

## I. September 11

## A. Comments

1. The TV in the living room showed live footage of smoke rising from a New York Skyscraper. Those pictures are etched in my mind. At the time, I didn't realize how profound that moment was. Nobody realized how it would change our world. It seemed to be just an aviation accident. Tragic. Horrible. But an accident.
2. I dressed and went into the office.
3. Then I heard the news... a second plane and a second tower.
4. A chill passed through me. Confusion. Anger. Fear.
5. Someone came into my office. Said the first tower had just collapsed. I asked if it fell over. She said it didn't. It collapsed. Flat. I couldn't imagine it. I'd been studying and prepping. Away from the TV and radio.
6. I went into another office. Staff were gathered around a TV, watching news. They showed the plane crashing into the second tower. And the collapse of the first tower. And then of the second.
7. And such a jumble of questions and fears and confusion.
8. It was a Tuesday.
9. As the days went on, we learned more and more. Terrorists. A group we had never heard of called Al Qaeda. New rules. New laws. A new reality.
10. Flags were flown. America came together. Churches were flooded with people.
11. That day, September 11, 2001, we gathered in our church auditorium... just staff, and volunteers, and a handful of people who filtered in. We were all stunned. We prayed.
12. We called a prayer meeting for later that night. And I spoke.
13. And this is a little bit of what I said. And I believe it's still relevant for today.

## B. The Immensity of God

1. *Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has taught Him? With whom did He take counsel, and who instructed Him, And taught Him in the path of justice? Who taught Him knowledge, And showed Him the way of understanding? (Isaiah 40:13, 14, NKJV).*
  - a) When was the last time God needed advice? When was the last time God scratched his head and wondered what to do? Never. It's inconceivable. God is never confused.
  - b) God knows all things. He is omniscient. He not only knows all actualities, but he knows all potentialities as well. God knows the what if's. He knows how a change in one decision would ripple down through time.
    - (1) He needs no counsel on how to respond to a crisis.
    - (2) He needs no advice on how to bring terrorist to justice.
  - c) God is not surprised; God is not shaken; God is not moved.
  - d) Heaven and earth may crumble, but God is not surprised.
  - e) He did not begin to wring his hands on September 11, 2001. He did not scratch his head and wonder what to do.
2. *... All nations before Him are as nothing, And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless. (Isaiah 40:15-17, NKJV).*
  - a) Such an important bedrock reality for our times! Though some may tremble and fear at the insanity of nations, God doesn't. They are less than dust in the scales. Even the assembled might of all the nations of the world, and of all the nations of history, cannot compare to the power in the little finger of God.
  - b) All nations before Him are as nothing, and they are counted by Him less than nothing, and vanity.
  - c) God is always perfectly at peace. His tranquility is never disturbed. His day is never spoiled. And all the fumings and fussings of nations, in their supposed power, is not even a blip on the radar as it pertains to the tranquility of God. Heaven's throne is nothing but pure, unalterable, peace in the presence of God.
  - d) But does that mean that God is unmoved by our sufferings? No. The Bible says God is "touched with the feeling of our weaknesses" (Heb 4:15). He feels them.
  - e) What would we have seen if we could have stood in the throne room of God on September 11?
    - (1) We would have seen the *grief* of God over human suffering and heartbreak. He is the Father of all mercies, and the God of all comfort (2 Cor 1:3).
    - (2) We would have seen the *wrath* of God against sin and evil. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness in men" (Rom 1:18).
    - (3) We would have seen the *justice* of God weighing out consequences and penalties, and preparing for that coming day when God makes all things right (Eph 1:10).
    - (4) We would have seen the *grace* of God as he dispensed every resource, every strength, every special touch to every human soul willing to receive it, for his grace really is "sufficient" for us (2 Co 12:9).
    - (5) We would have seen the *sovereignty* of God already in the process of taking human and satanic evil and turning it around for good (Gen 50:20).
    - (6) We would have seen the *security* of God, in that not even the concentrated evil of the world could frighten him. When the nations of the earth conspire to throw off the rule and reign of God, what does he do? Does he panic? Does he worry? Does he fear? No. "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall consider them a big joke." Ps. 2:2-4
      - (a) If we had been in heaven with God on September 11, 2001, we would bear eyewitness to a God who was not perplexed, not dismayed, and not disturbed. He would not have lost his peace, his confidence, his power, his composure. He was not surprised. And he is not dismayed. The nations are counted before him as less than dust in the scales.

