

Tsunami response demands quick start, long process_32105

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Volunteers start framing (left) on more permanent structures for tsunami refugees in Sri Lanka. The finished house (right) is ready for a family to move in.

Tsunami response demands quick start, long process

By Craig Bird & John Hall

Baptist Child & Family Services & Texas Baptist Communications

SRI LANKA (ABP)-Tsunami disaster relief is not a race between the tortoise and the hare. It's more like a relay effort by the two.

TBM building new lives in Sri Lanka_32105

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TBM building new lives in Sri Lanka

By John Hall

Texas Baptist Communications

When Texas Baptist Men initially went into Sri Lanka, God led them day by day, footstep by footstep, reported Dick Talley, the group's ministry logistics coordinator.

Leaders are only now starting to clearly see the plan God was developing for Texas volunteers, he said.

In early January, it was difficult for Texas Baptist Men to lay out a long-term plan for relief and recovery because leaders needed to find the proper governmental channels, Talley said. God orchestrated those contacts, and his mission is becoming a reality in Sri Lanka.

**TBM needs two
volunteers as office
managers in Sri
Lanka**

Texas Baptist Men is looking for two people to help with its continuing disaster relief efforts in Sri Lanka.

Two office managers are needed to support the TBM operation in Sri Lanka for two to three months. These people will live in Sri Lanka for their period of service and would need to go through the Texas Baptist Men "yellow cap" training.

The positions are voluntary, but Texas Baptist Men will help with travel expenses. For more information, contact Jeanette Nichols at (214) 828-5357.

"God did not allow us to plan ahead over there," Talley said. "He showed us the way day by day." Now "literally some of the barriers that were there

when we arrived are coming down.”

As each wall has fallen, TBM volunteers have been able to meet more needs, he noted. They have cleaned more than 400 wells with the help of Sri Lankans and are looking for equipment to drill 300 more wells that could survive another tsunami.

Volunteers also have started serving in Batticaloa General Hospital. The men’s group purchased commercial laundry equipment to help supply the hospital with clean linens for patients. TBM has supplied a television and digital video disc player and *Veggie Tales* discs so children can watch Christian programming. Volunteers have cared for some of the children.

Texas Baptist Men provided a refrigerator and freezer for a temporary house for orphans. The children also were given school uniforms. TBM has contracted with locals to make clothing and school uniforms for several hundred more children who will stay in a Compassion International-constructed orphanage.

Texas volunteers have donated kitchen equipment for 700 nationals in refugee camps and trained them on how to use it. Gospel for Asia, a nondenominational mission organization, is working alongside TBM in each of the refugee camps.

The Texans have built eight homes after getting the design approved by the Sri Lankan government, and they may construct as many as 200 for all the people in Vaddavaan refugee camp. The group also built a community center there that will serve as a meeting place for refugee activities, including church services.

Carroll Prewitt, a member of First Baptist Church in Lindale who served as on-site coordinator for TBM relief efforts, said he believes there is a nucleus for a church in Vaddavaan, due in some part to TBM’s presence. He documents at least nine people coming to faith in Christ while the

Texans were there.

That is the tip of the spiritual iceberg, Prewitt said. Five of the volunteers' drivers and interpreters have converted to Christianity. One member of a nongovernmental organization made the same commitment. Texans have shared their faith and prayed with numerous people around the house they are renting.

The TBM home has become known as the "lighthouse of prayer," partly because of its proximity to a lighthouse. Their offices are called the "faith cottage."

"I really think the spiritual impact is greater than anything else we're doing," Prewitt said.

The Sri Lankan government has accepted their evangelistic efforts, Talley said. It has praised them for continuing to serve long after other agencies left.

In a sign of a growing relationship between TBM and the government, Sri Lanka leaders have invited Texans to help with a festival for children.

Some logistical issues still continue, as TBM tries to find people with the appropriate skill sets to match needs, but Talley believes God will work it out. TBM next is sending another building team.

"There are obstacles, but the acceptance we're being shown is exceptional," Talley said.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.

Texas Tidbits_32105

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Texas Tidbits

Baylor hires search consultant. Baylor University's board of regents has engaged Bill Funk, head of Korn/Ferry International's National Education Practice, to help find a successor to President Robert Sloan. Based in Dallas, Funk has conducted more than 250 university and college presidential and chancellor searches for institutions such as Vanderbilt, Syracuse, Miami, Tulane, Purdue, University of Washington, University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Iowa and University of Texas at Austin.

Neaves scholarship fund established at DBU. The Neaves endowed scholarship fund has been established at Dallas Baptist University to provide scholarship assistance to deserving students. The fund was made possible by a gift from the Mary Emma Neaves estate. It honors Neaves, a longtime member of Park Cities Baptist Church and public school teacher, and her parents, Roy and Ethel Neaves.

