

Answer the Wake-Up Call

September 11 was a major turning point in America. We all will remember where we were and what we were doing when we heard the news of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. It was a time of great pain for those whose friends, relatives and co-workers died at the hands of the enemy. Indeed, the nation as a whole was stunned with grief.

Just hours before, the United States stood at odds politically, socially and economically. But within moments we were thrust into a common unity. We were hurt, angry and fearful. We contemplated the injustice of it all. We united to protect our freedom and liberty.

On one of the worst days in American history, we were indivisible.

God mourned our loss alongside the nation. Parents had lost children, and children had lost parents. Wives and husbands would no longer have the opportunity to say that one last, "I'm sorry." Children wouldn't be able to recant that last hurtful word said to a parent. Sisters and brothers would never have the chance to make up for sibling rivalries.

That night, America would weep not only for what was lost, but also for what would never be reclaimed. No longer would we be able to sit by complacently and consider the state of our world, the state of our country, the state of our families and the state of our lives without thinking about how quickly all that we hold dear could be extinguished.

No one worried that they hadn't spent enough time at work or tracking their investments. We were preoccupied with thoughts of the eternal and the spiritual. We mourned.

Yet despite its horror, the terrorist attack brought an end that I and other ministers have spent decades praying for. In their shock and grief, Americans fell to their knees.

President Bush called a national day of prayer and reflection. The U.S. Congress called the nation to prayer. Governors throughout the land called us to prayer. Mayors in most American cities called for prayer. Even the so-called liberal media and most other branches of society called for special prayer.

And as a nation we prayed fervent, heartfelt, God-touching prayers. Thousands gathered for memorials and vigils and asked God to protect the nation. Hearing someone say, "God bless America," became as common as hearing, "Have a nice day."

Finally God's people, called by His name, had humbled themselves to pray, and He began healing hurts, lifting pain, quieting sorrow and offering hope (see 2 Chr. 7:14).

Christians and non-Christians alike were forced to dig deep inside themselves and ask the hard questions: "If I had died in one of those explosions, where would I be? Heaven or hell?"; "Is the life I have been living the one God would have me live?"; "Am I fulfilling God's destiny for my life?"; "Where does my treasure lie? In His kingdom or in my own selfish motives?"

Time and again during this tragic season, these questions and many more have surfaced—and they should, but not just during times of desperation. Every day we should be searching our lives, rooting out our sins and coming closer to our God. We should be taking a constant inventory of our lifestyles, attitudes, language, behavior, prayer life, worship, and even our serving and giving. We don't know the hour when death will come (see Jer. 9:21).

The church and the nation have received a wake-up call. As a people, we need to seriously evaluate our lives. It's time to get serious about God. We must stop driving by the church on our way to the golf course or the football game. We must stop picking and choosing which passages of Scripture to believe.

We have mistaken God's outpouring of love, grace and mercy for acceptance of our determination to live life our own way—and we think we've gotten away with it. We who deserve nothing but are recipients of so much must find the path back to Him as individuals and as a people. We must truly become one nation under God.