

Was God also in the Rubble?

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Solomon Kendagor, BCC, served as a member of the Spiritual Aviation Incident Response (SAIR) team called to New York City in the wake of the September 11 tragedy. His assignment focused on federal, state, and city law enforcement officers, firefighters, and other government employees. He is the city director for International Students, Inc., which ministers to foreign students in universities and colleges. In addition, he serves as a part-time chaplain at St. Mary's Hospital in East St. Louis, Illinois. Correspondence may be directed to him at <Kendagors@aol.com>

My schedule was full. I had plans, speaking engagements, appointments, and my work at St. Mary's Hospital. There was absolutely no room for any interruption. But the phone rang anyway, and the voice at the other end simply stated that I was needed in New York to minister to those affected by the September 11 tragedy, to participate in a small way in bringing healing to God's people. At that time flying was not a very attractive proposition, but it was the only way to get there fast enough.

Within twenty-four hours I was at the airport. What kind of ministry awaited me in New York? What kind of questions would I face? What answers would I give? But it was not about giving answers; it was about being present and available to those in need. I was going there simply to be an instrument of God's healing and a channel of his love and grace.

On the first day I was given a tour of Ground Zero. What destruction! I had visited the World Trade Center many times and had been to the top of the towers. Now, it was beyond recognition—total destruction!

As we walked around, someone asked, "Have you seen God's house?" What was that? How could one see God's house in these ruins? Then I encountered it. A cross that stood upright, looking like the work of a skilled artist. Who had made this cross? The story was that the fire, the collapsing of the building, the breaking, and the destruction, had somehow left some beams shaped into three perfect crosses and arranged in a semi-circle. Did that mean God was in the rubble? All I knew at that moment was that we who saw it felt that we were witnesses to a miracle, a divine intervention.

The tragedy affected lives in many ways, and at one time or another, most everyone found himself or herself lost in a rubble of confusion, pain, and, yes, anger. But God was in that rubble too.

A woman told me that her niece had called home that morning from her office in the World Trade Center. She was scared because she could see smoke but did not know what was happening. Various family members spoke with her and kept assuring her that help was on the way. Aware that her time was short, they tried to keep her spirits up. The conversation ended

suddenly, and they knew she had succumbed to the smoke and the fire. How can anyone understand the emotion and the pain that family experienced?

A man told me of his son, who was working as a security employee at the airport when several of the hijackers passed through. What kind of guilt might he be carrying?

My assignment was to a site primarily staffed by federal, state, and city law enforcement officers, fire fighters, and other government employees. On a daily basis, I ministered to these dedicated men and women, some of whom saw their friends and coworkers go into the buildings and never return. Each time the remains were brought in, everyone lined up to salute and show respect. As I stood there with them, I was well aware that they were looking at those friends, coworkers, and sometimes family members. How could I fathom the emotion contained in each salute?

There were doctors and scientists from around the country who

came to help in any way possible. They worked twelve, fourteen, sometimes sixteen-hour shifts. They stood above the rubble—a living demonstration of God's presence. They were true symbols of divine intervention, confirmation that good will always overcomes evil.

So, what exactly did *I* have to offer? Almost a month had passed since September 11, and I had no idea where each individual stood in the grieving process. Further, I had no answers to explain what took place on that morning. I was simply an empty vessel ready to be used by one greater than me, one greater than the overwhelming tragedy that confronted the nation.

Each day, I reminded myself that my ministry was to be present as a channel of God's grace, ready to be used to communicate God's compassionate care and presence. Each day, I went in empty handed, ready to give that which I did not have and to receive from those who never thought they had anything to give, especially those who

were direct victims of the terrorists' actions. When it comes to grace, it is not how much we think we know or have. It is how much we are aware of our need to depend on divine provision and intervention.

What did I learn from my experience in New York? Perhaps one lesson that was reinforced in my mind was that feeling inadequate in ministry is not necessarily a bad thing. As a matter of fact, there is freedom when we acknowledge our inadequacy and come simply with the willingness to be used by God. When the circumstances are so overwhelming, and our faith is stretched beyond limit, we can still walk into the situation knowing that God's grace will flow through us and generate healing beyond our comprehension. Indeed, we must apply every skill and ability we have at our disposal. But we also are called to reach out to resources that are beyond ourselves, resources that are sometimes available to us only when we step into the realm of the impossible.