

Experiencing the Haitian Earthquake

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I am writing this to share with all of my family and friends. It was an experience I would not care to repeat any time soon.

On Saturday, January 9th, 2010, I flew down to Haiti with a mission team from Grace Church of the Islands/Savannah, GA. The team consisted of a medical component (2 ER doctors, a trauma nurse and a regular RN, myself and three others) and a painting component. We totaled 14 individuals. Our trip down was uneventful, our Sunday in church uneventful, and our first two days of clinic/painting uneventful. The medical team saw about 80 patients a day those two days.

However, at about 4:30 pm on Tuesday, our world disintegrated in 53 seconds. I can imagine what Sodom and Gomorrah was like. Clinic was over, and as I do triage, we finish first. I had returned to my room in Pastor Charles' house, taken my shower, and was lying down resting. Someone had, earlier, been drilling beneath my second-story window, and when the earthquake first started, I thought he was at it again, thinking, "That fellow is really going at it!" I soon realized that it was an earthquake.

God had graciously prepared me for this, of course. I was ½ mile away watching through binoculars from the roof of my son's apartment building when the twin towers went down in NYC, and this was my third earthquake. The first was in St. Maarten – c. 6.0 on the Richter Scale; the second in Grenada – c. 3-4.0 on the Scale. I couldn't get off the bed because of the violence of the quake. Charles' house is 5,000 sq. ft., over-designed, and built of solid cement cores, beams and ceilings, all tied together with rebar. I lay there praying, "Lord, I pray this house is as solid as I think it is." It felt like a giant had picked up that large house and was shaking it as violently as he could. When it was over, there was loud wailing everywhere, and I dressed and went outside . . . just in case. People in the village were hysterical; those inside the campus were praying.

Providentially, the village of Messailler (near the town of Cabaret) has few cement block buildings, but those few all collapsed or sustained serious damage. To my

knowledge, no lives were lost in the village and none on the campus. The Haitians build cement blocks and cement block buildings with very weak cement – it makes the buckets lighter (all of the cement work is hand-poured) and cement is expensive. That is why, in 53 seconds, a city of 2-3 million people was reduced to a rubble heap. On Friday morning, as we were escorted to the Embassy in Port-au-Prince, we saw an enormously thick and long dust cloud trailing from Port-au-Prince up the peninsula for miles.

The following day clinic lasted from 7 am to 7 pm, but we saw and treated everyone who came in. Our two ER doctors, neither what you would call “young”, said they had not treated so

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much serious trauma in their entire careers. We saw many broken bones, crushed pelvises and limbs, concussions, eyes swollen shut with cement dust and chips, bodies white with cement dust from being buried for hours, women in premature labor, terrible lacerations everywhere, a horribly mangled hand, etc., etc. God stretched our supplies with creativity (palm fronds for splints, etc.) and we were able to mend and help everyone that day. One of our patients was a minister of the Haitian government who said he could find no help in Port-au-Prince. The following day was not nearly as bad.

Pastor Charles and my translator, Sammy, went into Port-au-Prince on Wednesday and both returned to report that the center of the city looked like a rubble heap for miles, covered with wailing, digging people. They could hear cries from many people buried under the rubble and dead bodies were stacked along the streets in groups of 10 to 50. I heard last night that they have now buried 50,000 bodies in mass graves and they expect the death toll to approach 200,000.

Charles was able to find his three siblings and their children who lived in Port. All had survived but lost their homes. Pastor Octavius and his wife and oldest son were in the second story of their house in Port when it collapsed, but God spared all of them with minor cuts and bruises, although his son suffered the above-mentioned badly mangled hand. He is currently in the States undergoing surgery so please be in prayer for healing. Pastor Octavius also lost a sister who lived in Port, but she was the *only* one of the Christian Haitians or their family members we

knew who died. God proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that He does, indeed, take care of His own.

My dear missionary friend, Muriel, who has an elementary school for the poorest of the poor in her home, lived with her adopted son, a 21 year old young man whom Jeff and I had been sponsoring through school since he was 4, and another woman with two children in the Carrfour area of Port – just six miles away from the epicenter. We heard that everything in that area was completely destroyed. I was heartsick, and prayed without ceasing for two whole days before I heard that she and her household were all alive. I still have no details concerning her experience, but was able to leave four bags of clothes and other needed supplies, along with some money for her.

Thursday night we learned that a company in Savannah had hired an international security group to extract us from Haiti, and early Friday morning we were put in three bullet-proof vehicles and escorted under armed guard to the American Embassy where we waited for two hours before realizing we were getting nowhere. We were then escorted to the airport where our U.S. passports got us into the secure area quickly. We waited outside the airport building (which had sustained a fair amount of damage along with the tower) for 6-7 hours before being put onboard a C-130 (one of those fat Coast Guard planes). It was like riding in a continually trumpeting flying elephant for two hours – noisy and cold. I was grateful for the earplugs my

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seatmate gave me! They flew us to the Homestead, FL, Air Force Base which is 30 miles south of Miami where we checked in with Immigration and Customs, and then boarded a private jet which quietly whisked us home in only one hour while regaling us with sandwiches, cookies and beverages. We felt very pampered and grateful.

We sagged off the plane at about 3:00 am Saturday morning. Jeff said he had never seen such a bedraggled bunch of people in his life. All the families were there to greet us with hugs and tears. Since then, life, for me, has consisted of answering incessant phone calls and e-mails, giving a report to our church during Sunday School, and sleeping as much as possible. I am bone weary, but praising God for lives spared and praying that the people of Haiti will take the experience

as a wakeup call. Please be in prayer for this and for the necessary supplies reaching those who most need them. Charles has all of his relatives with him on the campus in Messailler and is feeding about 100 people a night, including the many homeless from his area. He has recently let us know that he is out of food, water, and gasoline. The latter is necessary to run the generator so they can pump the well. Food will probably be the least problem as it is coming in from the country to market in Cabaret three times a week.

We are not promised the next second of life, so keep looking up and seeking the Source if you have not already found Him.

Warmest thanks for all of your prayers – they worked!

Hugs,

Ann