

HOPE Amid Crisis

Terrorist attacks sent Americans to their knees to find mercy and comfort on September 11. Are we ready to hear what God is saying to us through this tragedy?

After we saw the charred rubble of the World Trade Center, read the casualty lists and listened to horrific tales from survivors of the September 11 terrorist attack, Americans fell to their knees and prayed. We gathered in the National Cathedral, in city parks, on sidewalks and in office buildings to ask God to bless America.

We asked Him to calm our fears. We asked Him to comfort those in mourning.

And many of us dared to ask why.

Why did so many people have to suffocate when they found themselves trapped in burning skyscrapers? Why did children and schoolteachers have to find themselves on a hijacked plane headed for the Pentagon? Why did so many children in New York and Washington have to lose their mothers and fathers on that dark day?

Charisma asked several respected Christian leaders to help us put this tragedy in perspective. Although these leaders don't all agree, we think their viewpoints can help us develop God's heart as we seek to minister His love to all who have been shaken by this crisis.

Charisma: Some Christians view the Sept. 11 terrorist attack as God's judgment on the United States. Do you see it that way?

Jack Hayford: This terrorist attack on our nation calls believers to identify with the brokenness and pain present among those impacted. We should not seize this as a platform to issue self-righteous denunciations of sin.

Yes, sin does reap a bitter harvest. Yes, America is a sinful nation. But, no, I don't believe God slashed New York and Washington apart in order to get even with America.

I hold no casual attitude toward sin. But I fear some sincere believers hold too casual an attitude toward God's mercy—especially at times when people need to hear of it from those who have tasted of His love.

David Greco: I live in New York City, and I have walked among the ruins of the World Trade Center. I have watched the firemen remove the dead bodies. I have smelled the aroma of death. This is not the judgment of God.

If God were sending judgment on this nation, it would be much more severe than what we have experienced in this crisis. God has permitted this. But why? Why does God permit men to do evil? Why did God permit terrorists to infiltrate our airports, take those planes and crash them into buildings filled with innocent people?

I believe God has permitted this tragedy so that the city of New York, our nation and all mankind might understand that we are capable of doing evil—and that the only solution is to turn to God.

Lou Engle: I don't believe these attacks can be blamed on God.

He is not a destroyer of innocent life. He is a weeping God.

However, I believe His voice can be heard amid the rubble in New York City. “‘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, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows Me’” [see Jer. 9:23]. Our towers of riches [the World Trade Center] and the fortress of our might [the Pentagon] have been struck. This is a day of humility and weakness. This is not a time to boast of our strength.

Cindy Jacobs: If you ask whether I think the work done by terrorists was from God, the answer would have to be no. But I believe the walls are down around the United States because of our sin, and as a result, the Lord’s hand of protection has been removed from the country for a season. But this doesn’t mean we cannot change this through repentance and prayer.

Francis Frangipane: This attack was not God’s judgment any more than Japan’s attack at Pearl Harbor was divine wrath. At that time, the Lord needed to awaken American passion to crush the Japanese and German war machines. Today, He needs us to halt Islamic extremists.

America is the only nation that can unite the non-Muslim and moderate Muslim nations against the enemy. The Lord’s goal is to keep the world open for the gospel. Also, our defense of Israel has particularly inflamed the terrorists.

What about God’s promise that those who bless Israel would be blessed? Let’s remember that the Lord also promises that He will cause our enemies to “flee before you seven ways” [see Deut. 28:7]. The Lord doesn’t say our enemies will never

strike. His promise is that, when they attack, they will be utterly routed, and in the place of the attack will be a sevenfold blessing.

Jonathan Bernis: I do not view this as God's judgment on America. This terrorist act should wake up Christians to the diabolical spirit of fanatical Islam. Israel lives constantly with these horrors, and I am hopeful that this nightmare will help us understand what they face every day. These Islamic extremists are madmen who practice jihad ["holy war"] and have no regard for human life.

It would be a profound mistake, however, to blame all Arabs or Muslims for this attack. Many Muslims are sincere, peace-loving people, and many Arabs are actually Christians.

