

A SEPTEMBER 11TH TESTIMONY

By Andy Deane



I left there forever a different person.

It was September 10th, 2001 and I was just about to go to bed. Earlier that night I was out drinking at a bar trying to find satisfaction in a lifestyle of partying. It wasn't working. Truthfully, nothing in life felt like it was working since I started school at New York University and walked away from following the Lord. I was 19 years old and I closed my eyes that night feeling discouraged and guilty over my sin.

The next morning the phone would not stop ringing and I heard police and fire sirens outside. I picked up the phone and my mom told me that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. My roommate Eric A. and I went outside and saw the sky filled with smoke. We made our way towards the towers and walked past a police line that was still being set up on Broadway. We got up to Church Street & Cortlandt Street before we stopped (*see map location #1 below*). Both towers had already been hit with the planes and were on fire. There was debris everywhere on and everyone was afraid and panicking. My roommate and I took some photos and then he decided to head back to the room.



A photo of me from 5 minutes before the first tower collapsed.



The 4 World Trade Center building on Church Street.



It was then I realized that in about five minutes I was going to pass out from the smoke and die.

I called a fellow student and let her know where I was standing. She begged me to leave, but I was convinced the towers would not fall. At that point, my mom beeped through and asked where I was. Knowing that my mother wouldn't appreciate where I was standing, I decided to lie to her and told her I was far away walking towards Brooklyn. For the next few minutes, I just stood there watching the firemen running in and out of the WTC 4 building.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE FIRST TOWER

Suddenly I heard the noise of people screaming behind me. I turned and saw those at the police line running away. I looked back towards the towers and saw WTC 2 starting to collapse. It's hard to explain how I processed that moment. It felt impossible like a movie I was watching and I don't have a memory of any sounds for those moments. I just turned and started to run. When I reached Broadway, I turned left and then right on John St. The tower had hit and a warm wall of light gray smoke hit me like a wall. It quickly turned all the shades of gray until I couldn't see anymore. At this point, I was outside Evelyn's Chocolate shop at 4 John Street ([see map location #2 below](#)).

I heard a lady behind me coughing so I went back a few feet to help her get inside the store with me. As I shut the glass door to the shop it was broken and smoke began to fill this tiny store. There were 10 – 15 people inside the store. All of us were terrified and coughing. After a few minutes, the coughing turned to choking and dizziness from the smoke. It was then I realized that in about five minutes I was going to pass out from the smoke and die. I quickly asked the cashier behind the counter if there was another room or basement where there was more oxygen. With tears in her eyes, she replied, "no", and began to sob.

TURNING TO GOD FOR HELP

What do you do when you have a few minutes before you meet God and you were out rebelling against him the night before? It was then my Christian upbringing mattered more than ever as I began to recite the gospel to myself and asked God to forgive me. It honestly felt a little cheap and unfair to God that I would repent now only after realizing death was close, but God in His kindness gave me a feeling of peace as I prayed. If forgiveness had a physical feeling, I know I felt it. I was shocked at experiencing the love of God at that moment since I knew how undeserving I was.

For the first moment that day, I stopped thinking about myself and prayed, "God, if there's anything I can do to help these people around me...", and it was like God cut me off mid-sentence to answer that prayer. I instantly had a vision of a building across the street that would have oxygen. It was a picture in my mind of 11 John Street. Earlier that day I had seen a security guard locking those glass doors and I sensed God wanted me to go there. I walked outside and still couldn't even see

my hand in front of my face. I had to take one small step at a time with my hands stretched out in front of me. I was scared and began to sing an old worship song, Give Thanks, and recited again and again the line, "And now let the weak say, I am strong".

Directly across the street, I found 11 John Street ([*see map location #3 below*](#)) and two ladies were coughing outside the doors. I began to kick the doors in since they were locked and a security guard from the inside heard and came and opened the doors for us. We caught our breath in the lobby. I turned back and started to walk outside back towards Evelyn's Chocolates. This time I must have walked on a diagonal because I missed the shop to the right and had to feel my way along the wall until I found it. I told everyone to stand up and follow me because I found oxygen across the street. Everyone held hands and about 10 or so of us made our way back to 11 John Street. I told them to go up the stairs since the lobby was filling with smoke.

