

Code Red Alert

September 11 changed everything for most of us. After the World Trade Towers collapsed, what seemed important suddenly lost significance. The carnage in New York and Washington messed with our values and taught us what really matters. We quickly reprioritized.

Americans hoisted flags, gave blood and cried with President Bush for the 7,067 victims. We sang "God Bless America" without a hint of cynicism. On the Sunday after the tragedy, people who only attend church on Christmas and Easter showed up for worship with moist eyes. When we thought about the moms, dads, spouses and fiances who didn't come home from work on that black Tuesday, we held our loved ones closer and counted our blessings.

A feeble Billy Graham reminded the nation that God can heal us even after a disaster of this magnitude. Survivors of the twin towers attack told reporters how Jesus led them through choking smoke and falling debris into the arms of friends or strangers. Even Oprah Winfrey got religion, and she invited gospel musicians CeCe Winans and Donnie McClurkin to preach on her talk show.

In New York, a Vanity Fair editor announced that he wouldn't be featuring celebrities on magazine covers anytime soon. Executives at snooty public relations firms realized that no one really cares about a trivial interview with a big-name star when we are in a national crisis. (Why did it ever matter?) After the Emmy Awards show was postponed, one Hollywood insider said to USA Today: "How can we honestly watch somebody cry because they won a piece of metal?"

As Americans put their lives back together, I hope we Christians will get our priorities in line with God's. So much of what we are doing in the American church is just marching in place—when we need to be advancing into new territory. So much of what we dish out through religious television, and in Christian books, music and magazines, is useless fluff. Now that the alarm has gone off, it's obvious that business-as-usual Christianity is as hollow as it sounds.

Everything has changed now. We are in a war. The noise you hear is a Code Red Alert, and it is warning us that we must adopt wartime priorities:

1. Re-enlist. So many of us were asleep while the devil was plotting destruction. We need all reservists on duty now. If you've been AWOL, find your position again. If you don't have a church, find a healthy one and get your orders.

2. Mobilize the troops for evangelism. One Tennessee pastor I know, Rice Brooks, drove from Nashville to New York City the weekend after the tragedy and has since planted a church near Times Square. His quick response is an example to us all. Americans are open to hearing about God's love right now, but we have to go where they are—and while their hearts are still tender.

3. Get serious about engaging your invisible enemies. The Holy Spirit is serious about penetrating the Islamic world with the gospel of Jesus. I've mobilized a weekly prayer group to focus on the Middle East. I encourage you to seek the Lord for your specific prayer assignment. We need to love and pray for Muslims with the same intensity that those 19 hijackers displayed when they rained their jihad terror from the sky.