

COMFORT AFTER

Story by Christmas M. Beeler
Photos by various sources

BELIEVERS SPARED, MINISTER AFTER NUMEROUS

In early February, at least 82 tornadoes ravaged several states in the U.S. during a two-day period, killing at least 57 people and injuring hundreds of others. Gathering from across the country, believers from several Calvary Chapel churches stepped up to help in relief efforts.

Benjamin Ferrell crouched in a protective position on his bathroom floor with his three roommates at Union University, a Christian school in Jackson, TN. Though there had been a party atmosphere earlier—with students dancing in the rain and others daring each other to sleep outside despite tornado warnings—the young men had scrambled to the most secure part of their college dorm room after watching a tornado suck the glass, panes, and blinds out of their window. The ground was shaking, a loud rumbling filled their ears, and the power had gone out. In the dark, each young man began praying. “God, please protect us, keep us safe. We pray that Your will would be done no matter what—even if You want to take our lives,” Benjamin prayed. A few seconds later, the rumbling stopped. The four young men walked outside that night, February 5, to see what the twister had done to the rest of their campus.

The sky was a brilliant green. They heard a young man screaming, “Oh my gosh! Waters Commons is gone! It’s gone!” Sure enough, the gathering place for students had been flattened to rubble. Students, firefighters, and staff sifted through concrete, debris, and bricks for hours to release those buried underneath. Miraculously, all 13 of the trapped students were rescued; 51 students suffered serious injury, but all survived.

Benjamin’s father, Phillip Ferrell, pastors Calvary Chapel Memphis. Going home to Memphis for a week, Benjamin realized he didn’t have any clothes. He said, “It was a new feeling—kind of a relief, to realize I had nothing. ... My priorities have changed.”

The next Monday, Benjamin headed back to Jackson with other Calvary believers to help with relief work. There he met Sergio Babich,



Earl Wise helps clear debris from a house in Jackson, TN. Earl drove down from New York February. He met the CC relief team, worked alongside them, and accepted Christ as his

a former CC pastor who lives in Jackson and was coordinating volunteer assistance. Sergio and Katie Babich left California last year in order to be closer to their family in Jackson and because the climate is better for Katie’s chronic illness. Sergio is praying about whether the Lord would have him start a fellowship there.

Curt Hencye of CC Sarasota, FL, has helped provide aid after several disasters in the U.S. and abroad. He also came to Jackson to help. Because of Curt’s experience, city leaders

asked Curt and Sergio to organize volunteers and relief work. “We worked on 17 different homes,” Curt recalled.

Salvation and Encouragement

Earl Wise, a young man from New York, had driven down on his own to help. Earl worked alongside Curt, Sergio, and other CC volunteers for several days, sometimes asking them questions about God or the Bible. On Earl’s last night with the team, Sergio sat down with him and asked, “Do you want Jesus in your life?” Earl said that he did, but

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TORNADOS IN SEVERAL STATES

Tornado



to help after tornadoes ravaged Jackson in Savior before heading back home.

he wasn't sure how. "So we prayed together, and he received Jesus," Sergio recalled. The believers prayed together for Earl before he left, and Curt has kept in touch with him.

Curt recalled a Christian family whose home had been damaged. After the storm, the wife lost her job, and the family had gotten on their knees, asking God what to do. The next morning, Curt and the other volunteers showed up and offered to repair the roof. The family was greatly encouraged that God had answered their prayers.

Photo by Lindsey McDonald/The Jackson Sun



Photo courtesy of Curtis Henye

Calvary Chapel volunteers attach a tarp to a roof to keep out water and wind damage after a tornado destroyed several homes in Jackson, TN.

Helping Neighbors in Oxford, MS

After a tornado destroyed several homes in their community, a small group of Calvary Chapel believers in Oxford, MS, reached out to their neighbors in Christ's name. Though the fellowship no longer meets in a church building since the pastor stepped down, some in the community commented that the small group had provided more assistance than larger churches in the area.

Two sisters, Elizabeth and Laura Johnson, were at home the evening of February 5, when the tornado hit. "We had been listening to weather reports all day. They ended the tornado warning, and then it happened," said Elizabeth Johnson. "It was so loud; it sounded like a train. I jumped up and said, 'The train's coming! We have to get to the middle of the house!'" she said, chuckling. "My sister said, 'What train? What are you talking about?'" Laura ran to the window and saw the huge funnel cloud barreling toward them. They dashed to an empty fire-place and huddled for safety.

"We were directly in its path. It hit everything in a straight line toward us, and right before it got to us, it veered off into a little valley.



Photo by Matt Ellis©2008 BGEA

Toni New, center, of Billy Graham Rapid Response Team, prays with students at Union University after the tornado.

It made an 'L'-shape around us," Elizabeth said. "God really protected us." No one in their town was killed, although there was much property damage.