



## TEACHING NOTES FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

This resource is part of the *Disaster Zone* pack, which explores Christian Aid's approach to tackling disasters. To download the other materials, visit [christianaid.org.uk/learn-disaster-secondary](http://christianaid.org.uk/learn-disaster-secondary)

### A religious response to suffering

Everyone has experienced suffering in some form or other – some more serious than others. When natural disasters happen, when we hear of the suffering of others, or when we experience our own suffering, we are often left with big questions. For the many across the world who believe in a deity, the questions often take on an added depth.

Some people might find their faith strengthened in the face of suffering, while others might find that suffering presents a real challenge to faith.

A typical challenge to faith in the wake of suffering might be along the following lines: 'Either God wills to remove evil and is not able to do so, or God does not will to remove it. If God does not will to remove it, then he is not a God of love. If God is not able to remove it, then he is not all powerful.'<sup>1</sup>

#### As a class, discuss:

- What questions might people of faith ask in the wake of a big disaster?
- What role might faith have in helping people cope with and respond to disaster – and in what ways might it not help?

### A Christian response to suffering

Christians have often turned to the book of Job in the Bible in times of suffering. As one of the wisdom books, some say it was written to help a confused people who had suffered many things in exile and in being exiled. It is a story that has been told and retold many times and in many ways to help people through difficult times.

#### Ask:

- Has anyone in class read it? [Note to teacher: you may wish to set reading all or some sections of Job as homework prior to the class.]

There is a clear message in the book of Job that the old explanations no longer fitted; those theories that suffering was punishment for evil no longer added up. Job demonstrates the desire to remain faithful and devoted even if pain is almost overwhelming. God finally responds to Job's cries for revelation and lets Job know at least one thing: God is present in good times and bad.

#### Read Job and discuss:

- To what extent do you think the book of Job might be a comfort to those experiencing extreme suffering?

### A personal response to suffering

#### Discuss:

- How do we respond when we hear about natural disasters?
- Would a belief in a deity make a difference to a person's response?
- What response might be expected from followers of different faiths?

Empathy and compassion are powerful responses and can mobilise people (of all faiths and none) to generosity and to action.

The materials in the *Disaster Zone* resource demonstrate that some natural disasters would not cause such extensive damage if there was less poverty and greater equality in the world. Inequality and injustice often make people across the world more vulnerable to natural disasters.

#### Ask:

- What does the Bible say about justice and equality?

As well as, or instead of, asking where God is when disaster strikes, many Christians seek to be agents of restoration and justice.

### Christian Aid's response to suffering

Christian Aid is a Christian organisation that insists the world can and must be swiftly changed to one where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty. The charity works globally for profound change that

<sup>1</sup> Joe Jenkins, *Contemporary Moral Issues*, Heinemann Educational, Oxford, 1992.

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eradicates the causes of poverty, striving to achieve equality, dignity and freedom for all, regardless of faith or nationality. It is part of a wider movement for social justice, and provides urgent, practical and effective assistance where need is great, tackling the effects of poverty as well as its root causes.

Christian Aid is an agency of churches in Britain and Ireland and is mandated to work on relief, development and advocacy for poverty eradication. Christian Aid's work is founded on Christian faith, inspired by hope, and seeks to change an unjust world through charity – demonstrating a practical love and care for our neighbours.

**Discuss:**

- How might Christian Aid's role as a faith-based organisation influence its work and values?
- How might it influence its response to disasters?

Students can find out more about Christian Aid's response to current disasters at the following website:  
**[christianaid.org.uk/emergencies](http://christianaid.org.uk/emergencies)**

For more information on Christian Aid's beliefs and theology, visit: **[christianaid.org.uk/resources/churches/what-we-believe.aspx](http://christianaid.org.uk/resources/churches/what-we-believe.aspx)**

For prayers about current global issues visit:  
**[christianaid.org.uk/resources/churches/prayer](http://christianaid.org.uk/resources/churches/prayer)**

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**Suggested activity**

**Write** a reflective prayer/poem in response to the natural disasters you have heard about in this topic.