

Honoring the Fallen

Do you remember where you were at 8:45 AM on September 11, 2001? American Airlines flight 11 struck the 80th floor of World Trade Center's North Tower. Do you remember how you felt when the second airplane hit the South Tower of the World Trade Center? Those of us huddled around televisions saw the second aircraft make a sharp turn at 9:03 AM, taking dead aim into the 60th floor, causing a massive explosion. That second plane removed all doubt that America was under attack. As we wondered what was next, air traffic controllers radioed for all domestic airplanes to land immediately across the entire country. Not all landed. Forty-two minutes later American Airlines flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon, killing 125 military and civilian employees plus all 64 souls on the aircraft. There was a fourth plane. Passengers on United Airlines flight 93 became aware of the 3 earlier hijacked planes and they knew their fate. Their flight path of their aircraft had been diverted towards Washington, DC. The heroism of Todd Beamer and other passengers on flight 93 saved even greater devastation in our nation's capital. The plane made a crash landing in a Pennsylvania field, taking the lives of another 45 souls on board.



On the ground Americans rose to the occasion. At Ground Zero "New York's finest," the men and women of the NYPD and NYFD answered the call of duty, initiating rescue efforts at the World Trade Center. 343 firefighters and paramedics, 23 police officers and 37 Port Authority police officers gave their life trying to rescue those in the two towers. In total, over 3,000 people in the WTC lost their lives that day.

The hearts of Americans were broken by this senseless tragedy. None of the passengers and crew or rescue workers had any idea that the morning of September 11 was to be their last day on this earth.

That brings the conversation to us. How do we honor the courage and memories of those who gave their lives? Fifteen years ago our nation was under attack, and we lived up to our name as the United States of America. Churches were filled as people searched for comfort. Special memorial services were held to honor the dead and console the nation. There was a rebirth of patriotism and unity in our country. Tragedy had revitalized our nation.

So, how are we doing today? Have we sustained the warm sentiment towards our country today? Are we united as a nation? Is our flag a rallying cry? Do we continue to worship God in great numbers? How are we respecting the freedoms won for us by so many people who gave their life in service to our country?

Make no mistake about it: the freedoms won at such a great cost allow us to take our expression to the extreme. We certainly are expressing ourselves. We are at odds over whether to kneel, sit or stand when the national anthem is played. We shout at the police officers who put their lives on the line every day they put on a uniform, as they protect us. We call each other names on national television, hoping to win our confidence come Election Day. We look for differences with other people, not to appreciate their uniqueness but instead, allowing it to polarize us.

Is this how we honor our freedom? Are we proud of what is happening in our great nation?

It all starts with us, even in our own little corner of the world. Kindness can be contagious. We can guard our own hearts and minds. We can choose to look at life with a positive attitude and people with a loving heart. We can control our own tongues and not participate in slanderous or inflammatory statements about others.

There are some simple ways to do this. Starting today, make only positive comments about people on social media sites. Resist the urge to jump on the bandwagon to tear down others in political or polarizing posts. Who have you neglected to ever tell them that you love them? Tell them you appreciate and love them. Thank people who do even the smallest gesture to help you. Respect others' right to express themselves, even when their thoughts or

methods are different than your own. Seek unity in all that you do. It is contagious. Take the high road and be a leader others will want to follow.

Thousands of people gave of their lives 15 years ago, some as innocent victims in the line of fire, while others gave their life in heroic acts of service. Let us never forget their sacrifice, and honor them by doing our part to seek unity in all we do. Those who gave their lives on September 11 have done all they can do. Now, it is up to us. After all, we are blessed to live in The United States of America.

Scripture: *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).*

Prayer: Dear Lord. Many people have given of their lives to protect the freedoms we enjoy. We pray we will honor their service by respecting others and acting honorably in all we do. Amen.