

INTRODUCTION

Sixty five years ago President Franklin Roosevelt addressed the nation with these chilling words: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan." He concluded his speech with these words of hope: "With confidence in our armed forces—with the unbounded determination of our people—we will gain the inevitable triumph—so help us God." After four years of bloody combat in which 300,000 American soldiers died, there was dancing in the streets after Germany and Japan surrendered in 1945. The end of WWII brought a sense of closure to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Five years ago tomorrow, September 11, 2001, all of us remember where we were when we first heard the jets had crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. That evening, President Bush spoke these words to America: "Today, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack in a series of deliberate and deadly terrorist acts. The pictures of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing, have filled us with disbelief, terrible sadness, and a quiet, unyielding anger. These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; our country is strong. He concluded his remarks with these words: Tonight, I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened. And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us, spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me." I think the best words in his speech were these: Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve."

Speaking of steel, the steel from the World Trade Center was melted down and is being used to build three U.S. warships. The USS New York is already in service and the USS Arlington (the location of the Pentagon) and the USS Somerset (the county in Pennsylvania where Flight 93 crashed) are nearing completion soon.

Five years after that terrible day, we aren't dancing in the streets, because this war against Islamic extremists is still raging. Our enemy is still at large. In February of 1998 Osama Bin Laden issued a *fatwa* (religious order), "The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilian and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible."

There are about a billion Muslims in the world, and the vast majority does not recognize or follow Bin Laden's *fatwa*. But if only one half of one percent of Muslims accept Osama Bin Laden's *fatwa* to kill Americans, that means there are 5 million Muslims committed to fight and kill and die for their faith. And these soldiers aren't wearing uniforms like the Germans and Japanese. This is not a war that will end with the signing of a peace treaty between two governments. President Bush has called this an intergenerational war, and it may be a long time before we find any sense of closure from the events of 9/11.

In spite of the attacks five years ago, and the ongoing war against terrorism, God has still been faithful to us. As we look to the future we should not be filled with fear, we should be filled with a powerful hope—and remember, H.O.P.E. stands for Having Only Positive Expectations! God’s Word is full of promises of hope. One of His greatest promises is found in Proverbs 23:17-18 “Do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord. There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.” The goal of the terrorists is to disrupt our lives and make us live in fear. They want to cut off our hope. But as long as you are zealous for the fear of the Lord, your future hope can never be amputated. The fear of the Lord doesn’t mean to cringe before Him. As Brennan Manning says, “Biblical fear of God consists of silent wonder, radical amazement and affectionate awe at the infinite goodness of God.” And as Oswald Chambers wrote: “When you fear God, you need fear nothing else; whereas if you don’t fear God you fear everything else.”

Facing the future means being ready for whatever comes tomorrow. Think about that word tomorrow. The existentialist says there is no tomorrow, there is only today. A teenager says tomorrow can’t get here fast enough. A senior citizen says tomorrow is already here. But a child of God can say tomorrow is full of hope. God’s Word clearly tells us how to face tomorrow. Let me share with you three powerful principles from God’s Word about finding hope for your future. And along the way, I want to introduce you to three heroes who were at ground zero five years ago. First, God’s Word says:

(1) DO NOT BOAST ABOUT TOMORROW: SEEK GOD’S WILL

If you could predict the future, what would you do with that knowledge? Would you play the stock market, and make a killing? Or would you take that knowledge to share it with others? Nobody but God knows what the future holds. But as the old saying goes, “I may not know what the future holds, but I know Who holds Who holds the future!” The Bible says, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.” (Proverbs 27:1)

People have tried to boast about knowing the future, but they have been proven wrong over and over. For instance, here are three infamous examples of people who boasted about knowing the future: (1) “Theoretically, television may be feasible, but I consider it an impossibility—a development we should waste little time dreaming about.” (Lee de Forest, 1926, inventor of the cathode ray tube); (2) “I think there is a world market for about five computers.” (Thomas J. Watson, 1943, Chairman of the Board of IBM); (3) “We don’t think the Beatles will do anything in their market. Guitar groups are on their way out.” (Recording company expert, 1962)

Here’s what God has to say about people who boast about the future: “Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.” (James 4:13-16)

You can’t know the future, but there is one thing you *can* know: compared to eternity, the span of your life and my life is like a mist. The Greek word is *atmos* from which we get our word

atmosphere. Do you want to see how long our lives are compared to eternity? (Spray an aerosol can)—there did you see it? It's just a mist. Because some of you missed it, here it is again.

Lifepoint: Don't exclude God from your plans

Based upon that truth, here's the point—let's call it a Lifepoint: Don't exclude God from your plans. The Bible doesn't prohibit you from making plans—it teaches the importance of wise planning. But it is a mistake to make your plans and leave God out of those plans. As you make your plans you must say, "If the Lord wills." Only by seeking God's Will can you face the future with hope.

