Lessons from September 11, 2001
Rom. 8:31-39, 2 Tim. 3:1-5

September 11, 2001 will forever be etched in the psyche of the American people. At the mission we received a call that the World Trade Tower in Manhattan had been struck by an airplane. Several of us turned the TV on and saw smoke and flames belching out of the top of North Tower One. The news commentators were talking about whether the collision had been an accident or a deliberate crash. As we watched, we saw a 757 Boeing passenger jetliner approach from the right side of the screen. As we watched in horror, the plane circled the towers and slammed into South Tower Two. As the airliner, weighing 255,000 lbs, broke up into pieces over 11,000 gallons of aviation fuel created a gigantic fireball.

The twin towers of The World Trade Center were completed in 1972 and 1973. They stood 110 stories high. When they were built, they were the tallest structures in the world. The North Tower was 1,368 feet high. The South Tower was slightly smaller at 1,362'. Their weight was estimated to have been 450,000 tons each. There was appo. 200,000 tons of structural steel, 400,000 cubic yards of concrete and 600,000 sq. ft. of glass in each tower. 102 minutes after the plane struck the North Tower, it collapsed. The collapse took 8 seconds, and the impact of the collapse was that of a 2.0 magnitude earthquake.

The South Tower remained erect for 56 minutes after being struck. It collapsed in 10 seconds. It took 7 years to build the towers and 10 seconds for them to collapse.

As we watched the collapse of the two towers we heard the news commentator say, "My God! My God! The Pentagon's been hit!". Instantly the screen began showing a huge plume of smoke rising from the west side of the octagonal, 5-story building. A short time later we were informed that a passenger jet had crashed southeast of Pittsburgh in rural Pennsylvania.

Later I heard that the plane that went down in Pennsylvania narrowly missed hitting a school where appo. 500 children were in attendance. If the plane would have been in the air appo. 3 seconds longer it would have hit the school. On impact, the plane dug our a crater appo. 30' long and 20' deep. If it would have hit the school, there would probably have been a massive loss of life.
There were many stories told of people who usually would have been in the towers who weren't there because of some quirk in their plans. All of these incidents remind us of God's sovereignty and protection even in the midst of tragedy.

The death toll from these terrorist actions stands at well over 6,000 people. Thousands of lives have been affected as families face futures without loved ones. Hundreds of people are slowing recovering from the physical and psychological wounds inflicted by this mind-numbing tragedy.

The United States government is planning and has been executing a response to the attack. Many are holding their breath waiting for what will happen next.

As we consider this tragedy today, I'd like to have us think together about some lessons we can learn from it.

Lesson #1

We live in an uncertain world.

Paul writes in 2 Tim. 3:1-5 (NASB):
1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.  
2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy,  
3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,  
4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,  
5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

Certainly these verses are an apt description of the groups of men who without a shred of regret took 266 innocent lives on the four airplanes. Several hundred firefighters and dozens of police officers along with well over 6,000 persons were cruelly put to death by these people.
The world of the terrorist today is frightening and twisted. These people, in the name of God, believe it is OK to hate, murder, maim and destroy innocent human lives. They believe that there is a special place in heaven reserved for those who kill themselves and others.

We live in a world of vicious drive-by shootings, violent rapes, rampant destruction of human fetuses and senseless sexual exploitation of children and young people. There is a general disregard for God and His moral absolutes. Our world today is a world of sex-soaked immorality. Images and language which would have been banned 10 / 20 years ago are now commonplace in our living rooms. Nudity and bad language assault our nation on the television tube. Many of our children have no respect for authority. Our perilous world is closer than we would like to think. The senseless stabbing of Rachel and Phillip Hoover several years ago and the murder of a young woman in Gettysburg this year bring that perilous world close to our daily lives and brings us to our second lesson...

Lesson #2

We need to be ready to die at any moment.

Death is certain. Heb. 9:27 says, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment..." There is probably nothing more certain than the fact that unless Jesus Christ returns first, every person in this building today will die and stand before a Holy God in judgement. The people who died on September 11th had no idea when they started their day that this would be the day they would stand before God. They were sipping coffee, riding elevators, riding in airplanes and doing countless other ordinary things. In a moment, many without warning, they were in eternity. Many of them were ready to face God, but what a tragedy that many of them were not prepared to die.