Alice Smith: Our merciful God desires to exalt nations, not judge them. But when a nation knowingly chooses to disregard God's promises and push Him out of its schools, government and homes, it opts to remove itself from His protection. That nation earns the wages of its sin, which is death—and exposes itself to the work of Satan.

Our gracious, heavenly Father has not been waiting for an opportunity to inflict pain on us. He's been waiting for us to return to Him. I trust that as a result of this assault, we will.

Eddie Long: This attack is a mark in time that has changed America permanently. Life as we knew it before has ended, and we've now moved into another dimension. But all is not lost. God is still God; He is still on His throne, and history shows that tragedy always births something great.

Rob Stearns: I believe this attack is many things. It is the manifestation of the anti-Semitic, anti-Christ spirit that is prevailing right now in the earth. It is the judgment that results when holy passion, prayerful humility and authentic biblical spirituality are not diligently maintained in God's house. It is the mercy of God, sending a wake-up call to Christians to arise to a spiritual war that has been raging for some time.

The hijackers who committed suicide on September 11 were not waging a political or economic war. They were waging a war of worship. They saw their sacrifice as the ultimate act of worship. This is ultimately a war over who will be worshiped in the hearts of men, and who will be worshiped in Jerusalem.

Kirbyjon Caldwell: After the terrorist attacks, my wife said to me: "If you are going to be angry, don't be angry with Osama bin Laden. He was simply fulfilling a demonic mission as an agent of the devil. If you are going to be angry, then be angry at the church! The church has failed to exercise the power and authority given by God in Jesus name!"

I agree 100 percent. Jesus did not die on the cross so that Islam could become the fastest growing religion in the world. We are missing the mark.

Unlike John Wesley, the church does not view the world as its parish. If the church had truly prayed and operated in Holy Spirit-endued power and authority, then the possibility of a surprise attack by terrorists may have been lowered.

We must take some responsibility. We need to repent, seek

forgiveness and begin operating in our scriptural authority.

Charisma: Has the Lord spoken anything to you about the tragedy that would provide comfort or insight to American Christians who may be struggling to understand what is happening?

Jack Hayford: We need to make it clear that this attack was an act of man, not an act of God. The error that blames God for everything that happens in this world, or the old idea that suggests, "Well, at least God 'permitted' it, so it is His will," betrays a fundamental fact of Scripture: God's sovereign will is that human beings have a free will.

What a person or group does with that freedom of choice does not reflect His will unless they choose to come under the government of His will. So, God has not been passively absent about this occurrence, any more than He has been actively angry. But He is redemptively present—and He is abundantly ready to move in power, grace and mercy, as well as in providential vengeance.

Alice Smith: Four years ago the Lord spoke to me and my husband about a coming national transformation. He said: "I will not bring revival on top of what you have. I will replace it. Revival will be served to you on a platter of ruin."

Reza Safa: The condition of the church in America has been a great concern to me. We are facing a strong spiritual anti-Christ force that will be overcome by someone stronger [see Luke 11: 22]. Unless we have a stronger zeal for our Lord than these Muslims have for their god, we will not be able to overcome that spirit.

This tragedy can turn our hearts toward God. We need to humble ourselves before God, seek His face and pray. He has promised to heal our land if we make a U-turn toward Him. He can turn this situation around, and we can experience a great revival—not only in this land, but also among fanatical Muslims. Instead of us fearing them, we will win them for God.

Eddie Long: What happened on September 11 did not destroy this nation. It woke up this nation. These times drive us to grow up in Christ.

Bill Bright: When you come in late to see a movie, the plot makes little sense. But God knows the beginning and the end. He knows what has happened, and it all makes perfect sense to Him. Although we saw what happened to the World Trade Center and to the Pentagon, we only saw a few frames of something that is part of a much larger picture.

We should not fear just because we cannot see the big picture. God sees it. God is in control. And He is working out His marvelous plan in our world—a plan that includes both the good and the bad. We can trust Him.

Doug Stringer: In the last 20 years, the Lord has spoken that America will come to her knees by judgment or by choice. For quite some time the Lord has been exhorting us to prepare for difficult times. He's warned us to "prepare an ark." We should prepare our hearts to receive those who are devastated to come into the church.

