

Thoughts on September 11th: One Year Later

It rained this weekend. I had a little time, so I'll share some of my thoughts about people we should remember.

The great thing about September 11th was the forging of the American spirit. The tragedy is the corruption of that spirit. It has been a full year since this event occurred. I have begun to see the feathers fall off as the eagle soars. Complacency again begins to weave its web around us. We cannot let that happen! Too many have died already!

It was a warm morning in Wisconsin. The construction crew was working on the fifth tee when Chris Rule's cell phone rang—something that happens quite frequently when dozers are cranking in the fall, seed needs to hit the ground and Jack Nicklaus is your boss. I saw Chris sharply snap his phone shut as he quickly walked over to me.

“A plane just hit the World Trade Center. My brother just heard about it. They aren't sure what happened, but the press thinks it might be a terrorist.”

I looked at Chris in a kind of disbelief and mumbled something like, “They'll figure it out sooner or later, let's get this tee leveled out before they screw it up.”

Chris kind of agreed, copped a smoke from one of the laborers and checked the transit. A few minutes later, his phone rang. I was painting the measurements while we were shooting grades. I looked over at Chris, a little annoyed by another interruption, but he looked quite concerned as he snapped his phone shut again.

“Another plane hit the other tower,” he said quite grimly.

“What!”

“They really think terrorists are behind this now.”

“What are you talking about?” I said, feeling confused and vaguely troubled.

“Another plane full of people flew into the other tower of the World Trade Center. Both towers are on fire and hundreds, maybe thousands, of people have died already.”

I kind of hung my head and kicked a stone around. “Well, I try and pray every day. I think these people and their families will sure need all the support they can get.”

We were both a little quiet for a while. I remember looking over the beautiful bluff beside the fifth tee, then we went back to work.

A few moments later, Chris' phone rang again. I watched him close his phone slowly this time as he timidly walked over to me.

“Another plane just hit the Pentagon.”

“Oh my God!” I said. “Whatever happens next, we need some strong leadership to keep everyone from pushing buttons too soon.”

“Who's behind all this?” I asked.

“No one knows as of yet, but it sure looks like some terrorist organization.”

I left Chris and later heard about the plane that crashed in Pennsylvania. Shortly after that, one of the best decisions of that day was made by President Bush . . . all commercial aircraft is grounded indefinitely.

The rest of that morning was spent bouncing around the golf course, catching radio reports and looking south towards Milwaukee. I had a nervous feeling that World War III might soon start and why not level that city while they are bombing everything else. I thought about my wife and kids. They were an hour-and-a-half away. *What if this is it? Don't worry, I told myself, we're in God's hands.* It's time to pray for our leaders and our country.

It was nearing lunch time when Chris called my cell phone.

"One of the towers collapsed, hold on!" He had the radio on in his Jeep.

"The other tower just caved in too!"

"Meet me by the office, let's grab some lunch." I couldn't wait to get in his Jeep and listen to the reports. I couldn't imagine what was happening in New York. By now, thousands of people had died and the entire area was engulfed in flames.

By afternoon, things settled down; at least the planes stopped bombing us. I still had no idea of the magnitude of the destruction, only reports from Chris and the radio. I heard President Bush was going to speak to the nation at 7:30 p.m. So I finished all my chores, made sure everything was getting watered and hustled to my hotel room. I quickly flipped on the TV and sat there mesmerized for hours.

Our new President was faced with an enormous challenge, and he called upon the people of this nation to bond together in spirit, support and prayer. I saw heroes living, and heroes dying. I saw a huge monument to the prosperity of this country collapse in a fireball of smoke and rubble. And I saw an aircraft do something I had never, ever consid-

ered possible. They replayed that scene over and over again that night. And I watched over and over, and I still couldn't believe it.

I'm not too old, but old enough to have had some tragedies in my life. And as I have "aged," I have come to discover that something good comes, even in the worst situations. That night, as my reddened eyes closed, I fell asleep with that thought.

As the news unfolded the following days, my thoughts became statements and I boldly proclaimed that something good will come of this. And it did. Neighbors became neighbors again. People met in town squares, held hands, mourned and prayed. And people went to church . . . and prayed. Prayed for strangers they did not know. Prayed for the leaders of this country. Prayed for understanding. And prayed for peace.

I do not want to be misunderstood in what I am about to say. I feel very, very sorry for all of those who lost their lives and loved ones. But every once in a while, the American people need to have their eyes opened. We are more vulnerable than we think. Yes, we live in the greatest nation in the world, but we are just one nation in a world full of divergent ideologies, despair and trouble.

Since September 11th, nothing tragic has happened in our nation . . . except for a moderate recession. But why did this recession happen? Some say that we were heading in that direction anyway and this incident only accelerated the fall. Others say it was the fear of traveling. The President asked us to "Go shopping! Travel, please have no fear!" You know what? George was right! I do not agree with every move our President has made so far, but I do happen to believe in the same God as he does. And for the life of me, I cannot understand why people at that time were so fearful of flying. If it is your time to die, it is your time to die. Whether it be on an airplane, behind the wheel of your car, while you're shoveling snow or deep in sleep. And you know what? There is nothing you can do about it.

God only allows us so much time on this earth. The great thing about September 11th was the forging of the American spirit. The tragedy is the corruption of that spirit. It has been a full year since this event occurred. I have begun to see the feathers fall off as the eagle soars. Complacency again begins to weave its web around us. We cannot let that happen! Too many have died already! We need to remember those in New York, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania. That tragedy will be remembered forever.

But we also need to remember those who died in Hawaii. We need to remember those who fought for this country, those teens that went to other nations, fought battles over the years . . . and never returned. Those men *willingly* gave their lives for us.

I heard stories and saw documentaries relating to World War II. I have read some of the great novels written about war. In fact, I used to work at Cantigny Golf, which is also the home of the Cantigny War Memorial Museum. Quite a place to see if you are ever in Wheaton, Illinois. But all of this historic background never became more poignant until I saw the movie, *Saving Private Ryan*. If you are not moved to tears at some point in the movie, then something is sadly wrong and complacency has slowly woven into your heart.

The men in that movie portrayed the courage of the American spirit. They fought, just as every soldier in every war ever has. And they died. They died for us and our country. I consider this one of the greatest blessings my God has given me. Life in this country, America.

So let us show love and respect to our elders, our parents, our mentors and our children. Let us learn to live fearlessly, trusting in God and all the blessings that he has given to us who live in this beautiful and most blessed land. And the next time you see a police officer, a firefighter or a soldier on guard at the airport, walk up to him or her, grab his hand and say "Thank you!"