What a lesson for each of us. Jesus Christ came to this earth 2,000 years ago and died on a cruel cross to pay for our eternal salvation. That salvation is free and it is available to all, but it is not cheap— It cost the blood of God's only son. It is not effective in our lives until we reach out by faith and accept it. We do that by acknowledging our sin to God, repenting of that sin, acknowledging that Christ is...
God's son and that he died to pay for our sin. We then must accept that payment and allow Christ to live within us. Then we must live lives of obedience to him.

If you are here without the assurance of salvation, if you aren't sure that if you died tonight you would go to heaven, I urge you as Christ's ambassador in this place not to leave today till you have been introduced to Jesus Christ.

Even in the midst of a perilous / uncertain world today, the glorious "good news" of the gospel is that we can be ready to face death at any moment through the blood of our savior Jesus Christ.

Lesson #3

The importance of family and friends

This was driven home to the nation as we saw images of people describing loved ones who were killed.

It was heard in the frantic cell phone calls made by doomed passengers to loved ones. The words, "I love you, I love you..." were poignant and heart-breaking.

In the north tower, Arturo and Carmen Griffith were elevator operators. She ferried customers to the Windows on the World Restaurant. He operated a freight elevator in the same tower. Carmen was badly burned after the jet struck. Two heroic strangers carried her down 78 stairs to safety. She was taken to Long Island Hospital. She had no idea what had happened to her beloved husband. When she got to her hospital bed, she turned the TV on and learned that a freight elevator had stuck and that the building had collapsed. She thought her husband was dead.

Unknown to Carmen, it wasn't Arturo's elevator that was stuck. He managed to get his elevator most of the way down before it dropped. His leg was broken, but he was able to crawl away to be rescued. Doctors performed surgery on his leg. After surgery he lay on his bed thinking his wife had been killed. A relative finally located Carmen and rushed to tell Arturo the news. He immediately called his wife. She says, "I was so happy to speak to my husband—I just kept telling him that I loved him! He came back from the dead, it was an incredible feeling. I told him I was burnt pretty bad, that he may not recognize me, but I'm still me."

He said, "I don't care. I love you."
"Arturo is a very wonderful man and now we will have many more happy years together. God gave us a second chance."

We saw the importance of family / friends as we heard and saw funerals and memorial services for the loved ones. It was felt as we heard and saw hundreds of people frantically rushing from building to morgue to hospital in a desperate search for missing loved ones.

8 days after the tragedy, I heard survivors of the Windows on the World Restaurant which used to be on top of the tower say, "Maybe just a person has survived." "Our co-workers were family to us. The saddest thing was they were in trouble and we couldn't help them."

An astonishing number of people who had started divorce proceedings cancelled them and decided to try to restore their marriages.

A news commentator said they were forced to think about what was really important to them, and they realized one of the important things was family / friends.

We were reminded again in a powerful way how important we are to each other. At the mission one of the ladies came into the office and expressed fear and emotion. Another person was having emotional problems dealing with the tragedy. Several of us met in the chapel, at the suggestion of one of our men, for a time of prayer. Family and friends were very important to all of us.

How we need to remember to cherish our family and friends.
We should encourage and build each other up. We should be our own best cheerleaders. Our family members should feel safe and loved in our homes.

How desperate we would be to provide that love and care if they would be ripped away from us by death. Let's resolve to treat our family and friends in a way that will build legacies of good memories after we or they are gone.

Life is but a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.
Let's say and do those nice things now. Let's not be left with regrets because of how we treated our family and loved ones while they were with us.

Lesson #4

The value and comfort of prayer
Prayers as simple as "O my God, help me", to eloquent prayers uttered at Washington's National Cathedral were voiced to Almighty God.

All over the nation grieving and frightened people found comfort and solace in prayer.

During this national tragedy we were reminded of the importance of prayer for:

- Our president and our leaders
- Our nation, and protection for its people
- The rescuers who made such selfless sacrifice as they labored non-stop in the effort to find victims of the disaster.
- The mourners who grieved for loved ones
- The wounded and injured
- and yes, even for the enemies who did this terrible deed

All over this land, people attended prayer vigils and services as they tried to cope with the tragedy.

We need to remember that we must be people of prayer at all times— Not just in times of disaster. Our relationship with our heavenly Father should be one where we are familiar with prayer, praise and worship of God. Then when disaster strikes we don't need to get acquainted with God— We already know him and can come boldly into his presence and find grace to help in our time of need.

Thank God for the comfort and value of prayer. Let's resolve to be a praying people.

Lesson #5

The spirit of unity that joined us as a nation

Speaking of the terrorists, Governor Ridge said, quote, "They did not and will not drive us apart. They will bring us together." End of quotation.