God is saying we cannot return to business as usual. He's been

preparing us for a time such as this. There will be harvest like we've never seen.

Charisma: Is there a particular Scripture that you believe is applicable to this situation right now?

Alice Smith: Proverbs 20:18 says, "Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance." We need to pray that God will speak to President Bush about this situation. Godly advisers can offer a great deal of help, but President Bush will walk in greater confidence if he gets a direct word from God about this situation.

And remember that even if President Bush doesn't do what you want him to do, support him in prayer anyway. Leadership is difficult. When directing military conflict becomes part of leading a nation, the pressure is immense.

Rob Stearns: Hebrews 12:26 tells us that everything that can be shaken will be shaken. Everything that has been built on a foundation other than Christ Jesus will not stand in this day. Many of us are being surprised at how many areas in our lives are vulnerable to this shaking, simply because they have not been tested up until now. We should not try to resist, ignore or minimize this shaking. Though painful, it is ultimately for our good and ultimately the answer to our deepest prayers for Christlikeness.

Cindy Jacobs: The tragedy happened on September 11, which is 9-1-1. We could say it was "a 911 crisis situation"—so we need to cling to Psalm 91:1: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty."

Lou Engle: I have been claiming Isaiah 30:25, "There will be on every high mountain and on every high hill rivers and streams of waters, in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall."

In 1857, when the stock market crashed, a man named Jeremiah Lanphier called for a prayer meeting in New York City. Only six people came, but within months, tens of thousands were praying all over the nation. Portland, Oregon, and Denver shut down at noon for prayer and a million souls were swept into the kingdom during what was called the great Prayer Meeting Revival. I am believing that after the towers have fallen, a massive swell of prayer will arise to heaven and a third great awakening will be unleashed.

Bill Bright: I am reminded of the powerful call given in Nehemiah 1:3-6. When Nehemiah heard about the state of his beloved Jerusalem, he mourned, and then fasted and prayed, confessing the sins of his people before his sovereign, righteous God.

We have all seen hundreds of images of America, and indeed the entire world, in mourning. What we must now do is follow the example of Nehemiah, who also fasted and prayed for his nation. It was only then that the Lord gave him a strategy to go to work for restoration. I believe it is vital that the body of Christ do the same and see this as an unprecedented opportunity to minister to America in a massive, unified way.

Charisma: How have you been directing people to pray as a result of the events of September 11?

David Greco: In recent years, especially in Latin America, I

have seen the burden in the hearts of young missionaries who want to preach the gospel to Muslim nations. I believe that this zeal in the church has shaken the kingdom of darkness, and Satan has responded.

Muslim extremists have attacked in terror so that the rest of the world will react with violence. This conflict, if it is not conducted with great justice and care, will thwart the purpose of reaching Muslims. Instead of the gospel, the rest of the world will send bombs and destruction—as in the days of the medieval Crusades.

Let us pray that the purpose of God for the Muslim world is not thwarted. Let us pray that God guides our president and our military leaders to be wise and just.

Cindy Jacobs: We need to pray for wisdom for President Bush, his Cabinet and the Congress. Things are so volatile that we could spark World War III. I do not believe the Lord wants us drawn into a world war. His will is that the terrorists be flushed out in a supernatural way. He can show our leaders how to do this.

Alice Smith: The Lord is answering our prayers for revival. He's just not answering us the way we had expected. So let's keep our focus for a national spiritual awakening. Pray big prayers, not according to your problems but according to His purposes. Problem-based praying identifies problems. Purpose-centered praying forms requests in line with God's activity.

No doubt God's plan for the United States is "that none should perish, but all should come to repentance" [see 2 Pet. 3:9].

When we stretch out our faith and agree with God for what is on His heart for our nation, He will answer.

Eddie Long: This may not be a popular statement to make, but we must pray for our enemies and for those who would use and abuse us.

Jack Hayford: So many believers wonder: "Is it right to want to see retribution on those who did these things?" Because the Bible says vengeance belongs to God alone [see Ps. 94:1], some mistakenly suppose that this disallows human retribution. But Romans 1-4 reveals that God wills human government as "His ministers" for executing wrath and judgment upon evil.

