

A CALL TO ACTION

BAHAMAS DEVASTATION OPENS THE DOOR FOR THE GOSPEL

Story by Margot Bass

As Hurricane Dorian relentlessly pounded Marsh Harbour, Abaco, Bahamas, this September, Jim Richard hunkered down for hours with his son and three others in his laundry room, his house falling apart around him. At one point they pulled a mattress over their heads for protection. According to Pastor John Snoderly, director of Calvary Disaster Relief (CDR), “When the [calm of the] eye of the storm came, they were able to drive to a church on higher ground, where they thought they would be safer.” More than 250 were gathered in the dark, wet church. When the eye passed, a concrete wall, and eventually the ceiling, collapsed. Everybody ran for their lives to a government building to ride out the rest of the storm.

Three weeks later, John met Jim, who was a Christian school principal on the Bahamian island, as he and two other leaders of CDR traveled to the Bahamas to assess post-hurricane needs and make connections to plan relief efforts by Calvary Chapel believers. “I was able to sit with Jim and hear his story first-hand, to walk with him and basically see his livelihood dissolve. It was heart-wrenching,” John continued.

Lance Cook, senior pastor of Calvary Chapel La Habra, CA, and CDR founder, was one of the leaders. “We took Jim back to his campus—it was decimated. We were able to walk through the school with him as a brother in the Lord, to cry with him, and hug him,” Lance recalled. They returned together to his home, only to find it had been completely ransacked by looters who had stolen many of his belongings. Jim despondently told the men, “I don’t know where I’m going or what I’m going to do now.”

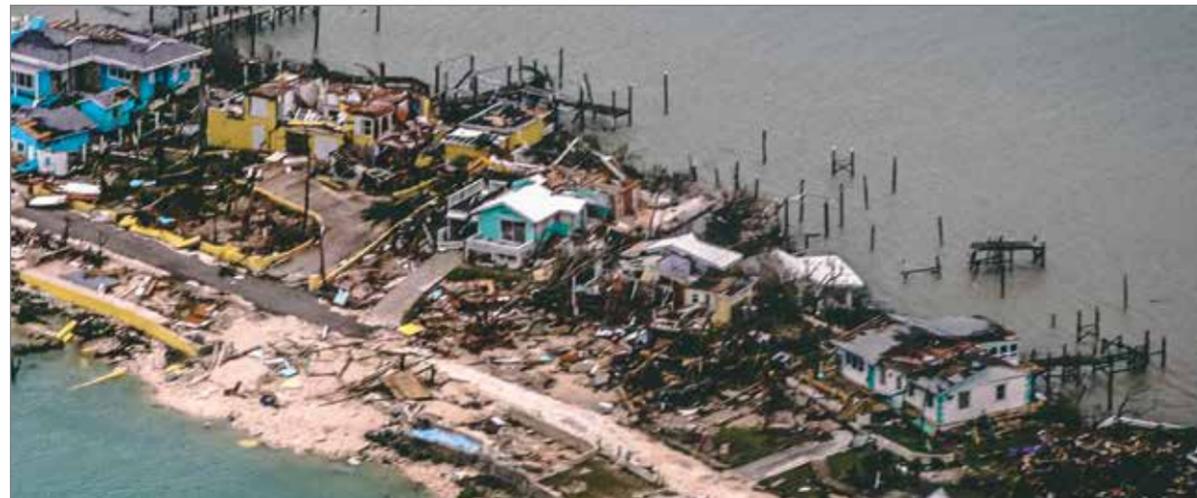
The three men from CDR took him with them as they flew to their next stop, the island of Eleuthera, where they

met with a Christian foundation representative. “God already had a plan and a place for him. When we got there, the foundation offered him a job at a school because of his educational experience,” John stated. “It’s amazing how God has a provision for us in these times of tragedy.”

