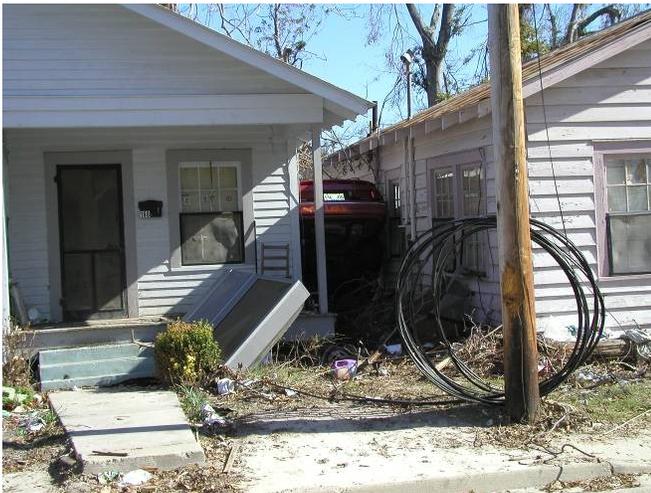


Hurricane Katrina, God’s Opportunity for His Church

By
Robert E Bolitho

Copyright © 2008 by Robert E. Bolitho All Rights Reserved
Any part or all of this book may be freely distributed as long as it is done without charge.

“Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright© 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”



I would like to express a special thank you to my niece Alyssa Wolff, an English Teacher, for pointing out the many errors in this document so that I could correct the ones that I wanted to.

To my Pastor, Grover Timms, I want to give special thanks for his support, suggestions and encouragement.

Finally, thank you to my wife, MaryLee, for her help in correcting the way I remembered some events in the book, and for her hard work in being my partner during this adventure.



God's Opportunity for His Church

Daniel 4: 34-35 " At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him who lives forever, for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom endures from generation to generation; all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'"

Introduction

I was thinking about how to introduce the subject of this book and realized that I have little understanding about what I am trying to do. I know that I usually find introductions boring, so I will keep this one short. Following is a short story about my adventures while leading the hurricane relief work that for over 2 years went out of First Presbyterian Church Biloxi.

I wish in as few words as possible to tell about the wonderful experience that I had serving as a missionary to Biloxi. Really, the story is about how God blessed me and how He blessed so many others through hurricane Katrina. It may be difficult for some to understand how I could call hurricane Katrina "God's opportunity for His church," but I hope this will be clear when I am finished. I think this book will be valuable to those of you who worked so hard in Biloxi but had only a small picture of what was happening.

Astute readers will notice that I will not be reporting about some people and institutions that you would normally expect to find in a book such as this. They are missing because I want to make this as positive a report as possible. Even so, there will still be plenty of stories about the difficulties we faced. These difficulties are evidence that God's work was going forward, and I hope to show that God was faithful to help us through the trials.

I will be mentioning some churches and individuals by name as I tell this story. I wish that I could mention every church and person by name, but space will not allow this. Also, I can't remember all who were part of what God has done in Biloxi. Every week I met and worked with new churches and individuals on a one-week basis. I think that I can safely say that I served with more than 6,000 volunteers, and I just can't remember everyone. If I fail to mention someone, don't think that you are not appreciated. You are appreciated and God knows every one of you and He knows all you did to help.

I will start at the beginning and tell the story as I understand it. I recognize that I only saw a minuscule fragment of the grand scheme, so this is not going to tell all that has and continues to happen along the coast. I know that there may be different versions of some of the stories that I will relate, and while my memory might differ from what others remember, I believe the basic parts of the stories are accurate. Anyway, remember that history is written by the one who has the pen.

I want everyone to understand that this has been the greatest experience of my life and I have been truly blessed. I hope you will remember this as I recount some of the problems and difficulties my wife and I faced in our ministry.

I will be talking a lot using the word 'I' but I want everyone to understand that I did nothing by myself. My wife was my faithful partner and she worked harder than I. The thousands of volunteers we worked with these last couple of years were simply amazing, and this book is written as a tribute to their tremendous efforts. God blessed our efforts with positive results and nothing could have been done without His provision. All the glory belongs to Him.

Isaiah 45:7 " I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things."

I, like so many others, watched as Hurricane Katrina formed in the Atlantic Ocean. At first it was just another one of many hurricanes during that very busy 2005 season. Nothing about Hurricane Katrina stuck out as being of any particular interest. It wasn't until God parked Katrina in the Gulf of Mexico and built its winds up to 200 miles per hour that many of us took notice that Katrina was going to be different. Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast during the early morning hours of August 29, 2005 and is known along the Gulf coast as the day that changed south Mississippi forever. The eye of the storm landed at Bay St. Louis which meant that Biloxi was on the most damaging side of the storm. New Orleans was fortunate to be on the west side of the storm, meaning they were on the easy side of it.

The worst damage from Katrina was from the storm surge. Katrina built up a tidal wave that varied from about 27 feet in Biloxi to about 35 feet in Bay St. Louis. Making things even worse was that Katrina came ashore at the highest possible tide. If you can imagine a wall of water over twenty feet high coming toward you, then you can imagine what it was like along the waterfront. In addition to this mountain of water, there were also the high winds and rain normally found in a hurricane and which added to the damage.

Almost 2,000 people lost their lives in the storm and others were injured. It is difficult to give exact figures because I have not seen accurate reports. The question is often asked why all the people didn't evacuate ahead of the storm. This is a valid question with no simple answer. I heard many answers. Some people felt safe if they were higher than the waterline from Hurricane Camille, a killer hurricane from 1969. It was felt that since in their more than 300 years of recorded history there had never been a flood line higher than Camille that there was nothing to worry about. The difference between Camille and Katrina was similar to the difference between an ordinary bomb and an atomic one.

Other reasons for staying in Biloxi were that so many previous warnings about hurricanes were followed by no hurricane. It is also very difficult to evacuate from Biloxi because of a lack of roads. This fact is the reason that I did not plan to evacuate. My hurricane plan was to hole up, with a case of Spam and several cases of water, in a church office which received no damage from Katrina. Another reason some people did not evacuate is that there are some people who are just too bullheaded to listen to good advice.

Hurricane Katrina ravaged the coast of Mississippi from the eastern border of Alabama to the western border of Louisiana. It destroyed the two major bridges on highway 90. Today in East Biloxi there is enough newly vacant land that large scale farming could be done. The damage along the 70 miles of shoreline was complete with the exception of some of the new big buildings, such as the casinos, and they were severely damaged. It is impossible to describe how severe the damage was to the coast. All you have to do to try to understand how bad the damage was to south Mississippi is to look up Hurricane Katrina pictures on the internet. Since a picture is better than a thousand words, I will not try to further describe the overall damage. However, I will describe damage done to individual buildings as this story unfolds.

East Biloxi is where we did most of our work. Biloxi is a peninsula bordered on the south by the Gulf of Mexico and on the east and north by what is known as the Back Bay. The land is not very far above sea level and has experienced moderate flooding in previous hurricanes. This time the waters rose much higher than ever before in recorded history. You can drive along Oak Street and see a water line someone

drew on their house on the second floor. Further west, on Division Street in a local paint store, they have put up a plaque which shows they received over six feet of flooding.

The water did not just come in and go right back out. It stayed for hours causing the buildings to receive a thorough salt water soaking. The land was flooded from the ocean side of the peninsula and also from the Back Bay. The storm surge followed rivers far upstream and destroyed buildings miles from the ocean. It was this flooding that caused the major damage and which causes Katrina to stand out as the most damaging hurricane ever. This statement needs explaining as there have been previous hurricanes which killed more people and caused much property damage. However, there has never been a hurricane that caused such tremendous destruction over such a large area. The size of Katrina is what sets this hurricane apart from the rest.

Chapter II The Earliest Days

Genesis 9:11 "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

I did not personally witness the earliest days after the hurricane, so I will have to rely on what others told me. It goes without saying that the people were in shock and desperately in need of help. Among those who quickly arrived were individuals who packed their truck or van with ice, water, hotdogs, hamburgers, and things of that nature and drove to Biloxi. They started handing these necessary items out on street corners and telling people that Jesus loved them. This was very practical, timely aid. Governmental authorities have made plans to see that this much needed help will not be available in future disasters. They have set up a system preventing those without proper documentation from entering the damaged areas in the future. The government's position is typical of their uncaring attitude as largely expressed by FEMA throughout this disaster, and also today by local and state officials.

The Salvation Army was among the first to arrive. I need to talk at length about the huge role the Salvation Army has played and continues to play in helping the people recover from Katrina. They have truly had a major impact. This is a story about how God in His providence provided for the people as they struggled and still struggle to rebuild. Several days before the hurricane, the Salvation Army finalized the purchase of a large parcel of land in the heart of the now damaged residential district. This property is called Yankee Stadium and contains a football stadium. Their purchase was so that they could develop a community center, but this plan has been put on hold. This property is being used by the Salvation Army and other relief agencies to help in the relief effort, and has proven to be very important for this effort. God certainly has His plans.

The Salvation Army arrived in Biloxi and started feeding thousands of meals daily for the needy people. I have heard stories about how much their meals meant. I think it is fair to say that theirs and others' early intervention made the difference between life and death for people. Additionally, they handed out boxes of necessities to thousands of people for months. There would be lines of cars waiting for these necessities stretching for more than a mile. This was still going on in late December, four months after the storm.

They also operate what they call a volunteer village at their facility where they house and feed more than 100 volunteers. They also feed any volunteers who want a free lunch at this facility. Our volunteers took advantage of this often. They also had a separate warehouse which they used to supply food for volunteer

groups such as ours. We really appreciated this as it enabled us to use more of our money for building materials instead of food. We certainly enjoyed our coffee furnished by the Salvation Army.

They even had grants available to homeowners for building materials and appliances. There may be other ways in which they helped the recovery efforts, but I think you can understand why I am really thankful to them for all they do. At this juncture, I would urge you to donate whenever you see a Salvation Army kettle. We can help insure that they have adequate monies for the next big disaster.

One of the earliest things that happened after the waters subsided was that each house was checked for survivors. It was common for a long time to see an "X" spray painted on houses. The searchers would paint numbers in these Xs to tell that the house had been searched and whether they found corpses or live people. I found it unnerving to drive around wondering which houses had been occupied by drowning victims.

Chapter III **My First Trip to Biloxi**

Isaiah 6:8 "And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then I said, 'Here am I! Send me.'"

At first, I watched with interest, which soon turned to horror, as events unfolded after Katrina. My first thoughts were that this is so very bad, but I live almost 600 miles away and it really does not affect me. However, God worked on me and I soon was convicted that I had to help these poor people. So, I started searching for a way to help. I briefly considered the American Red Cross, but this was quickly rejected because I could not work with an organization which would not allow me to share the gospel with people.

It was my pastor, Grover Timms, who found a website for the Mission to North America (MNA), a mission agency of our denomination where I could sign up to help with the recovery. I went to the website and looked at the application only to be discouraged because all the questions indicated that all they were looking for were people who were physically strong. For example, they really were interested in chainsaw operators. I told my wife that there was no reason for me to fill out the application because I am a very weak individual suffering from post polio syndrome, and they would not want me. She told me that I had nothing to lose, and to go ahead and fill it out. So I did.

I then waited for a call from MNA, and as time went along I figured that they could not use me. Actually I was glad that they did not quickly call me because I would daily check the weather for Biloxi and see that the temperatures were in the upper nineties. I had been stationed in Biloxi while in the Air Force and I really had no desire to work again in those temperatures along with the high humidity that the area experiences.

Finally, I was contacted by Judy Haines, who along with her husband Ron, were heading up the disaster relief for our denomination. It was obvious that they had not read my application because I was asked to discuss my nonexistent chainsaw operating abilities. We started discussing my employment background and it was determined that I could serve as a site manager in Biloxi. I agreed, but questioned them on what a site manager actually does. They told me not to worry, that I would be trained when I got to Biloxi. The moral of this is to not believe everything you are told.

I headed for Biloxi early on November 11 to work for 1 week which eventually stretched into 10 days. I arrived in the early evening after a 570 mile drive. My first reaction was one of shock and disbelief. As I traveled west on I-10 there was very little damage to see other than some windows missing in the Mississippi welcome station and the many blue roofs on houses. I soon learned that blue was the current leader in the color of roofs in the storm ravaged areas because this was the color of the tarpaulins put on damaged roofs.

It wasn't until I headed south on I-110 that I began to see just how bad the damage was. As I crossed over the drawbridge to Biloxi, I watched a large helicopter as it was repairing the casino roof which is the first sight to greet visitors to Biloxi. As soon as I got off of I-110, I was able to see a sight that words can not adequately describe. Here it was, almost 2½ months after the storm, and it looked as if multiple giant bombs had just been set off.

It was very difficult to get around as many streets were blocked off to traffic. The main east-west road, highway 90, was open only to emergency vehicles. This meant that Irish Hills Drive was the only east-west road open. Even though traffic was greatly reduced from normal, there were excessively long delays. Travel on any open road was difficult because many of the roads only had 1 lane open. You had to look far ahead to see if anybody was coming before you tried to get through. The roads were full of all sorts of debris, including boats and houses.

