

Hurricane Melissa

Samaritan's Purse response in Jamaica

Hurricane Melissa – what happened?



Hurricane Melissa hit Jamaica on 28 October. It was the third most intense storm ever recorded, and it caused massive damage to buildings, trees, overhead cables, mobile phone masts and broadcast transmitters. The rain has caused flooding and landslides, and washed away roads.



A month later, some communities are still inaccessible by road. Power is gradually being restored, but it will take months to reconnect more remote towns and villages. Mobile phone coverage is patchy, and water supplies have been contaminated, even where pumping remains available.



In the regional hub of Black River, most houses have lost all or part of their roof. The municipal hospital is non-operational, and other nearby medical facilities have also been badly damaged.

Jamaica



The arrow shows the path of the centre of the hurricane, where there has been the most damage. Black River, on the south-west coast, is very badly affected. Moorlands Camps is where Dave's team is based.



Damaged buildings



Damaged buildings



Damaged buildings

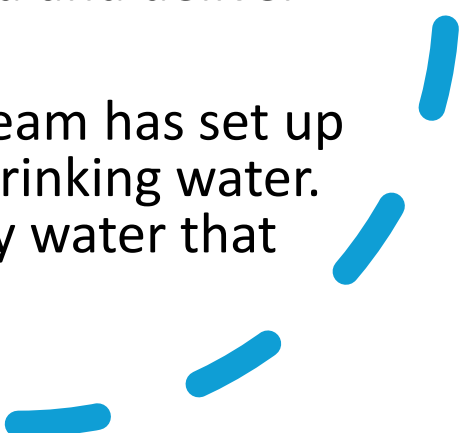
A large orange circle on the left side of the slide, partially cut off by the edge.

Samaritan's Purse response

Dave has been part of the Samaritan's Purse 'DART' response since 16 November, and expects to be there until 21 December. The team's base is a Christian retreat centre near Mandeville. They have no mains electricity or internet, and rely on generators and solar arrays for power and a Starlink satellite connection for internet. There are about 70 team members based there.

Their main warehouse (another conference facility) is about 20 minutes away in Kendal. From there, they distribute supplies, including tarpaulins, solar lamps with USB phone chargers, hygiene kits (soap, toothpaste, etc), and water filters. Some of this is given directly to the public and some via churches and other organisations. The team also do house-to-house assessments of need and deliver supplies in the worst affected areas.

The WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) team has set up five units that convert seawater into clean drinking water. These are open to the public and also supply water that the team delivers to another six sites.

Four blue curved lines of varying lengths and orientations, located in the bottom right corner of the slide.



Water purification kits in the warehouse



Water filtration system

Pray for...

- Jamaicans who have lived through what was a terrifying 24–36 hours. Many people have described to Dave that they were hiding under beds or tables, and ‘clinging on’ for several hours after their roof blew away. Pray for those experiencing trauma and flashbacks.
- first responders – especially fire crews – who have been working tirelessly for the whole month to rescue people, make structures safe and use specialist equipment to help essential crews gain access to cut-off areas. The work continues as a national emergency. Pray for renewed energy, tenacity and skill in dealing with an unprecedented situation.
- students who have exams coming up – libraries have had their books destroyed, the lack of power means that revising in the evenings is impossible. Many students are sleep-deprived where they have inadequate shelter.



Giving out tarpaulins



Giving out water purification kits

Samaritan's Purse response

To the west of where Dave is based, another 80 team members are based at a field hospital that Samaritan's Purse have set up in the grounds of a high school in Black River (the local hospital was destroyed by the storm). They've treated 3,000 people in the month they've been there. They're seeing a lot of injuries caused by people trying to repair their own homes, along with leptospirosis and dengue fever caused by water contamination.

Mobile medical teams are also taking clinics to hard-to-reach areas, often by helicopter.

Re-roofing has begun in Black River, with more than 70 roofs repaired so far. There are now eight teams out every day, with enough materials to complete up to 20 roofs a day.

Later this week, a small team including Dave hope to start installing community device charging points for 30 communities (using solar panels and generators) and internet connectivity via Starlink.



Setting up the field hospital

Pray for...

- all communities receiving aid (from Samaritan's Purse and other agencies) – that the right aid would get to the people in most need.
- enough stock of aid items to arrive – then that it gets through customs quickly and is able to be distributed promptly. Pray specifically for 50-metre cables needed for the internet project (using Starlink to re-establish internet infrastructure) – these are taking a long time to ship from the US.



Tarpaulins in the warehouse

Pray for...

- churches assisting their communities – often despite seriously damaged church buildings. Many ministers/pastors are reporting community members seeking a spiritual answer to the physical damage they are faced with. Some are seeing record numbers of people coming to Sunday services, including many that rarely or never previously attended. Several church leaders told Samaritan's Purse evaluation teams that they couldn't get enough Bibles, such is the demand. (Many Christians have also lost their Bibles when they became waterlogged.)
- people who have come to faith as a direct result of this disaster. Billy Graham chaplains working alongside the team (as well as DART team members themselves) have helped at least 28 individuals to work through a gospel presentation and prayed for salvation with them.



Distributions from a roofless church

Dave's role

Dave's balancing his Information Officer role (collecting information from the different parts of the response and producing a daily situation report) with helping other teams. Sometimes he's the driver – and driving conditions are extremely difficult, with missing road surfaces, floods, mud and stones covering the road and fallen overhead cables.

Generally, food for the team is good and plentiful (jerk chicken every day!), but sleeping conditions are not ideal. There is no air-con outside the office, or power for fans in the bedrooms. The days are often very long – breakfast at 6.30am and they work through to 10pm or later at night.



‘Challenging’ roads



‘Challenging’ roads

Pray for...

- safety on the roads and in areas where tensions are heightened
- good storytelling opportunities for the daily reports and for Samaritan's Purse social media/publications
- restorative sleep
- good connections with HQ in North Carolina – Dave's counterpart there is brand new to the job and finding their feet
- good time management as he juggles both practical relief work and report-writing