

Youth Culture Lesson
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Disaster: What Japan Can Teach Us About Tough Times

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What Happened:

On March 11, a massive undersea earthquake—one of the largest ever recorded—struck near northeast Japan. The 9.0-magnitude quake sparked a tsunami, while a series of huge aftershocks further shook the densely populated island nation.

The natural disasters took a heavy toll on the Japanese populace. More than 7,300 people were declared dead by March 19, with 11,000 still missing. Far more are still without power, food or shelter; and Japan's heartache is far from being healed.

The earthquake severely damaged a nuclear power plant near Fukushima, raising the specter of a potential nuclear disaster. Several explosions rocked the plant, and poisonous radioactive substances were released into the environment.

More than 230,000 people living near the power plant were evacuated, and the Japanese government worked feverishly to prevent nuclear cores from "melting down." A meltdown disaster in Chernobyl, Russia, in 1986, directly killed 31 people from acute radiation poisoning. Chernobyl's indirect death toll from cancer caused by the radiation may range from 4,000 to 1 million people.

The Japanese are familiar with disaster, and they often deal with its aftermath with stoic resolve and creative art. Its islands lie near a fault line, making it susceptible to an array of natural perils. It's also the only country ever to be bombed with a nuclear weapon. Godzilla was initially a symbol of nuclear disaster. It can be difficult to find meaning in disaster, but you can bet the Japanese are trying.

Japan isn't struggling through this alone. Aid is pouring into the country from all corners of the world. Google's front page includes a link to aid organizations, including the Japanese Red Cross Society and the International Medical Corps. The American Red Cross and Mercy Corps are also taking donations for Japan, as are religious organizations such as World Vision.

Talk About It:

As Christians, is it our responsibility to help people in need? Have you helped the people in Japan? How? By praying? Donating money? If you could, how would you *like* to help?

Disaster doesn't always involve earthquakes or nuclear meltdowns, and it can hit far closer to home: Our towns and cities are filled with people who are homeless or hurting

for a variety of reasons. Poverty, drugs and illness can impact us all. What are the special needs in your community? Are there ways you can help?

There are personal disasters, too. We all struggle through pain sometimes—pain that can feel almost unendurable. Sometimes it's a painful breakup or a fight with a friend. Death or divorce can have a huge impact on a family. Even moving to a new community or bringing home a bad report card can feel pretty awful. Have you ever experienced such a disaster? What was it? What helped you through it? Have you ever helped someone else through a disaster of his or her own?

What the Bible Says:

The people we read about in the Bible experienced their own disasters, but perhaps none was worse than the Israelites' exile into Babylon. They couldn't rebuild their nation: There ceased to be a nation to rebuild. They were taken away from the land God had given them, going instead to a foreign hostile country. Yet, in the midst of what must've been their incredible pain, God (through the prophet Jeremiah) made them a promise:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (Jer. 29:11).

In the midst of our disasters, God tells us He will never leave us and that He still has plans for us.

“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor My covenant of peace be removed” (Isa. 54:10).