Because life is so short, a mist, you should live everyday as if it was your last. The first 9/11 hero I want to introduce to you is Father Mychal Judge. For ten years this 68-year-old gentleman served as a Chaplain for the New York Fire Department. When the alarm went out on 9/11, Chaplain Judge was at the nearby fire station and threw on a fireproof suit and ran immediately toward the burning buildings. He was struck and killed by falling debris and became casualty #1 of 9/11. There's a famous picture of five firemen carrying his body out of the rubble. They found a hand-written prayer in Father Judge's pocket has been named Mychal's prayer: "Lord, take me where You want me to go; Let me meet who You want me to meet; Tell me what You want me to say, and; Keep me out of Your way." That's the attitude of a man who is trusting God for the future!

(2) DON'T WORRY ABOUT TOMORROW: TRUST GOD'S HEART!

You might not have a problem of boasting about the future. Your problem may be just the opposite—you're so worried about the future you're afraid to make any plans at all. The Bible says we don't have to live in fear and anxiety. God is in control.

Our English word "worry" comes from the German word *würgen*, which means "to strangle." One of the biggest obstacles many people face for healthy, positive living is worry. Here's what Jesus had to say about worrying about tomorrow: "Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ... But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:26-27; 33-34)

If you have a problem with fear and worry, you need to turn into a birdwatcher. They don't work or worry—God takes care of them. If you have a birdfeeder in your back yard like we do, God uses you to feed them, but if you didn't feed them, God would find another source. Ask one of our vets if they've ever treated a wild bird for anxiety disorder and see what they say.

It reminds me of an imaginary conversation that took place between a robin and a sparrow. "Said the Robin to the Sparrow; I'd really like to know; Why these anxious human creatures rush about and worry so? Said the sparrow to the Robin, I suppose that it must be; that they have no Heavenly Father such as cares for you and me."

When some people see all the violence and suffering in the world they may ask, "What is God doing?" Or worse, they ask, "Where is God?" The great British Baptist pastor Charles Spurgeon once said, "God is too good to be unkind, He is too wise to be mistaken, and when you cannot trace His hand, you can always trust His heart."

Lifepoint: Worry calls God a liar

If you a child of God you must understand worry is not just a weakness, worry is a sin! Here's the Lifepoint: Worry calls God a liar. God has promised you He will never leave you or forsake you and when you worry you're saying, "I don't believe you, God." God has promised He will supply all your needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus. When you worry you're saying, "I heard what you said, Lord, but I just can't believe it." God has said over and over in His Word, "Do not worry. Do not fear. Do not let your heart be troubled." And when we worry, we are saying, "Maybe you don't know what you're talking about!" Worry and faith are mutually exclusive.

When the Bible says you shouldn't worry about the future, it doesn't mean you should just put your mind in neutral and glibly say, "Qué será será." No! There are things we can do instead of worrying. We can pray. We can be vigilant and diligent. We can support our troops, and pray for those in authority over us.

If you can *do* something about a troubling situation, don't worry about the situation, **DO** what you can to resolve it. But if there's nothing you can do about a situation (like the weather) don't worry about it—worrying only makes it worse. You've probably heard my little worry poem before. That's okay. I like hearing it myself. "For every evil under the sun—either there is a cure or there is none. If there be one seek 'till you find it; if there be none, never mind it!" Worry is stewing without doing!

So, don't boast about tomorrow; instead seek God's will and include Him in all your plans. Next, don't worry about tomorrow; trust God's heart—even if you can't see His hand. Finally:

(3) DON'T PROCRASTINATE UNTIL TOMORROW: OBEY GOD TODAY!

I've been meaning to preach on procrastination for a long time...I just now got around to doing it. Someone once said procrastination is putting off today what you can do tomorrow. But true procrastination is putting off today what you can put off again tomorrow. Scarlett O'Hara from "Gone with the Wind" is the matron saint of all procrastinators. Her mantra was, "I'll think about that tomorrow." There are so many procrastinators in Tyler we have formed a P.A. group—Procrastinator's Anonymous. But they haven't gotten around to having a meeting yet. I came across a cute poem, "Procrastination is my sin. It only brings me sorrow. I know I ought to change my life. In fact, I will, tomorrow."

The Bible says, "If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done." (Ecclesiastes 11:4 TLB) Zig Ziglar is fond of saying, "If you wait until all the traffic lights on the street are green, you'll never go anywhere." Procrastination may be humorous when it comes

to things like getting a haircut or replacing a light bulb, but there's nothing funny about spiritual procrastination.

Lifepoint: Delayed obedience is disobedience

When God tells you to do something, the best time to obey Him is right now. Here's an important Lifepoint: Delayed obedience is disobedience. Parents understand this. If you tell your child to clean up their room and they say, "Sure I'll do it next week" that isn't acceptable. God's word says the same thing. The Bible says, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." (James 4:17) Most of the time, we *know* the right thing to do, we just don't get around to doing it—we procrastinate.

