



January 21, 2026

MESSENGER

Quote of the Week

"What's the first step in rebuilding?"

Pastor George in this week's message

INFO

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On the web: www.altadenabaptist.org

Contact Information:

Due to the fires, our mail has been forwarded. Please send mail to PO Box 91055, Pasadena, CA 91109. You may still call the church phone at 626-797-8970;

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NO TWO STORIES ARE THE SAME

A few days after the January 7, 2025, Eaton Fire Disaster, a site was established at the Pasadena City College Extension campus, where people could meet with local, State and Federal emergency service organizations to figure out the first steps toward recovery. I was out there, on behalf of ABC, standing in line with all those dazed people trying to figure out what help we could get. While we were waiting for initial interviews, we shared stories. Some of them were really awful, but in my memory, they all blur together. It's hard to distinguish one family's suffering from another. They all seemed traumatized.

Now, a year later, we're trying to evaluate what happened and how our community responded. It turns out that this was possibly the most costly natural disaster in U.S. history! A total of 9,418 structures were destroyed, and another 1,071 were severely damaged. More than 100,000 people had to find another place to live, at least temporarily. Some are still homeless.

These are not just statistics. Every one of the families affected has a story, and each is unique. They vary in significant ways:

- Some suffered total property loss; others just partial damage.
- Some owned the homes they lived in; some rented
- Some of the owners had high mortgage payments; other owned outright.
- Some had adequate insurance coverage; others had none.
- Some have signed on with law firms to sue for damages; others have not.
- Some have accepted a settlement from Southern Cal Edison; other have not.
- Some have engaged an architect/contractor and have begun rebuilding.
- Some haven't taken the first step toward recovery.

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These differences are interconnected with variations in education, life skills, mental health, financial resources (savings, good credit for loans, etc.), support systems (families, neighbors, churches, etc.). The bottom line is, each person's recovery from the trauma of last year's Eaton Fire Disaster is completely unique, and the differences in our coping ability have become even more pronounced over time.

I stumbled on a Psalm that speaks to me about the One who understands the uniqueness of each person's individual struggle to rebuild a broken life:

*The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the outcasts of Israel.
He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.
He determines the **number of the stars**;
he **gives to all of them their names**.
Great is our Lord and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.
The Lord lifts up the downtrodden . . .
(Psalm 147:2-6a)*

So, how many stars are there? The ancient astrologers had nothing to watch but stars --- no electric lights, TV, cell phones, social media. All they could do during a long, dark night was count and name stars. Under the clearest night sky, they thought they could see 6,000 or more. They began naming them, and they came up with about 530 star names. It turns out that they could only count a tiny fraction of the stars, which actually number in the billions of trillions.

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turns out that they could only count a tiny fraction of the stars, which actually number in the billions of trillions.

This Psalm tells us that our God knows the accurate "*number of the stars*" and "*gives to all of them their names*." *That, in itself, is an amazing and wonderful fact about how awesome our God is, but notice the context in which this truth is expressed. It has to do with his individualized attention to each human person's hurts and struggles. Note the words "outcasts" (verse 2), "brokenhearted" (verse 3), "wounds" (verse 3), "downtrodden" (verse 6). These are the individuals he knows on a first-name basis and loves on in an intimate, personal way.*

In light of the intensely personal nature of each individual's recovery/ rebuild journey, let's be kind and understanding to one another. Be careful not to judge another Fire victim for decisions they may make, when you don't know all they are facing. Just pray for and encourage fellow travelers on the road to recovery.

And take care of **yourself**. ABC's Pastors and Deacons are always available to walk through hard times with you. There are also a number of mental health support groups we can refer you to. Also, please check the notice below regarding the Eaton Fire Grief Stations event this weekend.

Pastor George Van Alstine