I managed to get to my destination around 5:00 PM and reported to work. Earlier I mentioned that I was to be trained in the duties of a site manager. Well, my training did not take long because all it consisted of was me introducing myself and being told by the man I was replacing, who was my trainer, what his name was, and goodbye. At this point, I was in charge of over 100 volunteers who were very active in doing their work, work which I knew nothing about. That was the start of a very long weekend.

The next morning my troubles really began when the cooks told me they were going home because their week was over. I must have showed my dismay on my face because there was an elder from a PCA church in Virginia who told me not to worry because Sally Missionary (which is not her real name) was coming with another group from his church that afternoon that she had the skills and would be our cook. In the middle of the afternoon, a group of volunteers from Virginia arrived and Sally Missionary identified herself. I told her how happy I was to see her because we desperately needed a cook. She looked me in the eye and informed me she had not come to Biloxi to cook and she was not going to cook.

It became apparent, from my earliest days in Biloxi, that one of the reasons God had called me there was to develop some of the fruits of the Spirit in me, particularly peace, patience, and self-control. For this reason, I refrained from pointing out to Sally Missionary that when a person answers God's call, they need to copy Isaiah. Isaiah did not put any conditions on accepting His call. Isaiah 6:8 records Isaiah's answer to God's question, "Who shall we send? Who will go for us?" Isaiah answered, "Here am I, send me." Our answer to God must always be the same as Isaiah's.

I don't remember what we ate that Saturday evening, probably leftovers. I also do not remember breakfast the next day, but by lunch things were looking pretty grim. I skipped worship to try to prepare something to eat, and it was then that I did my first sensible thing in Biloxi. I started praying and telling God that I was in deep trouble and that I desperately needed His help. Not only did I need to learn what a site manager does, but I had this cook problem to deal with.

Very early in the afternoon, God replied in a way which became normal for our work. A man from Milwaukee arrived with a team from a Lutheran Church, and introduced himself. He told me his name was Scott, that he was a chef, and that he came to Biloxi to cook; so we enjoyed gourmet meals all week

long. God certainly answered my prayer. We were to experience God providing for our needs over and over again the rest of the time in Biloxi. He continued to provide for His work right up through our last week there.

Most of our early work was that of cleaning up yards filled with storm debris and cleaning out the mess left in houses when the salt water receded. "Mucking" out a house is a new phrase on the Gulf Coast. This is what we used to describe the dirty work of removing all the mud, broken lumber, and the sheetrock debris from houses. Our workers would leave early in the morning and return in the evening looking as if they had spent their day playing in the dirt, and they had. The only clean part of these volunteers would be on their faces where their respirators had been. It was necessary to wear these respirators for the protection of the workers.

It is difficult to describe just how horribly filthy and difficult the work that was done by so many of God's army in those early days was, but the people we were helping certainly knew. They were blown away by the sight of thousands of Christians volunteering their own time and money to come to Biloxi to work so hard to help them. Thus began a new saying, a new attitude which is strongly expressed today in South Mississippi. I heard this expressed constantly throughout my stay there. People would say, "If it weren't for the church, we don't know how we would have survived. Or they would say, "If it wasn't for the church, we would still be flat on our back." We even heard, "We know church people care."

One of many stories that I like to tell is about this attitude. Although this actually happened in 2007, telling it here helps illustrate my current point. One day my wife was in the Vietnamese bakery located on Oak Street waiting to buy bread for our evening meal. The bakery was busy so she had time to talk to a Biloxi resident. He told her how he had lost his house and also lost his business. When he found out that my wife was buying bread for our work camp, he expressed his gratitude for our work by trying to pay for the bread.

The following is not an attack on The Roman Catholic Church; rather, it is just reporting observations gleaned by my experience in Biloxi. Most of the people in Biloxi call themselves Roman Catholic, and they are disappointed by the fact that their church did almost nothing to help them in their need, especially at first. We would often hear people express their amazement at the volume of help coming to them from other churches and their dismay of none from their own church. As you can imagine, this had a tremendous impact on the people of Biloxi and opened many doors for us. People were openly questioning what they believed in and they were eager to listen to our volunteers share the truth from the Bible about Jesus and why we were motivated to help them.

Another story illustrates this point. I was in Biloxi the week before Thanksgiving and some ladies from the local Catholic Church came by and very graciously invited us to come and enjoy a Thanksgiving meal at their church. I explained that we actually had plans with several other churches to serve the community Thanksgiving dinner at our church. I thanked the ladies and as they turned to leave, one of the ladies blurted out that she didn't know what was wrong with her church because they had several million dollars set apart for relief work. She continued by saying, "We Presbyterians were all over town."

I want to make clear that I am not attacking the Roman Catholic Church, only reporting what I observed. We had many members of the Catholic Church come and worked with us during the time we were in Biloxi, and they made great contributions to our work. An interesting aside is that most of the people on the Gulf Coast are Roman Catholic and I learned that Mardi Gras is a big celebration in Biloxi just like in New Orleans. In fact, there is a 3 day holiday during Mardi Gras. Even our church took Fat Tuesday off as a holiday, but not the volunteers. They worked through all the drunken festivities.

The volunteers were simply amazing. They were from many parts of the United States and from many different church backgrounds. Later, I will talk more about how our work was never just a Presbyterian thing; rather it was truly a work of the universal church. Actually, our biggest supporters were from another denomination and from a non-church organization. It was truly a blessing to work with so many people who were united by their love of Jesus.

A couple of volunteers from these early days stand out in my mind. One of these is Fran Roberts, an elderly lady from Charlotte, who told me that she wasn't sure that she was physically fit to work with the others in her group. She said she liked to talk to people and so she spent her week walking the neighborhoods where her team was working, handing out Bibles and encouraging people.

I need to mention the need of the people for encouragement. They were terribly shattered by what had happened to them. Many of them had lost loved ones in the storm and they had lost all their worldly possessions other than the clothes on their backs. At first it seemed as if the survivors were in shock as they tried to understand what had happened to them. The following information has not been widely disseminated, but the incidence of suicide, mental breakdown, alcoholism, drug use, divorce, child and spouse abuse, etc. has risen dramatically and remains a problem to this day. Today, the attitude among many who still have no house to live in is one of being resigned to their fate; they have lost hope.

My time in Biloxi was one of long days and short nights. I would get up about 6:00 AM and send the volunteers out to their work assignments. Much of the remainder of my day was occupied with meeting survivors who were requesting aid. This was a very difficult time because the needs were so great and our ability to respond was so inadequate. People would tell me that while they had survived, a friend or relative had not. Sometimes the survivors were in the same house as the one who died. Many survivors (a term they would rather hear than victim) would often tell how even though they had lost all their possessions, they were thankful that they and their loved ones were alive. The item that they seemed the saddest at losing was their family pictures.

It was while dealing with these survivors that I began to really love and respect so many of them. They would sit in my office and ask for help, but then tell me to take care of another person first, who they felt needed the help more, or they would tell me that we had done enough for them right now and we should help others. More than once, I would tell a person after examining their house, that there was nothing we could do to help them because their house was too badly damaged to repair and needed to be torn down. I would feel sad when I had to do this especially when the person who had just been told that they no longer had a house would tell me, "That's alright Bob. We know that you care and we know you are doing all you can to help."

One of the residents who asked for help was a 74 year old lady who told me that she had managed to clean up her yard of storm debris, but it had almost killed her. She stated that she had a heart condition and she didn't feel able to climb up on her roof and remove a tree which had fallen on it, and she wondered if we could help her. We gladly helped her.

Another man who asked for help was in his 70s and was building a very small, one room house on his own. He was doing alright until he fell off his roof and broke some ribs. We were glad to help him finish his house.

I had not left church property since I had arrived, so the day before I was to go home, I drove down the highway along the ocean and took some pictures to show people back home. I only drove a couple of miles because it was so sad to see the damage. As I looked at everything, I was not seeing destroyed property, but rather I was seeing hurting people. It was too painful, so I quickly turned around and returned

to the church. I thought about how the good life we enjoy in America had ended for so many people along the coast of Mississippi, and even though I was scheduled to go home, I felt sure that I would be back.

I finally left Biloxi on November 21, way too late in the morning to be able to easily get through Atlanta at rush hour. It was while I was dealing with rush hour traffic that I received a call from David Brand, the church elder in charge of hurricane relief. We discussed the possibility of my returning in December for a couple of weeks. By this time it was apparent that the site manager needed to come and stay for more than one week as there needed to be continuity in this position. I think David was tired of training a new site manager each week.

Another factor in the desire of First Presbyterian Church Biloxi that I return to Biloxi was that my physical handicap helped keep me at my desk in the office doing my job. It was exciting for the person in charge to be out in the field, but it was necessary for him to stay in the office and direct operations.

The trip home was long and tiring. It was raining and there were many accidents along the way. I was totally exhausted when I finally arrived home around midnight. My adoring wife lovingly greeted me by telling me that I smelled too bad to be allowed in the house and that I was to get undressed in the garage and get right in the shower. She was right because the storm has deposited so much filth on Biloxi that there was a terrible odor that clung to people.

Chapter IV **Christmas in Biloxi: 2005**

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

I returned to Biloxi on December 10, accompanied by my wife, for a three week tour of duty. I learned from my mistakes, so I brought a cook with me so that there would be no repeat of the cooking problem from my first trip. It was my wife's duty to act as camp cook for 3 weeks. This began what turned out to be our more than two year partnership leading the relief work. MaryLee was indispensable to the success of our ministry as so many of you know from your experience in Biloxi. Following are some comments from her:

On December 10, 2005, Bob and I arrived in Biloxi to begin our 3 week tour of duty. Arriving in the morning the sun revealed the full extent of what felt to me like being dropped into a war torn, bomb blasted 3rd world country. The damage just went on and on until the senses were so overwhelmed that nothing more could sink in except an incredible sadness that began to creep in and overtake my being. The stench was so tremendous and I can still recall that scent into memory today, 2 ½ years later.

I investigated the church kitchen on my arrival and noticed a definite need for my organizational skills. After worship, I asked permission from the men staying in camp when I arrived to have control of the kitchen and cooking. Since they were content with that scenario, I dug in and got busy, which helped the sadness subside. A sense of mission is a great asset! At this point, I still had no idea of a budget for a kitchen and shopping wasn't easy as many businesses were gone or badly damaged; no one seemed to be back on their feet yet. Some of our earlier meals were pitiful, although we had enough.

As I had a chance, I visited with local people. Every day was filled with many tears from the natives and from the volunteers. Everything normal was gone –the house, the school, the neighborhood, the church, the bus route, the favorite store and most important visual reminders like pictures, a wedding dress, grandpa’s favorite chair, grandma’s tableware, and so on. An incredible sense of loss filled so many folks. Everyone was looking for answers. Why did this happen? How will we go on? To the volunteers, who suddenly felt incredibly wealthy, we wondered the same. In such an intense situation, we volunteers forged friendships quickly. I will always prize my relationships with so many godly and caring people.

The local people wandered the streets and sorted through piles of debris looking for valued possessions, most of which were never found. They also wandered the streets empty eyed giving rise to thoughts that perhaps zombies did actually exist!

In view of all this suffering, what could I do but give myself to the work 100%? Bob and I worked long hours 7 days a week. I tried to protect him and would do the late night and early morning airport runs and be on duty to make sure breakfast was served on time so the teams could get out for work. The day after Christmas our team count went to about 160 –people were sleeping everywhere, including on the choir platform. Since I relied too much on myself to do everything, the last 2 days were miserable as I found out what true exhaustion was. I spent too little personal time with the Lord, slept too little, and did too much. I learned great lessons about important things that I needed to learn. And now, back to Bob.

The first thing that I noticed when I returned to Biloxi was that while progress must have been made, the cleaned up areas were not very noticeable. Many houses and boats had floated into the middle of the roads, and they were still there. Mountains of debris were everywhere. The area was still incredibly filthy. Hanging in the trees was all types of garbage. Limbs were wrapped and draped with garden hoses, bedspreads, curtains, webbing from lawn chairs and so on.

I am now going to give credit to FEMA for something they actually did to help in the recovery. Even though it looked like little had been done to cleanup the area, FEMA had contracted with hundreds, maybe thousands of trucks to haul debris out of the area up to a landfill area. All day long, trucks were hauling debris on the highway in front of the church. This was going on when I was there in November and was still going on in December.

Perhaps a brief description of the condition of the church we worked out of is in order. Our church is the only church left in operation after Hurricane Katrina along the coast of Mississippi. This is remarkable as I have been told that there were over a hundred churches along the coast before the storm.

First Presbyterian Church Biloxi was back in business worshipping God as soon as the water subsided. There was no power in the church, and it was very hot, but the church met for worship the first Sunday after the storm. One of my favorite pictures of Biloxi is one of a sheet of plywood propped up in front of the church with a spray painted message announcing the time of worship.

