

How Has America Changed Since 9/11?

Sept. 11, 2001, was a day that changed America forever. Who among us will ever forget the image of those blazing, crumbling towers? Who could forget the gruesome sight of those who jumped to their deaths from the 110-story towers or the images of ash-covered New Yorkers in the streets? Or the days and weeks of sorrow that followed as the death toll climbed during search-and-rescue efforts?

But has America really changed since that day? Or have we too quickly forgotten and gone back to business as usual?

“God please help us!” were the words of many in the wake of 9/11. But let’s take a look at the 10 years since that tragic day.

In September 2001 and during the weeks that followed, Americans turned to God. Church services across the nation hit record attendance numbers as people searched for answers, comfort and peace. But instead of experiencing a spiritual awakening and the fruits of righteousness that could have occurred, we are experiencing a deterioration of life as we knew it 10 years ago. We are seeing God moved more and more out of the public sector of our nation.

In 2003, Judge Roy Moore was removed as Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court for refusing to take down a monument of

the Ten

Commandments from the state courthouse. Shortly after that in Houston, a Bible was removed from a privately maintained display on the lawn of the Civil Courts building. It honored the faith and motivation of one of the city's benefactors, whose organization helps thousands of widows, single mothers, and homeless men and women.

Last year, we saw the opening of the largest late-term abortion clinics in the Western Hemisphere. This year the director of the veteran's cemetery in Houston issued a mandate that the name of God could not be mentioned in military burials at the cemetery.

Marriages continue to fall apart all around us, leaving behind a broken generation of young people, while government leaders in New York and California openly celebrate the legalization of same-sex marriages.

Church leaders have fallen to adultery, immorality and pornography. Those who oppose any expression of Christianity continually harass Christian educators with frivolous lawsuits. Atheist groups even protested The Response prayer meeting held in Houston in August, attempting to prohibit the governor from attending.

"God help us!" we cried in 2001. But on Sept. 11, 2001, prayers were officially banned from the memorial ceremony at Ground Zero.

Shaking, Groaning and Rage

The past 10 years have seen tsunamis, earthquakes, tornadoes, floods and droughts like never before. This year alone, our nation has experienced an unprecedented number of disasters, including one 24-hour period in which over 300 tornadoes were recorded. As the South and Midwest were still reeling from the summer's deadly storms, an earthquake rocked our nation's capital and the East Coast began recovery from Hurricane Irene and resulting floods. And even as I write this, personal friends and their families are fleeing from wildfires here in Texas.

Unemployment rates have steadily remained at all-time highs, thousands of families have been unable to pay for their homes, and white-collar scandals are continually exposed. As a nation and as individuals, our spending is out of control. No institution is exempt from God's shaking, not our government or the economy or even the church.

Asleep From Sorrow

Pastor Jim Garlow from San Diego spoke at Grace Community Church the day after 35,000 individuals (some estimate 44,000 to 50,000) came to Houston's Reliant Stadium to participate in a day of fasting and prayer for our nation. Drawing a spiritual parallel to the natural disasters our nation has experienced, Jim so aptly stated: "Our nation has been experiencing a series of earthquakes—and the church has been sleeping through them."

In Luke 22:45-46, the Bible tell us when Jesus "rose up from

prayer and had come to His disciples, He found them sleeping from sorrow.

And He said, 'Why do you sleep? Rise up lest you fall into temptation.'" That

word *sorrow* means "stress, anxiety, grief." The disciples were overwhelmed with all they were facing. But Jesus told them to stay awake so

they would not enter into temptation. Likewise in the midst of the shaking and

the groanings and raging of nations, we are to stay awake and watchful so all

of these situations can be become an occasion for our testimonies (Luke 21:13).

In 2 Tim. 4, the apostle Paul says to be ready in season and out of season. The Amplified Bible says we are to keep our sense of urgency; to

be at hand, ready, whether the opportunity is favorable or unfavorable,

convenient or inconvenient, welcome or unwelcome. As the late Leonard Ravenhill

once wrote to me: "Let others live on the cutting edge, but you and I should

live on the edge of eternity." There are multitudes upon multitudes in the

valley of decision who need to have what you and I have.

I published an article shortly after the tragedy of 9/11, in which I wrote the answer I had given to national media at the time when asked

if 9/11 was a judgment of God:

"We asked God not to be in our schools, not to be in our public venues, not to be the Lord of our lives any more except in image. Yet we

want to blame God when things like this happen? If you're saying, 'God's not

present, so judgment comes,' then the answer is yes. But the

Bible says sin produces death. It was our choice to ask God not to be in our everyday lives and not to be present in our land. This is not an act of judgment; it's a wake-up call. God is longing to be in the midst of His people again."

Transformation will not come from trusting in our institutions, our political leaders, our banking system, our housing industry or in any other institution. It will not even come from trusting in the institution of the church. It will only come when the church that Christ has established becomes once again the heart of our cities, the heart of the communities, the heart of our nation.

A Revival of Character

Amid the heart-wrenching stories that emerged from 9/11, there also emerged stories of great heroism: the valiant firefighters, police officers, emergency 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. Each of these became modern-day heroes.

There is a battle for the soul of our nation and for the soul of a generation. The only hope is the hope of glory that lives in you and me. Now more than ever we need courageous leaders to give our nation a vision of hope again, a vision of purpose, a vision of destination. We need a revival of character, from the pulpits to the White House and all in between. We need heroes, like those 9/11 firefighters, who are unafraid to lay down their lives and rescue the perishing.

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 the greatest fireman of all, who gave His own life to rescue perishing humanity from hell's flames.

Jesus Christ is our Savior, healer, deliverer and liberator. There is nothing too difficult for Him if He truly is on the throne of our hearts and truly back on the throne of our pulpits in America.

God can do exceedingly beyond all we can think or imagine. May we not look back 10 years from now and say that the harvest is past, the summer has ended and the people still are not saved (Jer. 8:20).

Today is not a time for the church to draw back; it's a time for us to move forward. In the midst of the darkness, God is still calling us to be a city on a hill. Ten years ago on Sept. 11, He gave us a wake-up call—it's time to stop pushing our snooze buttons!

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