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Recovering From a Tornado During a Pandemic

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Most will remember 2020 for the COVID-19 pandemic, but for Laini Bergthold, a junior communication major from Chattanooga, Tennessee, the year brought a different kind of trauma in the form of a tornado that destroyed her family's home.

After a difficult three-year building process, the Bergthold family moved into their new home in December 2018. Little did they know that in 15 months this new home would be completely unlivable.

When the nationwide shutdown began in March 2020, Bergthold headed home from college and started to grapple with the unknowns of the coronavirus.

"On Easter Sunday, the Lord very clearly prepared me spiritually and mentally for what we were about to experience," said Bergthold. "That day I sat on my back porch and read Psalm 40, which is about praising the Lord for his faithfulness even when you're in a dark place. I then began thinking about how thankful I was to be stuck at home with this space and the people that I had."

That night, bad weather was expected in Chattanooga. Bergthold's parents were extra cautious of the weather and set up night watches so that someone would always be awake throughout the night.

"Honestly, it is so unusual for us to be that conscious of the weather. Our family never paid attention to weather like that, but it was just one of the ways the Lord protected us," said Bergthold.

At around 11:30 p.m., the Bergtholds' weather radio began to blare that a tornado had touched down in their area. The family quickly took cover in their pantry, which was also designed to be their storm shelter. Within minutes the Bergtholds' home was gone.

"Looking back at the week following the tornado, it almost doesn't seem real," explained Bergthold. "It was a week-long out of body experience of adjusting to our new reality with a million things to do. But there was also a pandemic, so everything was going to be shut down."

The Bergtholds' church family quickly responded to their need, but with all the wreckage, it was almost impossible to reach the Bergthold home.

"I remember one guy came the next morning, and he was outside at 8 a.m. with his chainsaw cutting down the trees blocking our driveway so that people could get in and help," said

Bergthold. "I was so grateful to him, but when I went to thank him, he said, 'You don't have to thank us. This is just the church being the church. This is what we do.'

"I will never forget that because it will forever change the way that I think about service and about the role of the church. God is glorified when we just serve each other because that's what Christ did for us."

The Bergthold family moved into a hotel, but with unreliable internet and a lot of work to be done, online school was nearly impossible. Bergthold sent an email to her academic advisor, Heather Heritage, assistant professor of communication, explaining the situation.

"She didn't put any pressure on me and reassured me that they were here for me no matter what," explained Berthold. "But even before I contacted her, I had never had a moment of anxiety where I questioned what to do about school.

"I just knew that Cedarville was going to be there for me, which is a huge privilege. I never want to take for granted how caring my Cedarville community is and how the professors love students by seeing their needs and helping."

Three weeks after the tornado, Bergthold started school again and finally finished her sophomore year in mid-June. Despite this delay, Bergthold is still on track to graduate in May 2022.

Currently, the Bergthold family is living in a rented house as they begin the building process all over again.

"Through this, I learned to truly believe that God is working all things together for the good of those who love him," said Bergthold. "It's because of Him—his faithfulness and steadfastness in my family's hardest season yet—that I am beckoned to love Him more. And because I love Him, I am confident that he is working the confusing, painful things in this season for my good and the good of His kingdom."

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,550 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including its [Bachelor of Arts in Communication](#) program, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.