Clearly the hand of God is seen in the fact that the church, while badly damaged, still was able to function as both a place of worship and a relief center. The church was flooded in the sanctuary by a little over 3 feet of seawater which stopped just short of going over the platform. The fellowship hall in the back of the church and in several other places lost its shingles.

The church is very large and it has a large wing which we took over to house volunteers. Upstairs was for men and in the downstairs we housed women. We could comfortably house about 130 people, and in times of need we uncomfortably housed up to about 160 volunteers. They slept wherever there was room. Some volunteers were furnished with cots, some bunk beds, and others air mattresses. Our bathroom facilities were very limited and lacked hot water. Our showers were outside and it was a big

event when hot water was installed in November. People did not tarry in completing their showers during cold periods. Essentially, the church was turned over to us for relief work.

The combination of hot water in the showers and a chef caused me on my first trip in November to make a sign which was hung outside my office. This sign proclaimed to the volunteers that they were staying at the Biloxi Hilton and that we had a half star rating. I might mention that as managers of this fancy hotel, my wife and I slept in the office on cots. I am, as many of you know, rather large, but I quickly got used to sleeping on the cot. It's amazing what fatigue will do for a person.

The period from December 10th to the 25th was a relatively quiet period of time for us out in the field. The closer we got to Christmas, the smaller the number of volunteers became, but we were still very busy in the office. The church secretary, Kim Clark, and I had all we could do to keep up with the request coming in from the community for help, and all the calls from churches arraigning for trips to help us. The volume of requests for help overwhelmed me. I would listen to the people and could promise nothing in the way of aid. We had tall stacks of unanswered requests for aid and no way of handling the volume. It was very depressing listening to people tell such terrible stories about how they had suffered and not be able to help them. Some of them would break down and cry because they were so overwhelmed by their troubles. We had several hundred of these requests stacked up. I think my lack of ability to help them was one of the most difficult things I have ever had to deal with.

I want to talk about my relationship with the church secretary, Kim Clark, for a few minutes. Kim has been a joy to work with from the very beginning of our time together right up to the end of my time in Biloxi. The relief work caused her a lot of extra stress and labor, particularly in the early days. She not only had her duties as church secretary to a hurting church to perform, she also had the additional work of helping with the relief work. This extra burden on her lasted until we closed the work down. Kim always helped me as much as she could. Kim, I love and appreciate you.

The following story is not typical because almost all of the volunteer teams were in Biloxi for the right reason and they were a joy to work with. However, there were a few exceptions out of the hundreds of teams that I worked with. One team stands out in my mind and that is because it seemed that they came mostly to help me develop some of the fruits of the Spirit, especially patience and self-control. This team arrived in mid-December for a couple of weeks, lasting until after Christmas. These were a mixed bag of volunteers from several different churches. One of them was from a Baptist-Catholic Church, something that I did not previously know existed.

They were difficult from the very beginning. The first night, when bedtime came, several of them started upstairs arm-in-arm with their spouses. They had been told earlier that upstairs was off-limits to women, and was for men only. However, it took some effort on my part to enforce this order with them.

I wish this was my only difficulty with them, but it was not. They were very fussy about the kind of work that they would do. As we would look through stacks of request for aid, they would tell me over and over, "We don't do that kind of work." They would ask for details about the homeowners and then say, "They are not worthy of our help, we are not going to work on their house." One time they actually started working on a house of a church member, and after working for a couple of hours told the member and his wife that they were not worthy and walked off the job. This was a young couple who had completely lost their house on the beach and bought a house which had been badly damaged by the storm, but which they were able to fix up to live in. What made this particularly significant was that this was one of the few members of our host church who needed our help. We only worked on a couple of houses of church members; our work was concentrated on helping the community.

This problem of volunteers deciding that a person did not deserve our help never completely went away. Usually I handled this by not arguing the merits of fixing a particular house, rather I would assign the team to another house, and give the original house to a new team a week later. Sometimes it was difficult to correctly judge whether we should work on particular houses, and we did work on some houses where after we started we knew we should leave and we did. My main weapon in making sure that we worked on houses we should was to rely on the Holy Spirit to lead me. Looking back, I can see that this was very effective and very few mistakes were made.

The government would make assumptions as to who should receive help based on appearances that were often not valid. We did not want to operate without heart like the government. For example, a person could have a very nice income, but when they returned to Biloxi to find their house completely gone, and their insurance company denying them any aid, and still being obligated to pay a mortgage, they needed help which we gave as we could.

Another area where this group caused difficulty was in the kitchen where they took over and kicked my wife out. Rather than argue about this, my wife let them cook and she concentrated on helping in other areas. Everything was fine until they let us know that our Christmas Day meal would be pizza. Some of us objected, but my first Christmas Day meal there was pizza. It was a very good, homemade pizza, but it did not seem like a Christmas meal. The day after Christmas they gave the kitchen back to my wife as they chickened out when we went from a couple of dozen people to feed, to over 160 in a matter of several hours.

The day after Christmas was a day of shock for me because while I knew ahead of time that we were going to have large numbers of people arrive, I was not prepared for around 160. We assigned beds to people until we ran out of beds and then we assigned air mattresses and when we ran out of room in our sleeping rooms, we put people in the library, the choir loft, and in pews. Some of the volunteers even slept in the undamaged part of the house they were repairing. It was a blessed time to work and fellowship with this large and diverse group of Christians.

Now, I want to talk about my observation about natural disasters; they attract every type of crook in the country. Even before any aid reaches the victims, the crooks are there. Most people are aware that the federal government was very slow in sending help. There was plenty of warning that the hurricane was coming and there is no excuse for the fact that looters arrived in Biloxi before the National Guard. We helped a lady, who later accepted Christ as her savior who returned to her house to find that it was occupied by looters who wouldn't let her back into her house. They also stole her life savings and now she lives on an inadequate social security check.

Earlier I complimented FEMA, but now I am going to give an example of their more common method of operation. This incident actually happened during my first trip to Biloxi. I received a phone call from an agency which helps deaf people, and they wondered if I could help. I was told that they were trying to help a deaf couple who were trying to obtain a FEMA trailer to live in, but they didn't understand all that they had to do to obtain the trailer. I didn't know the answer, but I figured that I could call FEMA and get the answers needed. So I called the FEMA phone number and it was answered in Atlanta. The first thing the lady asked was what business it was of mine, and she wanted to know why I was involved. She then wanted to know if the couple could read or whether they were just too stupid to understand simple instructions. Realizing that she was not going to be of much help, I asked her for the phone number of their office in Biloxi. I was put on hold for a couple of minutes and then the lady told me that she couldn't find their phone number in Biloxi, but she had one for Alabama. Unfortunately, this all too often was the kind of help people received from their government. There are some FEMA employees who tried to help people and I will mention them later.

Back to the crooks who came to Biloxi to take advantage of people. One group of these predators are called insurance adjusters. Much has been written about how the people suffered at the hands of the insurance companies, and the story is still continuing in various courts. There were some insurance companies who were fair to their customers, but not most of the big ones.

There are two main types of claims people submitted. One was the case of damage where there was storm surge flooding along with wind and rain damage. The insurance company's position in these cases was that the damage was not covered because the damage was caused by flooding. They totally ignored the wind and rain damage. Even though there was documentation that the wind and rain damaged the houses first, insurance companies denied liability. The courts mostly have not agreed with this position.

The other type of claim was for damage where there was no flooding. The insurance companies in these cases would acknowledge their liability, but they would only offer to pay a fraction of the claim even though the policy called for more. An example of a typical claim would be that of a homeowner having a policy of \$80,000 coverage and the insurance company offering \$30-50,000 with a take it or leave it attitude. The homeowner had a difficult decision to make. He could accept the amount offered and do some of the emergency repairs needed, or he could take his chance in court. This meant that his house would be open to further damage for a couple of years as he waited on the courts. It's sad to see what many of the insurance companies did to their customers, particularly when you consider that they were making record profits at the same time they were cheating their customers.

Another group of predators are those who call themselves contractors. It was such a problem that Mississippi made contractor fraud a felony, and it is particularly gratifying to see some of these criminals being prosecuted. Over and over people told me how they had either given their life savings or their insurance money to a contractor who fled with it. Quickly the people became afraid to hire anybody to work on their houses.

As we prepared to leave Biloxi at the end of December, the only really healthy things were the casinos. Money was no object to them as they rushed to get their repairs done and reopen. Three of them managed to reopen the day after Christmas. To this day it is startling to drive in East Biloxi past the opulence of the casinos, and a few blocks away to see the ruins where the people of East Biloxi live.

We left Biloxi about noon on December 31 having first stopped at the hospital in Gulfport to visit a volunteer who had received a serious injury. As we drove northwest toward Atlanta, we knew that it was wrong of us to abandon the people of Biloxi. My wife was in tears much of the way, and I cried inside. The long hours we had worked had left us exhausted and we made it as far as Atlanta where we stopped to spend New Years Eve. We enjoyed the luxury of a real bed and real showers after 3 weeks living in the church office in Biloxi.

Chapter V **Our Call to Return to Biloxi, and Assorted Stories**

2 Corinthians 9:10 "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness."

We were only home for a few days when we received a phone call from David Brand asking if we could return to Biloxi and supervise the rebuilding efforts going out from First Presbyterian Church for the next

two years. I quickly explained to David that my heart was answering yes, but my pocketbook said no. I explained that my wife had a job in our hometown area of Spartanburg, S.C. and that we need her income to live on. We all thought that this was the end of our involvement in Biloxi, but then God answered our prayers. My wife's boss heard about this and told her that she could move to Biloxi and work her job there. This allowed us to return to Biloxi as "tent making missionaries." For the rest of our time in Biloxi, I was a "kept" man supported by my wife's income. This is just another one of many examples of how God so richly provided for His work and His missionaries in Biloxi.

The next stories I tell are only a few of the ones I could tell if my memory was better and if I had more time. I remind you that, while your efforts may not be mentioned here (most aren't), God knows what you did and He is the one who counts.

My wife's boss, David Wolff, is also her brother, and he is in charge of the family business which is a company that manufactures and sells industrial scissors and sharpening equipment. This business, Wolff Industries, was started by my wife's father and it has always been operated as a Christian business using its money to support the Lord's work. I mention this because while my wife did her best to earn her salary, she really didn't earn it some of the time. She was forced to spend much of her time helping me, especially during our last few months. David knew this and allowed her to continue drawing her salary, which was his way of helping keep us in Biloxi. Wolff Industries also contributed in other ways, and for that, we are thankful.

Another story is about volunteers being injured while working on houses. Our volunteers had many injuries while doing their work. As many of you know, each evening I mentioned safety to try to keep the number of injuries down. The following story is about Bakersfield, California and their efforts to help us. This was our most severe injury and explains why we visited the hospital before we left town on New Years Eve.

Many people in Bakersfield, California were shocked by what they were witnessing as the reports from Biloxi came in. They wanted to help, but what could they do from over 2,000 miles away? Well, God took their willing hearts and made it so they could help. I don't know all the people or churches involved, but many people and churches got together to help. I do know that the two churches that led the effort are Calvary Bible Church and Crossroads Community Church. Two people who helped lead this effort are brothers Gerald and Steve Ogden, each of whom attends one of these churches.

There was a rancher who had 50 abandoned migrant worker houses on his property, and he donated these to the cause. The houses were brought in from the fields and completely renovated with new plumbing, wiring, etc. They were furnished with appliances, furniture, and even homemade comforters. They are nice and very adequate to live in, see picture in front of this book.

Unlike FEMA trailers, these trailers were large enough to actually live in and the people were given the title to them so they had assurance of permanent housing. I mention the size of a FEMA trailer knowing that many of you may not be able to appreciate just how small they are. Try measuring out an area of 10 feet by 24 feet to get an idea of how small 240 feet is. Then try to imagine that your family has to live in this space and as small as these living quarters are, they can be taken away from you whenever the government wants to. Even though people are still living in these trailers, the government lets the people know that they could lose their shelter at any time. You can easily understand that these trailers from Bakersfield have been a real blessing. Some of the elderly people will probably live their lives out in these trailers.

As soon as a few trailers were ready, axles were put on them and then in a convoy they were towed across the country. A book could be written about their adventures and misadventures along the way. As soon as the trailers arrived, they were set up on the recipient's property and they moved in. I don't know when the first caravan arrived in Biloxi, but there was one that arrived the first Saturday I was in Biloxi, and I will never forget that afternoon when a man came to my office crying with joy because for the first time since the hurricane, his whole family could live under one roof again.

A convoy arrived around December 10, and they had had a very difficult journey with many breakdowns along the way. They had even had to temporarily abandon a couple of broken down trailers out west. As they were setting up a trailer tragedy struck, and a man by the name of Duane Damron was severely injured. As I many times told people, we didn't have many accidents, but we had many people injured because of carelessness, and this was one of those incidents. The trailer being set up was pulled in parallel and very close to a chain link fence. An older teenage boy was working between the trailer and the fence while Duane was on his knees working on the corner of the trailer when several children went into the trailer and their weight caused the trailer to tip over against the fence. As it was tipping, Duane reached in back of the trailer and pulled the teenager out preventing him from being crushed when the trailer crashed against the fence. However, the corner of the trailer landed on the hand Duane was supporting his body with, and crushed his hand.

