

9/11 Tenth Anniversary What Now?

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Where were you when you heard the news that airliners had crashed into the twin towers? What was your response? How has your life changed since then? Ten years later what is our perspective on this tragic event? The Bible helps us to put things in perspective. Hear these words from Jeremiah written during a time of crisis for Judah.

²³ This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches,

²⁴ but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

How has life changed since 9/11?

- We experience long lines, invasive searches and identity checks at airports.
- Whenever we see someone of Middle Eastern descent on a plane we observe them very intently.
- We are experiencing a new kind of warfare: a war on terrorism. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor our enemy was well defined: Germany and Japan were our enemies. The battlefields were well defined and the battle was fought overseas. When the decisive battles were won; the enemy surrendered; the war was over and reconstruction began.
- When the enemy is "terrorism"—it is not clear who that is or where we fight that battle. A suicide bomber can be anyone, anywhere, any age. Saddam Husein and Osama Bin Laden are dead, decisive battles have been won, but the enemy secretly relocates, changes tactics and the war continues.
- We live now in constant fear. There is an underlying feeling of uncertainty. We can never let down our guard. The battle is no longer over there—it is

right here. We know something could happen even in good ol' West Texas.

No one is immune to violence.

- We are more aware how fragile life and freedom really are.

To fully appreciate how life has changed since 9/11 we need to remember what life was like before 9/11. We were living in a time of unprecedented prosperity in America. Things that were once considered a luxury, were now considered necessities. Life was good for the majority of people. We had a sense of security. Nothing major could happen in USA. We viewed our military as the best in the world. The Berlin Wall was torn down. The Soviet Union had collapsed. The Cold War was over. We had a smug feeling of superiority. Democracy and capitalism had prevailed over socialism and communism. We were the most benevolent nation on earth. Whenever there was a natural disaster or famine anywhere in the world, we sent billions of dollars in aid. We were taking care of the world.

Jeremiah's words aptly describe America before 9/11. We boasted of our wisdom. We boasted of our strength. And we boasted of our riches. When the towers fell, our false sense of security fell with them. We were vulnerable to violence, destruction and fear. Reliance upon our own strength and resources were no longer adequate to protect us from harm. We had to face the reality of living in a dangerous world over which we have no control. Our illusions of the power of strength, wisdom and wealth vanished. Jeremiah goes on to tell us that is something good. When our false sense of security is gone, it causes to look to the One who alone can provide security and peace.

Jeremiah warns us not to boast about our own resources, but to boast in this: understanding and knowing God. When we know the heart of God we know that he is working in the world to bring kindness, righteousness and justice. Jeremiah reminds us

that the most important thing in life is to know God. When we are rich and secure, we have a tendency to think that we do not need God. We can handle anything.

Wess Stafford, President of Compassion International, met a pastor in Ethiopia during the mid-'80s when a communist regime ruled the country. Because this pastor preached the gospel at funerals, he was beaten regularly by communist soldiers and told not to mention the name of Jesus Christ. He continued to proclaim Jesus. Finally they threw him into prison where he preached to the prisoners. The only way to silence him was to execute him. They planned to electrocute him in the public square to make an example of him and to intimidate other Christians. Having no electric chair, they forced him to kneel in the dirt and wrapped bare electric wires around his wrists. They threw the switch. Sparks flew and fuses blew out all over town. When the smoked cleared, he was still alive. Infuriated the soldiers threw him back into prison and ordered the electrician to fix the problem. That night he preached again to the prisoners. The next morning they forced him to kneel in the dirt, wrapped the bare wires around his wrists and threw the switch. Sparks flew and fuses blew out all over town. He was still alive. The soldiers, told him to leave. They did not know how to respond.

Wess Stafford stood in the road when this pastor walked slowly and painfully up the hill to his home village. Wess said to him, "I want you to know that thousands of Christians in America are aware of the persecution here and are praying for you." The pastor said, "When you return tell them thank you. And tell them we are praying for America." Wess asked, "What do you pray for America?"

