

Enough of the Fluff

Allow the fire of this current season to refine you and your message.

When I met Sujo John, the man on *Charisma's* cover this month, I had already heard his amazing testimony of surviving 9/11. But when he shared his gripping story with me face to face in 2006, it was as if he still carried the smell of smoke from those burning skyscrapers. Until I heard about his

experience, the tragedy was just an event I had watched on TV. But when he told me about his narrow escape from the World Trade Center North Tower, and how he led victims to Jesus before they died, I realized how God's mercy was at work under all that melted steel and crushed concrete.

On that dark day, God plucked a young Indian immigrant out of the flames and commissioned him to be an evangelist. I believe Sujo's story carries a profound message for us all.

Sujo had been pursuing the American dream of wealth and success, but on 9/11 he made a major life adjustment. Everything changed when he heard the screams of dying people. Suddenly, in the light of eternity, his materialistic goals seemed pitifully shallow. Amid the coughing, the sirens, the unanswered cell phones and the mangled bodies, Sujo pledged to spend the rest of his life reaching people who don't know Christ.

We all need to make that decision.

I wish I could say that 9/11 woke up America. It is true that church attendance spiked for a few weeks after the tragedy. Now, eight years after the wake-up call sounded, we seem as arrogant and distracted as ever—in spite of the worst economic recession in decades.

The saddest part is that God's people did not learn the lesson of 9/11. Most of our churches today are still lukewarm and anemic. Our testimony is tarnished because of moral failures among our leaders. Our gospel is cheap.

We've abandoned the message of the cross and replaced it with the tasteless pabulum of pep talks and motivational seminars. We focus on what is marketable to the masses and how we can cash in now on God's blessings while people perish around us.

The urgency of evangelism has become a foreign concept. Will it take another 9/11 to jolt us into reality?

More than 100 years ago British revivalist Charles Spurgeon sounded an alarm to an apathetic church in his country. He told them that the chief object of glorifying God was winning souls. His cry was fervent: "We must see souls born unto God. If we do not, our cry should be that of Rachel: 'Give me children, or I die.'"

I am sorry this is not the burden of the American church. We major on minors and preach to the choir, but we have all but forgotten our core message. We must reclaim it out of the fire like my friend Sujo did on 9/11. Perhaps we need to be reminded of the basics of the gospel:

Human beings are sinners. The depravity of man is not a popular doctrine in this selfish age. Tolerance has become the supreme virtue. But people have to be convinced they are filthy before they can see the need for a Savior to wash them clean.

God is just, and He judges sin. When was the last time you heard a sermon about eternal punishment? The soft-sell approach has become the norm. We dare not offend anybody, especially by mentioning that hell is a real place. So we rob the gospel of its power by removing the threat of punishment.

God's love is revealed in Jesus. It was the essence of love

for the Father to give His Son for us. We cannot fathom the depths of that love, but we must try to convey it to a love-starved world.

Jesus provided full atonement. Many people don't respond to our appeals for salvation because we don't fully explain what Jesus did on the cross. We have to make it clear! Salvation is available because Christ did all the work of redemption and said, "It is finished." We can't earn forgiveness, but by simply trusting in His finished work we can receive it freely.

The only hope for our country is a wave of mass conversions. Please ask God to break your heart for lost souls. Allow the fire of this current season to refine you and your message. Let's stop preaching fluff and reclaim the true gospel.

Read J. LEE GRADY's weekly online column at [. Or follow him on Twitter at leegrady.](#)