

## **The God of the Earthquake**

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Everyone's mind is on the tragedy, tremendous destruction, and loss of life with the recent earthquake in Haiti. Pundits have analyzed this sad event from all angles, and I'm not about join them here. Natural catastrophes like this seem so far removed from life in quiet, northern Wyoming, with our warm and tranquil winter. I have never been to Haiti, but I have known of people who are Haitian and others who lived and worked there for many years. I lived near similar places of poverty in the Philippines and have seen great sorrow through catastrophes like typhoons, fires, and floods.

Where is God in all this? That is a question many people are asking. I have no answer that will satisfy everyone because I don't know how the sovereign God of the universe operates or how he might allow the forces of nature to take their course. But I do believe that God is in the midst of the Haiti earthquake and well as in each of our own "earthquakes."

I purposefully titled this article with the preposition "of" between "God" and "earthquake." The preposition "of" is vague in the English language and can mean many different things. I do not intend this to mean that God was the source of this earthquake, but that God is present in the moments during and after it. In the midst of human suffering, God is at work. God's sovereign power can certainly been seen in the forces of nature, but perhaps more significantly in the power of the compassion of his people.

That our lives will be rattled from time to time there is no doubt—it is part of human existence. Earthquakes happen. It is not a matter of “if” but “when,” “where,” and “to what extent.” Two questions come to my mind: are we ready for the disruptions of life, and how will we respond when the challenges come?

Not all of our earthquakes will shatter us to the core, as has the recent one in Haiti. Some days our troubles are more manageable or we may even be living in peace on the mountaintop, but something will happen to cause us to fall into the valley of despair.

It really does no good to ask, “Why has this happened to me?” but to ask, “Who is the One with me now?” Suffering will happen, but are we prepared for it? I find some of the simple answers people give to our pain, like, *it is God’s will for you*, or, *it will all work out for your best*, just a bit dissatisfying and even a bit self-righteous. There has got to be a deeper answer to the shake-ups of life, something beyond our pain and suffering.

When all is going well, we can be self-sufficient, but when troubles come, we need help from beyond ourselves. Insecurity producing situations open the door to compassion. We can experience compassion in two ways. One way has become so obvious this week with the millions of dollars donated for the Haiti crisis. People are willing to give of themselves when they see severe suffering. We can become both the recipients of others’ kindness as well as the catalysts for giving to those in need.

There is another form of compassion that is not always obvious to us during our times of shaking, and that comes from God. God may come to us in an earthquake but he may also come in the quietness of a whisper, like he did for Elijah the prophet. The Lord said to Elijah, “‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.’ Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the

rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper” (1 Kings 19:11-12, NIV). God comes in the quietness to bring comfort to us: “Peace, I am with you, my child.”

God is at work in our troubles. Our pain gives God opportunity to heal; most of the other times we think of ourselves as too strong to need God. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles.” There is a secondary purpose in God’s care for us, and that is “so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”

God’s love is unconditional and for all people. We experience His love most profoundly through his Son. Whenever I face “earthquakes” in my life, I like to remind myself of Romans 8:37-39: “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God is always present with us, but difficult times draw us closer to God. “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).