The pastor replied, "Our suffering is severe. It is awful. But nowhere near your suffering." Wess said, "What do you mean?" The pastor replied, "Here in Ethiopia with this terrible persecution we pray all day long. We need God if we are going to make it to sunset. I've heard in America it is possible for a Christian to go all day without praying. In

fact, I've heard that some can go a whole week without praying. Is that true?" "I'm afraid so," Wess replied.

"Here we risk our lives to pray and worship together. We need each other. We hide in ravines in the middle of the night when there is no moon to worship together. But I hear that in America there is a church on every corner. You can worship freely with no one barging in to beat you and carry you off to prison. Yet Christians choose to go on a picnic rather than to worship to God. Is that true?" "Yes, I'm afraid so."

"In our church we had only one Bible. Afraid the communists might destroy it at anytime, I tore it up and gave pages to each person. They memorized those pages. When I am preaching, I ask, 'Who has Isaiah 58?' Someone stands up in the dark and quotes Isaiah 58. Yet I hear in America some Christians have several Bibles but do open them for days or weeks. Is that true?"

"Stop it!" Wess said, "You are so right. Our suffering is greater than yours because we think we can live without God."

9/11 reveals to us our need to depend upon God. Our nation has declared its independence from God. We can no longer say we are One Nation under God! God uses experiences like 9/11, economic collapses, and natural disasters to turn our hearts back to him. He does not cause those experiences, but he uses them. Knowing him is what gives our lives security and peace even in the midst of violence and terrorism. When we know him, his perfect love casts out all our fear. We can live life with abandon and joy. We know there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Absolutely nothing.

Tragedies like 9/11 bring stunning clarity about what matters and what does not. They bring stunning clarity to what lasts and what can be lost in an instant. Following 9/11, government officials at all levels urged us to get back to life as normal or the

terrorists have won. If we let them disrupt our lives, then they win. What the government officials were really saying was: get back on the airplanes and spend money or our economy is in danger.

I would say, "Don't let fear rule your life or the terrorists have won." But I would avoid saying, "Get back to normal," if by normal we mean a dependence upon material things to give us a sense of security. If we go back to the normal, then Satan has won.

It is so easy to drift back to normal. After a loved one dies or we have a health scare, we vow to focus on the relationships that are important to us. We vow to not allow activities and work to rob us of time with those who matter to us most. After awhile, we drift back to normal and neglect those persons that matter.

I just returned from seeing terrible suffering in Africa: disease, poverty, malnutrition. I have promised myself I will not forget what I experienced. I am resolved that we need to make a difference in the world and help alleviate these evils that destroy God's children. But the longer I'm back, the easier it is to forget and drift back to normal.

Today is a day to remember the danger of drifting back to normal—to life prior to 9/11. We need to remember so that we recapture the stunning clarity about what matters and what does not; about what lasts and what does not.

One of the words used most often in scripture is "remember". It occurs 237 times. God wants us to "remember" so that we maintain clarity about what matters.

In the wake of 9/11 we need to remember:

God alone is certain. God alone is faithful. God alone is dependable. He alone can make these promises and keep them: "I will never leave you or forsake you." "I am with always." We can lose every other relationship in our lives, but we will always have him. He is always there for us. He is always there to offer his love, forgiveness and new

beginnings. He is always there to give us comfort and strength. He alone is eternal.

Everything else in our lives is temporary and can be lost.

Remember that knowing God is the only thing that matters. Our highest priority is to know him. How do you get to know God? It begins with an invitation. You ask him to come and live in your heart. You ask him to take control of your life. Then you spend time with him. The way you spend time with him is through worship both corporately and privately. You read his word. You pray. You gather with others who want to know him. You participate in one of our spiritual growth groups or Sunday school.

As you get to know him, you get to know his heart for kindness, justice and righteousness. You join with him in bringing those things into a world of violence, hatred and evil. You live your life each day in light of those things that really matter.

It is so easy to drift back to normal—to a life of comfort, depending upon ourselves and our own resources to deal with life. But it just takes one crisis like 9/11 to jolt us back to reality. My hope for you and me today, is that we don't have to wait for the next jolt. My hope is that today we will remember the stunning clarity that we had after 9/11 and that remembering will drive us to the feet of Jesus Christ to get to know him and love him.

What will you choose to remember?

Directed prayer: