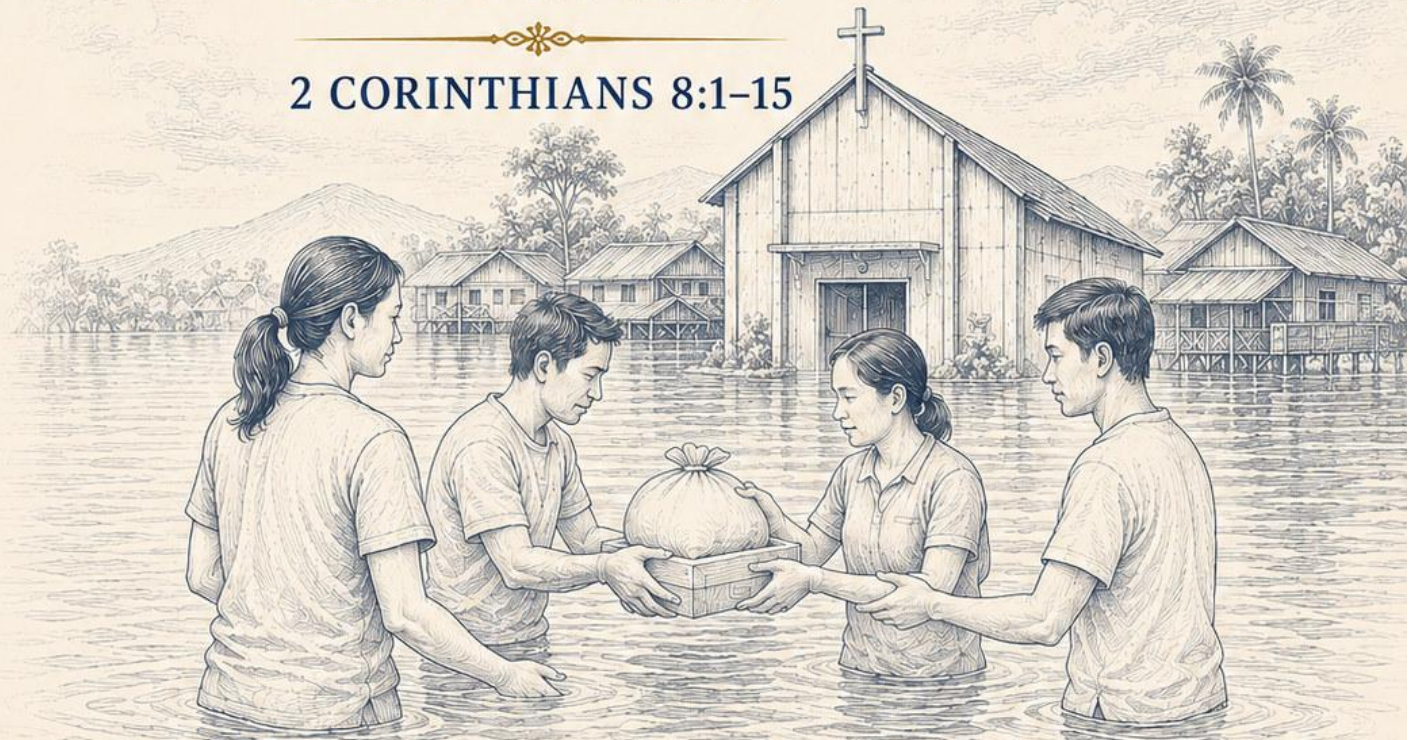


REASON TOGETHER STUDY

TYPHOON ONDOY

WHAT DOES GOD EXPECT
FROM A CHURCH THAT HAS
ALMOST NOTHING?

2 CORINTHIANS 8:1-15



DR. THOMAS W. HAWKSLEY

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

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Sermon Transcript

*What Does God Expect From a Church
That Has Almost Nothing?*

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley
Reason Together Church

Aloha.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

If you are worshipping with us for the first time, we are especially glad you are here.

You will not be singled out.

You will not be asked to stand or introduce yourself.

We simply want you to know that you are welcome.

If you would like us to stay in touch, our guest card asks only for your first name and your email address.

After the service, please join us at the Reason Together Cafe.

The coffee is free.

The conversation is free.

And we offer free refills on both.

This is a church where questions are not treated as enemies of faith.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Your mercy.

Thank You for bringing us together today.

Thank You for giving us Your Word.

As we open the Bible, protect us from easy answers to painful questions.

Protect us from claiming to understand what You have not revealed.

Give us compassion for families who have endured storms, floods, fires, wars and sudden loss.

Teach us to see people in need through the eyes of Jesus.

Expose the excuses we have used to remain comfortable.

Remove the pride that makes us think suffering always happens to someone else.

And show us what Your grace can do through ordinary people who have first given themselves to You.

In the Name of Jesus Christ we pray.

Amen.

Our Scripture reading today is Second Corinthians chapter 8, verses 1 through 15.

I will be reading from the King James Version.

The Apostle Paul writes:

“Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia;

How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.

Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago.

Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have.

For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened:

But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality.”

May God bless the reading of His Word.

Before we begin the message, I want to say a brief word about giving.

We do not pass an offering plate at Reason Together Church.

Guests are never expected to give.

If you are a member of another church, we encourage you to support your home church.

If you consider Reason Together Church your church, you may give as the Lord leads you.

God loveth a cheerful giver.

Giving should come from worship, gratitude and grace.

It should never come from embarrassment or pressure.

There is a giving box in the back for those who choose to use it.

We say something like that every week.

But today it matters in a special way.

Our passage describes poor people who gave beyond what anyone expected.

Nobody manipulated it out of them.

Nobody promised that a larger gift would purchase a larger miracle.

Nobody told them that God would love them more if they emptied their pockets.

Grace had placed something inside them that poverty could not remove.

And what they gave was larger than money.

They gave their concern.

They gave their strength.

They gave their time.

They gave themselves.

To understand what that kind of grace looks like, I want to take you back to a quiet room in Florida and a storm unfolding halfway around the world.

Our son was two months old.

Danielin and I had finally gotten him to sleep.

Parents of newborn children understand what that means.

You move carefully.

You speak quietly.

You become afraid that the smallest noise will wake the baby and begin the entire process again.

But for a few moments, the house was peaceful.

Our son was safe.

He was warm.

He was sleeping.

And everything in our little part of the world seemed to be all right.

Halfway around the world, other parents were holding their children above rising water.

They were not worried that a noise might wake their baby.

They were wondering whether they could keep their baby alive.

It was the same night.

It was not the same world.

On September 26, 2009, Tropical Storm Ondoy struck Metro Manila and surrounding areas of the Philippines.

Internationally, the storm was known as Ketsana.

The winds were not the worst winds the Philippines had experienced.

The rain was the catastrophe.

At one weather station in Quezon City, nearly eighteen inches of rain fell in twenty-four hours.

Much of it fell in only a few hours.

Streets became rivers.

Water climbed stairways.

Homes disappeared beneath brown floodwater.

People climbed onto roofs.

Families tied themselves together so the current would not separate them.

Parents lifted children as high as their arms could reach.

Hundreds of people died.

Millions were affected.

Danielin and I watched the coverage from Florida.

But we were not watching an anonymous tragedy in a place we could not locate on a map.

We knew people there.

We knew pastors there.

We knew churches there.

One of those pastors was Pastor Dennis Tabugara.

I had preached in his home church on several occasions.

He had been associated with our ministry for years.

We knew the kind of man he was.

We knew the kind of congregation he served.

And as we watched the water rise, we could not reach him.

The electricity was out.

Power lines were down.

Communications had failed.

We did not know whether he was alive.

We did not know whether his family was alive.

We did not know whether the members of his church were alive.

We watched.

We prayed.

We waited.

And waiting can be its own kind of helplessness.

You see the need.

You love the people.

You would do something if you knew what to do.

But there is an ocean between your hands and their suffering.

So we prayed.

And we began raising support because we knew that if Pastor Dennis was physically able, he would already be helping people.

Several days passed.

Then a message finally came.

Pastor Dennis and his family had survived.

The church was still standing.

Many of the humble buildings surrounding them had been destroyed.

The sight of that church still standing felt like a miracle.

It seemed as though God had placed a shield around that dwelling and that little church.

And we thanked God.

But we need to be careful with what we say next.

We cannot say that their building remained because those Christians were better than the people whose homes disappeared.

We cannot say that they lived because they had more faith than those who died.

We cannot say that God loved one child more than a child who lost a father.

Jesus would not permit us to speak that way.

In Luke chapter 13, people told Jesus about Galileans whom Pilate had killed.

Jesus asked, “Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?”

Then He answered His own question.

“I tell you, Nay.”

Jesus then mentioned eighteen people killed when the tower of Siloam fell upon them.

Again He asked whether they were sinners above everyone else in Jerusalem.

Again He answered, “I tell you, Nay.”

Tragedy is not a reliable measuring instrument for another person's righteousness.

A person who survives is not necessarily a superior person.

A Christian whose house remains is not necessarily more faithful than a Christian whose house is gone.

A church building that survives is not necessarily a better church than one reduced to rubble.

Jesus turned the attention of the survivors away from judging the dead and toward examining themselves.

Survival is not a certificate of superiority.

It is an opportunity for humility.

It is an opportunity for repentance.

And it may become a summons to responsibility.

We thanked God that something remained.

Then came the question.

What did God expect them to do with it?

What does God expect from a church that has almost nothing?

That is the question we are reasoning through today.

What does God expect from a church that has almost nothing?

Paul knew churches like that.

He wrote about the churches of Macedonia.

These were not wealthy congregations with large reserve accounts.

They were not giving from a position of safety.

Paul says they were in "a great trial of affliction."

He says they were living in "deep poverty."

Not mild inconvenience.

Not a temporary reduction in disposable income.

Deep poverty.

And yet Paul describes something that seems mathematically impossible.

He says their deep poverty "abounded unto the riches of their liberality."

Their poverty produced riches.

Their emptiness overflowed.

They had very little, yet grace made them generous.

Notice how Paul begins.

He does not say, "Let me tell you how naturally wonderful the Macedonians were."

He says, “We do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia.”

This was grace at work.

The generosity was not evidence that the Macedonians were the heroes of the story.

It was evidence that God had done something within them.

The same must be said about Pastor Dennis and World in Need Baptist Church.

Pastor Dennis should not become the savior of this story.

The members of that church should not become spiritual superheroes who make the rest of us look small.

They were ordinary believers.

They were frightened people.

They were poor people.

They were people surrounded by loss.

But the grace of God was at work in them.

And grace made what little they possessed available to someone else.

They had fried noodles.

They had some rice.

They had used clothing.

They had a few remaining provisions.

So they began packing those things into small sacks.

Small sacks do not look impressive in a photograph.

A small sack cannot rebuild a home.

It cannot restore a father to a child.

It cannot replace everything a family watched float away.

But to a hungry person, a small sack of rice is not small.

To a wet child, a used shirt is not useless.

To a family that has nothing, fried noodles are not insignificant.

The church could not help everyone.

But that did not excuse them from helping anyone.

That is one of the lies we sometimes tell ourselves.

We say the need is too large.

We say our resources are too small.

We say helping one person will not solve the problem.

All of that may be true.

One meal will not end hunger.

One bag of rice will not rebuild Manila.

One church cannot carry every burden in its community.

But inability to do everything is not permission to do nothing.

Jesus never asked one person to solve every problem in the world.

He does ask us to love the neighbor He places before us.

One of the children in that church had lost his father in the storm.

The members looked at their own limited supply.

Then they took another collection to purchase a bag of rice for that child.

Think about who was giving.

These were not spectators watching the flood on television.

They were inside the disaster.

Their own future was uncertain.

Their own food was limited.

Their own neighborhood was damaged.

And they gave.

They did not give from what they could spare.

They gave from what the storm had not yet taken.

Does that mean God always commands poor people to surrender what they need to live?

No.

This passage must never be used to pressure people who have almost nothing.

Paul says the Macedonians were “willing of themselves.”

Their giving was voluntary.

Grace invited it.

Love moved it.

Nobody forced it.