LOOKING FOR SURVIVORS

About 10 - 15 minutes later the smoke outside began to lift due to a light breeze. We all started to leave the building to heads towards the South Street Seaport away from the towers when I saw a man running back towards the towers. I asked him what he was doing and he said that a deli on Fulton Street need some oxygen tanks because people were passed out. We went up to a dusty ambulance around Broadway & Dey Street ([*see map location #4 below*](#)) and grabbed two oxygen tanks and a medical bag of supplies. When we arrived at the deli on Fulton Street ([*see map location #5 below*](#)) I handed them the O2 tank and left to walk back towards the towers.

At this point, I began to wander around the rubble of Ground Zero. I didn't see anyone. I began to yell, "Is anyone alive" and remember thinking how crazy it was I had to say that. The only movement I saw was a pigeon fly away that was startled by my voice. At one point I looked left and saw a lady in her 50s standing there frozen, covered in dust. I walked up to her and put my hand on her shoulder and she began to scream. I couldn't believe how she survived standing so close. Just behind her, I saw the FDNY Ten House entrance on Greenwich Street & Liberty Street ([*see map location #6 below*](#)). I walked her inside the fire station to find

help. On my right, I saw a fireman helping a man with a broken hip. To my left, I saw two firemen holding the hands of another fireman who was bleeding from his chest. It didn't look like he was going to make it and they were just there to comfort him in his final moments. We kept walking and I was able to find someone to help the lady I brought in.

I asked one of the firemen what I could do to help and he said, "well if you're going to be running around down here at least where this" and he handed me a mask and safety glasses. He shared that they were about to go looking for a missing fireman named Charlie and I could join them. I went out the back door of the fire station to wait for them on Greenwich Street & Cedar Street ([*see map location #7 below*](#)). Just then I heard a man yell from the second story of his apartment building that his family was trapped because the door on the first floor had some debris in front of it. I yelled over to another fireman and the two of us moved the metal that was blocking the door and pulled the door open for his family. After that, I looked up and saw a man who was trying to put out a small fire on the apartment's second-story balcony. I yelled at him to come down but he wouldn't listen. I told another fireman and he said it was ok and that we needed to start the search for Charlie.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE SECOND TOWER

I joined about 5 firemen and 1 police officer as they walked on Greenwich Street & Thames Street and yelled for this missing person. It was then we heard a deep and loud rumbling noise. The second tower (WTC 1) was beginning to fall and a fireman yelled, "It's coming down". We couldn't see it because of the smoke, but we ran as fast as we could to get away ([see map location #8 below](#)). As the tower began to hit the ground, we took shelter in the 120 Greenwich Street condos ([see map location #9 below](#)). Once inside a fireman yelled, "go to the basement", but the door to the stairs was locked. Once again, the smoke began to fill the lobby and we had a hard time breathing. This time my eyes also began to sting so I shut them for a while.

About 5 minutes later we walked outside and the firemen continued to yell for their friend Charlie as they waived their flashlights up and down. It wasn't more than a minute or two later that they found him limping

up with the help of another fireman. I was instructed to check the neighboring deli on the same block for water ([see map location #10 below](#)). I threw my first aid bag into the shop through a broken window and then stepped onto a fire hydrant to jump through that window. I ran to the back and emptied my bag of medical supplies so I could fill it with water bottles. The firemen were ready to leave and yelled for me to hurry up. I had to pull a chair up to stand on to jump out and avoid the broken glass of the window. Once outside I passed out the water bottles so we could rinse out our eyes.

As we walked the street, I saw a man with two grocery bags walking into the carnage. I asked him where he was going and he said he was trying to bring supplies to his tenants in the building he owned. I told a fireman and we followed him to his building and began a search floor by floor, but found no one.

GROUND ZERO

We left him and turned the corner to arrive at what was eventually called Ground Zero ([see map location #11 below](#)). There was almost nothing left and it looked like a warzone. I saw a fire truck that was completely gray and touched the side of it to reveal its red color. It was here we saw 50 plus firemen and I started to hand out the rest of the small water bottles to them. They were trying to put out fires in cars and in the buildings so they could search them for survivors. I was asked to carry fire hoses behind the firemen and they asked me to, "make sure I didn't kink the lines". Over the next 30 minutes, I helped the firemen carry and even connect fire hose lines to make them longer. I told the firemen I was an NYU student and they seemed to appreciate I was there helping them in the small ways I was able to. Throughout the day they called me "brother". Eventually, a city worker or official in a suit came up to me and asked me to get back farther from the fires where it was safer. He shook my hand and I walked back a bit.

