

## *Saturday "Sermon"*

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January 23, 2010

# Understanding Haiti

The world's response to the devastating earthquake in Haiti has been heart-warming, but the event surfaces the ancient "problem of evil" once again. "Where was God?" some ask, while others wonder "Is God at all?" These questions won't be solved in these few paragraphs, but it seems to me that there are some ways of thinking about Haiti that are more helpful than others.

In the first place, earthquakes are a necessary part of a world in which humans are able to live at all. Haiti's earthquake was the result of movement of the earth's tectonic plates, a movement that is required to continue the creation of land mass at a sufficient rate to replace erosion, among other things.

The sun's luminosity increases as it ages, and complex things have to happen to our planet to accommodate the sun's increasing light in a way that can continue to sustain complex life. Earthquakes are an essential part of this accommodation, an example of God's kindness far more than divine cruelty, and they become problems only when we're in their way. We're frequently in their way, of course.

Let me suggest three things that we can learn from suffering such as that in Haiti. First, Haiti reminds us how much we need God. Most of us pay little attention to God when life appears to be under our control, and "natural disasters" are powerful reminders that no matter how sophisticated our science, we are not in control of this planet—or of many other things that affect our lives. It's often in our seasons of suffering that we become most convinced of God's faithfulness and care.

Second, Haiti can help to clarify our values. The loss of our earthly goods is a powerful reminder that the real values of life are found in relationships. And the loss of people we love is a reminder that the only true anchor for our souls is a personal relationship with the God who is there, who is with us, and who loves us.

Third, Haiti reminds us that suffering shapes our character by calling us to courageous living. After stretching ourselves into caring for others, we don't return to the "same shape" we were before we took the risk to become involved, and we become more like God through that sacrifice.

God doesn't promise that our lives will be free from pain or protected from tragedy. God does promise to be with us in the bad times as well as the happy ones, bringing good out of situations that God neither caused nor willed, preparing us for the Real Story that is to come.