Later in the passage Paul gives us a necessary safeguard.

He says, “For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.”

God does not condemn you for failing to give what He has not placed in your hands.

He does not demand imaginary resources.

He does not tell a mother to let her children starve so strangers can eat.

He does not require one struggling congregation to carry an entire nation.

God begins with what a person has.

The question is whether what we have has been surrendered to Him.

Verse 5 explains the Macedonians' generosity.

Paul says they "first gave their own selves to the Lord."

Before the gift, there was the giver.

Before the money, there was the heart.

Before something left their hands, they had placed themselves in God's hands.

God is not merely asking, "What do you have?"

He is asking, "Who has you?"

If I belong entirely to myself, everything in my hand exists for me.

My money is for my comfort.

My time is for my plans.

My home is for my family alone.

My vehicle is for my convenience.

My knowledge is for my advancement.

My safety is the highest good.

But if I have first given myself to the Lord, every remaining resource becomes a stewardship.

I may still need wisdom.

I may still need boundaries.

I may still be unable to meet a particular need.

But I can no longer assume that everything in my hand is only for me.

What does God expect from a church that has almost nothing?

He does not expect what it does not possess.

He asks for what remains.

And He begins with the people themselves.

Pastor Dennis had sensed the need to stock some provisions before the storm.

We do not need to claim that he received a revelation equal to an Old Testament prophet.

He saw the warning.

He exercised wisdom.

He prepared with what the church could afford.

Preparedness is not always evidence of fear.

Sometimes preparation is an expression of love for the neighbor who did not prepare.

But the church's supplies were now running out.

The need was multiplying.

And even if they could find more money, there was little available in the immediate area.

Stores were closed.

Shelves were empty.

Roads were flooded.

This is where another part of the Body of Christ became necessary.

In Florida, Together With Him Ministries raised financial support.

We went across the street to the supermarket to send money through Western Union.

That was normally how we sent support to pastors in the Philippines.

But normal methods do not always survive abnormal circumstances.

The usual collection locations were closed.

Even if Pastor Dennis could collect the money, nearby stores had nothing left to sell.

We had money in Florida.

But money in Florida could not feed a flooded family in Manila by itself.

The local church had relationships.

It knew the streets.

It knew the families.

It knew where the need was greatest.

It had willing hands and willing feet.

But it did not have enough money or food.

The distant ministry had resources without access.

The local church had access without resources.

God joined the two.

That is not a modern invention.

We see the same pattern in Acts chapter 11.

A prophet named Agabus warned that a great famine was coming.

The disciples did not respond by organizing a conference about the meaning of famine.

They did not debate whether the suffering believers should have prepared better.

They did not merely send a message saying, "We are praying for you."

Prayer mattered.

But their prayer moved their hands.

Acts 11:29 says, "Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea."

Every man according to his ability.

Not every man according to someone else's ability.

Not every man according to the size of the entire famine.

According to his ability.

They gathered the relief.

Then they entrusted it to Barnabas and Saul, who carried it to the elders.

One church helped another church in another region.

Different believers contributed different things.

Some gave money.

Some carried it.

Local leaders knew how to use it.

Suffering believers received it.

The Body worked because no single part pretended it could do everything.

Paul explains this in Second Corinthians 8.

He says, "For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened."

God was not asking one congregation to be crushed so another could be comfortable.

He continues, "But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want."

At another time, their abundance might supply your need.

Today, I may carry you.

Tomorrow, you may carry me.

Today, Hawaii may send help across the ocean.

Tomorrow, a church across the ocean may pray for Hawaii, encourage Hawaii or send help when our own roads are flooded.

That is the Body of Christ.

No church is so wealthy that it never needs another.

No church is so poor that it has nothing of value to contribute.

Eventually, the money and the willing hearts met.

But the food was still miles away.

Floodwater stood between the church and the open stores.

Pastor Dennis and several members of the congregation began walking.

The water rose to their waists.

This was not clean rainwater.

It was filled with rubbish.
It carried broken pieces of people's homes.
Sharp debris was hidden beneath the surface.
The remains of some who had died were in that water.
They walked through it.
Mile after mile.
They reached an area of the city that had not flooded as severely.
They found stores that were open.
They found supplies.
They purchased bags of rice.
Getting there had been difficult.
Returning was harder.
Now they had to enter the same water carrying heavy bags of rice.
They held the rice on their shoulders.
They tried to keep it above the waterline.
The return journey took approximately three hours.
It was getting late.
They were exhausted.
Desperate people could see what they were carrying.
Someone could have robbed them.
Someone could have taken the rice.
They could have become injured or sick.
The danger was real.
Christian faith does not require us to pretend that danger is imaginary.
Faith is not carelessness.
Faith does not mean that wisdom disappears.
Jesus sometimes withdrew from danger.
Paul escaped a city in a basket.
Believers fled persecution and carried the Gospel to new places.
Personal safety is not sinful.
But personal safety cannot become our only moral consideration.
Jesus told about a man traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho.
Thieves attacked him.

They stripped him.

They wounded him.

They left him half dead beside the road.

A priest saw him.

A Levite saw him.

Both passed by.

We are not told everything they were thinking.

Perhaps they feared the thieves were still nearby.

Perhaps they feared ceremonial defilement.

Perhaps they had important religious responsibilities waiting for them.

Perhaps they wondered whether the injured man had made an unwise decision by traveling alone.

Whatever the reason, they saw him and organized their response around themselves.

Then a Samaritan came.

He also saw the danger.

But he allowed the wounded man's condition to become his responsibility.

He went to him.

He bound his wounds.

He placed him on his own animal.

He brought him to an inn.

He paid for his care.

And he promised to return.

In his final sermon, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. described the question on that road in a powerful way.

The first travelers were concerned about what might happen to them if they stopped.

The Samaritan considered what would happen to the wounded man if he did not stop.

That is the question Pastor Dennis and those church members faced.

Fear asked, "What may happen to us if we go?"

Love asked, "What will happen to our neighbors if no one goes?"

They entered the water.

And in doing so, they demonstrated the kind of worship Isaiah described.

In Isaiah 58, the people were fasting.

They were performing religious acts.

