

## Gustav/Ike Final Thoughts 9/08

Well I'm finally catching up on my rest as sleep was not easy to come by and I'm getting to sending out my final email with the compilations of my thoughts from my trip to Louisiana and Texas in response to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. I'm sorry I didn't send this sooner, just needed the rest!

Every storm is different. Every time we respond, our response and God's work both in our lives and in the people's lives that've been affected is different. No this wasn't Katrina and the sad fact is that since Katrina, too many people compare anything that happens to Katrina and if it doesn't match up, a lot of people decide that no response and relief is necessary. I can't tell you how many times I was told that there was nothing to do, even by people who toured the areas? It was very heartbreaking to hear and trust me there is a lot of work to be done, what little I could do barely scratched the surface. Yes there were many who did respond and did some work and still others who are there or are making plans to go, but there is still much work to be done. Try telling someone who's house was flooded or who's roof was blown off that it's no Katrina! The people who were affected by these storms deserve Jesus' love and the sacrificial work of His people just as much as anyone else!

God often times moves in ways that we don't expect Him to, at least in my life. Things I refuse to pray for, like patience, often times ends up being what He wants to work in my life. This trip was no exception. I met many obstacles and hindrances to the work that God was calling me to do. Sometimes I pressed on in spite of my circumstances and sometimes I let the circumstances get the best of me for a while, then getting my focus back on God instead of me, I pressed on. This trip was not easy in many ways and flexibility was the key to all that was going on. I often think that I'm more flexible than I truly am, and God certainly worked on me in this area during this trip. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares The Lord!

When we first started out, Matt was with me and we were staging in Hattiesburg , Mississippi . I had arranged with Gary of Mercy Chefs to assist him in any way I could this time out. We needed to pick up some supplies from Christian Contractors Association and Living Water on our way up. We arrived early in the morning on Monday and didn't realize that there were two Salvation Army locations across the street from each other, so ended up at the wrong one and had to sleep in the truck, the first of many times!

Gustav arrived that day and amidst rain and wind we managed to get some things ready with Gary and Operation Blessing's crew. It was a long day, but eventually we got to bed and were ready to go. It was unclear where Gary was going to end up, so we parted ways as we had been contacted from people in Baton Rouge who needed help. We told Gary that if he needed anything to let us know and we'd do our best to come and help. They ended up in St. Bernard's Parish, near New Orleans and June and Sandy from our church were able to join him and help, so we stayed on in Baton Rouge .

While there we were able to help many people, cutting trees, removing debris, tarping roofs and most importantly, sharing the Lord with them. We worked alongside of a few different churches and many volunteers. God directed us to work with a ministry called Streams of Life in Baton Rouge . It totally amazed me what a little church of about 20 people were able to do! They had warehouse after warehouse filled with product that they routinely distribute to many churches and ministries in the area. Once the hurricanes hit, they beefed it up and began distributing goods to the people affected by the storm. They welcomed us with open arms and gave us as much product as we needed to take with us once we headed out. Pastor Steve and his wife Diane are truly a blessing and example of what God can do if we trust in Him and obey His leading in our lives. Please keep them in prayer as Steve is undergoing chemo treatments, yet the ministry presses on!

We were joined by Brady and Bubba from CC Plano who came in for a few days to scout things out and do some cooking. They were able to cook some meals for us as well as the community. Their heart to serve the Lord is displayed in all they do. I wish you could've seen them in action!

Matt headed home after about a week, which left me without a helper, but God always provides! A teenager that was working with Streams of Life joined me one day, then several Church of God Chaplains who were staying with us at Streams of Life helped out, not only providing physical labor, but spent time ministering to those folks whose homes we were working at, what an awesome blessing they were, and they even cooked for us!

The Chaplains needed to get back to what they were doing on the next Monday and I was left with some local help. Usually this is fine, but this time it was a disaster! Later that day I received a call from some friends in CA who were headed to Houma and they asked that I join them. I had planned on taking them some supplies to them and now felt the Lord leading me to just go and stay and work with them. We were able to distribute food and water that the Streams of Life ministry had given us immediately upon arriving. As it was late in the day, no physical work was completed. The next day we removed a huge tree from a family's home and then cut down a couple of trees at another location.

The next morning news of Ike's track near where we were staying caused us to move back to Baton Rouge . Winds, rain and flooding had already started in the area we were working on and we were counseled to not go back. We managed to work on a couple more homes closer to where we were and then packed up and headed out after dark. It was a windy ride back!

Streams of Life again took us in. We helped them stage trucks to go in to supply relief to Ike victims and worked on some more trees and roofs. Early Saturday morning, we did our laundry and packed up, again loaded with food and supplies from Streams of Life and headed for CC Houston. We arrived at around 10 PM, what an eerie feeling as we drove through one of the most populated areas in the country and everything was pitch black! I lived in Houston for a few years in the early 80's and drove right past my first job location and then exited off the highway where my first apartment was as I followed my

GPS. I have no idea if anything is the same as I couldn't see a thing and my return trip took me a different way since some blocked roads had been opened.

I spent the night sleeping in my truck and when I got up many people and vehicles, mostly from CA, had arrived to help as well. We got up, fixed breakfast for ourselves and immediately started out to tarp a roof that was leaking badly. As things usually go, we worked on a neighbor's house as well and picked up more work orders to complete later. The crew was tired but I still had some energy left so the Lord led me to an elderly couple that had a huge tree fall in their back yard. I told them I could cut it, but didn't have enough time to move it. They said just cut it in small pieces and they'd take their time and haul it to the curb so I managed to get the whole tree cut just as it was beginning to get too dark to see.