- (b) That doesn't mean he doesn't care; he does care deeply.
- (c) In fact, if you ever question God's loving concern for human pain, just look at Jesus. Look at his Cross. God was not content to stay distant from our suffering. But he entered into it to a depth that knows no bounds, and he redeemed us from it. And only Jesus can give a meaning to our suffering that will far outlast this universe, and all its stars and galaxies.

- f) The realities of this world are passing reality — reality-lite. The pain is real. The loss is real. The evil is real. Let us never forget.
- g) But let us also never forget that there is a greater, deeper, broader reality. And if you dig deep enough, you'll find the bedrock reality of the Cross of Christ, the hope of the world.
- h) We are receiving an unshakeable kingdom. And that is Ultimate reality. And that is our hope and our everlasting home.
- i) Please pray with me.

## C. Prayer

1. Lord, you know how fifteen years ago, our nation faced a devastating blow, a great loss of life, a second Pearl Harbor, and an attack rippling down the years to still affect us today.
2. We pray, Lord, heal our land. Turn the hearts of the people toward you. Toward your Son, Jesus.
3. It is you, Lord, that brought forth a nation conceived in liberty — something never before accomplished. It is from you that our founders declared that people are created equal, in your sight and under the law.
4. Lord, draw us back to these lofty ideals.
5. Draw us back to you. Defeat the foes of freedom. Crush injustice. Silence the lies. Let freedom, truth, godliness, and grace reign throughout our land.
6. Lord, revive your church. Ignite your own people. Restore our first love. Restore the preaching of your Word to the pulpits of this land. Change our hearts, and call us back to yourself, back to your truth, back to your word, and back to a worldwide mission of helping people find and follow you.
7. Lord, as you, through Christ, have committed yourself to us to an infinite degree, so we, through Christ, commit ourselves to you to the best of our abilities.
8. On this anniversary of 9/11, we pray, God bless America, and we ask that you would enable America to bless God.
9. Through Christ our King we pray,
10. Amen.

## II. Introduction

- A. Our Scripture for today is short, and I'd like to read the whole thing. I'll fill in the details about what's going on as we go.
  1. *So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you."*
  2. *And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant. (1 Kings 19:19-21, NKJV).*
- B. Welcome to Part 9 in our summer series called G.R.I.T. We'll wrap up the series next week with Elijah's flashy finish.
- C. This is about being spiritually strong, spiritually tough. Spiritually ready to handle whatever life throws at you, without falling apart, and without losing your testimony for Christ.
  1. G.R.I.T.
  2. *Grace Revealed in Trials*
  3. *G.R.I.T. is the spiritual toughness to face the tyrants that would steal your dominion and the faith to crush them with supernatural weapons of grace.*
- D. What is your dominion?
  1. It is your turf, your territory, your right to rule and reign under the leadership of Christ. Your dominion is your boundaries.
- E. Who are the tyrants?
  1. The tyrants are any force that chews at the edges of your dominion. Any intrusive person. Any addiction. Any dysfunction. Any wimping out that's fighting a turf war with you.
  2. God gave you dominion, and the devil's been trying to steal it ever since.
- F. What are the supernatural weapons of grace?
  1. Christ living in you and all of the qualities he brings.
  2. All of these qualities are activated in your life by faith.
  3. GRIT is what happens when Jesus expresses his life through you.
- G. Here is this man Elijah. He's been through a lot. If you've been tracking with his story, you know that. He's been attacked. He's had a target painted on his back. He's been lonely. He's been depressed. He's just wanted to die, and he's asked God to take his life.
- H. In all of this, he was a hero of the faith, even at his low points.
- I. Even when he wanted to call it quits.
- J. He was still a hero. Still a conqueror. Still the King and Champion of GRIT.
- K. And now, in this paragraph of the Bible, he shows us what Grit looks like from yet another angle.
- L. Let's dig in and see what God is saying to us here.