They were asking why God did not seem impressed.
God revealed that they had separated worship from the way they treated suffering people.
He called them to loose the bands of wickedness.
He called them to undo heavy burdens.
He called them to let the oppressed go free.
He called them to deal their bread to the hungry.
He called them to bring the poor who were cast out into their houses.
Then Isaiah 58:10 says, “And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity.”
Notice the language.
Not merely draw out your bread.
Draw out your soul.
Do not send an object while withholding yourself.
Do not toss assistance from a safe distance and turn away before learning the person’s name.
Let your compassion travel with the gift.
Let your presence accompany the provision.
Let your soul be involved.
Those church members carried rice.
But they also carried concern.
They carried time.
They carried effort.
They carried risk.
They carried themselves.
The church building survived the storm.
But the congregation entered the water.
That is when the building became a beacon.
Not when its roof remained above the flood.
When its people moved beneath that roof and toward their neighbors.
There is an old account from the early centuries of Christianity.
It is not Scripture, but it shows how early believers understood Scripture.
Dionysius of Alexandria described a terrible epidemic.
Christians became sick just as their neighbors became sick.
They were not protected by an invisible wall.

They did not necessarily suffer less.

But many of them visited the sick.

They cared for people others had abandoned.

They accepted personal risk.

Some became ill and died while caring for others.

The distinguishing mark of those Christians was not immunity.

It was love.

They suffered the same disaster.

But they refused to let their neighbors suffer alone.

That is part of what the Church is for when the water rises.

It is not an ark where Christians lock the door and congratulate one another for being dry.

It is a people sent from safety toward suffering.

It is a people who understand that whatever remains is not theirs alone.

When the rice reached the neighborhood, the congregation began distributing thousands of small bags of food and water.

They gave clothing.

They helped children.

They helped families who had lost nearly everything.

Some of those neighbors had shown little interest in the things of God before the storm.

Now they saw something they had not expected.

They saw Christians who did more than hold services inside a surviving building.

They saw Christians who came looking for them.

James asks what profit there is if a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food and someone says, "Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled," but gives nothing they need.

James says faith without works is dead.

He does not say works replace faith.

He says living faith becomes visible.

First John 3:17 asks how the love of God can dwell in someone who sees a brother in need, possesses this world's good and closes his compassion.

Then verse 18 says, "My little children, let us love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."

The Gospel was spoken with their mouths.

But it was made visible in the bags they carried on their shoulders.

Their works did not replace the Gospel.

Their works showed that they believed the Gospel they preached.

We must make another distinction.

The rice was not bait.

The water was not payment for listening to a sermon.

The used clothing did not carry a hidden spiritual price tag.

No hungry person should be required to pray before receiving food.

No displaced family should be required to attend church before receiving help.

No frightened child should be treated as a ministry statistic.

Christians help because people bear the image of God.

Christians help because Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor.

Christians help because the grace we received freely has made us generous.

And when someone asks why we would walk through water for a stranger, we should be ready to speak the Name of Jesus.

We do not need to hide the Gospel to prove that our compassion is sincere.

And we must not use compassion to force the Gospel upon someone who cannot freely refuse.

We give the food freely.

We speak the truth freely.

We entrust the response to God.

Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

The purpose of the light is not to make people admire the lamp.

The purpose is to direct glory to the Father.

People saw the work of that small church.

Thousands heard the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Many received Him as their personal Savior.

We should rejoice over every person who came to Christ.

But we must not let the numbers erase the people.

There was a child whose father died.

There were children who no longer had parents.

There were mothers searching for food.

There were families looking at the place where a home had stood.

They were not scenery for a successful ministry report.

They were neighbors.

They were people Jesus loved.

They were people for whom Christ died.

The devastation was not the blessing.

The deaths were not the blessing.

The orphaned children were not the blessing.

The destroyed homes were not the blessing.

God's redeeming work within the devastation was the blessing.

Romans 8:28 does not say that everything that happens is good.

It says that God works through all things for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

Joseph did not look back at the evil his brothers committed and call their evil good.

He said, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good."

God is so good that He can enter what is terrible without becoming the author of evil.

He can bring mercy from misery.

He can bring generosity from poverty.

He can bring a testimony from a storm.

He can bring churches from a flood.

After the waters receded, Pastor Dennis continued serving.

The rice was eaten.

The water was consumed.

The clothes eventually wore out.

But the testimony remained.

People remembered who came when the streets were rivers.

People remembered the church that carried food rather than merely announcing a service.

Pastor Dennis later established extension churches to continue ministering in that community.

The deepest evidence that World in Need Baptist Church survived Ondoy was not that its building remained standing.

Its people were still serving.

The storm did not make them the Church.

The storm revealed whether they were the Church.

Now the question comes to us.

What has God left in our hands?

You may say, “I do not have much money.”

Perhaps you do not.

God does not ask you to give what you do not have.

But money is not the only thing that remains.

You may have time.

You may have a vehicle.

You may have an extra room.

You may know how to complete a form that confuses someone else.

You may know the neighborhood.

You may speak a language that allows a frightened person to be understood.

You may have food.

You may have strength.

You may have a telephone.

You may have a relationship with someone who can provide what you cannot.

You may be able to pray with a person who feels forgotten.

You may simply have the willingness to remain when everyone else has left.

What does God expect from a church that has almost nothing?

He does not expect what it does not possess.

He asks for what remains.

A little rice.

A few clothes.

A collection taken by people who are poor themselves.

A shoulder willing to carry a burden.

A pair of feet willing to enter the water.

A mouth willing to speak the Name of Jesus.

And a life already given to the Lord.

But even the finest act of Christian mercy is only a reflection.

The light did not begin with Pastor Dennis.

It did not begin with a church in Manila.

It did not begin with a ministry in Florida.

It began with Jesus Christ.

Return to Second Corinthians 8:9.

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

That is where Christian generosity begins.

Not with guilt.

Not with pressure.

Not with fear.

With the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“That, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.”

Jesus did not rescue us from a safe distance.

He did not remain in Heaven and call instructions down to drowning people.

He came near.

The eternal Son of God entered His creation.

He took upon Himself the form of a servant.

He knew hunger.