Duane was hauled off to the hospital where the doctors operated on his hand and admitted him. Duane remained under doctor's care for the next couple of months while his doctor kept cutting away parts of his hand. Duane eventually ended up with much of his hand, his thumb, and two other fingers being cut off. Duane is a very interesting individual. My wife and I went on Christmas day to visit him in the hospital, only he was missing from his bed because his doctor took him home for Christmas. Eventually Duane moved in with his doctor, incidentally who is a member of First Presbyterian Church Gulfport, a church totally destroyed by Katrina. Duane could have returned to California for his operations, but he trusted his Mississippi doctor and friend, and stayed with him until the surgeries were all done.

At the time of the accident, Duane was about 72 years old and a widower. He always had a positive mental attitude and never complained about his accident. On Labor Day weekend in 2007 during one of those infrequent down times for our work, my wife and I had the privilege to be at Calvary Bible Church in Bakersfield, one of our supporting churches where Duane introduced his new wife to me. It seems that when Duane returned to California, he entered therapy to learn how to live with part of a hand missing. Duane liked his therapist so well that he married her.

The trailers continued coming through the spring of 2006. We were always happy to hear that another convoy was coming because they fed us a feast every trip. They would bring all the ingredients for a western barbecue with them all the way from Bakersfield. One of their last trips was very memorable for me. I have told this story hundreds of times to almost every team that came to Biloxi.

When we knew when the night of the barbecue would be, we would invite many of the people from the community that we had been working with to come and join us. On this particular evening, we had about 200 people sharing a meal in our fellowship hall, which pretty well filled up all the available room. After we ate, we had an evening devotion and a time of prayer. That evening I asked for everyone to pray as they felt led. We were praying along when all of a sudden a nine year old girl from Huntsville, Alabama started praying. I thought it was amazing that this young lady would pray out loud in front of a couple of hundred strangers. I don't remember what she was saying until she got to the part where she asked God to please spare Biloxi from another hurricane that year. She then asked God that if He did send a hurricane, would He please make it a weak, category one hurricane. What a moving moment!

This happened on the eve of the start of the 2006 hurricane season which was predicted by all the human experts to be a more severe season than 2005, which was the worst on record. As it turned out, 2006 was a wimpy year for hurricanes. I can't say that the reason for this was because of this young girl's prayer, but we do know that God works through the prayers of His people. So maybe it was her prayer that protected us.

I will talk about additional aid we received from Bakersfield later in this story. Now, I want to talk about a unique individual, David Brand, and the role he played and continues to play helping people recover from the storm. He is the man I reported to, as he was the elder in charge of Hurricane Katrina relief work. David has been involved in the relief work right from the beginning, even as the waters receded. He sells retirement and health insurance for a living, but he devoted all his time for a year to helping the recovery effort, and let his business fend for itself. Here is another example of how God provided for His workers, as David reported that his business operated on autopilot and his income went down very little during the time he neglected his business to help people.

David and I worked very closely and without his help we would never have been able to help as many people as we did. His special skill was raising money to fund the work we were doing. He wrote constantly to churches explaining the need and asking for help. Many responded with financial aid and volunteers. I don't know how he did it, but David put together a partnership that proved very helpful to our efforts. I'm not sure even David could explain how it all came together. This partnership was with Rotary International and various Rotary Clubs around the country. David continues as this is written to mop up the loose ends of our work together, and only God knows all that David did.

For some reason, after the first few months, our denomination's mission agencies decided to not help us anymore financially, and also as time went on they ceased to send us volunteers. I think we received two teams from our denomination's two missions agencies our last 15 months. Let me make sure to make the point that we continued to receive tremendous support from individual PCA (Presbyterian Church in America) churches that came directly to work with us. God made up for our denomination's lack of support by sending us help from unexpected places. For example, Rotary became one of our staunchest supporters. Rotary was our single biggest source of money and they sent hundreds of volunteers. David Brand figures that their financial contribution was more than \$800,000.00.

Our first aid came from Rotary International and was a grant in excess of \$300,000. This deal came about by a Rotarian in the Bakersfield group hooking David up with a Rotarian in North Mississippi who came up with the money. This money was used to buy sheetrock and insulation which we gave away to people who needed it to finish rebuilding their houses. We gave sheetrock away until May of 2006 when the money ran out. We later received several other large grants from Rotary International before we were finished in Biloxi.

We also received financial and volunteer aid from many local Rotary clubs. These clubs were from all over the country, from New York to California and many states in between. Thank you to all the Rotarians who helped. Now it is time to mention a very special rotary group, and this is the District 7300 clubs in the Pittsburg area. They were absolutely amazing as they sent us over 20 teams of volunteers each coming with a check for \$5,000 to help with expenses. I have many fond memories of these men and women, some of who came numerous times.

It all started with a Rotary team coming to volunteer in December of 2005. This team was led by Cindy Sakala who, at that time, was the Rotary President of the district. She stayed with us the week after Christmas when we were overcrowded with over 160 volunteers. In fact, we were so jammed that her team

ate meals with us and then slept in the undamaged part of the house they were working on. She saw enough while working with us to cause her to return to Pittsburg and become one of our major supporters.

As I said earlier, when we ceased to receive much in the way of constructive help from our denomination's official agencies, God brought us help from many other churches. We received help from many different denominations and many independent churches. It is a wonderful fact that the work that we did is truly a work done by the universal church. We came together as God's people united in Jesus and motivated by Him to work together without any denominational friction. My experience working with all these wonderful Christians removed any trace of Presbyterian snobbery that I might have had.

I think that it is time to go back to reporting in a chronological order what happened in Biloxi. So, I will end this chapter.

Chapter VI **We Return to Biloxi for a Couple of Years**

Philippians 4:19 "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

It was on February 24, 2006 that I returned to Biloxi without my wife. The most difficult part of working in Biloxi for me was that often my wife had to go on the road to call on customers. I had lived alone until I was 38 years old before God sent me my wife, and I don't enjoy being separated. It was three long weeks before she joined me. There had not been a lot of change in the nearly two months that I had been gone. It still looked like a bombed out area, and we were still mucking out houses although we were doing a little more construction work.

It is time for me to both make a confession and to pay tribute to God. My confession is that I knew nothing about construction and now I had to supervise volunteers as they rebuilt houses. My only skill with wood is to burn it. My tribute to God here is that every week He brought skilled people to Biloxi who knew how to do the construction work, and each week they were able to go out and do great work. My system of assigning work was to get to know the teams and determine what kind of work they were capable of doing, and then give them what they needed and get out of their way. Over time God taught me what I needed to know to better assist the volunteers, but I still have a lot to learn. This system must have worked well because we soon developed a reputation for doing quality work.

There was a problem with my system that never completely went away. Many of the team leaders wanted to know long before they were scheduled to arrive exactly what work they would be doing, and I couldn't tell them because I never knew what they would be doing in advance. I told my wife just the other day that often I made the decisions about how to direct the volunteers as we were all sitting in my office discussing the work orders the day before they started work. Sometimes people who liked to plan every last detail were quite put out with me about my system, and sometimes they would complain, but quickly they saw that they were given productive work assignments and they were content.

All I can say is that I relied on God to direct the work and He did a good job of each week matching up just the right job with just the right workers. I am proud of the fact that our workers did not stand around for hours their first day waiting to go to work. I knew that the volunteers did not sacrifice their time and money to be idle; they came to Biloxi to work and make a difference. God was faithful, and I don't know of any teams that felt they were not productive while in Biloxi.

Another way that God provided for us was to provide a place for us to live in. We spent 2 months sleeping on a cot in my office, and so God provided a trailer for my wife and me, and a real bed for us to sleep in. The trailer was provided by the Bakersfield California volunteers. It was about 38 feet long containing less square footage than our deck back home. It had been abandoned in a field for some time. The people who brought it told me they had good news and bad news about the trailer. The good news was that the trailer was here for us to use and the bad news was that they had not had enough time to fix everything that needed fixing. Many volunteers over the next two years showed their love for us by continually repairing our home.

The trailer showed that it was a desert trailer, and that it was not designed for the humid climate of Biloxi. Most of our rain in Biloxi came in the form of downpours and the trailer never stopped leaking for any long period of time. In fact, as we were packing up to come home, we noticed that the light fixture, on the living room ceiling was half full of water. We would often lose power in part of the trailer until things dried out.

I want to make sure that my comments about our trailer are not to be seen as complaints because they are only descriptions. We always were grateful that God provided so well for us and we were very content with our living conditions. I think living in the trailer gave us a deeper understanding of just what the displaced residents had to deal with; of course our trailer was bigger than theirs. Our small living space also taught us how unnecessary worldly items are.

Just after we moved into the trailer in March, my pastor, Grover Timms, and fellow elder, Lance Womack, came from my home church to Biloxi to work for a week. They looked at our needs and built us a very substantial bed frame with storage. The bed was designed for a mattress without any springs. We loved this bed so much that we brought it home with us. We often worked ourselves into exhaustion and many a night, as I was getting into bed, I would thank God for such a wonderful bed. It was always encouraging to be reminded that it was built by people who wanted to show their love for us and see that we had a nice place to sleep.

My pastor tends to be quite conservative about the foods that he eats. His idea of a culinary adventure is to eat at Cracker Barrel, but he was forced to step out in faith and eat an exotic dish while working in Mississippi. We were in a restaurant in Bay St. Louis where they were serving boiled crawfish, a real culinary treat, but one far from anything my pastor would choose to eat. However, a deputy sheriff in uniform and wearing his service revolver was boiling the crawfish. He took one look at Grover, pointed to a crawfish, and told him to eat it, at which he did. The way my pastor describes this is to tell how he was forced at gunpoint to eat the crawfish. It's amazing what one will do while on the mission field.

The period of time from my return in February until Good Friday on April 14th was a very busy time. It was a time of spring break when thousands of students gave up their vacation time to come and work. Talk about having your faith in the next generation renewed, we had many weeks when we had more than 100 students working with us. We were still cleaning up the mess left behind by Katrina and the students pitched into this work with youthful enthusiasm. We also found out that young people made good roofers.

Bob was sent by Mission to the World to work with us for a few weeks to supervise the repairing of roofs. At the beginning of each week, Bob would go around the fellowship hall where we would be gathered for our devotion, and he would look everybody over and talk to some. Then he would pick out the ones he wanted to be his roofing crews during the following week. I would often ask the students how they felt having just been the slaves on the auction block. It was a real joy to work with these students. Incidentally ladies make good roofers, and one day I overheard one on the phone telling her father that

she now knew how to roof a house. I listened as her father asked her questions that she answered showing that she had actually learned a new skill. As she answered his questions, you could tell that she was enthusiastic about her experience, especially as she ended up her conversation telling her father that she had just that day been allowed to use the roofing nail gun.

The devastation was so complete that even a local government body asked for help. The city of Long Beach asked us for some help cleaning up. They explained that their income had decreased to the point that they couldn't clean up the city property. When I told them that we would be willing to help, they asked us to bring our own trash bags because they couldn't afford any. Another project our teams helped on was cleaning up and planting flowers around a school. This might seem like an unimportant job, but it was important for the children to see some things that didn't remind them of the devastation. Books could and maybe have been written about how the hurricane impacted the children. The city of Long Beach also directed us to many of their residents who needed help cleaning up.

The cleanup phase of our work came to an end the week before Easter. There were no volunteers the week after Easter, so I hitched a ride home with a team from First Presbyterian Church in Lexington, S.C. My wife had earlier gone home and she picked me up in Lexington. The ride home was a long one as we had to stop numerous times to tend to a teenager who had broken his ankle when a pile of sheetrock fell over on him, and was getting sick from the medicine he was taking.

This problem of injuries never went away, and any of the volunteers could tell you that safety was discussed each evening. Each evening we had a time of devotions after we had eaten and hopefully before anybody fell asleep. We would also at this time discuss our day and many other things. These evenings were precious to me, and this fellowship each evening helped keep my enthusiasm up.

As long as I am talking about injuries, let me tell you a story I told each week about my wife's injury. She wishes this story would go away, but it is known all around North America. MaryLee spent most of her time in December working in the camp, but one day she asked to go out to work in the community. At that time, there were still mountains of debris left which made it easy to get injured. Sure enough, MaryLee came back with a badly skinned up knuckle which needed first aid. She wanted to apply liquid bandage but she had trouble opening the tube, and ended up with the tube glued to the tip of a finger. She and a couple of helpers tried for about forty-five minutes to remove this tube. Meanwhile, MaryLee was very upset because among other things, she had to get dinner ready for 150 hungry volunteers. The manufacturer of the product had a phone number to call for aid, which they did. Their answer was to not worry, that in three weeks the tube would come off. Fortunately, there was a free medical clinic whose nurse removed the tube. This was the only one of our many accidents that had some humor, but in most cases, they were very painful.