III. *So he departed from there...*

- A. From where?
- B. From the mountain where he met with God, and told God he was worn out. Asked God to take his life. From there.

- C. But God met with him. God showed Elijah he was not alone.
- D. And now, God is giving him help.
- IV. *and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth.*
  - A. One yoke of oxen equal 2 oxen. So twelve pairs. So 24 oxen.
  - B. Which is to say, that Elisha has a very big farm and a very wealthy family.
  - C. We're told this guy was with the 12th pair of oxen, which probably means he oversaw the first eleven guys. He helped them hook up their oxen to the plows, and get started plowing their rows. And then he got himself all set to go, and started plowing his row.
  - D. What you have is a profile of a hard working, very responsible, excellent supervisor, faithful young man named Elisha. He's minding the family farm, taking care of business, and doing everything right.
- V. *Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him.*
  - A. Put yourself in Elisha's shoes. You're minding your own business... you've got two gigantic oxen pulling a heavy plow and you're standing on it, and ripping through the hard soil.
  - B. Off in the distance, this man appears. This mountain man. Big. Rugged. Dirty. Bearded. Hairy Mountain Man. He's got a mantle on. A cloak. So right away you know what he is — that he's a prophet.
  - C. And you know who he is... he's the world famous wild man named Elijah.
  - D. Elijah the prophet, climbs over the dirt clods in his sandals, and he's heading toward you.
  - E. He gets in front, and Elisha's oxen slam on the brakes.
  - F. Young Elisha doesn't have a clue what's going on, when old Elijah climbs around to the back of the oxen, and to the plow where Elisha is working.
  - G. The mountain man prophet of God reaches up by his throat, and unlatches his ragged, dirty cloak. His mantle. The sign of a prophet.
  - H. Without saying a single word, Elijah throws the mantle over the shoulders of Elisha.
  - I. And then he walks away.
    - 1. My call
      - a) It was the last week of December and I was 20 years old.
      - b) At the time, I was a produce clerk. I worked at a grocery store, stacking apples, and snipping the ends of bundles of green onions. I was a part time student at the University of Illinois and a part time grocery clerk at Eagle Foods, a division of Lucky Foods.
      - c) The phone rang... the old fashioned kind fastened to the kitchen wall. I answered and I heard my friend, one of my mentors, named Vern Benner. He ran a huge kids program called Awana — in case you don't know it, Awana is an international program for kids, to teach them God's Word, and we have Awana here at Neighborhood.
      - d) Vern ran a big Awana program at the church in Chicago that started Awana.
      - e) And I was getting ready for work, when Vern's phone call rang.
      - f) I'll never forget what he said.
      - g) Vern said, "Bill, how would you like to quit your job, and come and work full time with me, running Awana, here at the North Side Gospel Center."
      - h) I asked a few questions. Vern answered all of them.
      - i) It was decision time. It was something I'd avoided for a long time. But now here it was. An open door.
      - j) I told Vern I'd think about it. Pray about it. I asked my Dad for his advice, even though he wasn't a Christian at the time. He encouraged me to do it.
      - k) So I gave my notice, and two weeks later in January, I become a pastor.
      - l) Vern threw his mantle over me.
        - (1) Just like Elijah threw his mantle over Elisha.
    - 2. But now he's walking away, fading into the distance.
    - 3. It's decision time.
  - J. *And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you."*
    - 1. This is Grit. It's a man stepping into his destiny. It's a man moving out of mom's basement, leaving the comfort of a safe, familiar life, moving into the great unknown, undefined, uncontrollable future.
    - 2. This is Grit.
    - 3. There's nothing wrong with a safe, definable, routine life. Sometimes that's a blessing.
    - 4. But sometimes, G.R.I.T. means you have to shake things up a little bit. You have to explore the boundaries of what God wants to do with you.
    - 5. Elisha wanted to say goodbye to his father and mother.
  - K. *And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen's equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate.*
    - 1. Elijah is good with Elisha's plan. Elisha says his goodbyes, takes his oxen, slaughters them, and uses the yoke to make fuel a fire for a party. He roasts the meat, shares it with all his people, and celebrates the new life to come.
    - 2. Listen, when you pile up the tools of your old trade, and burn them up, that's called burning your bridges behind you.
      - a) That's what Elisha did when he burned his yoke, and barbecued his oxen.
      - b) That's what I did when I gave notice at my grocery store.
      - c) It's what Margi and I did when we sold our brand new Chicago house and, left family and a lifetime of friends, and moved to California.
      - d) It's what parents do when they put their career on hold to raise their children or to school them.