He knew weariness.

He knew rejection.

He knew grief.

He touched people others avoided.

He moved toward people religion had passed by.

He carried a burden no one else could carry.

And He went to the cross.

We were not merely victims of difficult circumstances.

We were sinners separated from a holy God.

We could not remove our own guilt.

We could not purchase forgiveness.

We could not perform enough good works to erase one sin.

We needed a rescue we could not provide for ourselves.

Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

He was buried.

And He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

He offers forgiveness and eternal life as a gift of grace.

The food distributed after Ondoy sustained physical life for a time.

Jesus offers eternal life.

The rice had to be purchased.

Salvation has already been purchased by the blood of Christ.

The church members carried the rice through the water.
Jesus carried our sins in His own body on the tree.
They risked their lives.
Jesus gave His life.
Then He rose from the grave.
Before Jesus asks what is in your hands, He offers to place your life in His hands.
Perhaps you have attended church for years.
Perhaps you have performed many generous acts.
Perhaps you have helped people through storms of every kind.
None of those works can save you.
They may be evidence of love.
They cannot be payment for sin.
Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
You must recognize that you are a sinner.
You must stop trusting your goodness, religion or generosity.
You must believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again.
You must receive Him.
If you have never trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, you can do that today.
You do not need to wait for another storm.
You do not need to be frightened into repeating words you do not believe.
You can come honestly.
You can come freely.
You can come just as you are.
Wherever you are, you may pray with me.
The prayer itself is not a formula that saves.
Jesus saves.
But you may use these words to express your faith in Him.
Let us pray.
Dear God,
I know that I am a sinner.
I know that I cannot save myself.
I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.
I believe that He died on the cross for my sins.

I believe that He was buried and rose again.

I turn from trusting myself.

I place my faith in Jesus Christ.

Please forgive me.

Please save me.

I receive Jesus as my Savior.

I give my life to You.

Thank You for Your grace.

Thank You for Your forgiveness.

Thank You for giving me eternal life through Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' Name I pray.

Amen.

If you trusted Christ today, please speak with me after the service or send us a message.

We will not embarrass you.

We simply want to rejoice with you and help you take your next steps with Christ.

And for those of us who already know Christ, the question remains.

What has God left in our hands?

We may not be able to stop the storm.

We may not be able to rebuild every house.

We may not be able to feed every family.

But we must not mistake our inability to help everyone for permission to help no one.

Some of us can enter the water.

Some of us can purchase the rice.

Some of us can prepare before the storm.

Some of us can open a room.

Some of us can make a telephone call.

Some of us can connect the person who has resources with the person who has access.

And all of us can first give ourselves to the Lord.

When the next storm rises, will our neighbors discover merely that a church was located near them?

Or will they discover that the Church of Jesus Christ was living among them?

May Reason Together Church be known not merely for the questions we ask, but for the love with which we live the answers Scripture gives.

May we speak the Gospel clearly.

May we make it visible through mercy.

May we never use suffering people for our purposes.

May we never let fear become an excuse for indifference.

And may whatever remains in our hands be available to the One who placed it there.

Please join us at the Reason Together Cafe.

Bring your questions.

Bring your story.

The coffee is waiting and so is the conversation.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ guide us toward those who need to know that they are not alone.

Aloha Nui Loa.

BIBLICAL COMMENTARY

TYPHOON ONDOY

*What Does God Expect From a Church
That Has Almost Nothing?*

2 Corinthians 8:1-15 | Acts 11:27-30 | Luke 13:1-5

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Reason Together Church

www.ReasonTogether.Church

"Come now, and let us reason together" | Isaiah 1:18

Commentary in Brief

The story of Typhoon Ondoy begins with a church building that remained standing while much of the surrounding community was devastated. Yet the study is not principally about a building that survived. It is about a congregation that used what remained. World in Need Baptist Church possessed limited provisions, a small collection, local knowledge, willing people and the Gospel. Those resources could not repair a city, but they could carry rice, clothing and hope to neighbors.

"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." Second Corinthians 8:12, KJV

CENTRAL CONCLUSION: God does not expect a church to possess what it does not have. He calls its people first to give themselves to the Lord, then to make whatever remains available for love. Christian mercy is not a substitute for the Gospel and it must never become bait for a response. It is the visible fruit of the grace of Jesus Christ.

The governing text is Second Corinthians 8:1-15. Paul describes churches living in affliction and deep poverty, yet overflowing in willing generosity. Their secret was not hidden wealth. They had "first given their own selves to the Lord." The gift followed surrender.

This study also keeps a necessary safeguard in view. The survival of one church does not prove that its members were more righteous than those whose homes or churches were destroyed. Jesus rejected that kind of reasoning in Luke 13. Survival should produce gratitude, humility and responsibility, never superiority.

The Question Behind the Study

The ordinary sermon question would be, "Can God bring good out of tragedy?" Scripture allows us to answer yes, but the question can remain too general. It may also move too quickly past the people who died, the children who lost parents and the families whose homes disappeared beneath the water.

The stronger question is practical: What does God expect from a church that has almost nothing?

The word "almost" matters. The congregation did not possess enough money, food or equipment to meet the scale of the disaster. It did possess people, relationships, courage, knowledge of the neighborhood and a willingness to act. A resource can be small without being meaningless.

The question also resists a common excuse. When need becomes enormous, an individual or congregation can feel that a small response will not matter. One meal will not end hunger. One bag of rice will not rebuild Manila. One church cannot carry an entire nation. All of that is true. None of it removes the hungry neighbor standing within reach.

GOVERNING TENSION: The church could not help everyone, but that did not excuse it from helping anyone. Scripture does not condemn believers for lacking resources they do not possess. It does ask whether what they possess has been surrendered to the Lord.

1. Grace Comes Before Generosity

Read the Opening Carefully: Second Corinthians 8:1-2

Paul begins his appeal by speaking about "the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia." That order is essential. He does not first praise the Macedonians as naturally heroic or unusually compassionate people. He points to something God gave before describing what they gave.

"Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality." Second Corinthians 8: 1-2, KJV

Grace is the cause. Generosity is the fruit. If this order is reversed, giving easily becomes a religious performance. People give to appear compassionate, to quiet guilt, to gain influence or to earn God's approval. Paul places the act inside grace. God has already moved toward His people. Their open hands answer His open heart.

The same verse holds affliction, joy, poverty and liberality together. Paul does not say the affliction was pleasant. He does not say deep poverty was secretly abundance. He says grace was powerful enough to produce joy and generosity without denying the hardship.

This distinction protects the Ondoy story. Poverty did not make the church generous. The storm did not make tragedy beautiful. God's grace at work within ordinary believers moved them toward other suffering people.

Why This Matters for Modern Giving

A congregation can use the Macedonians to pressure people: "They gave from poverty, so you have no excuse." Paul refuses that method later in the same chapter. Their giving was willing. It grew from love. A gift may be financially useful even when extracted by embarrassment, but it does not display the grace Paul is describing.

Christian generosity is therefore more than a successful collection. It is worship. The giver recognizes that life, possessions, strength and opportunity have been received from God. The question becomes not "How little can I give and still feel generous?" but "What has grace made available through me?"

2. Deep Poverty Does Not Mean No Responsibility

The Macedonian Paradox

The phrase "deep poverty" is unusually strong. Paul is not describing people whose disposable income had become inconveniently small. These churches knew affliction and real limitation. Yet their poverty "abounded unto the riches of their liberality."

This does not mean poor people are obligated to rescue everyone else. Scripture repeatedly commands care for vulnerable households and recognizes differing ability. It means poverty cannot be used to define a person as spiritually useless. A believer may possess little money and still possess something that love can use.

The Ondoy congregation had noodles, used clothing and rice. It had members who could walk. It had a pastor who knew the neighborhood. It had a connection to Christians in Florida who could raise funds. It had enough community trust to become a point of service. None of these resources looked impressive alone. Together they became ministry.

Not What the Storm Spared, but What It Had Not Yet Taken

The church members were not giving from safety while observing strangers in trouble. They lived inside the disaster. Their food was limited. Their own futures were uncertain. Their community had been damaged.

The sermon describes their response with a deliberately uncomfortable line: They did not give from what the storm had spared. They gave from what the storm had not yet taken.

That statement is not a command for every suffering person to surrender the necessities of life. It is an observation about the voluntary generosity reported in the story. Grace loosened their grip even while circumstances gave them reasons to hold tightly.

The principle applies far beyond money. A person living through hardship may still offer a telephone call, local knowledge, translation, transportation, prayer or presence. A congregation with a modest budget may know the vulnerable families on its street better than a large distant organization does. Smallness changes the form of responsibility. It does not erase responsibility.

3. They First Gave Their Own Selves to the Lord

The Hinge of the Passage

Paul says the Macedonians gave beyond what he expected because they "first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." This is the theological center of the chapter.

"And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God." Second Corinthians 8:5, KJV

God is not merely asking, "What do you have?" He is asking, "Whose are you?" Possessions become stewardship only after the person recognizes that he belongs to Christ.

A church may donate food without giving itself to the Lord. It may serve for publicity, community approval, political influence or institutional growth. Those activities may still provide material help, but Paul is describing something deeper. Christian service begins in surrender and moves outward in love.

The rice journey illustrates this. Money alone could not complete the work. Funds were available in Florida, but access points were closed and nearby stores had no supplies. The local believers gave their feet, shoulders, time, knowledge and courage. Their persons connected the gift to the need.

Draw Out Thy Soul

Isaiah 58 uses similar language. God confronted people who performed religious acts while remaining detached from suffering. He called them to share bread, house the outcast and cover the naked. Then He said they must "draw out thy soul to the hungry."

"And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday." Isaiah 58:10, KJV

The text does not say merely, "Draw out your bread." Mercy involves the person. It pays attention. It learns a name. It accepts inconvenience. It refuses to treat a recipient as a problem to be processed.

The Florida ministry's contribution was not inferior because it was distant. Financial support was necessary. The Manila congregation's local action was not sufficient without that support. The Body of Christ joined distant resources and local presence. Different believers gave different parts of themselves to the same work.

4. According to What a Person Has

The Verse That Answers the Question

Second Corinthians 8:12 prevents generosity from becoming spiritual abuse. Paul says willingness is accepted according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have.

God does not demand an imaginary gift. He does not condemn a mother because she cannot feed a city. He does not require a struggling congregation to carry the financial responsibility of an entire nation. He does not measure faithfulness by comparing one person's capacity with another person's capacity.

At the same time, the verse does not bless indifference. It assumes there is first a willing mind. The person has looked honestly at what is available and placed it under God's authority.

This balance is often lost. One error says, "I cannot do everything, so I will do nothing." The other error says, "A faithful Christian must meet every need, regardless of ability, family duties or wisdom." Paul refuses both.

The Many Forms of What Remains

What remains may be money, but it may also be time. It may be a vehicle, an extra room or food already prepared. It may be knowledge of a government form, a second language or a relationship with someone who can provide what another person lacks.

For one person, faithfulness may mean entering the water. For another, it may mean purchasing the rice. For another, it may mean staying with children while parents respond. For another, it may mean knowing when a need requires trained emergency personnel rather than an untrained volunteer.

The point is not that every Christian performs the same action. The point is that every Christian belongs to the Lord. Different gifts, capacities and opportunities become one ministry when surrendered to Him.

MINISTRY PRINCIPLE: God does not compare the size of one person's gift with another person's gift. He examines willingness, truthfulness, love and stewardship according to what He has actually placed in that person's hands.

5. Survival Does Not Prove Spiritual Superiority

The Necessary Question After the Church Survived

The magazine describes the survival of Pastor Dennis Tabugara, his family and the church building with grateful language. Many nearby structures had been destroyed. It appeared as though God had placed a shield around that property so it could remain a beacon.

Gratitude is appropriate. It is right to thank God for life, shelter and protection. The danger begins when gratitude becomes an explanation for why someone else was not spared.

If the surviving church is declared more faithful, what does that imply about the child whose father died? If one house remained because its residents prayed, what are we saying about Christians whose houses disappeared? Scripture will not permit us to use survival as a moral ranking system.