Jesus said in the great high priestly prayer in John 17 (NASB):
21 "...that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

22 “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

23I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that
You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."

The days and weeks immediately following the attack brought an incredible coming together to the nation. Flags flew. Signs read, "God Bless America". People were united behind the president.

Our unity in Christ is of critical importance as we face the world, the flesh and the devil. Unless we are unified around our love of Christ, our effort to impact the world will be fractured and blunted.

Jesus said in Mark 3:24-27,

24 “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.
25 “If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.
26 “If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished!
27 “But no one can enter the strong man’s house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house.”

The time of national tragedy brought a rare cooperation between the political parties and between the White House and the lawmakers. Differences were forgotten or minimized as they pulled together to deal with the agenda of rescue, rebuilding and response.

Let's take a lesson. As Christ's body, we need to unite in the work of Christ's kingdom. Our focus should be on building each other up, encouraging each other and spurring each other on to a closer walk with Christ.

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Our focus should also be on reaching a lost world with the good news of the gospel.

Unity and focus on these areas will enhance the work of Christ's kingdom.

Lesson #6 is...

The opportunity to use times like this as witnessing opportunities

All around us there were, and still are, people whose hearts have been softened by this tragedy.

I heard on the radio of a Christian organization close to the World Trade Center which said, "We are determined to use this disaster as a tool to share the love of Christ with others. People are open to Christ during a time of tragedy."

One of my co-workers has a daughter-in-law whose daughter was upset by the tragedy. She explained to her about God's love, sovereignty, protection and care.

Later she went to her temporary job where she found 6 people she did not know who were fearful and who listened to her explain what she had said about God to her daughter. She had the opportunity to witness to 6 people she didn't even know because she was open to God's direction.

We need to be open to God's direction and be ready to share the gospel when he gives the opportunity.

It's great to pray for and support missionaries, but that does not relieve us of the responsibility of obeying Christ's imperative command to "make disciples of all nations."

A survivor of the disaster says, "From now on I will take every opportunity I have to share the gospel. We don't know how many opportunities we will have."

What a challenge for every one of us!

How are we going to use the opportunities God gives us to witness to a lost and dying world?

Lesson 7:

The providence and sovereignty of God.
We serve a God who is sovereign in the affairs of men and nations. The stories of people who were doomed or spared that day are a mute testimony to God's sovereign hand in our affairs.

Shirley Johnson missed an elevator. She was walking through the lobby and saw the doors of one elevator about to close. She yelled to the people in the elevator, "I'll take the next one!". Within moments she heard a loud whoosh, like a strong wind. She started running. Before she got through the revolving door, all the glass broke, cutting her wrist and slashing her head. But because she missed the elevator, she made it out alive.

Thomas Maciejewski missed his train. He had stayed up late to watch Monday Night Football and overslept. He said, "I'm sure people I know—people I've seen in the building, ridden elevators with and talked to—are gone."

Craig McFarland was headed home to Los Angeles from Boston on Sept. 11, but he exchanged his ticket on American Airlines flight #11 for a later flight. His original flight was the first plane to crash into the World Trade Center that fateful morning.

Michael Hingson is a blind man who was conducting a training seminar on the 78th floor of South Tower. His seeing eye dog Roselle guided him safely down to the street. Even though the dog is afraid of thunder, she remained calm and decisive throughout the ordeal. Moments after they emerged from the building it collapsed with a sickening roar.

Michael Benfante and John Cerqueira fought back panic and concern for their own safety. They carried a woman down 68 smoky floors. It took them an hour to get down, but all three survived.

The destruction was terrible; the number of fatalities far too high, but God in his sovereignty prevented greater loss of life—
Consider:

50,000 people worked at the World Trade Center. The figure of 5,000 missing means that 90% of the people who worked in the towers survived.

There were 23,000 people at the Pentagon.
123 lost their lives—This is an amazing 99.5% survival rate.
The section that was struck was the first of 5 sections to undergo renovations to help protect the building against terrorist attacks.
That section had recently been hardened, straightened, and blast-proofed, which saved many lives—

The total plane capacity is another miracle of God's sovereignty—
266 passengers lost their lives on the 4 airplanes. But 79% of the seats on the planes were empty—
If all planes would have been carrying maximum passenger loads, instead of 266 people dying, it would have been 1280 people!

