

The Lord's Providence at World Trade Center Towers

Richard Wozniak (Former Catholic)

The first thing I try to do every morning when I wake up is to ask God what it is He will have me do for him. I pray that I will be a light for others so that through me they can see that He is present and I pray that He will use me to plant seeds that will bring others to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

September 11th started out just like an ordinary day. I got into my office on Water St. at about 9 am and was greeted with a phone call from my friend Brian McLaughlin (also a former Catholic). This was not our daily discussion call, instead he informed me that a plane had collided with a World Trade Center Tower. At first we thought it was probably just a small aircraft that lost control but then my building began to shake (I work for AIG about 5 blocks east of the Towers) and I looked out the window and saw people staring up in disbelief as both towers were on fire. I hung up on Brian and ran to the elevator. Knowing that my older brother had worked in the Towers only months before but still arrived daily underneath them on the subway, without hesitation I began to run about 8 blocks toward the buildings as my co-worker Chris Murphy ran with me in support.

At this point so many things ran through my head as we got closer. There were 100's of shoes strewn all over the streets from women who literally ran out of them. As we moved toward the towers we were met by 1000's of people running away in our direction. But I was determined to keep going. At one point there was nothing between us and the towers except 2 police officers preparing to block the street entrance but they were too late as we blew right past them and got within 200 ft. of two burning towers. It was as if we were part of a movie. It didn't seem real. We had to position ourselves beneath a structure as debris was hitting the ground all around us. At this point Chris decided to leave and made his way uptown and knowing that there was no possible way I would be able to know if my brother was in any part of the towers I could have followed but I stayed.

I was now standing in what seemed to be a war zone. There were scattered police and firefighters all around the streets. It seemed that I was the only civilian so I had to pass myself off as a security agent and I was determined to stay and help. I was now outside the Bankers Trust building approximately 100 ft. away from the entrance of the main tower. I could hear objects hitting the ground around me so I decided to work my way around the back of the building and now I had learned what had happened.

I was standing in the middle of what were the remains of a passenger aircraft. There were seats and engine parts smashed through car windows everywhere. What seemed to be an engine was embedded into the sidewalk and body parts were strewn all over the street. Then I looked down to my feet and picked up a passport. It was a Saudi passport. It was green with Arabic writing and as I opened it and saw the man's face inside it I felt as if I were looking into the eyes of

someone that may have been part of the terror that I was witnessing around me and I later learned that I was right. I passed it off to an FBI agent that was standing a block away on West side Hwy who immediately took it from me. He then instructed me to leave the area but before he could notice, I had run back to the side of the Bankers Trust building determined to help find survivors that may have been hurt in the streets or in the cars. Then my life was changed forever.

I moved closer to the towers and was now about 100 ft. away when I approached a man that was huddled in a corner of the building. As I approached him he directed my attention to the remains of a person lying beside him. At this point I was numb to the horror around me and the man told me he had just come up to visit NY for the 1st time from Virginia. I was amazed at his courage as we started to plan our next move. Within seconds we were approached by 5 firefighters. They took shelter with us as they hooked up oxygen tanks to their backs to bring into the towers and I remember they were waiting for another fireman to catch up with them. Then I looked up as the towers were burning fiercely. And I saw a man that seemed to be floating in mid air. His hands were stretched out to his sides as if he were tranquil and within seconds he had hit the pavement below. He had jumped to escape a worse death by fire. I could not believe this was happening.

The firemen then proceeded to move toward the tower. They got about 30-40 feet away when without warning a person's body landed between them with such an impact they were thrown to the side. The man had also jumped from the building but he had landed on top of one of the firemen, killing him instantly. I watched as they dragged him away toward us. At this point I needed to find a phone to call my wife Mary and let her know that I was ok. My heart told me that somehow she knew that I would work my way down to the Towers to try and help and I was right. My cell phone messages were piling up as I watched them pass 10 but there was no reception within miles as the tower's antenna's were completely destroyed disrupting all cell phone usage in the area. I had to get inside a building so I entered the back of the Banker's Trust Bldg. that I had positioned myself against outside.

I was then greeted by about 8-10 security personnel. I immediately passed myself off as building management and headed right for the security phone in the front lobby about 100 feet from the entrance of the main tower. I was able to call my mom and my wife and assured them that I was ok. I explained to them that I was drawn to this place for a reason and assured them I was safe. As I hung up the phone I turned to the man next to me and we watched as dozens of police and firefighters began to make their way into the entrance of the tower. I remember telling him that my wife informed me that the Pentagon had been hit when all at once the ground shook violently and it sounded as if a bomb had been dropped.

I ran about 10 feet toward the back and positioned myself with another man behind a large concrete pillar in the middle of the lobby and then it hit. There was a wind of black smoke and soot that seemed to be moving at a catastrophic speed. Steel and concrete was being tossed around us and passed us tearing open walls and breaking glass. The ceiling seemed to have collapsed above us as debris was landing all over. All I could think about was that I just got off the phone with my wife Mary and told her I was ok but now I was about to die and she didn't have any idea where I was. I found it harder to breath as my lungs were being filled with dust

particles. At this point I had accepted the fact that I was about to die and prayed it would be quick but then I remembered that Mary had reminded me that our 9 month old daughter Sarah was waiting for her Daddy to come home the way she does every night and I knew I couldn't disappoint her. I remember thinking that I couldn't die. Not like this.

All at once it was over and I was still standing. I was gagging as I was spitting up dust and I was blinded by the heat and force of what I thought was a bomb. I covered my mouth and nose with my shirt and felt the man's hand next me. He was alive.

It was pitch black and we could not see anything so we began to yell for the others. Our voices and someone with a flashlight led us to each other but I can only remember that there were only 5 or 6 of us left that gathered together. I knew where we were in relation to the back exit and it seemed that the front entrance was completely destroyed and covered. As we held hands we felt our way toward the back slowly trying to avoid the glass that was hanging everywhere. We found the exit door but it would not budge. We knew at this time that something was against it and I was getting the idea that we were now buried alive but then I felt a step.

We made our way down a flight of stairs and noticed lights heading our way. It was more people, some women, climbing up from what seemed to be a basement shelter. And then I saw that God had provided us with what we needed. We were on a loading dock and right in the middle of the dock was a full pallet of soda and water and a soda truck was parked in front of it. I immediately began ripping open cases as we started to wash out our eyes and mouths. Now I was able to see those with me but all I could see were their eyes. Everyone was covered head to toe with dust but at least now there was some relief.

About 3 of us decided to search for exits as the others huddled together on the dock. All the doors were jammed shut from the outside. I remember thinking to myself, "what is out there", "what hit us"? I had no idea that the tower had fallen and much of it had landed on top of us destroying so much of the building we were in. And then I saw it bay doors that opened up and down to let trucks in. I figured that if we could open them the debris would not hinder it going up and there it was, a security booth with electronic buttons along the wall. I hit every one of them and it began to open. It was as if another wall were behind it though.

There were buildings collapsed all along the outside. I noticed the street that I had been standing on prior to going into the building. It was gone. There were fires all around as cars and trucks burned throughout the street. But then a crazy thought hit me. I remembered watching the Poseidan adventure when I was a child and recalled Gene Hackman yelling at people to move up toward an exit and not just sit waiting around so I ran back to the dock and urged people to leave. I knew if we could get to West side Hwy we would be able to make our way down to Battery park and away from danger and the threat of tall buildings falling. Only 3 people came with me as I grabbed a flashlight and some water from the dock.

The rest may have been scared or left soon after or even thought it best to wait for help but I knew there was no help, at least not right away. Most of the firemen and police within a 4 block radius had either worked their way into the tower before it collapsed or they were standing in the

street and were injured or killed by the force of the impact. So two ladies, one man, and myself held hands as we walked our way toward the hwy. It was only about 100 yards away but it took us what seemed forever as we climbed over building and car debris to get there. We had to be careful of sharp metal that could rip through our shoes so we took it slowly. But we got there. And then the second building collapsed and I remember praying that the others were ok.