Jesus and the Tower of Siloam

Luke 13 records people telling Jesus about Galileans whom Pilate had killed. Jesus also mentioned eighteen people killed when a tower fell. In both cases He asked whether the victims were greater sinners and answered, "I tell you, Nay."

"Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay." Luke 13:4-5, KJV

Jesus did not say the victims were sinless. He rejected the attempt to measure their guilt by the severity of their suffering. He redirected observers toward their own need for repentance.

This passage changes the meaning of the surviving church. Its survival is not a certificate of superiority. It is an opportunity for humility and responsibility. Something remained. The next question was what God expected the church to do with it.

PASTORAL SAFEGUARD: A Christian may thank God for surviving without claiming to know why another person died. Gratitude speaks about God's kindness to us. Humility refuses to turn that kindness into judgment against someone else.

6. One Church Had Resources and Another Had Access

Acts 11 and Relief Across Distance

Acts 11 records that the prophet Agabus foretold a famine. The disciples did not respond by debating whether suffering believers should have prepared better. They determined to send relief, every person according to ability, and entrusted it to Barnabas and Saul for delivery to the elders.

"Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea." Acts 11:29, KJV

The pattern is simple and durable. Need became known. Ability differed. People determined to act. Trusted messengers carried the gift. Local leaders received it.

The Ondoy narrative contains the same kind of interdependence. Together With Him Ministries raised support in Florida. Ordinarily, money could be sent through Western Union and collected at a nearby location. During the flood, ordinary systems no longer worked. Stores were closed, access points were unavailable and local supplies were exhausted.

Money in Florida could not feed a flooded family by itself. Local willingness in Manila could not buy rice without funds. The distant ministry possessed resources without access. The local church possessed access without sufficient resources. God joined the two.

No Part of the Body Does Everything

Churches sometimes measure partnership by asking which participant performed the most dramatic work. Scripture uses a better picture: one Body with many members. The hand does not compete with the foot. The distant giver should not control the local servant merely because funds were supplied. The local servant should not despise the giver because he did not enter the floodwater.

Healthy partnership recognizes differing knowledge. Pastor Dennis knew where people lived, which routes could be traveled and where the need was most urgent. The Florida ministry could mobilize resources. Each part remained limited. Together they accomplished what neither could accomplish alone.

This principle also protects a small congregation from pretending it must become a large relief agency overnight. Faithfulness may mean knowing whom to call, which organization has expertise or which church has a resource that can be shared.

7. Mercy That Enters the Water

The Journey for Rice

The most vivid scene in the story is not the building above the flood. It is the congregation entering the water.

Pastor Dennis and several church members walked for miles through waist-high water to reach an area with open stores. The water was polluted and filled with debris. The return journey was more difficult because they carried heavy bags of rice above the waterline. According to the article, the return took approximately three hours.

The danger should not be romanticized. They could have been injured, infected, robbed or swept away. Faith is not the denial of risk. The story matters because love considered more than personal safety.

The Good Samaritan

Jesus described a traveler who had been attacked, stripped and left half dead. A priest saw him and passed by. A Levite saw him and passed by. Scripture does not tell us everything they thought, so a careful commentary will not invent motives. The certain fact is that they saw and continued away from him.

The Samaritan also saw. He had compassion, went to the man, treated his wounds, used his own animal, brought him to an inn and paid for continuing care. Mercy crossed distance and accepted cost.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in his final sermon, drew attention to two possible questions on that road. The first asks what may happen to me if I stop. The second asks what may happen to the wounded man if I do not stop. This is not additional Scripture, but it faithfully sharpens the moral movement in Christ's parable.

The Ondoy congregation faced the same tension. Fear asked what might happen if they entered the water. Love asked what would happen to neighbors if no one went.

Courage Is Not Carelessness

The story does not establish a universal rule that believers should ignore evacuation orders, enter contaminated water or reject professional help. Scripture includes faithful people who escaped danger, accepted protection and used ordinary wisdom. Personal safety is a legitimate moral concern, especially when a person has responsibility for children or vulnerable family members.

The proper conclusion is narrower. Safety must not become the only moral consideration. Sometimes love accepts inconvenience. Sometimes it accepts uncertainty. In exceptional circumstances, it may accept serious risk. Wisdom asks what help is truly needed, who is equipped to provide it and how love can act without creating another victim.

8. The Rice Was Not Bait

Material Help and Gospel Witness

The congregation distributed thousands of small bags of food and water and gave clothing to people who had lost nearly everything. The article also reports that thousands heard the Good News and many accepted Christ as personal Savior.

Both statements belong in the story, but they must remain distinct. Thousands heard. Many accepted. The number who heard must not be transformed into a larger conversion claim.

An even more important distinction concerns the manner of ministry. The rice was not payment for attending a service. The water was not exchanged for a prayer. Used clothing did not carry a hidden spiritual price.

No hungry person should be required to listen before receiving food. No displaced family should be required to attend church before receiving help. No frightened child should become a ministry statistic.

Why Christians Help

Christians help because people bear the image of God. They help because Jesus commanded love of neighbor. They help because grace has made them generous. They help because closing compassion while possessing something useful contradicts the love they profess.

James asks what profit there is in telling a hungry and poorly clothed person to depart in peace while withholding what the body needs. First John asks how God's love dwells in a person who sees a brother in need and closes his compassion.

*"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."
First John 3:18, KJV*

The works do not replace faith. They reveal whether the professed faith is living. The congregation's service did not become the Gospel, but it made their profession visible.

Why Christians Still Speak of Christ

Avoiding coercion does not require hiding Jesus. A Christian can explain why he serves, offer prayer without pressure and answer questions honestly. The Gospel can be proclaimed wherever people remain free to respond or refuse.

The correct ministry pattern is simple: Give the food freely. Speak the truth freely. Entrust the response to God.

Jesus said good works should be visible so people glorify the Father in Heaven. The purpose is not to make observers admire the lamp. It is to direct attention to the source of the light.

RELIEF ETHIC: Christian mercy neither conceals Christ nor exploits the vulnerable. It gives without a hidden price, speaks without manipulation and treats every recipient as a neighbor rather than a project.