I watched as a truck pulled up with those huge Poland Spring bottles you see at offices. A man with a military background named Paul Groce pointed at me and instructed me to go up and down the lines of firemen

to give them water. We had to exchange contact information so we could check up on each other in case another building collapsed. For the next few hours, this is what my job was. We didn't have any cups so I could just put the bottle on my shoulder and pour it into the mouths of the firemen. I kept varying where I would go and felt an urgency to make sure I didn't miss any firemen. They seemed so thirsty. One time I decided to pass by some of the firemen who already got water to make a 10-minute walk to the farthest point I had not reached yet. I left an entire bottle there because I knew I couldn't come back that way due to all the wreckage I had to climb over. I heard one of the firemen say, "Where did this angel come from" and I turned and laughed because I thought it was a fireman joke, but he wasn't joking. He just stared at me and said thank you, and chugged a huge drink of water. Another fireman declined to drink first until his rescue dog drank. I started to run back to the water supply to grab another bottle and I tripped and cut my palm. I was told to slow down to be safer. I felt this need to work quickly because each time I got back to the truck there were no missing bottles. Because of this, I felt pressure as if I was the only one bringing them water to drink.



Looking back at the police line on Broadway before the first tower fell.

LEAVING A DIFFERENT PERSON

Gradually around 2 pm, I saw more and more people began to come and help. They would bring grocery carts full of supplies (and even candy bars) to give the firemen. Finally, I realized there were so many people helping that I wasn't as needed anymore and I sat down. I was sitting with some firemen on what used to be a vertical beam of the World Trade Center. We just sat there for a while. Our cell phones wouldn't work and the line at the payphone was 20 people long so that wasn't going to help either. Eventually, I said goodbye to the firemen around me and started to walk away.

I walked towards Battery Park and then through the Financial District. I ended up right in front of the New York Stock Exchange and was blown away by what I saw. Everything was caked in dust. The streets and windows were all gray and there wasn't a single person around me. It was like a nuclear bomb had gone off. I finally got to my Cliff Street dorm building and was told by the security guard to head towards the NYU Athletics Center. It took me an hour to walk there. As I walked, I passed through Chinatown and saw signs for people to use bathrooms and drink some water. Everyone was being so helpful and it was then I realized that I had not sipped water all day until that moment. When I got to the athletic center and saw my friends some of them started to cry. The last they had heard I was standing underneath the towers and they thought I was dead.

I went downstairs to the men's locker room to shower off. What felt like only a minute later another man came

in and asked if I was ok. I laughed and told him I would be more ok if he wasn't in here. But with a straight face, he told me that I'd been down there for over an hour and he was told to check on me. I didn't believe him, but then I looked at my hands and they were the most wrinkled I had ever seen them. I had fallen asleep under the shower with my head leaning against the shower wall. At that moment I knew I wasn't ok and I believed him. I went to the NYU Medical Center to get my lungs checked out for asbestos, but they were clear.

That night about a dozen NYU students were all sleeping in the same room because we weren't allowed back in our dorms yet. A remote control fell off the TV and hit the floor and everyone jumped and some screamed and cried from the noise. We weren't ok. NYC was swarming with the national guard and military-looking vehicles and no one felt safe. The next day as I was walking towards the NY Penn Station, I felt a rumbling and stopped to look around to see what building was going to fall. It was just a subway passing under the street, but it gave me anxiety because I thought another building was collapsing. I saw a huge convoy of construction vehicles heading towards Ground Zero and joined in with the crowd clapping out hands for them. I saw people crying in the street and one man was crying and said, "It's just so great to see this, they can knock down our buildings, but America is going to be ok". It was an emotional moment. The train from NYC to NJ was free that day and I left there forever a different person.

