

Where was God on September 11, 2001?

On September 11, 2001, we watched in shock and horror as the worst terrorist attack in the history of the United States unfolded before our eyes.

Al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four passenger planes and aimed them at buildings that represented the power and might of America: the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

Nearly 3,000 people lost their lives that day.

The surreal images of planes crashing into buildings and into the ground, of people desperately fleeing for their lives, of thick smoke and dust rising from the ruins of the collapsed towers are forever etched in our minds.

The pain of September 11 will always be with us – a devastating reminder that we live in a fallen world marred by sin, hatred and violence. My thoughts and prayers are with the families who are grieving. In the aftermath of that terrible day, we wrestled with the age-old question: Why does God allow so much evil in the world? Twenty years later, we continue to ask: Where was God on September 11, 2001?

I believe He was where He has always been – with us.

God did not create a world filled with suffering and evil. His was a perfect world, a paradise. Genesis 1:31 (ESV) tells us, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” God created us to love and serve Him and, through Jesus, commanded us to love one another as we love ourselves. But He also gave us free will because love is a choice.

And in our flesh, we took the freedoms God gave us and turned

away from Him. The Bible tells us sin and evil do not come from God but from Satan, and they entered this world when Satan deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Our world is coming to grips with the disorder that's inherent in our fallen universe. We see this disorder in our own suffering and pain, and in those seemingly random events that cause so much anguish in life. Just last month, 13 American soldiers were killed in an attack at the gates of Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul, Afghanistan – another searing reminder that evil still plagues us today like it did on September 11, 2001.

However, we know God has not lost the battle to Satan. John 1:5 (ESV) tells us, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." According to Matthew 25:41 (ESV), God will one day banish all evil "into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

Nobody is immune from suffering. But in John 16:33, Jesus gives us this promise: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace."

This promise should motivate us to do something about the injustice and pain that so pervade this world. Sadly, many people – yes, even Christians – sit on the sidelines and do nothing. I sometimes wonder if we have forgotten how to weep.

I think one thing that's noticeably missing among people today is a deep sense of compassion and empathy for the hurting. One reason for this, I believe, is that we are so inundated through media with news of suffering that it's easy to begin to tune it out.

We must not forget that people who suffer are real people, whether they lost loved ones on September 11, 2001, bear the visible and invisible scars of war or are Afghans trapped under the Taliban's rule. We need to pray and ask God to show us where we can help relieve suffering in this world.

There are times in life when we just have a hard time understanding why. I think about a friend I have who lost a child in a tragic accident. I think about those who are sick and hungry with little hope for relief.

Yet others whom we see as less innocent seem to prosper.

It's in those times when we wonder why we can often feel disheartened or disillusioned with our faith. "If God is good," we ask, "then why would He allow innocent people to suffer like that?" This is a reasonable question provoked by very real emotions. And the truth is, there's an answer – but it may not be one we like to hear.

The world is fallen. Because of that, there will be suffering until Christ returns. And often, others who seem less deserving will prosper. The world will be wrought with injustice until the Justifier returns to bring back order.

So what can we do?

We persevere. We allow suffering and hardship to create a thirst in us for the day when all suffering will end. We wait in anticipation for Christ to usher in His kingdom on earth. We hold on – because help is coming. In the meantime, we provide all the comfort we can to our hurting neighbors because of the hope we have in Christ. {eoa}

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