On September 11, 2001 husbands and wives said goodbye to each other that morning, never realizing they'd never have another chance to see each other. There were children and parents who didn't realize that morning would be their last chance to see each other. We never know what will happen tomorrow, so don't ever procrastinate in telling those you love how precious they are to you.

Have you ever had a friend or loved one die unexpectedly and after they were gone you wished you had taken one more chance to tell them how much you love and appreciate them? That's the bitter fruit of procrastination. Someone once said, "Dead noses smell no roses." In other words, don't wait until the funeral of someone you love to send them flowers. Give them flowers now. Is there someone right now the Holy Spirit is prompting you to express that you love them? Don't quench the Spirit—don't procrastinate. Tell them today!

The most important thing not to procrastinate about is making sure of your own salvation. In Acts 24 there is a man named Felix, who along with his wife, Drusilla, heard the Apostle Paul talk about how Jesus had changed his life. Paul asked Felix, "Wouldn't you like to receive Jesus right now?" The Bible says in Acts 24:24 Felix was under such conviction he trembled...but he procrastinated. He said, "Not today—maybe tomorrow will be a more convenient time to talk about this." But there is no record Felix ever trusted Jesus.

Hero #2 from 9/11 is Dawn Robinson. Dawn is a committed Christian who worked for Morgan Stanley on the 61st floor of the World Trade Center. While at work, she had talked about Jesus many times with her friend and coworker, Cassie. Cassie's response was always the same—like Felix she procrastinated. Her standard reply was, "You know I'm really searching, but I don't think I'm ready to get on the bus yet."

On the morning of September 11 Dawn was at her desk when the first jet hit the other tower. There was an announcement over the building's speakers for everyone to remain in their offices. But Dawn heard an inner voice that told her to leave immediately. She started down the stairs and when she was in the 44th floor the jet hit her building. In her own words she said, "At that point, people were screaming and then hysteria broke out. There was smoke covering us. There was water coming down. So some of us were yelling, just go! Go fast! Because you're scared to death, you know you're up 40 flights and it's going to take a long time to get down. I just kept praying very loudly, 'God, please protect us. Jesus, be with us.' Finally when we got to the

second level, that’s also the street level, we found some doors that we could get out.” In the confusion she found her friend Cassie, and as they ran away, the first tower collapsed. As the wall of dust rushed toward them, they found a deserted city bus and they quickly boarded it to find protection from the dust and debris.

As they huddled together and prayed and cried with tears streaming down their blackened faces, they realized except for the mercy of God they might have died with the others in the buildings. Cassie understood she had come close to facing an eternity without Christ, so right there on a city bus, the girl who had said she wasn’t ready to get on the bus yet, gave her heart to Jesus Christ. Are you ready to get on the bus? Don’t wait. Don’t put it off. You may be under the conviction of the Holy Spirit right now, and that conviction may never be stronger than it is right now. After all, how long is your life? It’s just a mist.

CONCLUSION

Five years after 9/11 I am a man full of hope. Because of God’s Sovereignty, I Have Only Positive Expectations. Because of my hope in Jesus I always look for the positives—even in the tragedy of 9/11. For instance, have you ever stopped to think if you had added up all the employees at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the capacity of those four jets that crashed, there was a minimum of 75,000 potential casualties. The final fatality count stands at a little less than 3,000 people. That means 96% of the potential casualties survived. Belying engineering logic the two towers stood long enough for almost 20,000 people to escape. The section of the Pentagon that was attacked was the first of five sections had been rebuilt to stronger standards to resist terrorist attacks and instead of the jet penetrating into other sections; it was confined to that one area. Three of the four jets had only 25% of their passenger capacity and the fourth was only 1/3 full. When was the last time you flew in an airliner that was mostly empty? Even though it was a terrible day, I can see the hand of God there preventing it from being much worse.

In the midst of tragedy, God gives us signs of hope. Let me introduce the last 9/11 hero. On the day after the towers collapsed, Ironworker Frank Silecchia risked his life to sort through the rubble to look for survivors. The dispersion pattern of the materials created a dangerous debris field workers later named “the valley of the shadow of death.” Frank was in this debris valley when he came upon a perfectly formed cross standing in the middle of the tangled rubble. Tears came to his eyes as he gazed at this powerful symbol of hope. This cross, which was later named “God’s healing cross,” was transferred to a permanent location and is now on display near ground zero. In reflecting on discovering the cross Frank said, “When I saw the cross it was if God was saying, ‘I’ve never left you, I’ve been here all along.’ When I first touched the cross beam, I felt the power of the cross. Not just THIS cross, but THE cross. Terrorism is the devil’s tool; the cross is our tool. And I don’t think, I KNOW, we’ll win.”

The cross is more than just a symbol of hope. When Jesus died on the cross He was making a way for you to have eternal hope—not just hope for tomorrow or next week, or next year, but hope for the rest of eternity. With Jesus Christ, you *can* find hope for your future!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes