

What Is American Patriotism?

Sept. 11 has become known as **Patriot Day**, a day for remembering all those who were impacted, injured or who lost their lives during the tragic terrorist attacks against the U.S. on Sept. 11, 2001.

(Note: Patriot Day is different from Patriots' Day, a holiday observed in both Massachusetts & Maine on the third Monday of April to commemorate the battles of Lexington and Concord fought near Boston in 1775.)

The events of that fateful September morning left an indelible imprint in the hearts and minds of our nation's citizens. Nearly every nation was impacted that day. In many ways, the whole world will never be the same.

Amidst the heart-wrenching stories that emerged from **9/11**, there also emerged stories of great heroism: the valiant firemen, policemen, rescue workers and citizens who rushed to rescue the victims, many of them losing their own lives in the process of trying to save others. Although the fates of many were sealed as the towers collapsed, rescue workers labored for days in the faint hope of finding some of their brethren alive beneath the chaos and rubble. The passengers on Flight 93 made a conscious decision to give their lives in a crashing plane in order to spare the lives of many.

Blood donors from around the nation responded to the call on 9/11, mirroring the greatest act of love ever—**Jesus Christ**, who gave His own blood so that we might live. He was also the greatest of firemen, giving His own life to rescue perishing humanity. Each of these public servants, volunteers and everyday citizens who responded became modern day heroes—patriots.

What is a Patriot?

What is a patriot? One definition of the word states that a

patriot is someone who feels strong support and is a strong defender of and for his or her country. There have been patriots throughout our history, dating back to the birth of our nation, who defended not only our land, but the values and freedoms we hold dear. But what happens when those values and freedoms, the very foundation of our nation, begin to erode beneath our feet?

When I was a boy living in National City, Calif., just outside of San Diego, our school was invited by the American Legion to enter a contest by submitting an essay titled "What is American Patriotism?" This was during the Vietnam War when the country was divided and many were questioning what true **patriotism** was. To my amazement and the astonishment of others, when the winner for the essay contest was announced during our school assembly, my name was called. Imagine—an Asian-American of Japanese descent receiving a gold medal for an essay on American Patriotism.

For Love of Country

To this day, when I travel to various nations and go through immigration, some of the agents look at me, then my passport, then back at me. I jokingly say something like, "I know. How does someone with an American-sounding name look so Asian?" I usually have to explain that I was born to a Japanese mother and a father who was stationed in Japan in the U.S. Navy.

Years after coming to the U.S., my mother became a naturalized citizen. She was so proud to become an American! After her citizenship ceremony, she received a small U.S. flag fitted into a Pledge of Allegiance table tent-type card. She proudly set it upon our television set where it remained for many years. Although she suffered through the tragedies of World War II as a child in Japan, she understood the great value placed upon being a U.S. citizen. She loved this country, as do I.

It is because of my love for our country that I grieve for the

tragic and dangerous state our culture is in today. It pains me to see how far we have digressed from our foundations and the amount of disregard we have for the freedoms and liberties we have enjoyed. Let me say that I do not believe we must always be in agreement to be patriotic, but I do believe we should show respect and honor to those who give of themselves to serve and protect us. All of us are beneficiaries of the many sacrifices made, price paid, and foundations laid for us to build upon.

The freedoms and liberties we so enjoy in the United States of America did not and do not come cheaply. There is a high cost of freedom. I remember when my stepfather was stationed at the Oak Harbor Naval Air Station on Whidbey Island in Washington state, there was a large billboard just outside the base that read, "Pardon the Noise, it's the sound of Freedom!"

Today, there are symbolic signs, sirens and alarms that are screaming a resounding cry of the state of our nation. Just a glance at the daily news reveals to us just how volatile things are and that there is a battle for the soul of America and for a generation. We are looking for a sense of patriotism, but the foundation our patriotism was built on is faltering.

Removing God from Public Display

A few years ago, I had the pleasure of meeting and ministering with Stephen Tchividjian, the eldest grandson of **Billy Graham**. One of the things I remember Stephen saying was, "Rules without relationship leads to rebellion." This explains what we see happening more and more in our nation today, as those who have no relationship with the God of the Commandments have rebelled to the point of opposing any representation of Him in the public arena.

Statistics say the majority of Americans are favorable to public displays of the Ten Commandments, nativity scenes and other Christian themes. But it seems there is a minority who

are proactively using the letter of the law to coerce the majority to cower to the beliefs of the few, banning any mention of God in public.

Just the other night during the **Democratic National Convention**, there was a vote to reinstate God into their party platform because He had been removed. It took three different votes to pass the measure, but even the third time, there was much dissension. Who ever thought there'd be a struggle in our nation to reinstate God?

Wow! The good news is that it doesn't take God three times to force a consensus to reinstate us into His platform. Our triune Holy God is already in agreement with Himself. No confusion there. The tragic removal of God from the public arena has been seen in many places in various ways.

In 2004, a judge ruled that a Bible had to be removed from a public display on the courthouse lawn in downtown Houston honoring industrialist William Mosher. Mosher was honored with a small lighted display case in front of the courthouse for his contributions to the Star of Hope Mission, which has served thousands of homeless, desperate and destitute individuals and families in the city of Houston throughout the years.

The display, which is maintained by private funds and individual citizens, included a King James Bible, honoring Mosher's faith and love for the Lord, which compelled him to do the work of ministry to others. A judge in 2004 ruled that the Bible must be removed from the display after an individual complained that a Bible displayed on public property was unconstitutional.

Only last year, at the Veteran's National Cemetery in Houston, one rogue director censored the language of pastors and chaplains saying that they could not mention God during funerals for veterans. How outrageous! I shudder when I think

about how many men and women buried there were people of faith who gave their very lives to defend our freedoms—including the freedom of faith which was now being stripped from them in their final resting place. My grandfather and biological father are both buried in that very cemetery, having served this nation proudly. In fact, both my father and stepfather died of military-related cancers.

Despite these examples and the erosion of the values and freedoms we hold dear, I believe the heart of the nation remains patriotic, not just those who give their lives on foreign shores, but the many unsung heroes as well—teachers, doctors, nurses, pastors and other community leaders, who serve just because they love their country. Jesus said true greatness is in serving others (Matt. 23:11). I can think of many friends who serve by washing the feet of others every day.

These are the ones I think of when I think of a patriot.

From Tragedy to Triumph

911 is the phone number we dial in an emergency. Emergencies are typically times of crisis and desperation in which intervention is needed. While many remember 9/11 as a time of great tragedy, crisis and despair, may we take what was meant for harm and turn it for good. It is time for us as patriots to bring a message of hope. We can see tragedies turn into triumphs as we call upon the Lord in our times of crisis. As the words to an old song go, “Jesus is on the mainline, tell Him what you want.” When we call upon Him, He answers with comfort, peace and promise. It’s time for champions and heroes to arise with a message of hope. It’s time to call upon the Lord. Let’s see what God can do when we call His 911.

God’s answer to humanity’s call was never depicted so wonderfully as through the work of the cross and the price Christ paid to rescue us. He answered our 911 call by giving Himself for us. One way we commemorate His perpetual gift of

life is through our devotion and communion with Him. "Do this in remembrance of Me" was the instruction to remember His high cost of love for our freedom. We remember His great act of love and the tragedy by which that love was bestowed on us. His tragedy brought our triumph.

With this in mind, may we also reflect on Sept. 11, 2001. There's something we can do. We can rise up and rescue lives each day. We can be those everyday patriots who demonstrate the love of Christ to our communities, our nation, and around the globe by serving others. Let's give 911 a renewed meaning of hope and challenge. It's time to answer His call.

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