Chapter VII **Reconstruction 2006**

*Nehemiah 2:17-18 "Then I said to them, 'You see the trouble we are in, how Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates burned. Come, let us build the wall of Jerusalem, that we may no longer suffer derision.'
And I told them of the hand of my God that had been upon me for good, and also of the words that the king had spoken to me.
And they said, 'Let us rise up and build.' So they strengthened their hands for the good work."*

We reopened our worksite after our Easter vacation and as I said earlier, we were finished with cleanup work for the most part. Now, for the rest of our time, we concentrated on rebuilding badly damaged

houses. We did not build new houses because there were so many damaged houses that could be rebuilt, and we felt that by concentrating on rebuilding rather than building new houses we could put more families back into their houses and this was our goal. There are organizations such as Habitat For Humanity who concentrate on new housing, which is also a good thing.

First Presbyterian Church Biloxi had been slow in recovering from the effects of the storm, but now they needed to take back some of the space they were letting us use, and so we graciously gave them back the downstairs rooms we were using and we moved upstairs. At that point, the number of beds available to us was 45; however, when necessary, we often put air mattresses down in Sunday school rooms and slept many more.

We suffered some discouragement because we had very few volunteers during the months of April and May. Many of these weeks we had less than 10 volunteers and in May, we had no volunteers for a couple of weeks. It was beginning to look as if we would not be staying open much longer. However, God had other plans and our numbers picked up in June when a number of youth teams came to work with us. We never again had to consider closing because of a lack of volunteers.

We were unique, among the different worksites in that we never put age restrictions on our volunteers who ranged in age from six months to 88 years old. I always enjoyed seeing young children set out daily to work with their parents, and the weeks we had children in camp made life more interesting. We also suffered very little problems with the youngsters until 2007, and I will talk about this later. The problem we did have was to make sure that there were enough adult volunteers to supervise the construction. We struggled up to the time the work ended with this problem. I dreaded the weeks when teams would show up with not enough construction supervision to keep everybody busy. I was forced to tell some volunteer groups that were large in students and short in construction leaders that we simply could not have them come, and I know this did not go over very well. It also did not set well with me as I am very aware of our need to train the next generation.

It was in June of 2006 that one of my favorite teams came to work with us, even though I know I shouldn't have favorites. Anyway, a team of about 33 youth from Coquina Presbyterian Church accompanied by their chaperones arrived in early June for a week's work. The leaders of these youth were Patty and Wolff, who are to be commended for the fine job they do with their youth. The team practiced doing the jobs they would be doing in Biloxi long before they arrived, and they were able to go right to work. The young people were extremely pleasant and were constantly looking for ways to help with the camp chores. I was very glad that they returned in 2007 for another week. One of my favorite moments of my experience in Biloxi was that before they would get on their bus to leave, every person required a hug from me.

I mentioned how they helped around the camp. One of the jobs they helped with was the sheetrock pile. Let me explain this. The initial financial grant from Rotary International was spent mostly on sheetrock which was delivered to the church parking lot and given to people who came to pick it up to use in their houses. There were many people who could do their own work as long as someone helped supply them with building materials. We had this sheetrock pile for several months and everyday we had people coming to pick up sheetrock.

The struggles of the people in loading and hauling the sheetrock were something to witness as 12 foot sheets of sheetrock at 188 lbs. per pack are bulky and heavy to handle. I used to tease the ones who showed up in Ford pickups that they probably would not be able to pull their heavy trailers. One family that showed up was a Vietnamese one. Their problem was that they had only a small pickup which would not work. They left and soon returned with a small trailer which again would not work. It was late on a

Saturday afternoon so I told them that if they would load my trailer that I would take the sheetrock to their house. These are small people and it took three or four of them to load a piece of sheetrock on the trailer, but they worked as a team, and we soon had the sheetrock delivered. A couple of hours later to show their gratitude, they brought us several bags of fresh caught shrimp and fish. We sure enjoyed a feast.

This gives me a good opportunity to talk about Samaritan's Purse and some of the help they provided. As I said before, the spirit of cooperation between churches was wonderful to witness. Our grant from Rotary was running out in June of 2006, and we were beginning to be concerned about building materials for the future. God, as He so often did, furnished us with help at just the right time in the form of Ken Sides, the director of the Biloxi Samaritan's Purse relief effort. Ken came in and said that he had both good and bad news. The bad news was that his organization was only going to work in the area until the end of May 2007, and the good news was that they were going to spend all the money they had raised for Katrina relief before they left, and that we were invited to help them spend this money. In Ken's words, "We, from that point on, could consider his lumberyard our lumberyard." As many of you know, we took advantage of this offer and used Samaritan's Purse building materials to repair many houses.

It was at the end of June that I received the first of many severe attacks from the enemy. These attacks should have been expected because whenever the work of the Lord is going forward, Satan is not pleased, and the Lord was doing great things through our work. I have debated whether to mention these attacks in this story and have decided to share some of them with you. I do this because they are part of the story and anybody who is going to serve God had better be prepared for opposition. I include this to tell you that our God is a faithful God and He provided relief every time I was attacked. He did this in various ways, and I was always reassured and able to continue the work He had called me to do. The main way God reinforced me was to use individual Christians to encourage me when things were difficult.

We managed to have enough volunteers that summer of 2006 to keep things interesting. I remember one very enterprising Rotary team from Pittsburg. They had a couple of ladies who ended up being part of a roofing crew at a time when it was really too hot to put on new roofs. One of the ladies, Joy, is a small lady full of life. The men on her crew were assigned to a somewhat easier job and after the first day the men thought they would be noble and change places with the women to protect them. They misread Joy and the other lady because these ladies were bound and determined to finish that roof and they did. Joy managed to get five free airplane tickets for her team from Southwest Airlines by asking them to support the work. Joy was a joy to work with.

I should mention the weather in Biloxi. It was so humid along with the heat that it is hard to believe that our volunteers could work in it. I spent enough time outside during the summer that I no longer am bothered by hot days here in South Carolina. In fact, as I write this, it is 95 degrees outside and I have just mowed my lawn without being bothered by the heat. It's all about humidity along with the heat. Biloxi is just too hot and too humid to work outside during the summer and early fall, but our volunteers did. When the workers got back in the evenings, they were dehydrated and we kept plenty of liquids on hand for them. They also consumed large quantities of watermelon in their efforts to rehydrate. It was interesting to listen to them share how they had drunk large quantities of water all day and then had never had to go to the bathroom as they had sweat out all the liquid they drank. Working under these hot conditions made a powerful statement to the residents of Biloxi about how much the volunteers cared for them.

We helped and tried to help many interesting individuals during our time in Biloxi. I say tried to help because in some cases the homeowners wouldn't let us do our work as we should do it and we were forced to leave their house with the work unfinished. An example of this was a man whose house we

were making good progress on until we got to putting in a new floor. We made several suggestions but he rejected all our ideas, and proposed his. The problem was that he would mumble vaguely about what he wanted done and after twenty minutes we were so confused that we couldn't proceed. We tried over and over for about six months, but were never able to proceed. It is a shame because instead of moving back into his home when we left Biloxi, he was still living in his FEMA trailer.

Another family we worked with did their best to drive us away, only we persevered and finished the house. I received a phone call from a lady by the name of Mary telling me such a desperate story that I felt compelled to help her. She explained that she wanted to get her mother out of a nursing house where she was going downhill quickly. The only reason for her mother to be in the nursing was that she could not live in the small FEMA trailer, as this was a common problem. Mary wanted to be able to care for her mother in her house. The house was in the city of Long Beach, which is farther than we normally travelled for construction, but the plight of these people was such that I felt we should try to help. There is another individual involved in this house, Mary's son Joey, and he is the one who almost stopped us from finishing the job.

Joey is a very big individual, and he should have been motivated to do all he could to help us finish the job. You see, Joey was too big to fit into the shower in the trailer and he had to go to a truck stop to take showers. Joey's plight was not uncommon because many people were too big for the showers in their trailers. The problem we had with Joey was that he did not know how to do the work, but he would order our workers around until they would give up and come back to camp. I would then call Mary up and explain why we couldn't finish her house. She would tearfully promise to control her son if we would return to work. We would return to work and for a few days everything would be all right until Joey became too bossy again.

Joey then found a new way to drive us away. If we were not going to work on his house for a couple of days, he started recruiting volunteers from other worksites to work on the job for a day or two. The problem was that these teams did not do good work and we would have to repair their work. We quit work on Mary's house for about a month until we were able to make a deal prohibiting Joey from being present when we were working and him not bringing in other workers. Sadly, we finished the house and several weeks after they moved back in, Mary's mother died.

The problem of substandard work was a continuing one, and never went away. Most of the work done by volunteers was good but some teams worked without proper supervision. This was a shame because of the waste of time and materials as much work had to be done again. One example was that of a large (43 square foot) roof. A group of college students who were unsupervised put a new roof on this house, and it leaked so badly that it had to be done over again. It was a shame to see our scarce resources being used this way.

It was in August of 2006 that we became involved in another one of these poor roofing jobs. We received a request from a home owner asking us to help him by putting his sheetrock in. Our team was starting work when they looked up saw the bottom of shingles, which meant that the wood decking was rotted and should have been replaced before the new shingles were put on. So we found ourselves forced to put on a new roof in August. The team assigned to this was from Simpsonville, S.C., and one of their members took home a reminder of his work. Roger, one of the church's pastors, rode home sitting on painful blisters on his bottom from having sat too long on a hot roof.

It was during this summer that we saw a church, Seven Rivers Presbyterian Church, from Leonto, Florida begin an amazing relationship with us. They made and kept a commitment to come for a week once each month. At first the commitment was for a few months, and eventually they extended this

commitment to the time we remained open. One of their members, a man by the name of Paul, never missed a month, coming for twenty-two straight months to help. This team was proof that age is not a handicap to serving God as most of their volunteers were older; one week their average age was 72 years old. They were very skilled and often they helped train volunteers from other teams and they worked during winter and right through summer. Nothing, except our camp closing, ever stopped them, and if we were still working in Biloxi, I think they would still be working with us. This church has a real commitment to mercy ministry as between monthly visits with us they kept busy helping others out.

Most of the work we did was hurricane relief and we tried to stick to this kind of work, but occasionally we came across a job that was mostly mercy ministry that we couldn't ignore, and this was the case in late summer. We were asked to repair a roof that had suffered some wind damage. The house was located about 45 minutes northeast of Biloxi, an area where there was very little damage from the hurricane. The roof was not the only part of the house needing repair as years of neglect had left the house needing major fixing up. The lady homeowner is a Christian who lost her job due to a physical injury, and she has an adult mentally handicapped son to take care of. The volunteers and I made a decision to go ahead and repair the house so that the homeowner could live in it for many more years. It is sure rewarding to be able to help a fellow Christian.

The problem of careless injuries continued to plague us and in November of 2006, we had another nasty one. Most of the roofs we worked on were not high up and they were very flat. However, we were called to work on a house that was two stories and had a very steep roof. We looked at the job and decided we would have to wait for a professional roofer to do the job for us. We were anxious to do the job quickly because the roof was leaking and causing further damage inside. Shortly after, God sent us a professional roofer as a volunteer and he was doing a good job until when he was about half finished, he shot himself with his nail gun in the ankle. This was a very painful injury and ended these roof repairs until God sent us another qualified roofer.

The arrival of fall brought relief from the intense heat and larger numbers of volunteers returned to work. The fall/early winter of 2006 was routine as far as the work goes, but we had several people accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, and that surely isn't routine. It is very exciting and rewarding to be part of a person coming to the Lord. Sunday December 24th was a special day for us as it was the day a lady many of us know as Anky was baptized. Anky is kind of a character as so many of you know.

Anna Marie de la Rie is her real name and she first came into my life on a Sunday in May of 2006 as we were preparing to go into worship. She wanted to see if we would work on repairing her house. I explained that worship was starting and that after we worshipped I would talk to her about her house. I then suggested that she worship with us. At this, a look of terror came over her face and she started to leave the church. However, there were a couple of ladies from Northern Mississippi staying with us and they quickly assessed the situation. Before Anky could leave, they had her by the elbows and escorted her into the sanctuary. I looked back several times during the service and the expression on her face was the same as a deer in your headlights: pure terror.

Anky was uncomfortable worshipping with us because a Protestant Church can be a frightening place for a Roman Catholic. Anky was born in Holland where she grew up during World War II. Each week the volunteers were reminded that their most important work in Biloxi was to tell people about Jesus, that each day they were to go to work with a hammer in one hand and the Gospel in another. One tactic we used to make people feel comfortable with us was to invite home owners to have supper with us. We found that this helped people to be more comfortable. We started inviting Anky to eat with us and then we started letting her help us in the kitchen. Soon she was comfortable with us and she started wanting to be a part of us.

Anky started acting as a part of the church before she became a Christian. An example of this is when my wife went to visit a lady homeowner to see if we should work on her house. The homeowner mentioned God constantly as my wife visited with her and finally MaryLee said to the lady, "You talk about God a lot, where do you go to church?" The lady answered that she did not go to church and immediately Anky, who was accompanying my wife, told the lady, "Shame on you, you belong in church and you had better be in church this Sunday." Anky is not known for her diplomacy.

