

Max Lucado Reflects on 9/11: Evil, God, Good

Sept. 11, 2001, has become a day of remembrance for the many trials we have endured as a nation over the past decade. The continued fears and anxiety created by ongoing terror threats have become, if not normal, an ever-present stressor. We wonder if we'll ever be free of that sense of unease in our daily lives.

The Boston bombing served as a reminder of this new reality. Violence continues to tear at our country from within—the mass shootings in Arizona, Colorado and at Sandy Hook and natural disasters like Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Sandy, and other destructive forces have scarred our land and our people. The unthinkable stories of the innocent victims and instant heroes in these situations have seared our consciousness, leaving us reeling with grief and yet searching for hope in even these dark times.

We are weary. We wonder: Will we get through these turbulent times? So I'll tell you what I tell those in my church who face hard times: You'll get through this. It won't be painless. It won't be quick. But God will use this mess for good. In the meantime, don't be foolish or naive. But don't despair either. With God's help, you will get through this.

Audacious of me, right? How dare I say such words in the face of evil? Where did I get the nerve to speak such a promise into tragedy? In a pit, actually. A deep, dark pit. So steep the boy could not climb out. Had he been able to, his brothers would have shoved him back down. They were the ones who had thrown him in. The Bible's story of Joseph reveals that even when life hits us with multiple blows, with God's help we will overcome.

Joseph didn't see this assault coming. He didn't climb out of bed that morning and think, *I'd better dress in padded clothing because this is the day I get tossed into a hole*. The attack caught him off guard. So will the attacks that surprise Americans this year. Joseph's attack came in the form of a cistern. But yours may come in the form of a diagnosis, a foster home or a traumatic injury. Joseph was thrown into a hole and despised. And you? Thrown into an unemployment line and forgotten. Thrown into a divorce and abandoned, into a bed and abused. The pit. Life is reduced to one quest: Get out and never be hurt again. Not simply done.

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Joseph's story gets worse before it gets better. Yet he never gave up. Neither did Jennifer Sands, who lost her husband when the twin towers fell. She was in a dark pit that first Christmas after 9/11, her heart broken as she trudged through the mall. But she dropped a dollar into the red Salvation Army kettle and received a card in exchange for her gift. She collapsed wearily into her car and read the card to find distraction from her heart's pain. It bore a picture of the American flag, a silhouette of the towers bearing the words "9-11-01-We Will Not Forget You" and this Scripture verse: "For I know the plans I have for you ... plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11, NIV).

Sands recalls, "It was the first time in my life—ever—that I had taken notice of a Bible verse. Sure, I had seen Bible verses before ... but I never paid attention to them. The words *hope* and *future* jumped out at me. More importantly, it seemed like God Himself had just broken the silence and spoken to me. Because of that verse, I opened the Bible for the first time in my life and started reading it. That Scripture verse changed things."

The stories of Jennifer Sands, Joseph and a thousand others assure us that what Satan intends for evil, God uses for good. That's why, on a day like Sept. 11, we should gather and remember that intended evil can become eventual good. Joseph faced a famine in his day, and he focused all his efforts on bringing life and nourishment to all. Today we face a famine of hope. As God's people, let's dispense courage and sustenance to our generation, offering a plan and a story of God's help and goodness.

That's how I plan to spend 9/11 this year. My friends at the Salvation Army in New York City and I will host a beautiful service of hope and remembrance. Our goal is simple—to remember that God is for us, and with His help, we'll get through this. {eoa}

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*More than 100 million readers have found comfort in the writings of **Max Lucado**. He ministers at Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, Texas, where he lives with his wife, Denalyn, and a sweet but misbehaving mutt, Andy.*