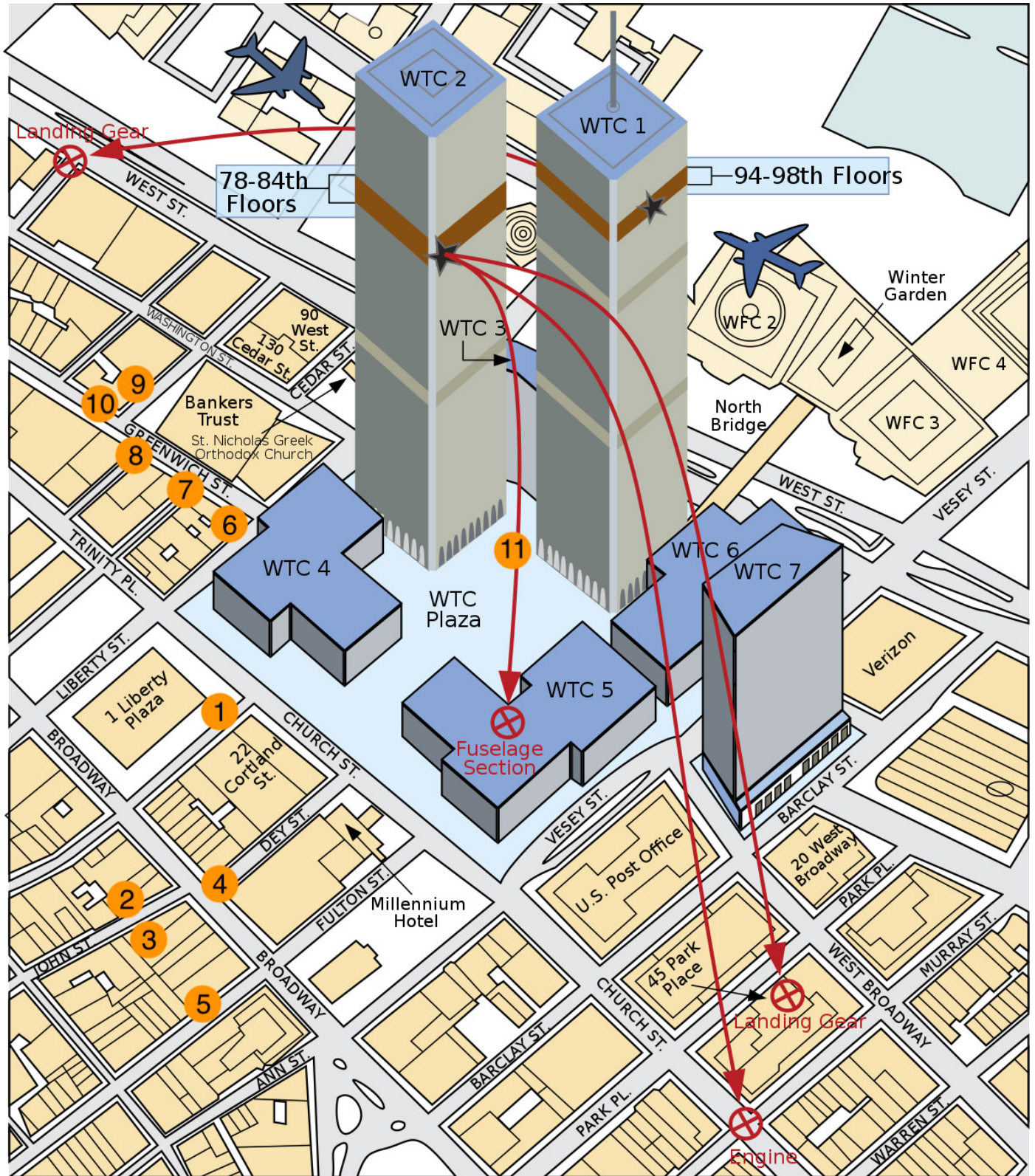
THE LORD'S FAITHFULNESS

The Lord saved my life that day despite my sin and I am so grateful for His mercy. My turning back to the Lord wasn't perfect. It took many months to repent of the bad habits I had developed, but 9/11/01 was the day I made the decision to turn back to God. I have never regretted the decision to follow the Lord and I have experienced more joy in serving God than anything I ever had while living for myself. Today I have the privilege of serving the Lord at Cornerstone Community Church in Wildomar, California. The photos I took before the first tower fell, along with a video of me sharing my testimony, are available at www.Go2Cornerstone.com/911.



**If forgiveness had
a physical feeling,
I know I felt it.**





Location Map