Several times Anky sent copies of my newsletters about what was happening in Biloxi to the Pope in Rome asking him to send help to rebuild Biloxi. She was quite indignant that he never answered her and that he sent no help. In early December of 2006, Anky came to me on a Saturday evening and gave a credible profession of her faith in Jesus and her immediate change in behavior demonstrated her faith was real. She was 75 years old and she gave up her long habits of drinking, gambling, swearing, and smoking. Soon she started bombarding me with questions from the Bible and after months of questions from her and another new convert, I started a class for new believers.

Anky needs your prayers as she was diagnosed with breathing problems shortly after her conversion and now she has some dangerous aneurysms on her heart. Anky also has almost no money to live on as she had kept her money in her house and when she returned, it was all stolen. She is the lady who I mentioned earlier returned to her house and had to chase some looters out who had taken over the house.

Another lady whose house we worked on by the name of Cathy accepted the Lord around the same time period. We had been working on her house all year, and while Cathy had known about God all her life, she did not know Jesus as her Lord and Savior. The team from Seven Rivers Presbyterian Church worked on her physical house and they worked on Cathy's spiritual house at the same time. Cathy, like Anky, wanted to know more about God, and as she read her Bible, she too was full of questions.

Our second Christmas in Biloxi was celebrated in a pretty normal fashion. The church had been mostly repaired and we were able to enjoy a traditional Christmas meal with the few volunteers we had on hand. The day after Christmas saw our camp fill up like it had the year before. Remember, we were down to only 45 beds, and we had about 80 volunteers show up. So we shipped a few of them down to bunk at the Samaritan's Purse facility as they had no volunteers of their own over the holidays. Over sixty of the volunteers were from Bakersfield, California, the supplier of the trailers. We continued to receive help from this group right up until we closed the work. The highlight of their stay with us was the evening 2 of their volunteers accepted Jesus as their Lord. I will report more about one of these new Christians later in this story.

We were blessed at this time with a large amount of help from a denomination. God sent us help from the CRWRC, which is the relief agency of The Christian Reformed Church. I received a phone call from a man by the name of Art which resulted in our receiving hundreds of extra volunteers over the next 2 years. This denomination certainly has something to teach us about commitment to mercy ministry as they are very active in this service to God. They are headquartered in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area and many of their members are of Dutch ancestry. They furnish their volunteers with lime colored t-shirts which they are encouraged to wear in the field. Their Dutch ancestry and the green shirts caused my wife, who is of Dutch ancestry, to pin the name of "The Dutch Leprechauns" on their teams. We certainly enjoyed these fine Christians and appreciate all the work they did.

I mentioned some difficult homeowners we tried to help earlier, but now I want to mention one who was a delight to work with and who many of our volunteers still maintain relations with. Marty Shapanik is another one of those tall people who did not fit in his shower. He is so tall his head ended up in the

skylight when he tried to shower. Marty had hired a contractor to repair his house, and after ruining his house, the contractor ran off with his money. The contractor literally cut the house into two parts which were collapsing on each other, and no one could figure how to fix it until a man by the name of Jerry, who was from Illinois, looked at it. He at first could not figure out a way to repair it, and it was not until he was partway home that an idea came to him and he made a u-turn and returned to Biloxi.

Many teams, mostly from Pennsylvania, worked on Marty's house before it was finished. It was interesting to see a couple of relationships develop. One relationship was between Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia volunteers and Marty, and the other was between Rotary volunteers of Pittsburg and Marty. Both groups worked many times with Marty. Everybody enjoyed working at Marty's both because he is so pleasant and also because everyday he fed the volunteers seafood. These volunteers loved to tell us about their wonderful meals they were served each day.

Marty, for some reason, is a rabid Pittsburg Steelers fan, and if you are on Haise Street in East Biloxi, you will see a house adorned with Steeler's paraphernalia and know that you have arrived at Marty's. One time a group of the Rotary members managed to be in Biloxi when the local television station televised a Steeler's game, and they all got together for a football party.

Marty's house was a major job for us, but we finally managed to finish it. Marty and his wife are happily living in it, and they say it is better than new. We often had Marty come to our meetings to explain how rough it was to survive in the early days after the storm. Marty remains a friend and from time to time volunteers return to Biloxi to visit with him.

An interesting story we used to tell about Marty was about the dogs he left behind in his house when he evacuated before Katrina. He left two small dogs inside his house as the water rose up almost to the ceiling. The dogs swam around until the waters rose enough so that they were able to climb aboard a tall piece of furniture. They left paw prints on the ceiling as they tried to push the ceiling up to get higher. Only 1 dog survived. The paw prints served to remind us about the seriousness of what many people endured as they were trapped in rooms by rising water.

Jerry, the man who figured out how to repair Marty's house, is one of those people who could not stay away from the work. He made at least 14 trips to Biloxi to work with us, and he was a real asset. Jerry had been in the house moving business and it seemed that he could fix just about anything. Jerry would drive his motor home down and stay at one of our trailer hookups for a week or two. Jerry had so much energy that he had to always be moving and he worked very long days.

One of the houses we worked on through the spring and summer of 2006 belongs to a man named Gary. We all enjoyed working on Gary's house as he is such a pleasant Christian man to work with. Gary is a diabetic and he has an artificial leg. Gary and his brother who has the same physical problem stayed in his house during the hurricane. As the waters rose, Gary managed to get up in his attic, which saved his life even though he lost his artificial leg. Unfortunately, his brother did not survive the storm. Gary's house floated off its foundation and had to be put back on a new foundation. Jerry once again was very valuable to us as he led the repairs on Gary's house which among other things needed new water, sewer, and gas lines installed.

I mention how we enjoyed working with Gary. He would sit in his wheelchair and hold the end of a board as it was being nailed to a wall. Gary is typical of those we helped. He is a military veteran who served at a time when it was not easy to be a black man in our armed services. He worked most of his life as a commercial fisherman and while he worked hard, he never made much money. Gary always has a word of praise on his lips for Jesus. I remember checking in with him several weeks after he moved back

into his house and asking him how things were going, and as he told me, he kept thanking God for his many blessings.

Chapter VIII **Our Last Full Year—2007**

2 Chronicles 2:7 “So now send me a man skilled to work in gold, silver, bronze, and iron, and in purple, crimson, and blue fabrics, trained also in engraving, to be with the skilled workers who are with me in Judah and Jerusalem, whom David my father provided.”

Early in January 2007 we began working on a house on 55th street in Gulfport, a job that eventually grew to include two neighboring houses. It was while working on the first house that I met a man by the name of Chevas. At the time, Chevas was busy taking bricks that had fallen off his house out to the curb, and also he was watching us put a roof on his neighbor’s house. I went over to talk to him and after awhile asked if there was anything we could do to help him. It was decided that we could put a new roof on his house for him. This began a relationship that lasted most of the year as we began helping him. Many volunteers met and loved Chevas, who along with his wife are fellow believers. The only way I can describe Chevas is as a man, who along with his Labrador retriever, is mellow and easy to get along with.

Telling about Chevas gives me a chance to talk about a CRC team from Prinsburg, Minnesota, that worked with us several times. This group was not part of the teams that their denomination sent; rather they found us on their own. They did not bunk with us; instead they slept at a church which they had helped repair right after the storm. They looked to me to supply them with work, which I gladly did. Early in January they came with approximately 30 volunteers looking to work on roofs. It didn’t matter to them that it was cold and rainy outside, and they never seemed to mind as they quickly put a roof on for Chevas. This team from Minnesota returned again with another team to help the relief efforts in Mississippi.

During the winter, God started sending us some much needed talent in the form of electricians who stayed and worked for extended periods of time. There never seemed to be enough electricians to do all the electrical work that was needed, and the cost of hiring electricians was prohibitive. The first of these electricians to spend an extended time with us was a man from E. Peoria by the name of Marvin. We soon got caught up on our own jobs and then Marvin helped other churches with their jobs. It was sure good to be able to help The Salvation Army, who had helped us so much.

Soon God sent us Ed, another talented man who spent two months with us as he and his wife escaped from a Minnesota winter. Ed is not only a talented electrician, but he is also a talented plumber, which is a skill needed even more than his electrical ability. Ed really enjoyed helping people and he was willing to even give away his lunch to someone who needed it more than he did. Ed was working in Gulfport in what is one of the poorest areas of our country. You can visit the third world by travelling to some of the neighborhoods that we worked in while in Gulfport. Ed was working on a house when he attracted the attention of one of the area’s needy residents who soon was eating Ed’s lunch. Before Ed finished working in that area, we were forced to send a half dozen lunches with him to insure that he got one to eat.

This reminds me of another story about feeding needy people. An organization calling itself God’s Katrina Kitchen set up in the town of Pass Christian where they fed many thousands of volunteers. They soon were forced to move to Gulfport where they continued to feed people eventually serving more than one million free meals. They soon got into trouble because when they moved to Gulfport, the areas needy

residents soon found them and started showing up for meals. It seems they were helping to fill a gap created by Hurricane Katrina which destroyed a couple of soup kitchens that have not reopened. More affluent well fed residents in the area where God's Katrina Kitchen was located soon started complaining to their city council about the type of people being attracted by the free meals. The result was that God's Katrina Kitchen was forced to close up and quit feeding needy people. We often witnessed this cold heartlessness by officials toward their less fortunate citizens.

A major problem came our way in January when we started running out of work to do. It is not that there was no work to do, rather it was difficult to clear all the hurdles that were in our way to go to work on a house. The biggest hurdle was put in our way by the city governments as they added increasingly burdensome additions to the building codes, and we had to deal with this issue and others, such as funding. It was at this time that we started working with the East Biloxi Coordination Relief & Redevelopment Agency. We continued to cooperate with this group right up until we closed our work. This agency is headed by Bill and his wife Kyrza, a fine Christian couple. They live in East Biloxi and Bill serves as a city councilman. East Biloxi is the area which suffered the worst damage and Bill is the only councilman who exhibited any compassion for the hurting people.

The last week of January saw our first official Christian Reformed Church volunteers come to work with us. This team came all the way from Alberta, and maybe our weather was part of the attraction because while with us they didn't have to deal with snow and cold temperatures. I say official because we had CRC teams come who had found us on their own come to work with us. We had a camp full of CRC volunteers for the next two months which was a real blessing.

One of the CRC churches that stayed with us was not one that had been scheduled to be with us. The CRC denomination is so active in mercy ministry that they fill their own worksites up and then farm out their extras to other volunteer groups. We weren't the only church to receive their volunteers, just the best one they worked with. One week a large group of volunteers from Providence CRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan was staying in another neighboring camp where they were being mistreated. We met this team on Sunday at our worship service and we invited them to come to supper with us on Wednesday, which they did. At this time, their leader, a man by the name of Marvin, told me about their mistreatment. The next day they showed up at our church very much discouraged. They were supposed to stay for two weeks and that morning they were told by their camp director that he had made a mistake and overbooked for the following week and that the CRC group would have to leave. They asked if they could stay and work with us. We told them that we were overbooked ourselves, but that they were welcome to sleep on air mattresses in classrooms. So once again, we were way overcrowded, but this allowed us to get more work done in the community.

This began a wonderful relationship, and we never worked with a sweeter, more hardworking team than this one from Grand Rapids. Now Chevas comes back into the story as I assigned this group to work on his house. Chevas lives a couple of miles from the ocean but the water table there is just below the surface and all the timbers supporting his house were rotten. Marvin and his team were given the dirty job of replacing all the timbers under his house. They did this job with enthusiasm and when they returned to Michigan, they knew that their work had made a difference and they had been a good testimony to God.

As I earlier said, it was a real blessing to be able to help our fellow Christians who were so needy. An example of one of these is a couple of young brothers who live together. Their house was flooded up to the roof and needed considerable repairs. The day we showed up to look the job over, they eagerly told us, "We were just praying to God that He would send us help and then you drove into our driveway." These are a couple of nice young men named Fred and Jeremiah that we enjoyed working with. One of

the brothers works in a nursing home and he was on duty while the hurricane struck. He was a witness to the horror of that night when many of the residents drowned.

While we were working on his house we met his mother and father who also needed help. They lived about 20 miles north of the ocean and their damage was from one of the many tornados that were spawned by the hurricane as it moved inland. The father serves as a lay pastor in his church and did not have money to buy the materials needed for his repairs. They never asked for help, but a few questions revealed the needs they had. We never furnished any labor, but we did buy what was needed for their repairs.

We were pleased to continue making new friends among churches and their volunteers. It was beautiful to see God bring us His people from all different churches. I have already mentioned some of these, and I want to continue to introduce more.

One group who first showed up in February 2007 was a team from Circle Drive Baptist Church from Colorado Springs. They were a very enthusiastic group despite the fact that they had to ride for two long days in a bus to reach us. We enjoyed their presence with us and especially appreciated Ed, their music pastor who, each evening, organized music for our devotions. This team returned as so many other teams did, shortly before we closed. We had many churches that did their best to return one last time in 2008 before it was too late. The second time they were with us they had two older men who were approaching 90 with them. These men worked their week and as soon as they returned to Colorado, one of them died.

