Christians in Japan respond with the love of Christ to the frequent earthquakes, typhoons, and other disasters in this country,” Jonathan explained. When China was hit in May, the men felt the Lord wanted them to respond.

Jonathan helped train Chinese Christians as crisis counselors for villagers and school children. Using vacation Bible school as a model to reach children, he had designed a crisis-intervention day camp for use in Japan. After the quake in China, he worked with American, Japanese, and Chinese believers to quickly adapt it for that country. The program was used to reach 450 children in July and hundreds more in August.

Jonathan shared, “The curriculum is neutral and based on widely used crisis-intervention principles, but the real key is that each of the volunteers are local Christians who embody the love and hope that we are teaching the children about. Although books and sermons can be censored [in China], the personal witness of individuals of the love of Christ is unstoppable.”

During their visits, the men brought supplies and encouraged children at several schools—many which had suffered casualties. “One 6-year-old girl related that she had managed to escape the collapse of her school; however, her best friend had been crushed at her feet,” Jonathan reported. In Chengdu, the CC believers provided critical-incident stress counseling and multiple truckloads of supplies and food.

During the June trip, the leaders of one school were so grateful to receive the supplies that they allowed the believers to spend the day with the children in their classrooms, teach them songs, and encourage them. Jonathan related, “It was such a joy to hear ... children singing heartily, ‘Deep and Wide.’ The love we share [God’s love] is truly deeper than any pain they are suffering and wider than the scale of even this disaster.”

Sherwood, Rusty, and Chinese believers ministered together to counsel and encourage distraught villagers. Weeping and visibly fatigued, one woman told them how she lost her 1-year-old daughter. After listening and

encouraging her, the men identified themselves as followers of Jesus Christ and asked if they could pray for her in Jesus’ name. She readily agreed. “During prayer, we sensed the moving of the Holy Spirit and recognized that God was mending her heart,” Sherwood recalled. “When we finished, it was obvious that her demeanor had changed and a genuine smile radiated from her face.”

He added, “After each crisis intervention, we always asked if the person would like prayer. It was then that we explained that we were Christians and believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Everyone was eager and willing to be prayed for in Jesus’ name.”

The team sought to meet the pressing physical and emotional needs in order to show the love of Christ. Sherwood explained, “The most obvious challenge for ministering in China was the suppression of religious freedom. It is against the law to preach in the name of Jesus to local Chinese. However, we discovered that there are many ways in

which the love of Christ can be demonstrated and expressed, not only with words, but in action.” He cited 1 John 3:18, which says, “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”



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The team brought medicine and food for victims. Here, a Chinese volunteer explains how to take the medicine.



A volunteer shares an English reading lesson in the shade with students whose school was destroyed by the earthquake.



Children enjoyed toys and games with the Christian volunteers.