

How Do We Pray for Moore, Oklahoma?

By Eddie Spencer

How do we pray for the people in Moore, Oklahoma? How do we pray for an area destroyed by a F5 tornado; leaving people dead, including little children and 100's of others emotionally scarred and physically homeless? How do we pray with poignancy and efficacy for a people whose suffering is difficult for the human mind to comprehend? May I humbly offer two simple insights?

First, we must ask God to help us SEE the suffering of our fellow human beings. Jesus, when he told the story of the Good Samaritan, was very intentional with his use of words. All three men, the Priest, Levite, and Good Samaritan, as Jesus made crystal clear, "saw the man." The Priest and the Levite "saw the man and passed by on the other side of the road." Sadly, this is how many of us view suffering. We see it, but what lasting impression does it really make?

Ask God to impress upon us the reality of the pain and suffering that afflict so many others. Pray, using the words of the Apostle Paul, "*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...*" (Philippians 3:10).

Secondly, we must learn how to meditate on the Cross. I am reminded of the profound words of John Stott regarding Christ's suffering on the cross in his book **The Cross of Christ**: "I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the Cross. The only God I believe in is the One Nietzsche ridiculed as 'God on the cross'. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while, I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me!"

Elie Wiesel, in his book Night, gives a painfully inspirational account of his boyhood experiences in the death camps of Buchenwald, Buna and Auschwitz. "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night..."

When he arrived at Auschwitz, he was faced with a tortured and hanged young boy. The prisoners were forced to march past him and look at him full in the face. Wiesel recalled that he heard a voice say behind him, "Where is God? Where is God now?" And Wiesel, in his spirit declared, "Where is God? He is hanging on the gallows!"

"God is on the gallows!" This is the message of the Cross. God is not immune to human pain and suffering. He became a man, walked the way of sorrows, to the point of death, death on the Cross. As our Savior and High Priest, He has declared solidarity with us in our suffering.

When we pray about such massive suffering in Oklahoma, other parts of the world, and in our own life, let us move our gaze beyond our own pain and others, to that "lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross... plunged in God forsaken darkness." Meditate on, "*Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth*" (Is. 53:4,7).

The pain and confusion of suffering will not go away, but it will be more manageable in light of divine suffering. And one day we can know, there will be no more suffering, sorrow, or tornadoes. "Thanks be to God. He has given us victory through Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 15:57).

If God is moving you to make a contribution to the Oklahoma Relief Effort, please consider directing your donation through the EPC and their local churches in the affected area. You can give online at <http://www.epc.org/giving/emergency-relief/> or mail a check payable to "Evangelical Presbyterian Church" and designated "Oklahoma Tornado Relief" to:

Evangelical Presbyterian Church
17197 N. Laurel Park Drive, Suite 567
Livonia, MI 48152