Physical and Spiritual Relief

John, senior pastor of Calvary Chapel Crossroads in Antioch, CA, went for four days to several locations in the Bahamas with Lance and Chris McCarrick, senior pastor of Cornerstone Calvary Chapel in Howell, NJ. The three leaders of CDR met in Freeport, Grand Bahama, with nearly 35 pastors and representatives of relief ministries. They discussed strategies for moving forward after the overwhelming and unprecedented destruction by Hurricane Dorian over Labor Day weekend. With sustained winds of 185 miles per hour and storm surges of 18 to 23 feet above natural tide levels, Dorian is considered by many as the worst natural disaster in Bahamian history. Most structures on affected islands were flattened or swept out to sea, and tens of thousands were left homeless. As of October 1, the World Health Organization reported that at least 56 had been killed and about 600 were still missing. The greatest damage occurred on Abaco and Grand Bahama islands, where the Category 5 storm hovered ominously for approximately 30 hours, witnesses said.

Chris noted the openness of the pastors in Freeport to the help offered by CDR. “They really want us to get behind them—not just in the physical aspects of recovery but in the spiritual support and pastoral encouragement, from us to them,” he said. “I met this 69-year-old pastor who told me that for the first time in his life he was homeless, losing both his home and church. He told me



Top: Hurricane Dorian is the most powerful storm on record to hit the Bahamas. Over 90% of the infrastructure and buildings were destroyed on some islands, leaving 70,000 homeless. Photo by U.S. Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Adam Stanton

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with tears in his eyes, ‘I don’t know what to do.’ I just wept and prayed with him; when we finished praying, he said he felt better.”

John asserted, “It’s not just rebuilding and mucking out houses. We want to minister to the whole person—physically, mentally, and spiritually. We want to see people come to Christ and understand that their lives are not defined by the disaster; their lives need to be defined by their relationship with Jesus. He is the One who takes us beyond tragedy.”

The Lord clearly admonishes us to be ambassadors for Him, Chris observed. ***Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God*** (2 Corinthians 5:20). “We can fix a house and put up sheet-rock, and that’s good. And we will do that. But it’s all about helping people see where God is in all this, and how we can help them be reconciled to God in the midst of their pain. He wants to use all things in our lives to draw all men to Himself,” Chris explained.

Open Doors to Ministry

Lance challenged the pastors at the Freeport meeting to remain ministry-minded while meeting physical needs: “We’re from Bible-teaching churches, and we will bring in people [to help]. Our cause is to help you find ministry opportunities and to bring Jesus into the conversations. All the work you do—building, mucking, drywall, roofing—that’s just the bridge to gain people’s attention.” After he spoke, Pastor Kyle Maycock of Freeport Bible Church ran up to him, admitting, “I needed to hear that; we need to talk.” Since then, he and CDR have been planning relief and restoration work to begin immediately.

Kyle’s church, with a private school for 350 students, has space to house teams. Built on a hill, it suffered minimal storm damage. Lance continued, “He’s been doing a great job keeping people’s focus on the Lord, but he was becoming inundated with the physical aspects of relief. He welcomed us into his life and church.” The CDR pastors were drawn to Kyle’s structured program using resources from local vendors and labor from local contractors to help the devastated local economy. They also identified other churches for possible future relief efforts.

And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful.
TITUS 3:14

Lance hopes that bringing in Calvary Chapel teams to help with physical labor, while sharing the Gospel, will enable Bahamian pastors to focus on being strong spiritual leaders. “They’re inundated with work. One pastor we met hadn’t left his church building since the storm. He needs a break, but there’s no one to fill in for him. We want to put the word out to our colleagues: You could come to fill in for a pastor and give him that break or bring in some of your people who know the Word of God to do some biblical counseling.”

John related that a pastor approached him after the Freeport meeting with a hug. “I just appreciate that you’re here and that you care about us,” the man told him. His church building and home had been destroyed. When John asked how the pastor was faring, the man replied, “By the grace of God, I’m doing great. I don’t know what the future holds for me, but I know that God has a plan for me and my family. Just pray that He will have a place for us now.” 🙏