

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
Fearless – Episode 84 – Returning Home After Devastating Hurricane Ian

Cissie Graham Lynch:

00:00:00 Many of you have been sending me questions and sending me your prayers after Hurricane Ian. My family, we live here in Fort Myers, Florida. So, in this episode of *Fearless*, I wanna share a little bit of what our life has looked like, what it's been our experience in these last couple weeks and days after Hurricane Ian.

Hi, I'm Cissie Graham Lynch. Welcome to *Fearless*, helping you have a fearless faith in a compromising culture.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Cissie Graham Lynch:

00:00:43 Well, this episode of *Fearless* is a little bit different. I'm sitting here outside in Fort Myers, Florida, and for those that don't know, um, my husband and I, we live in Fort Myers. We have called this home for over 10 years now, almost 13. My husband was born and raised in Fort Myers, Florida. So everything that has happened in the recent week and days is, uh, been quite emotional. It's been quite the journey to watch Hurricane Ian come. And so, I'm outside. I've been with, um, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association team and Samaritan's Purse team and our volunteers who are out working in people's homes right now. But I just wanted time to reflect. So many of you have asked questions on social media. I wanna thank you so much for all those who have checked in. I've been posting a little bit, but silent also.

It's been just a process, a week of a lot of processing. For those who do follow me on social media or part of the *Fearless* family. You know, my husband has been in Alaska working with Samaritan's Purse since May, and the kids and I lived in Alaska and we came back so I could put the kids in school. And um, I am eight months pregnant at this point and I just figured I hadn't even bought an outfit for this baby. I got back from my last work trip and said, "Okay, that was it. Time to relax and time to get settled and welcome a baby." And just that morning a friend had texted me and said, "Hey, there's a hurricane and nobody's really paying attention to it yet, but you might wanna start preparing." And I said, "Okay, thank you. I definitely will." You know, although I live here in Florida and I know all my friends and family have lived through hurricanes all their lives. I just don't take any storm lightly. When you grew up at Samaritan's Purse on the front lines of serving, I've seen some of the greatest disasters. I know a small storm can cause the mightiest of damage. So I started working that Friday because I'm moving at half speed, being at eight months pregnant. And so I just started doing what I could. I started getting just fuel and gas cans and putting furniture away, started getting food. And I know a lot of the locals here, they've lived through major hurricanes. And at first it wasn't anything that people were too worried about. And, of course, we've seen the news where people thought it was going to Tampa, but I was just doing what I could to prepare. My dad called me and he wanted me to get out of there. And I kind of argued with him and I said, "No, dad, I think I'll stick it out. Because even if we do lose power and Corey's not here to turn on the generator, I wanna be able to do that. Or even if we fled a little bit, you know, I just wanna be here."

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
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We live in an old 1960's home that's very low to the ground. And, um, we live near the big river that you've seen on TV. All these things you've seen on TV, it's wild to see like these are our landmarks, these are part of our daily lives. This is our home, that Sanibel Bridge. I just crossed that Sunday to go to church. But I was praying like, Lord, I was putting my kids to bed and I didn't know the decision to make. Do I stay? Do I go? 'Cuz there was work gonna be done even if it was a small storm. And I just woke up the next morning knowing I needed to get my kids out of there because even if I got two inches in my house, what was I possibly gonna do at eight months pregnant? Wasn't gonna be lifting the couch by myself with my husband out of town. I didn't wanna be a liability to somebody else. And so, I decided Sunday or Monday night before the storm to get out of there with my kids. And I'm so thankful I had a place to go that I could go to my parents in North Carolina, um, that I'm forever grateful. But then right after we evacuated, we were the first ones to be a mandatory evacuation. And there was really no doubt in my mind that our house was going to flood. It was just, we live in that area. We have a low house. Corey started flying back from Alaska and because he knew he was gonna have to cut out drywall. And so that Wednesday afternoon, Corey left the village he was working on in the Bering Sea and started flying home because we just knew that we had to start probably ripping out drywall, that we were expecting the worst. And Wednesday night of the storm hitting, I was still texting with my friends. Everybody'll say the same thing. It seemed to never end, ones that had sat through storms before, this was the never-ending storm. And I think it's of course the unknown. This has happened a few times for us where we're away and we just don't know what's gonna happen to our home in a storm. And I put my little girl to bed. Her birthday was Thursday and I put her to bed Wednesday night and she started asking questions and crying and I was trying to prepare her. I've always been honest, I've let y'all know that here on *Fearless*, I'm always honest with my kids. I don't hide the TV from them when it comes to the news, because that's where we work. That's where the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association works. That's where Samaritan's Purse works. They're on these front lines of so many of these stories. So I don't hide any of that. My parents never did. So they were seeing the news and she was asking all kinds of questions and she goes, "Mom, do we get to go home on Saturday?"

