

FINDING GOD IN HAITI

*“...in the midst of a ravaged land filled with fear and a growing body-count --
God met them.”*

Thirty-five seconds can feel like an eternity. That's how my friend Melvin described the earthquake in Haiti that he and his wife experienced first hand.

Arriving in Port-au-Prince the morning of the recent quake, they made a bee-line to the orphanage, where their soon-to-be-adopted three-year-old son, Mike, was eagerly waiting. Papers needed to be signed, bringing the adoption to its final stage. But first some good old-fashioned loving was in order.

The hours flew by, crammed with giggles and hugs and horsey-rides on “Papa.” Late afternoon found them on the third floor balcony of the orphanage with Mike and two other children basking in optimistic light for their family's future. However, 4:53 p.m. was fast approaching and their world was about to be shaken -- literally and figuratively.

Ten seconds into that 53rd minute, heads snapped up as the building began to move and shake. Some compared the sound to the rumble of a passing semi-truck. Then screams of “earthquake” filled the air. Melvin's wife, Melanie, grabbed two kids and sprinted for the stairs. Melvin, somewhat dazed, thought it might be safer to just “ride the balcony down three floors.” He stayed, clinging to one of the little ones for an eternity that lasted less than a minute.

The shaking stopped but the nightmare had only just begun.

Gazing across the city, he could see clouds of dust rising from decimated buildings. Wailing from thousands of voices filled the air -- a haunting chorus that would continue for days as bodies were dragged from the rubble to be piled on the street, many destined for mass graves. The estimated toll from Haiti's worst quake in 200 years would reach 200,000.

What do you do when you're in a foreign country, and the bottom falls out of your world? You desperately cry out for help from God. That's what Melvin and Melanie did. And right there -- in the midst of a ravaged land filled with fear and a growing body-count -- God met them.

God met them on the airport tarmac as they waited for a Canadian Forces evacuation plane that would not come for days. God was with them, when a soldier sporting a maple leaf insignia guided them to a group that would take them to the Canadian embassy.

God met them as they grappled with what they should do next. Should they flee or stay in the hope that Mike would soon be allowed to travel with them? They decided to return to Canada and fight for Mike's paperwork from that safe vantage point. It was a wise move. Their arrival home set off a media frenzy that resulted in increased pressure on the government to expedite the adoption process.

God met them as they over-nighted in Montreal, and tenderly cared for them via the Red Cross which provided a hotel and meals. He met them as they landed in Saskatoon and were surrounded by family and friends, who lavished His love upon the weary travelers.

Some question how a loving God could allow such tragedy to occur. I don't have an answer for that one. But I do know that God is not absent in the midst of turmoil. Rather, He is an ever-present help in the time of trouble.

A happy ending and a new beginning, Mike is coming "home." Melvin and Melanie will welcome him to Canadian soil this week. And I have a distinct feeling that those 35 seconds of horror will soon be eclipsed by a lifetime of blessing and love.