- e) It's what soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines do. It's what truck drivers do. It's what any man, any woman, and any young person does when it's time to move out of the comfort zone, and cast their lives on the mercy of God's great unknown.
- f) There's nothing in the world like it.
- g) Here's how this part of the story ends... and then I want to pull together some take aways for you.

L. *Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.*

- 1. Nothing high and mighty. A servant. An assistant. And soon we'll see this is Elisha's succession plan.

M. Let me pull together some G.R.I.T. lessons for today.

#### VI. Conclusion

A. *1. Grit flows out of transcendence.*

- 1. Here's what that means. Transcendence means above and beyond.
  - a) Above and beyond what you can see with your eyes.
  - b) Above and beyond what the world says is important.
  - c) Above and beyond simple logic.
  - d) Above and beyond the dollars and cents and politics and headlines and doctors visits and routines and homework and job functions of everyday life.
  - e) Above and beyond the two dimensional flat plane called nature.
  - f) Above and beyond time and space.
  - g) Above and beyond the world of economics and physics and energy and matter.
- 2. Transcendence is your ability to see the connection between your life and the eternal realms of glory.
- 3. It is the ability to lift the veil and peek into that spiritual realm... to see how angels and demons care about what you do. To see how God is looking, God is providing, God is strengthening, God is protecting, God is loving, God is healing, God is repairing, God is orchestrating, God is working, God is battling, God is reaching into the most average moment of the most average day and investing it with a glory that transcends time and ripples down the ages in eternity.
- 4. When you accept your mantle from God, the things you do take on a richer, fuller, deeper, eternal meaning.
  - a) You're not just a builder, you're making a place for the blessing of families. It's more than a job, it's a calling.
  - b) You're not just a stay at home mom; you're a minister of the gospel to a family and to vulnerable children, preparing them for a gospel-sharing life in a world going mad.
  - c) You're not just a produce clerk; you're an ambassador of heaven, sent to create beauty and sustenance for a hungering society.
  - d) Elisha, you're not just plowing a field, you're preparing a nation to meet its God.
- (1) What you do rises above the natural. It goes above and beyond. It transcends the ordinary.
- 5. Here is a paper, word for word, written by a home schooled little girl. Someone shared this with me a few days ago. She's answering the question of a person you have met who has changed your life:
  - a) "My parents are the only people so far who have made an impact on me. They've taught me what it means to be kind and respectful. My dad has taught me how important God is. My mom has taught me schoolwork, which required her to give up her job. They've taught me how to spend money, how to conserve money, they taught me about the real world, and taught me how to be a human being. I love them, and would give the world for them. They have made a lasting impact on my life, and even in death, I won't forget them."
- 6. Earth may never applaud. Facebook friends may never click like. You may labor in some little back corner of an insignificant place.
- 7. Transcendence. Grit is forged in the furnace of transcendence. A janitor pushing a broom, a mom helping with homework, a grandparent closing teary eyes in prayer, the frazzled and frumpy struggling to just get by, the addict asking God to make it the last hit ever... when you do that with faith, your Grit touches an eternal realm where angels cheer and demons flee and the devil rages, and God is pleased, and rewards and grace, and glory are stockpiled for you, with riches no tongue can describe.
- 8. And this leads to the last takeaway.

B. *2. Transcendence flows out of confidence in future grace.*

- 1. Your response to past grace is called gratitude. It's how you say thank you.
- 2. Your response to future grace... to eternal grace, to heaven's grace, to tomorrow's daily grace... well, that's another story.
- 3. And we'll have to pick that up next time.

#### VII. G.R.I.T. Basic Training

A. *God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; (Psalms 46:1, 2, NKJV).*