Gary had contacted me as they had staged in Dallas . They were heading to Beaumont and he needed help cooking. As I had given him my word before we had originally set out, that I would help him if needed, I decided that was what the Lord wanted me to do. I told the CA guys and got up the next morning to head out. I had not distributed any of the goods that Streams of Life had given me and CC Chino Hills gave me more stuff to take with me.

As I was heading out, I knew I was low on gas and just wanted to get where I was going. The Lord had a different plan and I ended up back in the neighborhood I was in the night before. I began distributing food, drinks and hygiene kits. I came across an elderly lady who said all she needed was some water, though everyone asked for ice and electricity! As I got the water out for her I noticed that her husband was trying to cut up a tree in their front yard with a hand saw. Feeling led by the Lord, I asked if I could cut up their tree with my chainsaw and they said their angel had arrived! The lady couldn't quit hugging and thanking me, don't get jealous MJ she's married and not my type! A neighbor came over and we managed to cut the tree and move it to the curb in about 45 minutes. Now I had to leave town. I was supposed to cook dinner in Beaumont , a two hour drive away and my gas was about gone.

I headed out looking everywhere for gas without a line. Every station that was open had a 5-6 hour wait and would probably run out before a lot of people in line got gas, including me if I got at the end of the line. I found a couple stations with small lines, but found out they were waiting in hopes that gas would arrive later in the day, I didn't have time to wait. As I was heading down the interstate, I was passing much of the same. Suddenly my low on gas warning light came on. I didn't know how far I could travel pulling my trailer and all the weight that I had loaded. My prayers increased! I had 20 gallons of reserve in cans in the back of the truck and was just getting ready to pull over and use them, though I knew there'd be no gas in Beaumont and I'd need some when I got there so this was only a temporary fix. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a gas station with about 10 or 12 cars in line. I'd seen this before and pulled in only to find out that people were just waiting in case the station got electricity and/or gas and with my gas running out I was not going to circle back and check it out. Then I thought I actually saw someone pumping gas, was this a mirage!! God told me to turn around, so I used the next

emergency u-turn spot and managed to get around to the station. They had just gotten a load of gas! It was also way past lunch and they had a BBQ joint in the station. I ordered a sandwich and by the time I got it and ate it, it was my turn to fill up! If I had not obeyed God and distributed the supplies and helped the elderly couple, I would've been through the area before the station received the gas! Where God guides, He always provides!!

I made it to Gary in time to help prepare dinner. Mercy Chefs along with Operation Blessing was feeding the first responders breakfast and dinner. We were feeding the Highway Patrol, Game Wardens, National Guard, Army and others. We would also send over 100 prepackaged hot meals to another area where similar first responders were set up. As new people came in we were met with the same greeting, they had all been deployed on Saturday and had been eating MRE's and this was the first hot meal that they had since they left home. We would feed anywhere from 300-550 per meal. One of the army guys came up to Gary and handed him his cell phone, it was the man's wife and she wanted to thank Gary for taking care of her husband! It was too late to take meals to homes at night, but three days we were able to load up the left over breakfast meals and along with some canned goods and supplies still left from Streams of Life, we went to Orange , TX and handed things out.

As we were packing up on Friday, the Master Sergeant from the Army asked us all to get in a line. I was trying to figure out who was taking the pictures when he started a small medal ceremony. He presented each of us with a medal of recognition for our services to them and it appears that we were made honorary Sergeant Majors? I was in tears! These people were truly blessed by what little we had done and as we took care of them, they were in turn able to go out and take care of thousands of others. It is truly remarkable to see how God works all things out for His glory! Keep them in your prayers as they are deploying to Iraq soon.

All in all through what we brought, were given, the helpers, etc, I was able to help over 22 homeowners utilizing over 46 volunteers on work teams. This doesn't include the distributions we did or the cooking for the last week and helping OB and Mercy Chefs prep for Gustav. I was gone 20 days and with travel, prep time and Mercy Chefs time, that's a lot that could only be done with God's providing all in everything we did!

But what we did only scratched the surface. I pray that one day Mary Jo and I will truly be able to do this full time without having to work jobs that take away our time and take us apart from each other. Please pray with us as to how the Lord will work all of this out so we can go into areas like this and stay longer and do more and do it together, as we know this is the Lord's will for our lives!

Also pray as to how you can help out. We are praying about a return trip soon, but need the funds and materials to do so.

If you are interested in giving to our ministry, we have set up an online giving section of our web page, <http://calvarychapelsarasota.com/306287.ihtml>, or you can contact us directly.

If you are interested in going to the areas affected by the storms, please contact us and we'll help you in any way we can. Some of these areas were hit with both storms and had barely gotten things back from Rita a few years ago and now desperately need our help.

Thanks for all your prayers and support. They were felt in many ways!

PS-we have switched to an email system that enables us to send out an email to multiple recipients at the same time. This new service costs us money and we want to be good stewards of what the Lord has given us. Please reply back to this message and let us know if you enjoy getting our updates or if you'd rather not get them. By all means, do not say you don't want them to save us money, as we want our updates sent out to anyone who will open and read them.

Lord Bless,