Easter pageant set at UMHB. The 65th University of Mary Hardin-Baylor Easter pageant will be presented March 23 at 12:30 p.m., 3 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. The outdoor presentation of Christ's passion, resurrection and ascension will be held at the Luther Memorial arches on campus. The drama is produced, directed, costumed and performed by university

students. More than 90 students, along with children from the area, will participate in the pageant.

TOGETHER: Who would you follow except Jesus_32105

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TOGETHER: Who would you follow except Jesus?

Dallas Willard teaches philosophy at the University of Southern California. He is a gifted teacher who is deeply committed to Christ. At Epicenter, our Texas Baptist gathering for evangelism and the missional church, he said: "Sometimes students step alongside me as I walk across campus and ask, 'Is it true that you are a follower of Jesus?' I ask, 'Who else did you have in mind?'"

Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do you say I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). And they followed him. Who else could they go to? And as they followed Jesus, with many a detour, they became more and more shaped by God into the likeness of Christ.



Executive Director
BGCT Executive
Board

I am deeply moved this Easter week as the Baptist General Convention of Texas has been recommended for full membership in the Baptist World Alliance. To be connected in Christ-centered fellowship with Baptists around the world is to join a global group of disciples who, with Peter, proclaim Jesus is the Christ and move forward to follow him. And together this Easter week, Christians around the world are thinking about what it means that Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead.

Ugandans follow Texan's steps in walk of faith_32105

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International Mission Board missionary John Witte walks from village to village to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ. Ugandan men walk with him along the path and discuss the Bible stories they learned in the villages. Witte walks around 72 kilometers a week. Witte contends that in this area of northern Uganda, walking models a way of evangelism the Dodoth people can carry out themselves. (Photos by Jon Jamar)

Ugandans follow Texan's steps in walk of faith

By Sue Sprenkle

International Mission Board

KAABONG, Uganda—Looking up from his daily chores, a village elder saw a group of men in the distance picking their way across the dry, rocky terrain. The presence of a stranger among them attracted his attention, but he continued working.

Musical turn-around sparks surge in youth ministry_32105

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Musical turn-around sparks surge in youth ministry

By Marc Rogers

Southwestern Seminary

FORT WORTH (BP)—As recently as a generation ago, student participation in music ministry at most churches meant singing in the youth choir or playing in a bell choir. Especially gifted students might have had the rare opportunity to play piano or organ for the congregation.

‘Kids these days’ busy, alone, stressed out_32105

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'Kids these days' busy, alone, stressed out

By Lance Wallace

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (ABP)—Sometimes the best way to minister to youth is by offering them less, said veteran youth minister Sam Hestorff of Bayshore

Baptist Church in Tampa, Fla.

Cybercolumn by Jeanie Miley: Who do you say God is?_32105

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CYBERCOLUMN: Who do you say God is?

By Jeanie Miley

Say the word “God” in any group, and the images that pop up in peoples’ minds will be as numerous as the people in the room.

Time was, before I’d thought about it, when I believed we were all on the same page in how we conceptualized God. It never occurred to me that a person’s God-image was shaped by his earliest experiences with caregivers. I hadn’t thought about the fact people form their images of God based on those pictures hanging in the Sunday school rooms. I just assumed that all of us had the same ideas about God.

Jeanie Miley

Shaped by the Christian story, I understood God as Good Shepherd or Great Physician, Savior and Teacher. I believed early, and I still believe,

that Jesus is the best picture of God we have, but I now know not everyone with whom I live and work and share this planet shares that same belief.

The truth is that most people, I've learned, have not even brought their ideas about God into conscious thought. Most people have not taken the time to reflect deeply on how they think about God, and most are operating out of a childhood image of who God is, and then they wonder why their God is too small for their big challenges of life as an adult.

A person's God-image is the most important concept he carries around in his head and heart. How a person perceives God determines how he perceives himself and how he understands his place in the world. If God is present and available, it is going to be easy for him to trust. If God is absent and disinterested or uninvolved in the world, then he is likely to believe it's all up to him.

Seeing God as Judge and Jury keeps a person running from God, scared of committing the unpardonable sin. Seeing God as a Divine Butler or a Benevolent Santa Claus, both of which are common God-concepts, diminishes the power of the Holy One.

God created humankind in his own image, and, as some wise sage admitted, we humans have been returning the favor since time began, ascribing our tendencies and traits onto the Almighty and remaking God to fit our image. We humans cannot *not* be anthropomorphic, but I'm not sure that is such a good thing.

My childhood image of God was adequate for me when I was a child, and as a young adult, I had to expand it to allow room for all that I was learning in the world. Now that I am a mature adult, I need a God big enough for the largeness of my challenges, and that is why I need a full, biblical concept of the nature of God.

