

# Rededicate 250: Pastor who survived 9/11 recounts testimony of God's mercy

By Jon Brown, Christian Post Reporter Friday, May 15, 2026

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People visit the Lincoln Memorial and National Mall in Washington, D.C., on May 13, 2026, ahead of Rededicate 250 on Sunday. | Kent Nishimura/AFP via Getty Images

A pastor whose experience as a teenager on 9/11 led him to return to Jesus Christ told The Christian Post that he hopes his testimony will remind listeners of God's mercy toward sinners.

Andy Deane, who serves as lead pastor at Cornerstone Community Church in Wildomar, California, is one of the faith leaders who was asked to speak during a portion of the [Rededicate 250: A National Jubilee of Prayer, Praise & Thanksgiving](#) event this Sunday on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

"The section they asked me to speak on is called 'In the Face of Terror,' and so I have a personal testimony of how I had to run from the Twin Towers as they were burning, and I helped out the firemen all day," he said.

"And that was a rededicating moment in my life, when I had walked away from God and came back to him. So I have four minutes to share on September 11, my story and how the nation really felt unified after that for a few weeks."

'If forgiveness had a physical feeling, I know I felt it'

Despite his Christian upbringing, Deane was a 19-year-old sophomore at New York University who was living in rebellion against God when he was confronted with eternity a quarter-century ago on Sept. 11, 2001.

Following a night of drunken partying that left him "feeling discouraged and guilty over my sin," he and his roommate were on nearby Church Street the next morning as they watched smoke pour out of the World Trade Center, according to his [testimony](#).

Though his roommate had left before the first collapse, Deane was among those who fled as the South Tower toppled and thick plumes of darkness engulfed those below.



Andy Deane, then 19, looks up at the burning World Trade Center minutes before the South Tower collapsed on Sept. 11, 2001. | Courtesy Andy Deane

Escaping into a chocolate shop a block away, he found himself trapped with about 10 other people as they struggled to breathe, coughing and choking on the toxic dust. When he was told there was nowhere else to go, he became convinced he was about to die and cried out to God.

"What do you do when you have a few minutes before you meet God and you were out rebelling against him the night before?" Deane wrote in his [written testimony](#). "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."

As spiritual peace came upon him, Deane immediately asked the Lord to help him assist those around him if there was any hope.

"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," he wrote.

An image came to Deane's mind of a building across the street, the glass doors of which he had seen a security guard locking earlier in the day. "I sensed God wanted me to go there," he wrote. A line from a hymn about [God's strength being made perfect in weakness](#) also came to him as he stumbled outside into the acrid smoke, where he was unable to see his own hand in front of him.

Deane found the building, kicked the door until the security guard opened it and was ultimately able to lead the others from the chocolate shop there so they could breathe. After the North Tower collapsed, he spent the next few hours helping firefighters and others amid the carnage of Ground Zero.

"The Lord saved my life that day despite my sin, and I am so grateful for His mercy," Deane wrote. While his journey "wasn't perfect" and it "took many months to repent of the bad habits I had developed," he claims his experience on 9/11 ultimately led him on his journey back to Christ.

'Cry out to God and He will meet you'

The importance of helping others, which Deane realized immediately after he sensed God's forgiveness that day, is a "crucial" part of the Christian life, he told CP.

"Otherwise, it's just an academic faith in your mind. But Jesus is pretty clear that we have to be doers of the Word, not hearers only, and so we must live out our faith by loving our neighbors, right?"

Deane said he is "very honest" in his testimony about how he had strayed from the Lord, but that it has helped him connect with others who are facing similar struggles.



A photo taken by Deane and his roommate shows people looking on with horror after planes struck the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001. | Courtesy Andy Deane

"And so, when I'm honest with that and share that testimony, I try to meet people where they're at, knowing that there's a lot of people out there who are without purpose and trying to find satisfaction in the world," he said. "So just by trying to be vulnerable with my testimony, people have connected with it and been encouraged by it."

Echoing the prayer he made on 9/11 to aid those around him choking in the dark, Deane said he hopes his story will continue to help those who find themselves suffering in spiritual darkness.

"I really want them to see that in my darkest hour, God met me; not because I deserved it, but because He is merciful," he said. "And so, I want them to have a clear reminder that when they go through their darkest hours: Cry out to God and He will meet you."

### Healing a divided nation

Deane said he appreciates the Rededicate 250 event's emphasis on prayer, fasting, humility and unity, noting that its May 17 date coincides with the 250th anniversary of the Continental Congress designating what they called "a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayers," according to the [congressional record](#).

The Congress exhorted the colonists amid the trials of war to "with united hearts, confess and bewail our manifold sins and transgressions, and, by a sincere repentance and amendment of life, appease his righteous displeasure, and, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, obtain his pardon and forgiveness."

"And so they were in a time of war, and they knew we need to depend on God," Deane said. "And I just think that's always a healthy message that people personally need to depend on God, and that should help us with those we disagree with and all the divisions out there."

Deane suggested that returning to such a spirit, united in humble repentance, could do much to heal an increasingly divided nation, and that Rededicate 250 could be seen as a success if it aids in developing such spiritual fruit.

"I think the best way to try to measure success would be if people are humble; if people are humble enough to listen to others, hear what they have to say, not just point the finger," he said. "Everyone loves pointing the finger at other people, and they love pointing the finger at sin groups that they don't personally struggle with. That makes them feel better about themselves."

"But I think if people would humble themselves, try to love their neighbors, be around people who are different than them, have a bit more of that unity that we need, that would be great. That's a big ask, right? But that would be the only way, I think, you can measure success," he added.

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