One of the ladies that was with us began to break down and cry. I stopped and assured her that God had bigger plans for us and that we were going to make it home safely. I told her to pray and as I did I realized that my prayers were answered that day because God had used me as a light so that others could see. I knew that we were ok but I also knew that it wasn't over. So we walked and witnessed the devastation around us. All the fire, police, & Ems vehicles were either burning or covered completely with debris and abandoned. I began to look in the buildings for other people and perhaps someone that could give us oxygen as it was becoming harder to breath. As I walked into one building I noticed about 30 people, mostly students, with masks over their mouths and there was a man that I met outside the bank prior to me entering it. He made it.

I heard someone telling everyone to stay and wait for a 1/2 hour for help but I told him there was no help. I told them that we were on our own at this point and we needed to get far away from the buildings and toward the park so people began to leave. We finally found an EMS truck with a technician in the back. One of the ladies with me got in and was able to get some oxygen. A young man approached me filled with blood and as I helped him into the back of the truck I noticed that either he or someone else had performed a tracheotomy on him as a straw stuck out of his throat so he could breath. I felt so helpless and hoped that the technician could help him. I left the 3 people at the truck and remembered giving my business card to the man in hopes that he would call me and let me know he when he got home ok and continued downtown determined to get home to my family.

There were thousands in the park walking toward the ferry. I chose to stay away in fear that it could become a target. I remember thinking that at any moment terrorists would come out of nowhere and begin shooting. I went into a subway hoping I could walk the tracks under the river across to Brooklyn but the abandoned subway cars were blocking my path. I decided to walk under the FDR drive toward my building by the seaport in hopes I could cross over the Brooklyn Bridge but it was closed now in fear of it being a target. I got to my building and walked inside completely oblivious to the stares that confronted me. No one was on my floor as I grabbed my bag and car keys tried to make a call to home but the phones were dead. Thus began my journey home.

I walked up 3rd avenue and God provided water stations for me at various Salvation Army posts. I entered a non-denominational church in hopes I could use a phone and was able to call home again. My family saw the building collapse moments after I hung up the phone with them and they were frantic because they had not heard from me in over an hour. My brother, who had just made it out of the subway tunnel after the first plane struck and was ok was now searching for me and he was finally able to make contact with me from his cell phone as we were both relieved that we were alive. The pastor of the church approached me and asked me if I needed anything and all I could say was "yes, I need to get home. Would you pray for me?" He did and I looked into my pockets and through all the glass that still filled them I found a pamphlet that I had in my

pocket that was titled, "*The Lord is My Savior*" by A.W. Pink and I handed it to him and thanked him. The further uptown I got the more I began to feel alienated. I was covered from head to toe with ashes and soot and stayed in the street away from the crowded sidewalks.

I remember standing next to two ladies at a red light and listened to them discuss dresses that were on sale. I watched people eating in the restaurants and drinking in the pubs. Construction workers were still building and people were smiling and all I could think was it was not fair for me to judge another's heart, but when President Kennedy was killed the Nation stood still and people were crying in the streets. How could anyone be doing anything less now than getting on their knees and praying for the relatives and friends of the victims and those that remained alive in the rubble and two of the tallest structures in the world were now missing from view. But then as I walked past a bus stop I saw a woman standing there. It seemed as if she were not real. It's hard to explain but she looked into my eyes and said, "you are blessed." All I could do was smile, and say, "thanks, I know" and as I kept walking I thought to myself that God had just used her to give me reassurance.