I don't need to form my image of God from an idea from some novel.

I don't need to define God by one of his human instruments, even if that human instrument acts all god-like and almighty.

I don't need to limit God by the ways that God worked in the past, for God is forever breaking out of old boxes and limited concepts and revealing still one more dimension of his sovereign nature.

What I do need, given the largeness of the challenges I face, is the full splendor of God, at work in my life day after day after day, and the very best place for me to go for a Big-Enough God is the Bible, where God revealed his full nature and character. And I need to read it all, from Genesis to Revelation, to get the full image of who God is.

Jeanie Miley is an author and columnist and a retreat and workshop leader. She is married to Martus Miley, pastor of River Oaks Baptist Church in Houston, and they have three adult daughters. Got feedback? Write her at Writer2530@aol.com.

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LifeWay Family Bible Series for March 27: Jesus as high priest intercedes for all

humanity_32105

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LifeWay Family Bible Series for March 27

Jesus as high priest intercedes for all humanity

Mark 16:1-7; Hebrews 7:1-9:14

By Mitch Randall

LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for March 27: Celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ_32105

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LifeWay Explore the Bible Series for March 27

Celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ

John 20:19-29

By Dennis Tucker

Truett Seminary, Waco

BaptistWay Bible Series for March 27: It is important to follow God's timetable_32105

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BaptistWay Bible Series for March 27

It is important to follow God's timetable

Leviticus 23:1-38

By Wayne Smith

Texan had brush with law after distributing literature in Dubai_30705

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Texan had brush with law after distributing literature in Dubai

By Toby Druin

Editor Emeritus

WAXAHACHIE—Marie Bush has a heart for missions, and it's still beating strong— even after a brush with the law in Dubai, a coastal city on the Persian Gulf. In fact, her experience there and in India more than ever convinced her God is in control and will sustain his people.

Upbeat but exhausted, Bush returned to Waxahachie late March 3 after she and a companion, Vivian Gilmer of Myrtle Beach, S.C., were detained for 12 days in the United Arab Emirates—north of Saudi Arabia—for distributing Bibles and other materials in a marketplace.

Bush, 55, a member of First Baptist Church in Waxahachie, and Gilmer, 72, from First Baptist Church in Myrtle Beach were among 19 people who took a side trip to Dubai following a 10-day mission trip to India.

Marie Bush
reunited
with her
husband,
Ronnie, in
Waxahachie
after her
arrest in
Dubai,
United
Arab
Emirates.

They and 40 others from across the United States held medical clinics and evangelistic services in tribal villages in three areas near the southeastern coast. Tom Cox World Ministries of Mountainburg, Ark., sponsored the trips to India and Dubai. It was the 24th annual trip for the Cox group, and members of the Waxahachie church have been involved with the Coxes in India for several years.

Bush served as a counselor and witnessed to women at the medical clinics and led the children's service at the church dedication. She is a veteran of nine mission trips, but this was her first to India and to Dubai.

"I took the trip to Dubai because information about the trip said we would be able to create relationships with the people there and be able to talk about Jesus," she said.

The Cox Ministry brochure on the trip describes activities in Dubai: "Shop, Drop Material and Prayerwalking."

Kay Cox, who directs the ministry with her husband, Tom, said she had advised the group going to Dubai that "there is always a chance there could

be a problem, but technically it is not illegal to pass out Bibles” there.

“I honestly didn’t know anything I did was against the law,” Bush said. “We had been told there were restrictions, but we thought what we were doing was OK. We knew we were not to give out tracts or witness verbally, but that it was OK to offer a gift.”

The mission volunteers went to a vast international marketplace, Global Village, which features pavilions with products from many countries in Europe and Asia. They were assigned to various areas and given disposable cameras.

“We were told in the van on the way to Global Village that we were to focus on children, asking the parents if we could take their pictures and if we could have their names and addresses so we could send them the picture and a gift from America. The gift would be a Bible,” Bush recalled.

After “getting our feet wet” with a brief visit to the Global Village the first day, the second day went very easily, she said. Although the Arab women were shrouded in black except for their eyes, they were easily approachable, and most spoke English.

“Women are just women,” she observed, and they talked freely, carrying on normal conversations.

On the third night in Global Village, they passed out DVDs with several stories on them, including “Jesus the Carpenter,” Bush said. On succeeding nights, they gave out the DVDs and Bibles, explaining to those who asked that it was not the Quran, but “our Holy Bible,” and some gave them back.

She said she could not remember any particular instance that might have led to their arrests, but she recalled offering a Bible to an elderly man in a wheelchair surrounded by his family. She told the man’s granddaughter the Bible was a gift from America, but when he asked if it was the Quran, she

told him it wasn't, and his son took it from him.

She also offered a Bible to a shopkeeper, she said, but he said he already knew a lot about the Bible and declined to accept it.