And I just honestly didn't know the answer to that. I thought we would lose our home. So I said, "No sweetheart, we might have to stay here in North Carolina for a few months and mom will have the baby here. We'll find you a school, but we don't know yet. And we're gonna pray and we're gonna trust in the Lord because he already knows, um, the steps to guide us as a family and where we go as a family. And we can trust him even in the unknown. We can trust him in the darkest of storms." So thankfully Thursday morning our friends, after the storm had passed, our friends were able to make it down our road. We live on a historical area, just really close the water, and the water got up to our sandbags, but not in the house. Which is a mystery other than God's grace. We even had some houses on our street that did flood houses on the street behind us on the other side, every side of us flooded. And you know, often you'll have that like survivor's like guilt that just guiltiness that your house survived, but thankful beyond imagination that our house was there when we're surrounded by such destruction as

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
Fearless – Episode 84 – Returning Home After Devastating Hurricane Ian

you see what happened on Sanibel, what you saw in Fort Myers Beach and all the houses like downtown. Like I said, those are our, that's our home. So Corey made it back. He drove 20 hours from Charlotte, North Carolina, um, stopping to get dehumidifiers, commercial sized dehumidifiers and um, all kinds of Craigslist deals on the way from North Carolina to Florida, trying to find things to help his family, to help our neighbors. So of course, Samaritan's Purse, growing up with my dad always teaching me, we are to help our neighbors. We're to show them mercy and compassion to be a light in the darkness. And our neighbors can be worldwide. And I've had to teach my son just today in the car. He goes, "Mom, our neighbors God meant the whole world." And I said, "Yes, Austin. But in this case, He means our true neighbors. This is our community and we get the opportunity to serve in our community right now." So Corey made it home. Unfortunately, he had to start gutting his parents' home. They were out of town, His parents' home did flood and they lost a lot. And so they had to get the drywall out, all the flooring out and get the furniture out. And it's different when it's personal to you, when you are truly serving. I call it like my team, my family, my Samaritan's Purse family, my Billy Graham Evangelistic Association family. They're serving my actual family. They're serving my community, our friends.

And so many people had heartache before the storm. They were going through their own storms in life before Ian ever hit. I had a friend call, she goes, "I am desperate." Her father had died on the 21st of this month. Her child has broken his arm, their house flooded, and their children lost their school at the same time and her husband still has a job, so he has to go to his job. They found a hotel on the other coast of Florida. So after his job, he'd go clean his house out as much as he could by himself and then drive back to the hotel to see his family at night for the first week. And she goes, "I'm barely holding on." Some other friends have called their, their family. The wife of the father had dementia. And the wife of the father had dementia. The wife had no idea what was going on. And this is a, some family friends of ours in the flood waters were rising in their home. They've lived in it for 40 years, never come close to flooding. And they had to put a life vest on the mother and she had no idea what was going on. And they had to swim out in the dark. The waters came up so high they had to swim to their neighbor's house with a life vest on their mother who had no idea what was going on. So in these storms, we at these two ministries get a front row seat to be able to see the glimpses of the goodness of God. The TV stations come and go. They show the destruction that has happened, and after a week or two they're gonna be gone. But as we are continuing working and working in these homes, some people don't have the insurance. There's a few homes we might work in the insurance, but they need the spiritual need met. They just need somebody to listen to them, to listen to their brokenness, to listen to their heartache. And that's when our chaplains come in and they just listen. It is amazing to watch. These chaplains have truly have a calling and a gift. They have a way of communicating God's love and a sincerity with these people who are just hurting. And I'm so thankful for our chaplains who serve alongside our Samaritan's Purse team. Anytime we have a Samaritan's Purse team go in to serve, whether that's the tarping, the mudding out, the cutting out of drywall, the removal of all the furniture, trying to get people back in their homes as soon as possible. You know, time is of the essence. You

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
Fearless – Episode 84 – Returning Home After Devastating Hurricane Ian

gotta get all the, um, drywall out of there, spray for mold. We do that. But our Billy Graham Evangelistic Association chaplains partner with them. They go to every family, they pray with them, they meet with them, they listen to 'em, they'll talk to 'em, they'll follow up with them. And every home that is served between these two teams always is presented a Bible from our team that is signed by everybody that worked on their home.

But we were met with a family, a lady today... And a story and a testimony I'll never forget. She had some family members, her sister, who was not in good health with her. And the flood waters kept coming up higher and higher and the only thing they felt that they could do was get in their attic. So, of course, we've all heard stories of that and how scary that can be of getting in their attic. They got up in their attic and she just started praying. She said she was texting her family, trying to fix all the wrongs that she had done and asking for forgiveness, praying. And she said, "You know what, I'm gonna claim victory over it." And so she started just doing different texts with her family, how much she loved them, and just asking the Holy Spirit to calm her. And she said, "There was just this peace that came over my body that I was almost like numb." And it was the peace of Jesus that she had. She had texted her family that the flood waters were coming up, but she, they were up in the attic if something was to happen. And she just said, "I knew this was the time God gives and he takes away. And this was the end." So thankfully that was not the of her story. God has a great purpose for her. Got to meet her full of joy, lots of grief right now, but just full of joy. And she was giving God all the praise and glory. And she goes, "I don't know what my purpose is anymore." And I said, I looked at her and I was just able to say, "You were living out your purpose now." What a testimony is that Jesus would always say, "Go and tell. Go and tell those of the goodness you have seen and the things you have heard." And she's doing that just days after losing everything, everything. Her lips are singing praises to God and His goodness and pointing to His faithfulness even in the storm. There was a pastor that was there from Calvary Chapel, Fort Lauderdale. And as we were talking he said, "It reminds me of Psalm 40. And it says, 'I waited patiently for the Lord. He turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit and out of the mud and mire, and he set my feet on a rock and he gave me a firm place to stand.'" And that was that woman's testimony. He heard her cry and He set her feet on a solid rock to stand on. I've been trying to teach that to my kids. I think I just said that in a recent episode of *Fearless* teaching my kids about the wise man building his house upon the rock. That rock being the solid foundation that God, He could give us a peace that floods our soul, that flooded that woman's soul during one of the darkest days of her life.

