

Billy Graham's remarks given at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., on Friday, September 14, 2001, brought hope and healing to a shocked nation. His words are still powerful and relevant 20 years later.

We come together today to affirm our conviction that God cares for us, whatever our ethnic, religious or political background may be. The Bible says that He is "the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles."

No matter how hard we try, words simply cannot express the horror, the shock and the revulsion we all feel over what took place in this nation on Tuesday morning. September 11 will go down in our history as a Day to Remember.

Today we say to those who masterminded this cruel plot, and to those who carried it out, that the spirit of this nation will not be defeated by their twisted and diabolical schemes. Some day those responsible will be brought to justice as President Bush and our congress has so forcefully stated.

But today we come together in this service to confess our need of God. We've always needed God from the very beginning of this nation. But today we need Him especially. We're facing a new kind of enemy. We are involved in a new kind of warfare. And we need the help of the Spirit of God.

The Bible words are our hope. The Bible says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea."

But how do we understand something like this? Why does God allow evil like this to take place? Perhaps that is what you are asking now. You may even be angry at God. I want to assure you that God understands these feelings that you may have.

We've seen so much on the television, heard on the radio stories that brings tears to our eyes and makes us all feel a sense of anger. But God can be trusted, even when life seems at its darkest.

What are some of the lessons we can learn?

First, **we are reminded of the mystery and reality of evil.** I have been asked hundreds of times in my life why God allows tragedy and suffering. I have to confess that I really do not know the answer totally even to my own satisfaction. I have to accept, by faith, that God is sovereign, and that He is a God of love and mercy and compassion in the midst of suffering.

The Bible says that God is not the Author of evil. It speaks of evil as a mystery. In 2 Thessalonians 2:7 the Bible talks about the mystery of iniquity. The Old Testament Prophet Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure." Who can understand it? Jeremiah asks that question and that is one reason why we all need God.

The lesson of this event is not only about the mystery of iniquity and evil, but, second, **it's a lesson about our need for each other.**

What an example New York and Washington have been to the world these past few days! None of us will forget the pictures of our courageous firefighters and police many of whom have lost friends or colleagues, or the hundreds of people standing patiently in line to donate blood.

A tragedy like this could have torn our country apart, but instead it has united us. So those perpetrators who took this on to tear us apart, it has worked the other way—it has backlashed backfired. We are more united than ever before. I think this was exemplified in a very moving

way when the members of our Congress stood shoulder to shoulder the other day and sang, "God Bless America."

Finally, difficult as it may be for us to see right now, **this event can give a message of hope—hope for the present and hope for the future.**

Yes, there is hope. There is hope for the present because the stage, I believe, has already been set for a new spirit in our nation.

One of the things we desperately need a spiritual renewal in this country. We need a spiritual revival In America and God has told us in His Word time after time that we need to repent of our sins and return to Him, and He will bless us in a new way.

There also is hope for the future because of God's promises. As a Christian, I have hope, not just for this life, but for heaven and the life to come. And many of those people who died this past week are in heaven right now. And they wouldn't want to come back. It's so glorious and so wonderful. That is the hope for all of us who put our faith in God. I pray that you will have this hope in your heart.

This event reminds us of the brevity and the uncertainty of life. We never know when we too will be called into eternity. I doubt if even one of those people who got on those planes or who walked into the World Trade Center or the Pentagon on Tuesday thought that it would be the last day of their lives. And that's why we each must face our own spiritual need and commit ourselves to God and His will now.

Here in this majestic National Cathedral we see all around us the symbol of the cross. For the Christian, the cross tells us that God understands our sin and our suffering, for He took them

upon Himself in the Person of Jesus Christ our sin and our suffering. From the cross God declares, "I love you. I know the heartaches and the sorrows and the pain that you feel. But I love you."

The story does not end with the cross, for Easter points us beyond the tragedy of the cross to the empty tomb. It tells us that there is hope for eternal life, for Christ has conquered evil and death and hell. Yes, there is hope.

I've become an old man now, and I've preached all over the world. And the older I get, the more I cling to that hope that I started with many years ago and proclaimed it in many languages in many nations of the world.

Several years ago at the National Prayer Breakfast here in Washington, Ambassador Andrew Young closed his talk with a quotation from the old hymn "How Firm a Foundation."

This week we watched in horror as planes crashed into the steel and glass of the World Trade Center. Those majestic towers, built on solid foundations, were examples of prosperity and creativity of America. When damaged, those buildings plummeted to the ground, imploding in upon themselves. Yet, underneath the debris, is a foundation that was not destroyed. Therein lies the truth of that old hymn, "How Firm a Foundation."

Yes, our nation has been attacked, buildings destroyed, lives lost. But now we have a choice: whether to implode and disintegrate emotionally and spiritually as a people and a nation; or whether we choose to become stronger through all of this struggle, to rebuild on a solid foundation.

And I believe that we are starting to rebuild on that foundation. That foundation is our trust in God. And in that faith, we have the strength to endure something as difficult and as horrendous as what we have experienced this week.

This has been a terrible week with many tears. But it also has been a week of great faith. Churches all across the country have called prayer meetings. And today is a day that they are praying not only in this country but in many parts of the world. In that hymn, "How Firm a Foundation," the words say, "Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed, / For I am thy God, and will give thee aid; / I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand, / Upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand."

My prayer today is that we will feel the loving arms of God wrapped around us and that as we trust in Him we will know in our hearts that He will never forsake us as we trust in Him.

We know also that God will give wisdom and courage and strength to the President and those around him. And this will be a day that we will remember as a Day of Victory.

May God bless you all.