

Phases of Disaster



Threat Phase: Small events serve as a warning or threat to “normal” living. A disaster has not yet occurred, but there is a sense of impending doom. Individual reactions range from feeling completely invulnerable to highly anxious and afraid.

Feelings: invincibility, denial, vulnerability, fear, uncertainty



Rescue Phase: The disaster event occurs, bringing with it a disruption of “normal” life. Individuals and communities lose the equilibrium of body, soul, and spirit. Disbelief leads to questions like Why me? Why us? Why didn’t God hear our prayers? Stories of selfless acts emerge, which provide hope.

Feelings: shock, disbelief, disorientation, heroism, selflessness



Honeymoon Phase: Shortly after the disaster, people experience a huge adrenaline rush. Communities adopt a “we shall overcome” mentality, and rally to help through donations and volunteering. The disaster has changed the world, and people renew their dedication to living better.

Feelings: generosity, optimism, gratitude, idealism



Despair Phase: As the high from the honeymoon phase fades, people begin to understand the extent of their losses. This leads to a sharp emotional plunge into depression, abandonment, and fear. Recovery feels impossible, made worse by feelings of loneliness and frustration.

Feelings: abandonment, fear, loneliness, anger, distrust, grief, disillusionment



Restoration Phase: People return step-by-step to their foundational strengths. Over time there is a growing recognition of wisdom learned and renewed reliance on loving community. While there are brief returns to the despair phase, eventually individuals and communities achieve a state of healing and emotional stability.

Feelings: love, shalom, community, acceptance, meaning