So I mentioned earlier that in the last couple months, my kids and I, we've been going to church in Sanibel. Getting back from Alaska, I needed to see God's beauty. And when you cross that Sanibel bridge, you saw God's glorious creation here in southwest Florida, and you would go across the bridge. And my son asked that Sunday before the storm hit goes, "Why does everybody ride their bikes around here?" And I said, "Because people come here to relax, to be restored, to be renewed. They're on vacation away from work and a lot of people don't get opportunities to ride bikes back at home. And they come to the beach and ride bikes and go walk on the beach where we get to

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
Fearless – Episode 84 – Returning Home After Devastating Hurricane Ian

live.” So of course all that's changed and we know it's gonna be built back. We're gonna build it back stronger and better. But the pastor from that church had written, you know, on his Facebook that they had to evacuate for the storm and that he and his wife were living in a hotel, um, that he is a “Sanibel refugee” now is what he called himself. But he reminded people about Psalm 46, a psalm that we all know well and that is “God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in trouble.” Those are true words. It's not things that we say or write on a card that is truth. And that God's might, God's force is so much stronger than the winds of Hurricane Ian and the destruction that Hurricane Ian did, that God's help is mightier than that, His love is stronger than any of that. And that we are to be reminded of all the scriptures that we know and that we remember that there are just not things we say, but those are truth that we can cling to in the darkest of storms. And that's what I've been trying to teach my children. And when the storm was hitting I went back to Isaiah 43 and it's a, a scripture that I've often like inserted my name in. It says, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, Cissie. And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. And when you walk through the fire, you will not be burned and the flames will not set you ablaze.” We will go through the rivers and the waters will be rushing. But we know that God is with us. He's our strength, He's our refuge. That those rivers will not consume us. And that's the beauty of kids. They can be crying one moment asking questions and they're there completely oblivious in the next moment and bring you joys in those moments. And I'm so thankful for my kids. There's been a process, you know, those first few days I was away from my family, away from friends, a community that was hurting, but we're back here. Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association have been here on the ground serving. And I am so thankful that they're here to serve my neighbors, my friends, my family. And I'm so thankful for all of you who have made it possible, who have prayed or who have given, who have volunteered yourselves. And, um, y'all make it all possible for these teams to serve here on the ground and to be a light, to share the hope of Jesus, even when everything seems to be stripped away that he doesn't forsake us.

So these are verses and different seasons I've had to cling to. But, of course, this week has been different and ones that I've had to talk through with my children. And I'm thankful to be home. I'm thankful to be with my community that my husband is back. And it is the greatest honor to serve with the men and women of Samaritan's Purse and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Normally I like to be out with the crews, like mudding out a home and cutting out dry wall, but of course at eight months pregnant, it's a little bit different. So, helping in the office wherever I can and encouraging and praying with our teams. Our volunteers are remarkable. And like I said earlier, I've seen devastation from some of the mightiest storms with my experience at Samaritan's Purse and the places that we have gone. But it's something different and of course, way more personal when it hits your own home and you see people that you love hurting. But I always remind people in that moment, we will see God's goodness through it, because I've experienced it. I've had the privilege of seeing that over and over my whole life being in the life of ministry and we're already seeing that. And, um, it is devastating. You go down our street, you see people's furniture on the side of the road. If you're watching

Billy Graham Evangelistic Association
Fearless – Episode 84 – Returning Home After Devastating Hurricane Ian

on YouTube, you see behind me just tons of tree damage and branches behind. You've seen the news stories. It is devastating. But like the lady we met today, we always remember we are to share of his goodness, the things we have heard, the things we have seen, and we have seen His goodness already. And I know we continue to see His goodness that, um, He is faithful. Even in the storms He knew Hurricane Ian was coming. None of this took Him by surprise. Although, it took so many of us by surprise, He's there and the waters won't sweep over us.

MUSIC TRANSITION

Cissie Graham Lynch:

00:20:16 Once again, thank you for joining me on this different episode of *Fearless*, as I've shared my experience of Hurricane Ian and what our families had gone through. I wanna say if you wanna know more information about the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, go to BillyGraham.org. You can see stories and ways you can help or maybe even eventually become part of our chaplain team who serve in those moments of crisis. And also, if you wanna see how you can help or volunteer with Samaritan's Purse, go to SamaritansPurse.org and see how you can get involved and be a part of our team.

CLOSING MUSIC

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