

**Patriot Day 9|11 Remembrance
John 15:13
September 11, 2016**

Today is the 15th Anniversary of the terrorist attacks on 9/11, so I want us to mediate on the Horrors on that Day, the Healing from that Day, and the Heroes of that Day. And I would like to direct you to a single verse of Scripture as we begin: John 15:13. Jesus declared: "Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends." Let's pray.

Tuesday, September 11 started out like any other day. Children getting ready to go to school. Parents getting ready for work. Commuters making their way into the office. Employees grabbing a cup of coffee and beginning the days work. And then the unthinkable happened. Everyone here has a "high-definition" memory of what you were doing that day, a day that is burned into the hearts and minds of every American.

I was in Nashville, visiting one of my church members who was about to head into surgery, I was praying for the success of the procedure, when without warning, a nurse burst into the holding room and told us to turn on the TV. Time stood still as we all watched in disbelief at the horrors on that day.

I. HORRORS ON THAT DAY

From what we know, American Flight 11 departed from Boston for Los Angeles at 7:58 AM. However, the plane was hijacked by five radical Islamo-fascists, part of the Al Qaeda network of Jihadists, from a cell of 19 terrorists who ultimately received their marching orders from Osama Bin Laden. These men rushed the cockpit, slit the throats of the pilots with make-shift knives and box-cutters, took over the plane, and headed straight toward New York City.

At 8:45 AM, American Flight 11 crashed into the face of the north tower of the World Trade Center. The jet, filled with fuel for the transcontinental flight, struck at about 20 stories below the top of the 110 story building. The Building shook as if in a quake. Black smoke billowed into the cerulean blue September sky. The images are all burned into our memory. That was the beginning of the Horrors on that Day.

Meanwhile, at 8:12 AM, United Flight 175 departed from Boston, bound for Los Angeles, the terrorists also took over that plane, and at 9:04 AM many who were beginning to watch this unthinkable event unfold witnessed Flight 175 streak into the south tower and a ball of fire blew out the other side.

The people in the towers below and above the crash sites knew that something was horribly wrong. Cell phone lines became jammed as people tried to call out and call in. Those in the Towers began to desperately try to get out. Some made it. But many did not make it. We all gasped when we saw footage of some in the Towers above the crash sites, who felt compelled to jump out of the flaming inferno to their deaths. Others on the ground were killed by falling debris.

At 10:05, the world watched in horror as the South Tower collapsed, instantly taking the lives of those inside and some outside, sending a hurricane gale force blast of debris and dust that blotted out the sun, choked the air and covered everyone and everything in the collapse radius.

Meanwhile, a somewhat similar scenario was playing out in Washington, DC. American Flight 77 pushed back from the gate at Dulles Airport bound for Los Angeles at 8:09 AM. About a half-hour later, it was reported that the plane had been hijacked and was running full throttle toward the White House. At the last moment it turned and exploded into the west wing of the Pentagon at 530 miles per hour. The time was 9:37 AM.

Meanwhile, at 8:42 AM, United Airlines Flight 93 takes off with 37 passengers and seven crew members from Newark, New Jersey bound for San Francisco, following a 40-minute delay due to congested runways. Four hijackers are aboard. Its flight path initially takes it close to the World Trade Center before moving away westward.

At 10:28 AM, the North Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed, and the damage from the twin towers falling caused other surrounding buildings of the World Trade Center to collapse into a ten-story pile of twisted metal, broken glass, and concrete rubble, all of which took even more lives.

At 10:37 AM, United Flight 93, the fourth plane crashed in a field outside the city of Pittsburgh. It's intended target was in Washington, D.C. Early speculation was that the target was the White House. 9/11 Mastermind Kahlid Sheik Mohammed confirmed that the target was the U.S. Capitol Building, the symbol of the seat of our government. But all on board flight 93 perished just as had the passengers on the other three hijacked flights. Just before they crashed, flight attendant Ceecee Lyles, 33 years old, in an answering-machine message to her husband: "Please tell my children that I love them very much. I'm sorry, baby. I wish I could see your face again."¹

All told on September 11th, nearly 3,000 people lost their lives at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in a rural field in Pennsylvania. It was the most devastating attack ever to happen on American soil. We remember the unforgettable images... The burning towers, the horrific collapse, the apocalyptic storm of dust, the anxious families gathered waiting, the vigil candles burning, the notes for the missing, the churches filled with those who were mourning, trying to make sense of the senseless, crying out to God. The unimaginable loss of life speaks to the horrors on that day.

II. HEALING FROM THAT DAY

But secondly, consider the healing from that day. For a brief time, total strangers became friends, there was no black or white, Hispanic or Asian, republican or democrat, liberal or conservative. We were all Americans, and across the nation quiet mourning yielded to a swelling patriotism, with the flag displayed on homes, cars, everywhere. We drew strength from one another and from God to find healing and to face our future together.

For some, the healing was not just emotional, but physical. On September 11, Army Lt. Col. Brian Birdwell watched the television in his boss' office as a second hijacked airplane slammed into the World Trade Center. He had no idea that minutes later madmen would ram a Boeing 757 into the Pentagon, just three windows away from his own office in the outermost ring. At 9:40 a.m. Brian was stepping out of the men's room as a massive explosion hurled him to the floor. Instantly a fireball engulfed him. He could not get to his feet and agonized that he would never again see his wife, Melanie, and 12-year-old son, Matthew. But within seconds, an overhead fire sprinkler showered water on his charred body. Brian stumbled down the hallway and fellow Pentagon workers carried him to safety and to emergency medical care.

Meanwhile, both Mel and Matthew were watching TV and saw the damage to the Pentagon. "I knew right away Brian's office could not have survived that impact," Melanie reflects. Mom and son tearfully prayed together for Brian to have been out of his office at the time of the crash. Burns seared 61% of Brian's body with 41% third-degree (arms and hands); the rest second-degree, scorching much of his face, ears, legs and back. Heavily sedated and clinging to life, Brian didn't open his eyes for 2 and ½ days - the same day President and Mrs. Bush visited Brian. When President Bush greeted the bed-ridden Brian with a salute, the soldier painstakingly attempted to raise his heavily bandaged arms in a return salute. There was not a dry eye in the room.

The next 12 weeks were the longest of Brian's 40 years. Infection gnawed away at the remaining flesh on both arms. He required nearly 20 surgeries to cleanse wounds and graft on fresh skin. But Brian is not focusing on what he lost through the attack, but what he has gained. "My living

through all this is one of God's many miracles," said Brian Birdwell, who continues to heal. Today Brian and his wife, Mel, communicate a message of faith, hope, love and patriotism in churches across America.

William Grim lost his fiancé when Tower One of the World Trade Center collapsed. He reflected on Friday: "This Sunday will be the anniversary I lost my future and fiancé when the Towers fell, she was on the phone with me, the last words were her cry of "God NO!!!" and the line went dead. With the death of Osama Bin Laden, justice at last was delivered in due course of time, and for me, this anniversary will be the end of the old chapter once and for all, and the memories laid to rest in full.

For me this day shall be the next beginning and change of direction in my life; may it be for so many of us who have seen this happen, been affected directly by it in friends, family or surviving, and may peace be brought unto all of us in this land."² Certainly, healing was accelerated when justice was served on Osama Bin Laden by the Navy Seal Team 6 at his compound in Pakistan, and we salute the brave men and women of the Armed forces, those in the intelligence community, and even the political leaders who made that happen. The healing from that day continues.

III. HEROES OF THAT DAY

Well we have talked about the unspeakable Horrors on that Day, the ongoing Healing from that Day, now consider the Heroes of that Day. As we think about that Tuesday morning 15 years ago we are reminded of the actions of hundreds of our fellow Americans. I will never forget the scenes of New York firefighters who rushed into those burning buildings that day, knowing that both the north and south towers of the World Trade Center would soon collapse, those heroic souls rushed forward in the hopes of saving as many lives as possible. They went up the stairs with 75 to 100 pounds of gear and tools on their back, many running into the jaws of death.

The other people who were there in the towers, they were innocent victims, they went to work that morning and wound up in the middle of a disaster through no choice of their own. But these firemen saw the disaster before they went into it, they knew what they were getting into, they made a decision. These were tough guys from Queens and Brooklyn and Staten Island, but they had families, wives and kids, and yet they went up those stairs anyway. NYFD Captain Terry Hatton of Rescue 1 got as high as the 83rd floor. That's the last time he was seen.

Capt. Walter Hynes of Ladder 13 dialed home that morning as his rig left the firehouse at 85th and Lexington. He was on his way downtown, he said in his message, "I don't know if we'll make it out. I want to tell you that I love you and I love the kids." His widow played his message hundreds of times and made copies for their kids. "He was thinking about us in those final moments."³

Over 90% of the workers and visitors who died in the towers had been at or above the points of impact.⁴ Yet many others made it out, many guided by first responders. But many of these brave souls gave their lives in the process. Three hundred forty-three firemen gave their lives that day,⁵ alongside 23 from the NYPD,⁶ 37 from the Port Authority,⁷ and 8 EMTs and Paramedics.⁸ Heroes all.

But there are other heroes. Al Braca worked on the 105th floor of Tower One. When he realized that they were trapped in the building and would be unable to escape, Al shared the gospel with 50 of his co-workers and led them in prayer. Some of those same individuals had in the past mocked him for his faith. Some of those same individuals received Christ before they died a horrible death and avoided an even more horrible eternity. Al Braca wasn't a fireman, policeman or an emergency services worker, but he is a hero.⁹

Then I think about David Karnes, who is Marine Corps veteran and was working as an accountant at Deloitte and Touche in Wilton, Connecticut. Soon after witnessing the attacks on television. Karnes said to his co-workers, "You guys may not realize it, but this country is at war." Karnes reflects: "After staying at my desk for a few hours praying and asking God what I should do, I left the office to go to the WTC site." He told his boss he might not see him for awhile.

Having spent 23 years in the Marine Corps infantry, he then got a regulation hair cut, put on his Marine Corps camo utility uniform, gathered equipment that included rappelling gear, and his Marine Corps K-Bar Knife, then drove to his church and asked the pastor and members who were gathered to say a prayer that God would lead him to survivors. From there he drove to what they called the "pile" that was the World Trade Center to assist with the disaster. Rescuers had been called off the pile because of the recent collapse of Tower 7, but Karne's Marine uniform got him through. At the site, he ran into another Marine, Jason Thomas, and walked with him into the rubble.

Karnes reflects: "As we were walking we were yelling at the top of our lungs 'United States Marines, can anyone hear us?' As we approached the depression of the south tower I thought I heard something. Indeed it was some muffled call for help, I ensured them that 'Thomas and I were both looking for them so keep yelling so we can find you.'" Karnes instructed Thomas to position himself on some high rubble for visibility and to guide any responding rescuers to the trapped men. After Karnes called his wife and sister on his cell phone with instructions to relay to the authorities his whereabouts, he and Thomas were able to find two survivors.

The men they found were Will Jimeno and John McLoughlin, a pair of Port Authority Police Officers buried in the rubble. They were 2 of only 12 who were providentially rescued from the collapsed towers. Karnes spent a total of nine days at the site before returning to his office. Upon returning home, he reenlisted in the Marine Corps Reserve and went on to serve two tours of duty in Iraq. Indeed, how many who serve in the military now enlisted or reenlisted because of 9/11? But Dave Karnes is another hero.¹⁰

And who hasn't heard of the heroic act of the passengers aboard United Airlines Flight 93? One was Jeremy Glick. Glick was US National Collegiate Judo champion. Once he and the other passengers knew they had been hijacked, Glick huddled with some of the men in the back of the plane, and they came up with a plan to retake the plane. Glick was to lead the fight against the terrorists because of his fighting skills. Realizing it was a suicide mission, Glick called his wife Lyz and told her to take care of their newborn daughter Emerson and have a good life. His last words to her: "We're going to rush the hijackers." Lyz didn't really know what to say, but replied: "You do what you have to do, Jeremy. Be brave." Then he put down the phone and she never heard from him again. There was also Tom Burnett's famous call from United Flight 93. "We're all going to die, but three of us are going to do something," he told his wife, Deena. "I love you, honey."¹¹

The third passenger was Todd Beamer. He and his wife Lisa, who were expecting a baby girl in January, had taught Sunday school at their church for six years. Todd picked up one of the Air Phones, and was routed to operator Lisa Jefferson, whom he told that Flight 93 had been hijacked. With the plane flying erratically, Todd Beamer asked Lisa Jefferson: "Would you say the Lord's Prayer with me?" "Yes, of course, Todd." And they recited the prayer together, and Todd added "Jesus help me!" And he added, "I just wanted to talk with someone and if I don't make it though this, will you do me a favor? Would you tell my wife and family how much I love them?" "Of course, I will do that for you Todd."

Then he told her more about the plan: "A few of us passengers are getting together. I think we are going to jump the guy with the bomb." Lisa replied: "Are you sure that's what you want to do, Todd?" And Todd answered: "Yes, I am going to have to go out on faith because at this point I don't have much of a choice." Then she could hear a side conversation that was going on with

his compatriots, and the last words Lisa Jefferson overheard Todd say were: "Are you guys ready?... Okay, Let's Roll."

Let's Roll. That became the rallying cry all across America as well as for our military efforts in Afghanistan. The heroic sacrificial actions by those passengers to bring down the plane no doubt saved many lives as the hijackers were denied their ultimate target. At a memorial for Flight 93, Former President Bush called their bravery the "first counteroffensive of the war on terror..." and "ranks among the most courageous acts in American history."¹²

You know, that was something those terrorists didn't count on. They had convinced themselves that Americans are weak, selfish, and spineless. They believed that they could do whatever they wanted with that plane, and no one would stop them. But they were wrong about those Americans. Just like King George III of Great Britain was wrong, and Admiral Yamamoto of the Imperial Japanese Navy was wrong, and Adolph Hitler of Nazi Germany was wrong, and Nikita Kruchev of Soviet Russia was wrong... We Americans hate tyranny and love our liberty and we are willing to fight for it and die for it. And that leads me to the final group of heroes: our troops.