As I walked I prayed for our nation that has been so complacent in these past years allowing our homes to be invaded with the immorality that is being shown on our major TV networks and news stands, and a nation that felt it necessary to take prayer out of our school systems. I prayed that we have not turned so far away from God and been so blinded by what the "world" has to offer than what He has already offered us through His Son. Will this country of ours one day again become "one nation under God"? This is our chance to turn to God for guidance and not to turn away so that He can be our shield against our enemies. My faith kept God close to me on Sept. 11th. He brought me to an unknown place. He shielded me from harm. He helped me find a way out and shine a light for others. He walked with me for 59 city blocks and one bridge. He provided me with doctors and a hospital to take care of me. And as I sit here in tears I know that He brought me home to my family. So now I glorify Him and give thanks and pray that He continues to use me as a light for others.

2 weeks later...

The events that unfolded on September 11, 2001 have left us all with visions and memories that none of us were ever prepared for and has left each one of us scarred and broken in some way. We each now have our own cross to bear and I pray that we reach out to each other and to those around us so that we can help carry them all. I witnessed many terrible things that I pray few did that day. Because I was able to come home to my family I knew that it was my responsibility to let everyone not only know what had occurred first hand but more importantly that we needed to keep our faith strong and turn to God. Perhaps one day again I will be able to share the events that I know changed my life forever but right now I feel it is a time we focused on healing.

Our lives will never be the same but I know that we can always find a light in any darkness. I have in my wife and my child. I have in all of those family, friends and strangers that have contacted me. I thank God for all of them as I watch how He works through them all. And I thank them all. There will be thousands of stories both tragic and miraculous being shared with all of us in the coming days, weeks and months. One need only turn on the TV and we can all see it. But I want to focus on the good ones now. For the first time in my life I understand the pride behind hanging our flag outside my home. It's not something that comes with a few holidays

anymore. God blessed me with a chance to witness so much courage and unity that day. I stood next to men and women that grouped together in a ripped apart building that showed so much courage and love. There were no color barriers when I stood next to a black man as the lobby was caving in around us as we hugged each other when we realized we were alive and there were no color barriers as I held hands with 3 black people (2 women and a man) through demolished streets looking for a way out. There were people with us that I will never know if they made it out or not and there are those that I saw did not. We never knew each other's names. We couldn't see each other's faces, but we all stuck together.

I stood next to police and firemen and watched as they entered the towers. There was no hesitation in their minds, only a desire to serve and to save lives. It was never about a paycheck with any of them. I know, I saw it in their eyes. I saw clergy running to minister to people and stood next to a man who was on vacation from Virginia that could have walked away at any time. He didn't. Through all the destruction I saw humanity and love for strangers. It is these memories that will help me heal and try and put away the tragic memories that I have embedded in my mind and it is the visions of men and women that we see everyday sacrifice their lives at ground zero that can help us all to heal.

God worked through so many of us that day and I know this because I was never alone. And He is still working through all of us right now as we try and reach out any way we can. We all need to turn to God and our loved ones now and seek comfort. I know that God has gifted many people and some are those that are waiting to listen and let those that are hurting speak in order to heal. We all need to look for a light through all of this now and my light is God and the comfort He provides to me through His Son Jesus Christ and through the promised comforter, His Spirit. We need to live and enjoy our loved ones and fellowship with each other. Thank God for each day because no one person has a promise of tomorrow. Embrace and savor each day and those who share it with you. Don't be driven by the world believing you are missing out on what it has to offer you. Look to God and your families and take what has already been given to you and cherish it. Don't miss the joy of today. This is a call for revival in our relationship with God. Turn to Him.

All I can think about now is how to use this for the Lord's purpose. This letter was the best way I knew how at first. I want everyone to know that true Christian faith cannot be shaken and that we need to be aware that God promises so much more than what this world has to offer. God will be proclaimed throughout this whole terror and I won't stop until He takes me to Him. Right now I know He wants me here. All is ok and life is an incredible gift and our Lord is an incredible Savior. Let us all turn to Him in repentance and prayer for our great Nation.

Peace in Christ Alone,
Rich Wozniak

Psalm 10:17-18
richwozniak@yahoo.com