

# Reflection on a natural disaster

## Introduction

Any natural disaster raises all sorts of faith-stretching and agonising questions. Children, too, can be caught up in the horror of the unfolding stories of death or devastation via the images they see in the media. The questions uppermost in children's minds will vary, of course, ranging from a God-given desire to do something practical to help to thoughts as to why God created a world in which this sort of thing happens. All this is the more poignant when they see pictures of children like themselves, who have lost their lives, been orphaned or become badly injured.

The following reflection is designed to be used in the classroom, providing a focus for their hopes, fears, prayers and thoughts at such a time.

## Preparation

It will help the children to have a focus for this reflection on a table at a level where all can see it easily. Suggestions for this focus include:

- A selection of the headlines and pictures from recent newspapers. However, avoid those with stark pictures of the dead.
- A map of the affected part of the world and a globe.
- A variety of pictures of scenes from nature including a glorious sunset, countryside scenery and seascapes - maybe someone has a calendar from last year with such pictures or else they could be obtained via the web.

In addition some pictures of the more dramatic and dangerous side of nature, including a thunderous and threatening sky and stormy seas.

- A bowl and two jugs filled with water.
- Some stones.
- Some dying or crushed flowers and leaves.
- A pillar candle set in the midst of all these items.

## Development

1. People of faith believe that this world is a gift from God. It is God who gave us light, water, land, sky and all living creatures.

The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness,  
The world and those who dwell therein.  
For he has founded it upon the seas,

And established it upon the waters.  
Psalm 24: 1-2 (NKJV)

*Lift up and show a globe for all to see and then show the map of the world.*

Pause

2. People of faith believe that God gave us a world full of beautiful things to enjoy. All sorts of amazing wildlife; mountain scenery and lakes; the stars at night; the splendour of the sunset; and the water without which there would be no life.

He has made everything beautiful in its time.  
Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NKJV)

*Lift up some of the pictures of the beauties of nature - sunsets, scenery and seascape. Also pour water slowly from one of the jugs into the bowl, enjoying the sound of it.*

Pause

3. People of faith believe that this is the world that God made. The forces of nature are his gift but they can be beautiful and dangerous; awe-inspiring and frightening; wonderful but also fragile. It seems that we cannot have one without the other and so nature is sometimes our enemy and not our friend.

The mountains shake in the heart of the sea;  
its waters roar and foam;  
the mountains tremble with its tumult.  
Psalm 46: 2b-3 (NRSV)

*Lift up and show some of the pictures of the darker side of nature; also begin to show some of the pictures and headlines from recent newspaper reports about the disaster; pick up a second jug of water and tip it violently so that water splashes noisily into the bowl or throw some stones together noisily or let fall some crushed and dying leaves or flowers - depending on the disaster in question.*

Pause

4. All people find such disasters hard to understand. And people of faith turn to God for help and hope at times like this. They believe that God does not remain distant and unfeeling but comes close to share in the pain and the tragedy of all that hurts life on earth. Christians in particular believe that God weeps with those who weep and suffers with those who suffer.

He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.  
Isaiah 53:3 (NKJV)

*Lift up two or more of the sadder headlines from the newspapers and then, after a short pause, light the candle, which should be located centrally among all the focus items. After a short pause add the words:*

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.  
John 1: 5 (NRSV)

5. Now have a time of quiet as they watch the candle flame among all the items that have been shown. Focus on all those who are suffering because of the disaster.

Pause

We remember all those who have lost people they love.

Pause

We remember all those who have lost their homes and their livelihoods.

Pause

We remember all the children who have no school to go to any more, no home to return to, and no safe place to play.

Pause

We remember all those who have been injured in this tragedy.

Pause

We remember all those who are trying to bring help today; taking medicines and food and clothes to those in need.

Pause

Let us now spend a moment thinking about what it is we can do to help.

Pause

It seems that there will always be disasters and sadness in this world. But such things should help us to think again about what we can do to care for others and to make this world into a better, safer place.

I wonder what part I have to play in this?

Pause

6. End this the reflection either with a piece of music such as Barber's *Adagio for Strings* which was played often after the tragedy of 9/11 or else end by saying the Lord's Prayer together or the following simple prayer:

Dear God,

We are very sad about all that has happened.

Help us to go on caring for all who have been affected.

Help us also to care for those in need right on our own doorsteps where we live.

Help us to make a difference for good in this world.

Amen

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