Now this weekend's memorial services on the 15th anniversary of that devastating attack on our soil will justly focus on the First Responders: The firemen, police officers, emergency medical technicians and everyday citizens who risked -- and sometimes lost -- their lives that day are heroes and deserve to be recognized as such. And I hope that you as individuals, couples, families, and your churches will go out of your way to thank, support, and minister to the First Responders. The spirit of 9/11 is still very much alive in the hearts of these folk, but at least as much if not even more so in the hearts of our American Troops.

While the rest of the world returned to semi-normal in the months after 9/11, the military's task was just beginning. As you know they soon became engaged in what has become America's longest war – the War on Terror. And the members of the military have carried out the most difficult mission of all, so that we can live freely under their protection. To date, over 6,864 courageous men and woman of the Armed Forces have made the ultimate sacrifice and laid it on the altar of freedom. Just as Jesus said: "Greater love hath no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends" or in our case, their country.

APPLICATION

In light of the heroism of 9/11 and the everyday sacrifices of our Armed Forces, what can we do as believers to make a patriotic contribution?

1. Pray for our Troops and First Responders: Obviously, we can pray for our troops and first responders and their families. They keep us safe, they defend our freedoms, they sacrifice so much. We should pray for them.
2. Participate in the Upcoming Elections: Not only should we pray, we should also honor the victims, the first responders, and our troops by participating in the upcoming elections. To sit at home, to fail to vote is to dishonor the sacrifices of those who gave their lives on 9/11 and those who have given their lives for our freedom. We need to evaluate the candidates when it comes to national security and Islamic terrorism. If they cannot even identify and verbalize the ideology that drives 100% of the terrorist acts, then they don't deserve my vote. The least we can do is register to vote and vote our biblical values. You can register to vote this morning and we will provide voter guides. But resolve that you are not going to sit out this election. Resolve to pray, participate, and then thirdly...
3. Promote the Spirit of 9/11: Remember the immediate aftermath of 9/11? How unified we were? Remember how the entire Congress, Republican and Democrat, standing on the steps of the Capitol, singing God Bless America? For a few weeks, there were no Republicans or Democrats, no Black or White, Asian or Hispanic. There were only Americans. What will it take to get us to

that place again? Another disaster? Another attack? Or a determined effort on our part to mend the fences, cross the bridges, go the extra mile to find common ground. There is more that unites us than divides us if we will really think about it.

So as we mark the 15th anniversary of 9/11, we remember them and all of the men and women who died simply for being Americans, representing beliefs and freedoms that these terrorists hate but beliefs and freedoms that can overcome evil. We pray, 15 years later, that just as concrete memorials have been built at Ground Zero in New York and in Pennsylvania, and the stone walls of the Pentagon have been rebuilt in DC, so too are we building our resolve that those we lost will be truly honored, not just in memorials, but in the ultimate victory for faith, family, and freedom. So let us dedicate ourselves afresh in the sight of God to that bold cause and that holy calling, and in the immortal words of Todd Beamer: "Let's Roll!"

¹ Peggy Noonan, "The Sounds That Still Echo From 9/11 Five Years later" Wall Street Journal, September 9. 2006 as found at:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB115774704992357920.html>

² Message Board post at <http://www.glennbeck.com/2011/09/09/glenn-remembers-911-chilling-audio-of-a-tragic-day-in-american-history>

³ Peggy Noonan, "The Sounds That Still Echo From 9/11 Five Years later" Wall Street Journal, September 9. 2006 as found at:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB115774704992357920.html>

⁴ http://www.nist.gov/customcf/get_pdf.cfm?pub_id=909017. See page 48.

⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/10/us/threats-responses-rescuer-s-health-lung-ailments-may-force-500-firefighters-off.html>.

⁶ http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2002-08-19-nypd-nyfd-report_x.htm.

⁷ http://articles.cnn.com/2002-07-20/us/wtc.police_1.police-officers-police-station-police-work?_s=PM:US.

⁸ <http://www.newsday.com/news/port-authority-workers-to-be-honored-1.695524>.

⁹ Christin Ditchfield, "A Light In the Darkness," *Focus on the Family Magazine*, September, 2002, 18-19.

¹⁰ <http://www.slate.com/?id=2070762>

¹¹ Peggy Noonan, "The Sounds That Still Echo From 9/11 Five Years later" Wall Street Journal, September 9. 2006 as found at:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB115774704992357920.html>

¹² <http://thehill.com/video/in-the-news/180743-bush-clinton-honor-the-heroes-flight-93-memorial-911>