

After Shock: Searching for Honest Faith When Your World Is Shaken

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An Annotated Wish List for Changes in/by God

1. Rather than a God of occasional disaster-rescue miracles, I want a God whose miracles prevent the disasters in the first place.
2. Rather than a God who needed to retreat in order to leave room for human freedom and love, I want a God who finds a less painful way to make freedom and love work.
3. Rather than a system set up so that those who suffer most are also the most vulnerable (usually those who are poor), I want the wealthy to be the most vulnerable. An increase in money beyond one's necessity could inhibit the body's production of antibodies.
4. Rather than children being at the mercy of nature and of other people, I want no one to die or be physically or emotionally traumatized before turning twelve years old. Nobody. And the only ones who die between thirteen and eighteen should be those whose decisions represent a clear and present danger to others.
5. For every unethical action, there should be an equal and opposite reaction—immediately. If you inflict suffering, you should immediately suffer accordingly.
6. I want a small indicator button, like a low-battery light, on the prominent C7 vertebrae that protrudes slightly on the cervical spine at the base of the neck between the shoulders. A gentle red light would glow forty-eight hours before death is irreversible, when the downward spiral toward unconsciousness or pain has won. It would indicate time for final goodbyes with loved ones and that a final welcome from God is imminent: "You're released from this life. Welcome into the next one."

—From part one, "Confronting a Crisis of Faith"



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Kent Annan, activist and author. Kent is co-director of Haiti Partners, a nonprofit focused on education in Haiti. He's worked in Haiti since 2003—living there some of the time and now traveling there regularly from Florida, where he lives with his wife and two children.

“Kent Annan struggles with his faith existentially. This is no simple attempt to excuse God for non-interference in the suffering that pervades Port-au-Prince following a devastating earthquake. Instead, it is the poetic confession of a Christian who faces his doubts and questions about God, and yet goes beyond them to find a newer, stronger faith.”

—Tony Campolo,
Professor Emeritus,
Eastern University



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An Interview with *After Shock* Author Kent Annan

How did you first come to work in Haiti? What developed your passion for the country?

I moved to Haiti almost eight years ago with my wife. I'd worked with refugees in Europe for a couple of years after college. I came back to the U.S. to study more. I got married. We were deciding what to do next and chose to work in Haiti. As we searched, we found an organization that approached development work in a really respectful way and saw that we could fit into their focus on education there. We lived in Haiti for two-and-a-half years and then I've been traveling back and forth regularly for the past five years.

I have many good friends in Haiti and it's been a privilege to work there. To answer your question: I like the culture. I like the language. I learn from people's hospitality. I hate how many people have to struggle on the edge of survival—and admire how so many do it with dignity in trying circumstances. I admire the strong faith of many people. I'm encouraged about our education work because many people are curious and want to learn more. I like fried chicken with rice and beans—though not so much the boiled plantains. This is just a partial list, but these are some of the ways I feel like I've been able to connect there as a foreigner.

Why did you write this book?

Like anyone involved in Haiti, my heart has been broken during this past year. For the first few months after the earthquake, we were of course working as hard as possible to respond in our way to the needs after the earthquake. The hard work has continued, but after a few months I found that at the same time I needed to write about it too, for the sake of sharing the stories one friend after another in Haiti was experiencing. And for my own sake, needing to work out my own faith—and doubt—in the midst of it. And, hopefully, I was writing in a way that is meaningful to readers in circumstances much different than Haiti—because while not nearly as dramatic or with devastation at such a massive scale, in some ways life can crash down on any of us at any time, whether in a car accident, a cancer diagnosis or something else that causes a crisis of faith. So I wrote the book because these questions were pressing in and felt urgent.

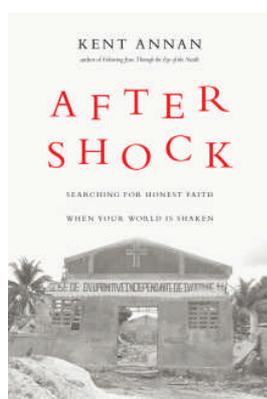
What is the current situation in Haiti? What kind of help is most needed?

The needs were vast before the earthquake—and add to that an earthquake of this magnitude that took so many lives, so much infrastructure. About a million people are still homeless—living in tents and under tarps—many months after the earthquake. People, especially women and children, are vulnerable in many of the tent camps. And the previous

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Q&A

AUTHOR INTERVIEW



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"*After Shock* is one man's scrupulously honest search for God. Although Kent Annan hopes for unshakable faith, he celebrates doubt as part of the process, a necessary part of being alive. There are no easy answers. There may be no answers at all. *After Shock* is the perfect example of what Rainer Maria Rilke called 'living the questions.' This is a book I will read over and over, for inspiration and for comfort. I loved it."

—Abigail Thomas,
author of *A Three Dog Life*

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challenges are still there: only about one of every two children gets to attend school. Unemployment. Illiteracy. And so on. The big-picture situation—homelessness, an upcoming presidential election, infrastructure, health—is overwhelming. But my colleagues and I have found that when we focus in on what we can do, focus in on hope, that in our small way we've been able to accomplish a lot. We have already rebuilt several schools and rebuilt them better than they were to begin with—now with steel framing, solar panels, laptops for children, more training for teachers. Nothing can make up for all the loss, but since this tragedy happened it seems there needs to be a strong commitment to rebuilding better than it ever was before.

Did the earthquake change how you thought about God, faith and suffering?

It's a tough question. In some ways, no. We know it's a brutal world. We know tsunamis and wars and cancer crash down on people all the time. But the scale of the earthquake in Haiti and the way I'm personally connected forced me, in a really personal way, to face some of this in a deeper, more direct way than I had before. The resentment, anger and frustrations with God were now on the surface, not hidden just below. The distance of God—there is so much uncertainty; how can we know what is true?—seemed more distant than ever. And yet, and yet, there were some amazing moments, especially with Haitian friends, or taking Communion with people next to the rubble of a church that had collapsed a few weeks before, when there were glimmers of hope, of something true, of God's love that is present even in such incredible suffering.

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