

Iowa Flood 2008 Wrap Up

Wow, where do I start! It has been an awesome two weeks and no matter what I write or how I tell the story, I'll never be able to convey all that happened on this trip. The last time I wrote, the Safe Harbor and Tru Hope teams had just arrived and we were getting them plugged in to help with the clean up.

I try to always tell those involved in any trip or relief effort we're on that the trip is never about the *work*. The event (flood, tornado, etc.) is just the catalyst that God uses to get us to do what He ultimately wants us to do—deepen our own relationships with Him and share the love of Jesus with others. God wants to see if we are faithful to heed the call He makes on our lives. He wants to do a work in the individual lives of those who are on our team as He continues to sanctify each of us, making us more into the likeness of His Son. And of course, God wants to use us to draw other people to Him. Now, as a human male, my priority is to get the job done—get in there, assess the needs, grab some piece of heavy equipment and get going. But what I've found is that God has different ideas! My priorities usually aren't God's priorities. *My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways*, says the Lord God Almighty. This trip in particular was a growing experience for me in many ways. My Christian brothers and sisters who came alongside of us really stretched me in some areas and time will tell if I heed what God wanted to do in my life or not. Please pray that I will!

On this trip, many of the local volunteers weren't Christians and we were able to share our faith with a lot of them. The homes were all vacant as the local government wouldn't allow anyone to live in them until the mold is gone and the reconstruction is complete. We were able to share with some of the residents, but it seemed as if the Lord wanted us first to minister to Jeff, Jen and CC Iowa City and then to the many people He sent our way to help out with our efforts.

Jeff Nullmeyer, the local CC pastor, his wife Jennifer, and their boys, Tyler, Zack and Josh, were an inspiration to me. I just realized this morning that if it wasn't for their faithfulness a few years ago as God began calling them to step out of their comfort zones and scout out, then move to, then plant a church in Iowa City and then remain there, nothing that we did would have been possible. They had unknowingly paved the way for the work that God wanted to do in my life and countless others in the aftermath of the Great Flood of 2008. I know in turn that they were greatly refreshed by all that God did during our visit. Those of us who attend regular church services where we are surrounded by many faithful servants and Christian brothers and sisters often forget about those who are in areas such as Iowa City planting a church. There are many people in many places just like this the world over. CC Iowa City is a young and small church and many of the people who fellowship there are newer Christians who are in need of discipleship. Only a couple are able to help serve and disciple. This not only imposes great burdens on Jeff and Jennifer, though they are more than happy to be faithful to what God has called them to do, but also leaves them lacking for the fellowship, encouragement and discipleship that they were used to before they followed God to Iowa. I won't try to tell you Jeff's family's story, but our group, though only there for a

short time, was able to be that for them and I know they greatly appreciated all of us for that.

But wait, there was even more! Because CCIC is a newer church, few of those in the fellowship have seen a serving church in action before. We were all able to be examples to them as to what a Christian life of love and service to our Lord and Savior actually looks like! I'm not saying this to take any credit for it. I just want to let you know again of the different ways that God will use you when you just trust Him and step out in faith and do what He calls you to do. God wants to know where our mindset is. Do we have heavenly goals or self-centered, earthly goals? Wood, hay and stubble, or gold, silver and precious jewels? We all have the same choices and the same opportunities. I don't mean whether or not to go on a mission trip or respond to a relief effort. I mean the choice to obey the call that God has on each of our individual lives, no matter what that is...responding to a relief effort, going to Bible College, teaching Sunday School, cleaning toilets, etc. God has called each of us to something and we all need to make God the number one priority in our lives, to step out in faith and to allow Him to work in and through our lives as we humbly serve Him!

Well let me get into some of the details of all that we did. The first week started out really nice. Temperatures were 10-15 degrees cooler than normal, humidity was lower than normal, rains, if they came, only came at night and there was always a cool breeze. That all changed on Sunday as temperatures and humidity levels climbed into the 90's and it even rained Tuesday afternoon! Yet somehow God allowed us to do amazing things in spite of ourselves or any of our elements.

I am not one to hurry through a job just to move onto another one. I believe that God calls us to do all to His Glory and to work as unto Him. Most of what was being worked on was a wreck. Flood waters were well above any levels ever seen before. Homes that had basements were completely flooded, and most had flood waters three plus feet into the main floors of their homes. When a flood hits, no one is allowed into the area until the waters have receded several feet. Sewers back up into homes and otherwise clean rivers and waterways become polluted, and these waters also reach most homes. By the time that relief teams, even first responders like us, are able to start cleaning up a home, it is a filthy, dirty mess, and depending on temperatures and other weather related issues, the mess usually gets worse before it gets better. We start by completely emptying the home of its contents. If there is anything that can be salvaged, the homeowner moves the items to some type of storage that has not received any flood damage. We then begin gutting the home. Depending on water levels, this can be anywhere from the total floor to the entire ceiling structure, or floor to ceiling, or floor to typically the four foot level (common drywall break point). Anything that is porous must be disposed of. Anything that isn't must be decontaminated, and anything that was in the home but hasn't gotten any sludge, mud, water or mold on it must be taken to a totally uncontaminated location or it stands the chance of also getting contaminated. Also, if a contaminated item is taken to an uncontaminated location, you run the risk of contaminating everything that wasn't already contaminated. It isn't a fun thing to go

through with the homeowners and can be quite emotional at times as I'm sure you could guess. Once you have gotten everything out and the home down to bare studs, it must be completely cleaned of all dust and debris. From there you get rid of mold and mildew and prevent it from returning again. Then the waiting begins as the government determines who can do what. Permits are granted if allowed and reconstruction can begin. It is a long process.