9. The Disaster Was Not the Blessing

Correcting a Dangerous Shortcut

The original article describes the devastation as a blessing because it opened an opportunity for ministry. The intended point is understandable and important: God brought redemptive opportunity within terrible circumstances. The wording, however, needs refinement.

The deaths were not blessings. Orphaned children were not blessings. Destroyed homes, polluted water and bereavement were not blessings. Those realities should not be renamed in order to protect a confident testimony.

God's work within the devastation was good. The mercy was good. The generosity was good. The Gospel opportunity was good. Later extension churches and continuing ministry were good. The storm itself remained destructive.

Romans 8:28 Does Not Call Everything Good

Romans 8:28 says God works all things together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. It does not say everything that happens is morally good.

Genesis 50:20 provides a helpful distinction. Joseph told his brothers they intended evil against him, but God intended good through the same history. Joseph did not need to call their evil good in order to confess God's sovereign purpose.

Likewise, Christians can grieve what Ondoy destroyed and still praise God for what grace produced. God can bring mercy from misery without becoming the author of evil. He can form a testimony in a storm without needing the storm to be called good.

This distinction matters pastorally. A grieving person should not be rushed into declaring that loss was secretly wonderful. Christian hope makes room for lament. Jesus wept at Lazarus's tomb even though He knew resurrection was moments away.

10. The Building Survived, but the Congregation Became the Beacon

What Makes a Church Visible

A surviving structure can provide shelter, storage and a gathering place. These are important gifts. Yet a building can remain while a church fails its neighborhood. The existence of walls and a roof does not by itself make Christian light visible.

The sermon therefore changes the emphasis. The church building survived the storm, but the congregation entered the water. That is when the building became a beacon.

The congregation packed food, shared clothing, collected money for a child and carried rice. Neighbors who had previously shown little interest in spiritual things saw believers come looking for them. Christian worship moved from an interior service into public mercy.

The story later reports extension churches. That development should not be reduced to institutional success following a relief campaign. The deeper point is that temporary supplies opened durable relationships and the church continued to serve after the television cameras and floodwaters were gone.

The Test of What Remains

Disaster reveals priorities. It exposes what a church believes itself to be. If the church is mainly an event held in a building, the loss of ordinary operations may leave it with nothing to offer. If the Church is a people belonging to Christ, ministry can continue even when systems fail.

The storm did not make them the Church. The storm revealed whether they were the Church.

This should not be heard only as a dramatic disaster statement. Ordinary interruptions reveal the same thing. A neighbor becomes ill. A family loses income. A child needs a safe place. A newcomer does not understand a form. Someone sits alone after worship. The water does not need to reach our waists before grace asks us to move.

11. Though He Was Rich, Yet for Your Sakes He Became Poor

Paul Ends the Appeal With Jesus

Second Corinthians 8 does not leave generosity grounded in the Macedonians. Paul points to Christ.

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Second Corinthians 8:9, KJV

Jesus did not rescue sinners from a safe distance. The eternal Son entered His creation. He took the form of a servant. He knew hunger, weariness, rejection and grief. He touched people others avoided and moved toward people religion had passed by.

He then carried a burden no church member could carry. Humanity's deepest need was not only hunger, displacement or disaster. We were sinners separated from a holy God. No act of charity could erase guilt. No amount of rice could purchase forgiveness.

Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He was buried and rose again the third day. He offers forgiveness and eternal life as a gift of grace to everyone who turns from self-trust and receives Him by faith.

The church members carried rice through the water. Jesus carried our sins in His own body on the tree. They risked their lives. Jesus gave His life. Their mercy was real and beautiful, but it remained a reflection of His greater mercy.

Good Works Cannot Save

This study must never imply that generous people earn salvation. A person may spend a lifetime serving disaster victims and remain unreconciled to God. Good works may display love, but they cannot pay the penalty of one sin.

Grace works in the opposite direction. Jesus saves the sinner freely. The saved person then becomes generous because he has received what he could never purchase.

Before Jesus asks what is in our hands, He offers to place our lives in His hands.

12. A Personal and Congregational Examination

This study is not asking every listener to imitate every detail of the Ondoy response. It is asking whether grace has made us available.

Have I first given myself to the Lord, or am I offering God carefully selected pieces of my life?

Do I define usefulness mainly by money, position or public visibility?

Have I mistaken my inability to help everyone for permission to help no one?

What practical knowledge, relationships, time, space or strength has God placed in my hands?

Do I notice the needs of people near me, or only distant tragedies that demand nothing personal?

When I give, am I serving the recipient or protecting my own image?

Do I preserve the dignity and freedom of people who need help?

Do my acts of mercy point toward Christ or toward admiration of me?

Have I used safety as wisdom, or as an excuse for indifference?

Have I called something a blessing before allowing a grieving person to grieve?

Does our church know the vulnerable people in its own neighborhood?

Are we prepared to cooperate with other churches and competent organizations rather than needing to control every response?

Do we report ministry results accurately, distinguishing people served, people who heard and people who professed faith?

If ordinary church operations stopped tomorrow, would our community still discover that the Church of Jesus Christ was living among them?

The questions lead back to a single act of surrender. What remains in our hands will never be fully available to God until we have first placed ourselves in His hands.

Final Commentary Conclusion

Typhoon Ondoy is a story of real devastation. Hundreds died and millions were affected. The study does not ask us to explain every loss. It does not promise that faithful Christians will be spared the same storms everyone else faces.

It shows something more modest and more demanding. A small church had little. Grace made that little available. Christians at a distance supplied money. Christians within the disaster supplied knowledge, effort and presence. Together they carried rice, clothing and the Gospel toward neighbors.

The deepest evidence that World in Need Baptist Church survived Ondoy was not that its building remained standing. Its people were still serving.

God does not expect what a church does not possess. He asks for what remains: a willing mind, a surrendered life, ordinary resources, truthful witness and love willing to move toward another person.

The final answer is Jesus Christ. Though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor. He came near, bore our sin, died and rose again. His grace saves us. His grace forms us. His grace teaches us to open our hands.

When the next storm rises, may our neighbors discover not merely that a church building is located near them, but that the Church of Jesus Christ is living among them.