

Praise for

***50 Devotionals for Disaster Relief Chaplains
during Deployment***

“I like them. They are soul searching, precise, and practical.”

—Chuck Turner, director of missions for Central/Lendale
Baptist Association

Jim Ellsworth has taken truths from God’s timeless Word and applied them to disaster situations in real time. He has many years of experience in many diverse ministries that have uniquely prepared him for volunteer ministry in disaster areas. These short and concise devotional thoughts will surely encourage people in the midst of serving!

—Philip Jones, pastor of education and leadership at
New Life Fellowship Church, Huntington, IN

50 DEVOTIONALS

FOR DISASTER RELIEF CHAPLAINS

DURING DEPLOYMENT

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CHAPLAIN JAMES R. ELLSWORTH

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About the Author

James (Jim) Ellsworth was born in Michigan and has five sisters and no brothers. In the mid-seventies, he was a volunteer forest firefighter in Pennsylvania, and then he was an Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed (AWANA) missionary to Liberia, West Africa, for about fifteen months. When war broke out, he was told by the American embassy, “If you want to live, leave.” He left with two suitcases, returned to the States, and completed his MBA degree at Spring Arbor University in Spring Arbor, Michigan. While getting his master’s degree, he worked two jobs, seven days a week. During this time he was pictured in the *Wall Street Journal* for his efforts in recycling ink cartridges and cell phones as a fundraiser for the nonprofit organization he worked for full time. He also completed seminary extension courses from the Southern Baptist Extension Seminary in Nashville, Tennessee.

Jim joined the Michigan Southern Baptist Disaster Relief teams in 2011. His training includes assessments, Serve Safe certification, chaplaincy, and volunteer coordinator. He has taken classes with Operational Stress First Aid (OFSA), Crises in Stress Management (CISM), and Suicide Prevention. He is active with his local Volunteers Organizations Aiding in Disasters (VOAD). Jim became the state chaplain for the Michigan Southern Baptist Disaster Relief of Michigan in 2018.

Jim is married to Connie Michelle Ellsworth, who is a pediatric triage nurse at the University of Michigan. They were married in 2007 and have no children.

Author's Note

In various disaster relief seminars and training, one issue repeatedly mentioned was that the chaplains needed more resources to share at morning or evening devotions with crews. Oftentimes when chaplains are embedded in a unit, they are working all day as a chainsaw person or in some other physical duty, and then they are given short notice to provide devotions. Sometimes they are told first thing in the morning to do devotions before the crews leave for the day. Other times they are given short notice to do evening devotions. It is my prayer that this book will be useful to them and provide some devotionals to help them and their crews stay physically, mentally, and spiritually healthy.

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Knock, Knock

So the Lord, said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

Genesis 4:6–7

Have you ever told a knock-knock joke, and the person hearing it just groaned? Knock-knock jokes have that effect. And sometimes people just don't get them—until much later.

Knocking on the door of Cain's heart, God warned Cain that his attitude was not pleasing, but Cain didn't open the door. He had a chip on his shoulder, and he let that sliver of pride grow. Cain wanted to do the right thing in the wrong way. James issued a similar warning in James 1:13–14. When we try to be the hands and feet of Jesus in disaster relief, we need to check our attitudes before knocking on the doors of those affected by the disaster.

We should take God's advice and examine ourselves before we go out. Are we doing the right thing for the right reasons? God cannot bless us and others if we have sin in our lives, even though we are doing a good thing. When we serve God, we have to do it the right way with the right heart, and only then will we be accepted by God and by people.

In Revelation 3:20, Jesus is knocking at the door of someone's

soul for salvation. Remember this when God sends you to knock at someone's door during disaster relief service. Check your attitudes and egos before you leave—because you might be the first representative of Jesus ever to be invited into the individual's life. You are not only the hands and feet of Jesus, but now you are also the face and attitude of Jesus.



Stir the Gift in You

*Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is
in you through the laying on of my hands.
For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and
of love and of a sound mind. Therefore do not be ashamed
of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner,
but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel
according to the power of God.*

2 Timothy 1:6–8

When we hear of someone trying to stir the pot, they are usually causing trouble. Today, I would like you to stir the pot in a good way.

As we are out serving during this disaster, we are going to stir the pot of gifts God has given you, whether it be administration, running a chainsaw, or even ash-out. You came planning to serve God with the gifts He has given you. Maybe you are new to disaster relief and don't know what to expect. Neither do we. That is OK because each disaster is different. The main thing is that you know that God knows you are here and that He is glad you are serving Him. The pieces will come together for you during your time here.

Serving the Lord in this way is unique, no matter where you are serving. You might feel overwhelmed with all the damage, grief, and loss you hear about and see, but we are going to stir the spirit

of love to you and from you, and not a spirit of fear. You get to share God's love with others by being part of a team, by your actions, and through a godly attitude.

On one disaster I brought a first-aid kit with me—something I typically didn't bring. Yet God knew that in this portable kitchen in the middle of a parking lot, where we were serving twelve to sixteen thousand meals a day, I would need that first-aid kit. A lady came to us in shock, needing a Band-Aid. Out of all the people helping in this kitchen, she came to me. I was able to help her, as I had been trained in basic first aid. I had been stirred to show compassion to her. I was on the cooking unit and was grateful to be used by God in many ways. A lady from my team prayed with her, and she went on her way.

As volunteers who have traveled, slept on air mattresses, and are not in your normal routine, you will not always find it easy and comfortable. But by being on the scene of a disaster, you will be stirred to serve God and to be loved on and to love others. God will stir your love for others in ways that you have not seen or used before, and you will be loved by being a part of the Disaster Relief family. Let's stir their pot with God's love. Just as you may be out of your comfort zone, they may be out of their comfort zone in letting you help them. Oftentimes it is harder to ask for help than it is to give it. Though their world has been shaken, you can now stir the love of God into the world of the individuals to whom you are ministering.



THREE

I Will

And he thought within himself saying, “What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?” So he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’ “But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Luke 12:17–21

As you go out into a community struck by natural disaster, remember that a few days ago the residents were content in their living circumstances. They could have been planning for the future—children’s graduations and grandkids’ birthday parties. Maybe they were making plans to retire in their ideal homes. Their lives were going normally. Then this disaster destroyed many years of hopes and dreams.

They know that they can’t handle the situation by themselves. That is why they called for help. Their heads are spinning and their thinking is skewed because their lives as they knew them are now destroyed. And because of the water damage and the potential for

mold and contamination, you are taking precious belongings and mementos to the curb: family pictures, the baby's first dress, a Little League uniform, and maybe the family Bible.

As these people had planned their future and placed their security in stuff, you have been throwing it all to the curb. It is good to know that some people like you have said, "I will lay up our treasures in heaven by helping these folks out." Wouldn't you rather be building the kingdom than building your own wealth when Jesus comes? I would.

It is true that we can't take anything with us, but disaster victims don't want to hear that at this time. It is our job to help them get back on their feet and to show them God in the midst of destruction. It is our duty to love on them and to show them God's love. We can only do this if our hearts are in tune with God and if we realize their hurt and are able to share God's love. Make this vow: "I will serve the Lord today. I will do what is needed to further the kingdom."