

Why You Must Look Beyond Feel-Good Spirituality for the Hope You Seek

This week, we commemorated a horrific event in our nation's history. Social media feeds once again overflowed with posts and photos from Sept. 11, 2001—a day that (please excuse the cliché) will live in infamy.

Whether it's 9/11 or another tragedy, personal or national, responses tend to move to two extremes: We either run to God or run away from Him.

We saw it 18 years ago. Some people asked, "Where was God?" almost derisively. As if the tragedy were proof God did not exist. Meanwhile, others recounted how they had a strong sense that God was intimately present, helping them through the worst day of their life.

For a time during and after 9/11, there was a surge in spirituality. Talking about God was suddenly more acceptable in mixed company. Houses of worship were packed as people sought comfort in the midst of confusion. Displaying a spiritual perspective was not just accepted, it was admired and applauded. For a while it was even OK—barely—to include the name of Jesus in conversations, as long as you didn't make any exclusive claims about Him.

But spirituality and Christianity are not the same thing. Spirituality accepts that there is another world—a world we cannot see. That spiritual world contains many ways to god ... and many gods. However, the biblical belief in Jesus Christ as God and Savior is an exclusive belief that says Jesus is the only way.

In fact, Jesus said this about Himself. "I am *the* way, *the*

truth..." (John 14:6, emphasis added). Not one way among many. Not one truth among many. For those who disagree, they are not disagreeing with us, they're disagreeing with Jesus' own words.

So it's not a surprise that the surge in spirituality has dissipated over the past 18 years. After all, feel-good spirituality offers nothing of substance. It's often a composite of beliefs chosen from a wide spectrum of faiths, cobbled together with nothing more than personal preferences.

And once again, Jesus is left outside our culture. A culture desperate for answers to the meaning of life, yet stubbornly running away from the Giver of Life.

Personal preferences make a poor foundation for beliefs about eternity. For your preferences will be different from mine, and mine will be different from the next person. And we can't all be right.

Christians are told it's OK to believe what you want, but only if you acknowledge that Jesus is not the only way. Problem is, if we acknowledge that, then we're no longer followers of Christ. We would become followers of yet another belief system comprised of empty promises. A belief system led by a god of our own making.

So how can we justify a belief in a sovereign God who allows tragedies such as 9/11 to occur? Perhaps a better question to ask is, why does God get blamed for all the bad things that happen, but those same people fail to give Him credit for the good that occurs?

Or why does our culture demand total freedom to do what we want, when we want it, and in the next breath, demand to know why God doesn't intervene and stop all evil from occurring?

Why do tragedies keep coming? It boils down to the reality that this is a broken world and all of us are broken people in

need of a Savior. And it helps me to remember that in light of eternity, our troubles are temporary. The apostle Paul put it this way:

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:17-18, ESV).

This world—on its best day or on its worst day—is not all there is. But this life does give us opportunities in the midst of tragedy. For when people ask, “Where is God?”, we can be the vessels He uses to display His grace and kindness. We can be the ones to meet a need in Jesus’ name. And we can love in a way that gives others a taste of the love their heavenly Father has for them. A love that was willing to provide the way—the *only* way—to restoration, healing, and wholeness.

The darkness of a broken world is the backdrop which allows God’s light and love to shine most brightly. Don’t blame God for tragedies. Be His hands and feet to love people in the midst of their suffering. Give them the answer to their question:

Where was God in the tragedy?

He was right here all along. {eo}

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