We had many wonderful teams work with us and if I don't mention your team, please forgive me as I can't include every team both because I don't have enough room and my memory is faulty. Now I want to talk briefly about a church by the name of Church of The Vineyard of Southeast Pittsburg. This church came to work with us a couple of times and really demonstrated that they are serious about loving people into the kingdom and about helping show God's love to people through mercy ministry. The reason that I mention this team is to tell a story about how they showed their love to my wife and me. One evening we were discussing restaurants and I mentioned a very expensive restaurant in Biloxi and I commented that it would cost around \$100 to eat there. The next thing I knew, they presented me with a gift certificate to this restaurant for \$100. This was both embarrassing and encouraging to us. It was embarrassing because we weren't trying to say that we want to eat at such an expensive restaurant, and I am not comfortable eating such an expensive meal when there are so many needy people in the world. It was encouraging because it showed us that we were loved by this church.

It was in the spring that I was forced to take on another responsibility as Anky and Cathy, the two new Christians that I earlier told you about had such a hunger for learning about God that I was forced to start a class to teach them about the Bible. I had better explain what I mean about being "forced" to teach them because teaching the Bible is my favorite job in the church. I was so overwhelmed with my regular responsibilities that I unsuccessfully tried to find someone else to teach this class. Finally though, I started to teach a class in which we looked at the overall story told in the Bible. My students were so new to the Bible that we had to start with an explanation of the Old Testament and the New Testament and how to find an address in the Bible. We were starting at ground zero.

The Lord blessed this effort as he so often did in Biloxi with sending another student by the name of Peter. Peter's story of coming to Christ is, like so many others, remarkable. We were repairing Peter's house at the time which was another one of those that had been almost ruined by a contractor who had cut through the ceiling joist and the only thing holding his ceiling up was friction. When we were given Peter's house to repair, we were told that no one could figure out how to fix the damage. As so often happened, God sent us a man who looked at the problem and then quickly fixed it.

Returning to the story of the class, I asked Peter to attend the class and he agreed to come. Peter claimed to be an agnostic who had been raised a Roman Catholic. Peter, as many of you know, is a very unusual person and he suffers from many physical and other problems. I found that I could be very direct when I talked to him as I think he knew that I loved him and so I would often tell him that what he needed in his life was Jesus Christ as his Lord. Peter was faithful in attending the class and in reading his Bible assignments. Later, he told us that the only reason that he had agreed to come to class was that he was afraid that we would quit working on his house if he did not come to class. He certainly did not understand us.

The class was a real blessing as all three soaked up what they were reading and the principles that I was teaching. They proved to be very quick learners both from our class and the preaching of the Word. Peter, in particular, loves good sermons and they all came regularly to worship. Peter often came to share our evening meal and to take part in our time of devotion. As time went on, every once in a while I would ask him if he was ready to put his trust in Jesus, and he would tell me not yet. By the 3rd week in August of 2007, my wife said to me that the changes she had seen in Peter told her that Peter was a Christian, but did not understand it. This sounds strange, but it proved to be true. The following Monday we met to have a class before my wife and I left town for three weeks. My students were not going to miss any classes if they could help it, so we squeezed in a class before we left. The only ones in the church were the three students, my wife, and I. As we prepared to start the class, Peter asked, "When can a person know that he loves Jesus enough to be saved?" I knew then exactly what to say, and so I asked Peter if he acknowledged his sins and the fact that he could not save himself from them. Peter said yes. Then I asked Peter if he acknowledged Jesus as being God and was Jesus the Lord of Peter's life. That was as far as I got before Peter exclaimed that now he no longer had to be afraid of dying and going to hell. Being with Peter as he realized that he is a Christian was one of the most special moments of my life and what a blessing it was to be part of this.

My wife and I enjoy a special relationship with these three Christians, and we functioned as if we were a church within a church, and leaving them behind is saddest thing about leaving Biloxi. A couple of weeks ago Peter called me up to express thankfulness for me leading him to Christ. He understands that it is God who saved him, but he wanted to make sure that I knew that he appreciated my efforts. We are planning soon to be in Biloxi to be present when Peter formally joins First Presbyterian Church. What great blessings we receive from God.

The summer of 2007 was both a good summer and a very difficult time. We, for the first time, encountered large youth groups on a steady basis. I shudder to think of the effect these groups have on mission efforts in other places if they behaved as many of the groups that stayed with us did. I want to make it clear that most of the youth groups were great and we really enjoyed working with them. I previously mentioned the youth of Coquina Presbyterian Church and how well-behaved they were, and there were many other groups like them. I take very seriously our responsibility to train up the next generation and for that reason we never had a lower age limit. Many young people developed skills while working with us that will help them to be good servants of God in the future.

However, there were far too many youth and youth groups who terrorized our work and who should never have gone on a mission trip. I have a few suggestions to offer here. First, prepare the youth ahead of time and make sure each person understands that this is not a vacation trip and that they are expected to work. We had occasions where we asked a youth to do a chore around the camp and they would refuse to do the chore. Second, don't send youth on a mission trip unless their Christian maturity is enough for them to go. For example, one group came and we were told that one of the girls liked to steal things. This person should not have been considered a missionary and been sent on a mission trip.

We observed that the best youth leaders are those who are a little bit older than those who are right out of college or seminary. It is also important to have an adequate number of chaperones who have a lot of experience in raising their own children. Experienced parents can relate with my statement that we can sense when a child is getting in trouble and we go investigate for the trouble.

I had better explain what I meant by being terrorized by youth. One time we had a couple of youth try to start a fire using a corner of the building as the fuel. Another time, we had a group who, just before they left for home, went through all our bathrooms and put cardboard in the toilets just below the seats. We had some awful messes to clean up. Another group had a food party in the sanctuary one evening and not only did they leave a mess, they also damaged the walls of the sanctuary, which necessitated the walls being repainted. The idea of allowing the youth to stay up all night should be avoided at all cost. Even teams who had done good work lost their testimony on their last evening in camp as their leaders allowed them to stay up all night.

I hesitated putting the above section in my book, but it is part of the story and needed to be told. I do want to make sure that everyone understands that most of the youth groups were a pleasure to have and they were a good testimony to our Lord. The ones who my negative remarks apply to know who they are, and hopefully, they can learn and go on to be good missionaries in the future.

I was not going to put this section in my book, but since I picked on the youth it is only fair that I mention an ongoing problem with adults. Sometimes we had problems in the kitchen with nobody wanting to do the cooking, which is one of the most important jobs we had. As most of those who worked with us know, we tried to feed everybody well. Another problem was that some cooks would not follow orders. It is important that when you go on a mission trip that you do everything the leaders request and do it the way they want. Let me emphasize that almost all of the teams came with the correct attitude of “tell me what to do and I will do my best.”

An example of a person who did his best to serve God was a very young man who was injured while working with us. He managed to hit his finger so hard with a hammer that he took the flesh off his finger. He was very brave and that evening at our camp meeting, I awarded him a purple heart which cheered him up.

It was always difficult when teams would show up without any skilled workers. Late in the summer, a very young-looking team showed up late in the afternoon from Clemson. This was after the week's work assignments had been made, and I thought we were all set for the week. I looked at the team and I thought that I was going to have a problem because the team looked so young that I wondered who was going to supervise their work. Their leader must have been reading my mind because she came up to talk to me. She told me that her name is Sarah; she was 27, not 18 as I judged her to be. She went on to tell me that she was married, that she was an architect, and that she knew how to install drywall. Sarah and her crew did excellent work and taught me a lesson about judging people and also trusting God.

A really nice thing that happened during the summer was the arrival for almost two months of an electrician from East Peoria who was accompanied by his wife and two children. Steve is talented in many building skills and proved to be a valuable worker. His wife and children were equally valuable in the kitchen. Steve had come to work with us earlier in the year and he felt so strongly about the value of our ministry that he returned every chance that he got. He and his family were with us the last week we were open. Steve's main fault was that he worked too hard, and at times it was necessary to tell him to take some time off. We saw over and over again volunteers come to work with us and become so

convicted about being a part of what God was doing through His church that they had to return at every opportunity to help. Serving in God's army is very rewarding.

It was during the summer that we discovered that there were dozens of houses in East Biloxi that had been partially repaired and then abandoned with out any plan to finish them. We started to work on these houses and it was very rewarding to be able with a little work see people move back into their homes. One of these houses only took three days of work to complete. It had been in this condition for seven months. We were involved in working on these abandoned, partially-repaired houses up until we left town.

The summer of 2007 came to a close and the number of volunteers dropped off enough so that we could see that we would not be able to keep the work going much longer. For example, we had 3 weeks with no volunteers starting the last week of August, then we had 1 week in September with a small team and then a total of two volunteers for the next two weeks. So Jan 5, 2008 was chosen to be our last day of work.

My wife and I took advantage of the three weeks off, and we went to California on a business trip for her and what was supposed to be a relaxation trip for me. California driving took care of my relaxing. Labor Day weekend we were privileged to attend Calvary Bible Church in Bakersfield, California where we visited with so many who had come to help us in Biloxi. I was thrilled to be able to talk to a combined Sunday School class about what God was doing in Biloxi and in which they were such an integral part of. The highlight of the trip was meeting Lance who was one of the two who had accepted Jesus as Savior while working with us the previous Christmas. It was so good to see how happy he was and to hear how he is on fire for the Lord and learning all he could about Him.

It was during October that our volunteers increased and we were able to see more houses being worked on, and we figured that we would have a strong finish to our work in January. God had His own plans about our closing date, and we soon made the decision to remain open longer. The way this came about was that as word got out about our closing we received calls from previous volunteers who wanted to come back one last time but couldn't until after our scheduled closing. It wasn't until after we received a call from Providence CRC in Grand Rapids wanting to send another group of volunteers early in 2008 that I understood that we should stay open until Good Friday 2008. First Presbyterian Church agreed to this date and we sent out the news. At first the response was very disappointing, and my lack of faith was causing me to be sorry that we had decided to stay open later. Once again God taught me a lesson in faith. In November I received a call from Art in which he committed enough CRC teams to fill up most of our open beds during the first quarter of 2008.

Each week, I led a devotion where we looked at Malachi 3:6-12 and we talked about our responsibility to bring our time and treasures into God's storehouse. We focused on the promise of God in verse 10, where we are told, *"Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of host, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."* God once again was faithful to His word because now the problem turned from not having enough volunteers to having too many and we kept receiving calls from former volunteers wanting to return one last time. Many times we had to turn teams away because there was no more room.

It was late in 2007 when we became involved in repairing a house that was in terrible condition from causes other than the hurricane. A team from Seven Rivers Presbyterian Church was working on a house in Gulfport right next to the Seabee base. They soon noticed a house right across the street that was in such poor condition that it needed be torn down. The reason they noticed the house was that after school each day a few children came to the house which they lived in. The children were very nice and polite

and the music they played was Christian. There was a single mom, Regina, who had been abandoned by her husband a couple of years earlier, and while she worked in a fast food place, she had almost no income. Soon the volunteers asked if we could help fix up the house. While the house did not qualify for hurricane relief, it certainly qualified on compassionate grounds for our help, which we gladly offered.

The house was a real disaster. It had broken windows, doors did not close, the corner of the house where the bathroom was located was collapsing, and the gas company had turned off the gas because of safety reasons. They lacked furniture and appliances. The weather turned cold and there was no heat in the house. Seven Rivers took special interest in helping this family by even furnishing them with furniture and appliances which were donated by their church members. Several times we brought this family over to the church so that they could share the evening with us. We certainly enjoyed our relationship with Regina and her children.

Now is time to tell the story about another Christian family who we helped at this same time period as the above family and who became involved in helping Regina's family also. Stanley's house had been partially repaired and then abandoned for almost a year when we started working on it. Most groups of volunteers could not work on his house because it is what is called "heir" property. This meant that the title was not in Stanley's name, but it was in his family name. This is very common as these houses are often passed down from generation to generation without ever going through the court system. Most volunteers groups will only work on houses where every bit of paperwork is 100% correct. We were known as the heir group because we would work on these properties if we felt that we were helping a family get back into their home.

Let's briefly look at what I learned that helped make me determine that we should repair this house. I learned that they were a poor family that struggled to pay their bills as they have four children still living at home and some in college. I asked his next door neighbor, a pleasant lady in her 80s, how long Stanley had lived in his home. She told me that Stanley grew up in the house and since Stanley is now gray-haired, maybe from all those children, I figured that we would benefit his family by repairing his house. So we repaired the house.

I need to mention how Stanley helped Regina from the previous story. It was at Christmas time that the weather turned very cold and there was no heat in Regina's house since we hadn't been able to repair it enough to get the gas turned back on. When Stanley and his family heard about this, they went and bought some space heaters for Regina. They did this even though they had so little themselves. Several times they made gumbo and dropped it off for us to eat. We visited this family our last day in town to see how they were enjoying living in their rebuilt house. They are so happy and grateful that God sent His church to help them.