Summary:

Approx. 74,280 Americans were directly targeted by these cowards. 93% survived or avoided the attacks.
The planes were mostly empty; the Pentagon was hit at its strongest point; the overwhelming majority of the people in the towers survived.

The second plane struck the World Trade Center South Tower at 9:03 am, the exact hour and minute that Timothy McVeigh's truck bomb destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995.

At the Lafayette and Spring Street Fire Station, Ladder 201, Engine 13, which was one of the closest stations to the attack site, 16 men responded to the alarm. All but 2 were never seen again.
Shortly before 9 am, Kurt Marisa called his dad Rudy to see if he had heard anything from his brother Kent. He worked across from the World Trade Centers. Rudy said Kent was fine, so Kurt returned to his work at the Pentagon. Within minutes a second plane would crash into the South Tower and a third would hit the Pentagon.

Now Rudy and his wife couldn't reach either son.

Around that time, Rudy learned that a fourth plane was down only two counties away from their home.

Today, all the Marisas are grateful to be alive.

Howard Lutnick escaped death because he dropped off his 5-year-old son on his first day at kindergarten. His firm, Cantor Fitzgerald, was on the 101st to 105th floors of the North Tower, just 10 floors above where the hijacked jet slammed into the building. As many as 700 of the firm's 1,000 employees are missing and presumed dead.

A secretary at Lehman Brothers missed death because she was a bit late for work that morning. She said, "Three of my friends are dead. All of you— You should all thank God you're alive...for what you have...that you didn't see what I saw this morning."

Barbara Olson, the wife of US Solicitor General Ted Olson, delayed her trip by one day in order to celebrate her husband's birthday. Shortly after she ate breakfast with him, she boarded American Airlines flight 77, which crashed into the Pentagon, just 2 hours after the birthday breakfast.

Robert Crabb was on the way to work when his subway train didn't show up— A delay that saved his life. He normally would have been at his desk on the 94th floor of North Tower One when the first plane hit the building.
Australian Olympic swimming champ Ian Thorpe didn't die because he forgot his camera. Back in his hotel, Thorpe caught a glimpse of the towering inferno on the TV.

We cannot understand our sovereign God's ways, but we can take comfort through our tears that truly "...all things work together for good to them that love God..."2

Our sovereign God loves us more than any of us can possibly love our children. His timing is always accurate and he will never do or allow anything to happen to us that is not for our good and his glory.

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "God is too good to be unkind. He is too wise to be confused. If I cannot trace his hand, I can always trust his heart."

A final lesson is...

A call to repentance and humility.

As our nation reeled from the terrorist attacks, many people across the land called for a turning back to God. President Bush called for a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance.

Tragedy makes us think. One of the guys at the mission was in New Jersey across the Hudson River from the Trade Towers. He saw the second plane smash into the tower. Over 3 or 4 days he walked and hitchhiked to Gettysburg. He said to me, "When I saw those towers go down, it really made me think."

2 Chronicles 7:14 says, (NASB)

...and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.3

2The King James Version. (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.
This scripture is a ringing call to each of us as we reflect on the tragedy we have lived through. In these perilous days we need humility, prayer, a seeking of God's face, and a turning from our sins.

God's precious promise is that if we do these things he will hear, forgive and heal our land.

The challenge for us today is...

God can keep us in perilous times. But if he choose to take us through the fire of tragedy, he will never leave us or forsake us.

We should always be ready to stand before God. We do not know when we will be called upon to exchange time for eternity.

We should nourish and cherish our family, friends, and loved ones
We should be people of prayer
We should be joined in our unity around Christ our Lord.
We should be a people who boldly share our faith in Jesus Christ.
We should be people of humility, prayer, seeking God's face, and turning from our wicked ways.

One of the most poignant pictures I have seen of the disaster is 5 firefighters and policemen carrying the body of fire chaplain Mychal Judge, who was killed by falling rubble while giving last rites to a dying firefighter.

Chaplain Judge was the beloved 68-year-old chaplain of Ladder 24, Engine 1 on West 31st Street. He rushed selflessly into the disaster scene and began to minister to his wounded fellows. He had removed his fireman's hat and was praying with the dying man when he was struck by falling debris and killed.

Years earlier, Judge was at the scene of TWA flight 800 to comfort victims' families. Anytime a fireman was killed or a cop went down, he was there.

Chaplain Judge gave the last full measure of devotion to his fellows.
His sacrifice should inspire us to give ourselves in service to God and fellow man as long as he gives us breath.
Belvidere '01
Prices '01
Ladies Gettysburg (short) '01