Therefore, knowing that the church has an intercessory role for government [see 1 Tim. 2:1-3], we must pray for success in finding and executing the perpetrators of this recent evil.

Lou Engle: We must pray against this cycle of retaliation that can erupt into world war. President Bush must seek God to know His ways. There is no natural wisdom that can defeat an unseen enemy.

We are praying that the church will enter into the highest realms of prophetic wisdom and intercessory power. That can expose schemes of evil, and avert war and destruction.

Francis Frangipane: I believe that because of this event there will be a great exodus of souls from Islam. The despicableness of these events will cause many moderate and reasonable Muslims to be deeply ashamed, and they will flee Islam. Thus we need to pray for the Arab community and reach out to them

during this time. They will undoubtedly expect rejection and receive persecution, but let us determine to reveal Christ to them.

I am standing in faith that for every American who died in this assault, 100,000 Muslims will turn to Christ and be saved. My prayer is that they, in turn, will eventually lead countless millions to the Lord.

God at Ground Zero

Pastor Chris Blake and a group of volunteers were able to help dozens of children in New York city after tragedy struck.

You couldn't see the World Trade Center from Chris Blake's office. But on September 11, 2001, when terrorists turned the twin towers into rubble, Chris saw up close the worst pain the tragedy brought.

Blake's Metro Relief Fund—partnering with Bill Wilson's Metro Ministries—focuses on needy children in Brooklyn, New York, just across the East River. On that fateful Tuesday evening, many mothers didn't come home from work. Blake and other volunteers found themselves holding distraught children, organizing searches and, days later, organizing funerals.

The hole in those children's hearts and lives were no smaller than the one in Manhattan. Yet the workers were few and far from TV cameras.

Blake, 36, came to Christ through the influence of Wilson and

has worked in the city for 19 years. He started Metro Relief Fund in June 2000 as a companion ministry to Wilson's—in order to meet inner-city needs when a crisis hit.

But Blake never imagined a crisis of this magnitude would strike so close to home. Within hours of the attack, he was near the Trade Center site looking for missing mothers.

The bright spot, Blake said, was when some nurses found “Anna,” a 20-year-old secretary who was raising three young children by herself. “She was working on the 10th floor of tower No. 1 when the first plane hit. Her boss told them not to leave the building, but without a word she stood up and walked to the staircase and made her way down. Seconds after she walked out of the building, it crashed behind her.”

Thirty-six hours later, nurses found her speechless and in shock. She didn't even remember her name. “But she was our miracle, our reason to keep looking,” Blake told Charisma.

Blake and other area clergy worked around the clock during the days that followed. They looked under cars, under benches, anywhere for survivors. They also took food to victims' families and arranged for emergency childcare. Armed with Scripture portions donated by the American Bible Society, the team took their colorful “sidewalk Sunday school” trucks to five locations in the city, where they gave people candles and flowers.

“We were mobbed with people hungry to talk to someone,” Blake said. “They were desperate for prayer. Every time we started a prayer circle it would grow from two or three to dozens. One circle grew to more than a hundred at the Brooklyn Promenade.

“And when the day was over, I left ground zero and rode the subway back to Brooklyn to the children I have been trying to teach about Jesus. And I told them I still had not found their moms.”

Metro Relief Fund is prepared to be there for these children for years if necessary. “I want them to know Jesus, but before they can even receive His love they must heal. We will be there for them. They will not be hungry. They will not be alone. They will know they are loved,” he vowed.

Blake has prepared an illustrated booklet to help kids deal with the tragedy of terrorism. Metro Relief Fund will distribute it not only to the 20,000 children who attend Bill Wilson’s weekly Metro Ministries Sunday school, but also to anyone who requests it free of charge.

—Mary Hutchinson in New York City

To receive a booklet, call (888) MERCY77. Charisma is helping victims of this tragedy. Send tax-deductible gifts to Christian Life Missions, “September 11 Relief Fund,” P.O. Box 952248, Lake Mary, FL 32795-2248.