All of what we do takes time if it is done correctly and thoroughly, and that is always our goal. One of the first team members to show up to help out couldn't understand what I was saying when I told him that his team would be working to finish up the first house we had started. He didn't know what would take so long! He quickly found out in the preceding days what I meant!

All in all we worked on nineteen residences. We completed nine of them—from removal of items to total disinfecting and drying. The others went from moving items to helping out at all other stages of the process. Four different teams showed up from different Calvary Chapels to help-- five people from three different Calvary Chapels joined together under the Safe Harbor ministry (San Diego , Richmond , VA and Dallas), seven people from CC Westgrove (Tru Hope International), four from CC Mississippi Valley (Illinois) and four from CC Sarasota. We weren't shy in enlisting local help from CC Iowa City and any other local organization or individual that wanted to help. As of Tuesday we had utilized 67 different volunteers, from a six year old to some seniors! We found plenty of work for everyone!

Mercy Chefs from Virginia Beach flew a chef to us for a week and also purchased food to meet our physical needs. Chef June was a true blessing, keeping the meals served up and the place clean while she was there. She even prepared some food for us to eat on her last day so we could enjoy it after she was gone! Mary Jo and I are also part of the Mercy Chefs team and Mary Jo helped out the entire time. Once June left I also donned my Mercy Chef jacket and got in the kitchen to lend a hand. None of us appeared to lose any weight!!

The teams stayed at All Nations Baptist Church . This was an interesting place to say the least! The church is mostly Korean, but also has an English pastor and ministries. A Spanish church and a Russian church also use their facility. Three times a week during the day the facility is used by a local school that teaches English to foreigners. There is a day care center that runs Monday to Friday as well as many youth activities during the week! They have a five A.M. prayer meeting that is well attended every morning. No wonder they can do so much!! Amidst all of that, they allowed our teams to sleep in the Sunday school rooms, to use their showers, and to cook in their full kitchen. Pastor Lee also arranged for the Red Cross to bring in some meals from Cedar Rapids which freed us up to do more ministry. Many other organizations also helped out with snacks, water, cleaning supplies, masks, tools, etc. It was definitely a team effort!

We can't thank Jeff and Jen enough for all they did in preparing the way for us for over the past few years, as well as opening up their church and home to us. Jen even let me

use her SUV for the duration of our stay! They are true servants and it was an honor and a privilege to serve along side of them. Continue to keep them in your prayers as the relief effort is in no way over. It has just begun!

Sadly, we had to head out today as I had work to do back home. It's hard sometimes waiting on God's timing. We look forward to the day when the work we do for the Lord is the work we do full time and we don't have to leave areas as soon as we have to now.

We were able to leave one member of our team from Sarasota through the end of the week. Two carpenters from Illinois are coming in over the weekend and will work alongside Jeff and some folks from CC Iowa, and then four to six men and women from CC Kansas City will be in town Monday and Tuesday.

There is still a lot of work to be done, not only in the Iowa City/Coralville area, but in many other areas that have recently been flooded. Because we didn't have the volunteers committed to come into the area and because we didn't want to give false hopes to anyone and not be able to fulfill our commitment, we didn't spend time canvassing the areas, but we could certainly see many who had a lot of work yet to be done. As with most disasters, when they first happen it is big news, but unless you're one of the ones affected or somehow tied to someone who's been affected, it's quickly forgotten. The first Saturday after a disaster, so many people show up to help that you can't find a place to park and traffic is a mess, but after that, the same area turns into a ghost town. Most of the larger agencies had left the area after the first week. The area wasn't prepared for such a disaster and even local churches are struggling to figure things out. It's sad, but we rest in the fact that God does have a plan and that we did what we could as we were led by the Lord. We are confident that His ways are better than our ways. He will provide as He sees fit!

We are still praying for guidance as to what to do next. A couple of CCs have said they can send teams to Iowa in August, but there is no one who can make a commitment to the effort at this time. CC Iowa City is a small fellowship and Jeff and Jen are tent makers like us and the rest of the pastors in Iowa. We are also praying for the Lord's leading as to whether or not there will be any long term recovery projects that we can assist any needy family with. At this point the Lord has not led us to anyone, but it could be months before something like this is even considered. Some of the houses are still under water, and Iowans are proud people who are usually are on the giving end of things and not the receiving, so this is hard for them to do!

Thanks to all of you for your prayers. We had many chances to take advantage of them! Continue to pray for Jeff and Jen and those that have seen Jesus at work! We also covet your prayers as we continue to seek God's will and not ours for our lives and ministry! Thanks to those who help support us financially as well. You are a blessing not only to us, but to all those lives that are touched because of your generosity!