

Message Discussion Guide

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO NATURAL DISASTERS?

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

May 18, 2008

Luke 13:1-5

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Divide learners into two groups. Instruct one group to argue the benefits of dying a predictable death—one in which they know when and how they will die. Instruct the second group to argue the benefits of dying an unpredictable death—one in which they do not know when or how they will die. Allow groups two minutes to briefly argue their side. Then ask the following questions:

- Is it possible to know how or when we will die?
- Would it make a difference in how you lived if you knew how or when you would die? How?
- If we don't know how or when we will die, should we live every day as if it were our last?

Explain that today we will take a look at the unpredictable nature of disasters and how we should respond to them.

Option 2

Read this short story:

In his book *Don't Waste Your Life* John Piper tells the story of an elderly man who became a believer at an old age, after years of refusing Christ. Piper tells the story that after his father preached a sermon, this elderly man came to him for help in trusting Christ. As the man realized that Christ forgave him for his sins and gave him eternal life, he sobbed tremendously as he uttered the words "I've wasted it! I've wasted it!"¹ The man couldn't bare the thought that he only had a small part of his life to now life for Christ.

Ask the following questions:

- What do you feel for this old man?
- Do you want to look at your life in the same way?
- How can we prevent wasting our lives?

Explain that today we will take a look at how disasters can remind us to live in a purposeful and urgent way that embraces God's mission.

¹Piper, John. *Don't Waste Your Life*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2003, p. 12.

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Review the Message . . .

Four Reminders . . .

- Natural disasters remind us that death is unpredictable.
 - Death is often sudden.
 - Death is often surprising.
 - Death is always sure.

***“Resolved, to think much, on all occasions, of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death.”
Jonathan Edwards, “Resolutions.”***

Discussion Questions

- Enlist a volunteer to read Luke 13:1-5.
- What are the two occurrences that form the background for Jesus’ conversation in this passage? (*Verses 1 and 4*) What words would you use to describe these events?
- Emphasize that both of these events resulted in the unexpected deaths of individuals. How do you describe the type of deaths that these individuals encountered?

Application . . .

- In our lifetime, has there ever been a time when we felt that we were safe from disasters in the United States? Has there been an event (or events) in our lifetime that took away that false sense of safety?
 - When we are truly faced with disasters, what do we learn about life? What do they teach us about death?
 - David stated that we are not guaranteed tomorrow—or today. How often do we consider our own mortality? Should we?
 - Invite a volunteer to read Jonathan Edwards’ Resolution above. How could thinking of the certainty of death change the way that we live our lives?
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- Natural disasters remind us of the penalty of sin, which plagues all of us.
 - Our sin is universal.
 - Our suffering is inevitable

“Resolved, to act, in all respects, both speaking and doing, as if nobody had been so vile as I, and as if I had committed the same sins, or had the same infirmities or failings as others; and that I will let the knowledge of their failings promote nothing but shame in myself, and prove only an occasion of my confessing my own sins and misery to God.”

Jonathan Edwards, “Resolutions”

Discussion Questions

- Emphasize that much of the culture in which Jesus was speaking held a belief that God blessed the righteous and punished the unrighteous. Based on this information, what was Jesus' audience likely assuming about the victims of these two disasters?
- Jesus states that the victims of these events were not worse sinners than anyone else. What does this idea indicate about the sin nature of the victims and His audience? Are there innocent people in the world?
- Although we do not know the exact details of the Galileans encounter with Pilate, they were killed while offering sacrifices to God. How did this event inform Jesus' audience regarding the possibility of God's people suffering?

Application . . .

- When disasters happen to others, what is our first question to God? Do we even show concern about events across the world such as in Myanmar and Lebanon? How do we really show evidence that we care for the outcome of others across the world?
- When disasters happen to us, what is our first question to God? Why do we want to know the reason behind the disaster?
- Many Christ followers and unbelievers alike question God's goodness during a time of disaster and ask questions such as "Why did this happen to me?" What does this line of questioning indicate about who is at the center of American Christianity? What does it indicate about our view of our own lives?
- Why is it important for us to realize that followers of Christ suffer, even when they are right in God's will?

- **Natural disasters remind us to repent and be reconciled to God.**

"Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life."

Jonathan Edwards, "Resolutions"

Discussion Questions

- What answers was Jesus' audience looking for?
- Highlight that Jesus had a perfect opportunity to explain how God can be good and still allow disasters to happen but He did not answer this question. What is the significance of Jesus not discussing God's attributes but, instead, calling His audience to repentance?
- How does Jesus' call to repent connect His audience with the victims of the disasters?

Application . . .

- Is questioning God wrong?

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- Jesus' primary response in the face of disaster is to call His audience to repentance. What, then, should our response be in light of surrounding disasters?
- Why is this response so imperative?
- What should our response be to others who are facing the results of disaster?

- **Natural disasters remind us of the urgency of our mission.**
 - **Life is fleeting.**
 - **People are perishing.**
 - **Eternity is coming.**

“Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can. Resolved, to live with all my might while I do live.”
Jonathan Edwards, “Resolutions”

Discussion Questions

- Read Luke 12:35-38.
- What idea is consistently repeated throughout this passage? (*Be ready/alert.*) What is Jesus telling His audience to be ready for?
- Enlist two volunteers to read James 4:14 and 2 Corinthians 4:3. What do these verses say about life and those who are without Christ?
- How do James 4:14 and 2 Cor. 4:3 highlight the urgency of the message of Luke 12:35-38?

Application . . .

- Does Jesus' call to be ready for His coming apply to us today? Specifically, how does it apply to disciple-making?
- If we believe the Bible, how should that change how we live, particularly in response to the fact that people die every day without Jesus?
- What do these recent disasters remind us about our mission?
- Emphasize that not only is life fleeting for those without Christ, but our own lives are fleeting as well. How can we look at our lives and not think that we've wasted it?

Three Responses . . .

- **Pray for the church.**
- **Pray for the lost.**
- **Pray for yourselves.**
 - **To all who don't know Christ . . .**
 - **Repent or perish.**
 - **To all who do know Christ . . .**
 - **Get involved or get out of the way.**

David reminded us that God has given us a mission to make disciples of all nations. As proven by recent disasters, our mission is urgent. We must be done with the notion that

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Christianity revolves around us and embrace our calling to make disciples. One way we can respond is through prayer for the Church around the world, that the lost will see God, and that we will get involved with God's mission.

Application . . .

- Am I sure that I have a saving faith in Jesus Christ?
- What things am I wasting my life on?
- How can I be more informed of the state of the world?
- How is God calling me to be involved in His mission?
- How can I take advantage of my stage of life to make disciples of all nations?