"It could have been one of those times, or maybe just the fact that I was being followed," Bush said. "But I have no idea who turned me in."

She said she and Gilmer were in the Czech pavilion, near the back door, when she heard a policeman say: "You! Come!" She looked and saw two policemen and three policewomen and she replied, "Me?"

The policeman said, "What do you not understand about the word 'come'?"

Bush said she responded: "Oh my. Mercy," and immediately thought, "'I am about to disappear.' That was the first thing that ran through my mind."

She responded by running a few feet around a corner in search of Gilmer.

"She was right there," Bush said. "It was a God thing. She could have been anywhere."

The police officers treated them well, she said, but asked "forceful" questions about what they were doing and where they had gotten the Bibles they were distributing, the name of their hotel and how many were in their group.

When Bush and Gilmer pleaded ignorance to many of their questions, they were taken to the Dubai police station, where they were asked the same questions. One police officer brought in and emptied onto a desk the 19 Bibles they still had with them when they were arrested and many, if not all, of those they had given away.

By that time, Bush said, they should have been meeting with the others of

the 19-member group at the lake in the Global Village. “We knew that when we didn’t show up, they would know we had been taken. They were already looking for us, but there was nothing they could do.”

That morning, while packing to leave the next day, Bush said, she had discarded all the phone numbers of the Coxes and other group members. Gilmer, however, remembered that she had a bulletin from the Emirates International Baptist Convention where they had gone for Bible study one night. It had Pastor Dan Marshall’s phone number on it.

“It was another God thing,” Bush said. “If I had called the others, it could have gotten them in trouble, too. Pastor Dan’s visa lists him as a pastor, so it didn’t get him into trouble.”

That morning, before going to the Global Village, she had prayed for divine intervention and “our intervention came when Pastor Dan walked into the station with two of his church members who spoke Arabic,” she said. “I felt God had sent us three angels. I felt it was what I had prayed for, because had it not been for them we would have seen jail.”

Although they were at the police station and never actually in jail, Bush said she was reconciled to going to jail, if it happened. She had survived 10 days in Third World conditions while in the villages in India, she reasoned, and Dubai was the richest nation in the world.

“I felt it wouldn’t be that bad,” she said. “But it didn’t happen. I never had a sense of fear, although I wanted to come home, to be at home. But I knew that when young girls in Dubai get pregnant and aren’t married, they are placed in jail. I thought that I could be a mother to them, and what would it hurt if I witnessed to them in jail?”

They were allowed to leave the police station at 1:30 a.m. and told they could get their passports at 7:30 that morning. When they got their wakeup call at 6 a.m., they were informed the hotel wanted them to check out. And

at 10:30, they were told their case had been bumped to a higher court.

“Our interpreter told us to use any connection we had in the States,” Bush said, “that this was not good.”

Although it was 4 a.m. in Waxahachie, she called her husband, Ronnie, and told him to call the church and her Sunday school teacher, Wayne Willmon, because she needed prayer warriors talking to God on her behalf. He also alerted their children—Matt in Iraq, his twin sister, Heather, who is a member of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., and their oldest son, Heath, a member of First Baptist Church of El Campo. They organized a worldwide prayer network.

After that, she felt every day that she and Gilmer would be allowed to leave that day. Her husband called every day, sometimes two or three times daily, to encourage her.

But each day when the courts closed at 2 p.m. and they hadn’t been given their passports, they knew the wait would go on at least another day. They received some assurances that they probably would be released, but the penalties for violating Dubai’s laws on promoting Christianity can be harsh, including prison sentences and heavy fines.

The day the news came they received their passports and were allowed to leave, Bush said, she had been reading the book of Job during her Bible study, and it occurred to her God was telling her to be patient.

“I thought: ‘Oh, God, you are so awesome. You reveal yourself in your word.’ I knew he had orchestrated our trip to India and then to Dubai, and he was still in control. He was just teaching me patience.”

Although the courts closed at 2 p.m., at 4:30, Bush and Gilmer were informed they would receive their passports if they could get confirmed airline tickets. That presented a dilemma, since it usually is impossible to

get a ticket without a passport, but with Pastor Marshall's help, they got a statement from the airlines that their seats had been confirmed, and their passports were released. They left the following morning.

Bush praised Marshall, a Texan who attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and whose work in Dubai is affiliated with the European Baptist Convention. After having to leave the hotel, Bush and Gilmer stayed with Marshall and his family. "They were very hospitable," she said.

She had kind words for the Dubai officials. "It could have been a lot worse," she said. "They were very gracious to us."

She's already thinking about her next mission trip, she said, although she doesn't know where it will be.

"I would love to go back to India," she said. "I have loved every mission trip, but on this one you could truly feel the presence of God."

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