December 25, 2007 was our third Christmas in Biloxi and we knew it was to be our last one. It was so great to be able to worship at Christmas time with the three new believers who were gathered by Jesus through the work His church was doing in Biloxi. The day after Christmas, for the 3rd time, we once again filled up with large quantities of volunteers. And once again, we received a large number of volunteers from Bakersfield, California who came to help close out the work they had been so much a part of.

Chapter IX **2008: Wrapping Up Our Last Few Months**

2 Corinthians 8:11" So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have."

There have been two main beneficiaries of the opportunity God gave His church in Mississippi. One group is of course the people who we helped. The other group is the volunteers who took part in this ministry, and I think churches all over North America are the biggest beneficiaries. We have seen volunteers accept the Lord while working with us. Church leaders have shared with me about individuals who have gone home changed, where previously a person might hardly ever show up for church, but since their trip this person can't get enough of being a part of their church.

Paul is an example of a young man who reports his life has changed since he volunteered in Biloxi. Paul recently wrote me to tell me his eyes have been opened and that he is ashamed of the life he was living before his time with us. Paul goes on to tell how his life has changed and that he is now involved in outreach in his hometown.

The New Year brought a number of volunteers back to Biloxi for one last time. One of these is a man by the name of Tim from Ontario who came with CRC teams even though he attends another denomination's church. Tim is one of those people we so love to see come as he is a professional remodeler and he can do so much to help our jobs. Tim is one of those people who have forever been changed by his experience working with us. Tim went home after his first experience desiring to continue serving God in ministry using his skills.

Recently Tim wrote me about how he is organizing craftsmen to help in a large outreach project close to where he lives. There is a Christian group who works, with considerable success, in rehabilitating teenage drug abusers. Tim is helping to see that a large building this group recently acquired is remodeled so that up to 75 teens can be housed there to help them in their recovery.

One of the churches that came back one last time was a group of ladies from First Presbyterian Church of Macon, Georgia. This group was headed up by a lady named Grayson. These ladies came numerous times to cook for us and to pamper us, which they did very well. They would bring so much food for us that they had to have their van loaded by a loadmaster. They had such an awesome reputation that volunteers would try to come back when they knew the Georgia Peaches would be cooking for us. This is a remarkable group who right after the hurricane came to Biloxi and fed hundreds of meals to the community a couple of times.

The church from Grand Rapids that helped cause us to remain open for three extra months came back to work again at the end of February. Marvin, their team leader, came for two weeks and since he is a building contractor, I appointed him in charge of all the jobsites. This is another example of how the Lord provided the exact help we needed at just the correct time. We had two very busy weeks and Marvin was busy fulltime watching over everyone. His being with us helped us to get a lot more done than we would have without his leadership. I'm sure Marvin now has a better understanding of what it takes to direct volunteers.

I mentioned earlier about how the dishonest contractors took advantage of the hurricane survivors. I thought it might be good if I shared a couple of examples of what I am talking about. Both of these actually happened in 2006. Edna is an older legally blind lady who I am glad to count as a Christian friend. She paid a contractor to put on a new roof and she was pleased with his work until someone pointed out that he never put any shingles on it, only tarpaper. She did not have any money left to pay for another new roof, so she called us to help her. Dishonest people don't care who they cheat and even an older blind lady is fair game for them. Edna was so grateful for our help that she gave us a video about Katrina which we watched in camp for a couple of years.

A couple more reports about the help received from the government. Each of the trailers was inspected regularly, and there were both compassionate and cruel FEMA inspectors. Some of the FEMA inspectors would come to me from time to time and would ask if I could help repair a house of one of their clients who was so needy. Other inspectors would hassle the people about getting out of their FEMA trailer. One lady got so upset about being threatened with being put on the street that she went and bought all her building materials paying with her credit card at very high interest rates.

The government has poured billions of dollars into the Gulf Coast on everything except houses. If the churches had a quarter of the money the government spent, we would have completely rebuilt everything. It was sad to see money being spent on the projects picked by the government. They spent more than a million dollars planting palm trees in the median of highway 90, and they spent millions repairing Jefferson Davis's house. They build state of the art schools, but they don't understand that the students would rather be living back in their own houses.

Another lady who asked for help called us after we had our first cold spell, telling us that the cold wind was blowing through her house. It turned out that she had paid a contractor to insulate her house and it wasn't until it was cold outside that she discovered that he hadn't put in any insulation. She stated that she still had enough money to pay for insulation to be put in, but she was so tired of being cheated by contractors that she was willing to pay us to do the job. We often ran into people who still had some money left for repairs but who had been cheated by contractors and they tried to hire us to do their work. Our answer in these cases was to recommend an honest contractor to do the job for them.

We tried to not compete with local contractors even though some of them did not understand this. We only helped those who had no way of paying someone to do their work. Many of the local contractors understood this and often would help us as they could. Some contractors did not understand this and they made us aware of their displeasure over what they perceived as us taking away their business. One time at a lumberyard, I thought I was going to be physically assaulted by a contractor who was offended in his words, by "Mr. Out-of-State Contractor."

I have previously told how the local governments had a lack of compassion for their residents. It was astonishing to see how cold they were toward people who were trying to get back into their houses. I have nothing against the laws being followed, but often there is a gray area and they could have given the benefit of the doubt to the homeowner. Instead they ruled against the homeowner even though sometimes we would point out that they were stricter than the code required. Some of our contractors were quite upset by the harshness of the code enforcers. They constantly changed the building codes to make it both more difficult and expensive for us to help people.

A couple of quick stories should illustrate the problems we had. One time we were working on two houses located next to each other and when the electrical work was finished we asked for inspection. The inspector came out in a couple of days and they passed 1 house. We waited for a few more days for the second house to be inspected, and called again. We were told that they had made a mistake and that they would be back the next day. The inspector came the next day and when he found the front door locked, he went to get back into his car. We had a team working on the house next door and they stopped the inspector and told him that he could get in the side door. The inspector told us that he was not going to go back to the house and that if we did not like it, we could call City Hall.

Another time, we started rebuilding a badly damaged house and after we had several weeks of work and thousands of dollars invested in the house, the city made us stop work. They told us that they should not have ever issued a building permit and the house remained unfinished as we left town. We might have

been able to fight the case in court, but we did not have the money or the time left to do this. In case you are wondering, yes, these city officials have a house to live in.

The city of Biloxi has a development plan for the future, and this plan does not include poor people living in the city. They want to see Biloxi become Las Vegas east, and they are on the way to fulfilling this plan. The city still has not replaced all their traffic lights and street signs, but they have built a brand new four lane road that connects the casinos on one side of the peninsula with the ones on the other side.

Another hindrance to the rebuilding effort was the price of merchandise on the Gulf Coast and the refusal of the big corporations to give us any kind of a discount. We were shocked when we first arrived on the coast to see how expensive things were. We did manage to find one local furniture company that was willing to give us a discount, but everybody else took advantage of the opportunity to make as much money as possible.

It was not until the fall of 2007 that for the first time I was told how much money was in the bank for us to spend on relief work. It was astonishing that there was so much to spend after what we had spent. It seems that trusting God to provide really works. I was so fortunate that we had this much money at this particular time because the people we were working with at this time were too poor to help themselves at all. We discovered that we would complete the rebuilding of a house and it would sit empty. The reason for this was that the house owner could not afford to buy any appliances or furniture. So in a few cases, we started supplying the bare necessities that allowed a family to move back home.

I have resisted adding anymore stories because of a lack of time before we move to where we feel God is now calling us. I do need to tell the story about the “Banana Santa” because it seems that the amount of bananas we served at meals were enough to be a prominent memory for many of our volunteers. So I am putting the following story in after I had officially finished the book. I can’t remember when we first met the “Banana Santa,” but he is an unforgettable character.

Dr. David is a medical doctor from Canada who was in Biloxi at the time of hurricane Katrina trying to get in the Guinness’s book of records by setting a new record for the most consecutive days golfing. Hurricane Katrina put a stop to this effort and Dr. David, who is a natural scrounger, made connections with donors who provided all sorts of items he could use to supply relief camps with. The first time that I met him he had an inflatable Santa on the dash of his truck and a load of bananas on his truck and trailer, hence his title of “Banana Santa.” He delivered 27 cases of bananas which were already ripe so most of them were frozen for later use. My wife can be extremely frugal so the bananas were all used. One volunteer remembers being served baked bananas for breakfast, banana nut bread for lunch, and bananas foster for dinner. We gave banana bread out all over town and we never ran out of bananas because the “Banana Santa” visited us often.

The government seemed determined to undermine our efforts to rebuild the Gulf Coast. The rules for Canadians are that they can come to the United States as tourists and stay for two years. However, to come as a volunteer requires special paperwork and the volunteer can only stay a short time before returning to Canada. So Dr. David had to frequently return to Canada and get permission to come back and help us again. Every time he was forced to leave he would have to reestablish relations with his suppliers before he could continue supplying us. All our volunteers from Canada, and there were many, had to overcome the efforts of our government to keep them out.

There are many more stories to tell, but I think that by now you have a good idea of the big picture. I want to close this book by making a few observations and summing up our work. I have tried to mainly report on positive things, but it is necessary now to report some of the negative side of things. So let’s

briefly touch on the subject of spiritual warfare. Great deeds were being done to advance God's kingdom here on earth and great opposition could be expected from the enemy and he did not disappoint us. The greatest opposition came from within the church, which seems to be the normal thing.

The greatest disappointment is the failure of the church to take advantage of the opportunities to evangelize people. Many of the people were brought to their knees by the storm and they were open to examining what they believed in. Our workers were often able to tell the Gospel story to those they worked with, and they would come back to report how they had shared with a person who was very interested in learning more, and they would report how they wished someone would follow up after they went back home. Sadly this did not happen and many opportunities were lost. There is no better time to talk about spiritual things to a person than when you are helping him recover from a tragedy. We, the church, should reach out and help hurting people, but we must make evangelizing as important to us as rebuilding a home or feeding someone.

We were blessed that so many of the people we helped are fellow Christians. This was very rewarding and I think helping Christians is Biblical (Galatians 6:10). A lady by the name of Mary is an example of what I mean by it being rewarding to help a fellow believer. We started working on her house when the team who had been working on it left the area. The work they had been doing was sadly, very poor. For example, when they replaced the broken windows, they used plywood to fill up most of the window opening and then they put in a small piece of glass. Our first day working on this house, we put a large number of workers on the job and by afternoon we had made remarkable progress and when Mary returned home she was overwhelmed. She asked if we could all gather in a circle to pray and thank God. We were all blessed by this and other similar experiences.

We had one lady who everyday before she would allow us to work on her daughter's house next door to hers, insisted that we have a time of prayer and worship. This was another house that had been the recipient of substandard work by another church group.

I have previously mentioned the problem about substandard work. I am happy to report that our church has a reputation for doing quality work. The last day I was in the field I was talking to the man who would be finishing the houses that we couldn't complete. He complimented me on the quality of work our teams had done all around town.

I want to close this report with several observations, some of which are redundant here, but they need to be emphasized. God did great things through His church along the Gulf Coast. As I reported earlier there were two main beneficiaries of our work. First and most obvious are those who we helped by rebuilding their houses. Second are the churches and the volunteers who came and worked in the Gulf Coast, and I believe they received the greatest benefit. I continue to hear from volunteers who tell me that they are changed for the better since their experience with us. After I wrote the above, another thought came to me that the merchants of the Gulf Coast also were beneficiaries of the relief work. Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent by the volunteers and this greatly stimulated the local economy.

My experience in Biloxi has left me a changed man. Having been involved in God's work the way I was and seeing Him provide for us left a deep and long-lasting impression on me. We operated by trusting Him to bring in the people and money we needed to do the work, and He did over and over again. By trusting Him and not charging anybody to stay with us allowed those who could not have afforded room and board charges to come with their families.

Many times we would need a certain skill to come and work with us and the next thing we knew, God brought us that person. For example, shortly before we closed down we had a desperate need for

plumbers. One job alone would have cost us over \$3,000. Even I knew that there was something wrong with that price. Sure enough, God brought us a couple of plumbers from Pittsburg and in half a day they took care of this plumbing problem. They then proceeded to finish several other plumbing jobs before they left.

God also provided so much money that we were not only able to pay for all our needs, we were also able to help many other churches who lacked adequate money of their own. Money continued to arrive even during our last week. As I said earlier, God had opened the floodgates of heaven.

God also richly provided for my wife and me. He provided a comfortable place for us to live, income for us to live on, strength to do the job, and everything we needed to do the job He called us to do. Many of you know that I had polio as a child. Prior to going to Mississippi, I had become too weak to work very much. God gave me back enough energy to work seven days a week and often 13-14 hours a day.

Another example of how God has changed my life and my wife's is that we are scheduled to go to Uganda as missionaries. We have decided to spend the rest of our lives in fulltime ministry as God enables. So, I am taking my social security check and moving to Africa to serve with the African Bible Colleges.

Thanks to all who supported our efforts with prayers, money, and hard work.

Isaiah 48:11 "For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another."