

Many of us have seen images from the unbelievable damage caused by the tornadoes that swept through my home state of Tennessee, Arkansas, Illinois, and Kentucky on Friday, December 10th. I was startled awake from the emergency alerts on my phone. I got up and looked out my window and saw water being pushed down the street in front of my house, and amid the flashes of lightning and thunder, I saw green flashes of light off in the distance. This was something I had never seen before.

I crawled back into bed, surprisingly calm and accepting as I fell right back to sleep. I slept in late Saturday morning, and as one who avoids the news like the plague, I didn't hear about the extensive damage until noon that day. As images started to appear on Facebook and news pop-ups, I started looking into the details a little more.

With death tolls rising and knowing how cold it is outside, the seriousness of the situation tugged at my heart. I always think of the little ones who were sleeping safely in their beds or cribs. These storms can seem so cruel. They are horrible, all around. Ironically, here in this part of the country, so many people are so amazing at how they still thank God for their safety, or for the miracles that took place despite the storm's wrath.

And there are always those who question why a loving God would allow things like this to happen. This is a valid question, and one of the most difficult to answer. I can't help but believe that even those who proclaim to be atheists must question how these things can take place, and for what purpose?

I have now hit the point in my life now where I have been a Christian longer than I have not been a Christian. I like to believe I know quite a bit, but the truth is, I still learn something new about God every day. Every time I read scripture or listen to a podcast from someone who has studied theology and really knows their stuff, I am just blown away by the lessons I learn from passages I have read over, and over again.

Yes, we must always revisit the first man and woman in the book of Genesis. Sin had not yet entered the world, and the garden where Adam and Eve dwelt was absolutely perfect. After being tempted by Satan, both the woman and the man exercised their right to free will, and disobeyed God. We experience pain, sickness, and death, because of the sin of man. Just as Adam and Eve tried to place blame on each other and the 'serpent that tricked them,' we have been trying to blame God for all the evil in the world. The reason for death is because of our sin. It's as simple as that.

Then we wonder about those precious little ones who haven't done anything to warrant sickness or death. The only answer I can give here is that there are always repercussions to our choices, good and bad. Scriptures are clear on how the sins of the father can carry on to the third and fourth generations. Just as the one who changes that pattern and chooses to honor God, their actions will follow to the generations to come. Again, we have been given free will.

I know everyone won't agree with me, but I personally do believe that God is the Creator, and I am the created. Who am I to question what he does with his creation? He commands the seas to be still and can part the ocean with his breath. He hung the stars and planets and created seasons to mark the changes in nature. But never will I believe he is sitting up in Heaven, looking down at us like we're a game of dominoes, and he just pushes the first one to see where everything ends up. No, he has a purpose for all he does. He has a purpose for each one of us.

I can't tell you why devastating things happen like the tornadoes and loss of life from this past weekend. I do look to the life of Job, who lost everything in one day. Even when he wished he had never been born, he still never cursed God. He simply said, "The Lord gives, and Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

To justify things in my own finite mind, perhaps he wanted to get our attention, yet again. We're all so busy with the hustle and bustle of buying more gifts that will end up in the summer yard sale. I absolutely love Christmas and the festivities it brings, but we must remember there are those that will go without basic necessities, like clothing, shelter, and food.

My own grandsons are admittedly spoiled by me. I don't know if they'll appreciate what they receive for Christmas. Perhaps we all need to go and show our children and grandchildren the flattened homes that are just two hours away, so they might see firsthand how blessed they truly are. Maybe God is literally telling us to 'look up,' and to remember from who we came.

I don't have all the answers. I don't pretend to. I just hope that as we go on about our lives, we think about those who don't have much, and not just at Christmas. I hope we remember that Christmas exists because of the gift of God's Son, who paid the ultimate sacrifice for the very sins that are causing so much pain all around us. I hope we remember that this world is not our home. The gifts, the stuff, the endless keeping up with each other, is all so temporary. Let it go. Enjoy your family this season and thank the Creator for all the good things he has done.

We have a local non-profit charity based in Clarksville, TN, called YAI Pak. YAI stands for You Are Important. They reach out to the homeless daily and are a tremendous help during disaster situations such as the tornadoes. They often are first on the scene before the government entities arrive. I have met the founder and I believe this is one of the best run charities I have ever come across. If you want to help them financially, and specifically for disaster relief help, you can just text GIVE to 844-335-1746. They didn't ask me to post this information. I just wanted to help get the word out.

