

So,
Are the Skies Really
Gonna Part?

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Dale Goodrich

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my wife Susan, son Logan and daughter Jillian. Their dedication, love and support have meant more to me than they'll ever know.

Susan, your sacrifices have not been acknowledged by the same medals, ribbons and insignia that I get to wear on my Air Force uniform so the average person on the street doesn't know what you've been through. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, however, has seen it all! Your love over the years and those tearful prayers on 9/11 have meant more to me than words could ever say!!

Logan, I've been able to comfortably go about my business because I know I've got another man

in the house to look after things. I couldn't possibly tell you how proud you've made me throughout your life. You are an outstanding young man after God's and my own heart. Keep up the great work!

Jillian, you are my ever present ray of sunshine. After a long hard day in the rat race, I know one of the first things I'm going to see when I come through the door is that trademark smile of yours that absolutely lights up the room. I couldn't imagine one single day without your sweet, heartfelt love!



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I am honored to call Campus Crusade for Christ evangelist and author Randy Newman (“Questioning Evangelism,” Kregel Publications, February 1, 2004) my friend. It seems like everyone who knows him can never get enough of his “down to earth” style and wise counsel. I count myself among those who feel that way. I could blissfully spend countless hours soaking up his perspective. Randy, to say you’ve been an inspirational friend would be a gross understatement. Thank you for your help!

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Our family often jokes that my "baby" sister, Lisa Laufer, and I are identical twins born nine years apart. It's almost spooky to see how similar our personalities really are. Lisa, you are one of the most beautiful, devoted Christians I've ever known. Thank you for being my spiritual sounding board. You're the best little buddy a big brother could've ever hoped for and your loving support over the years have meant more than you'll ever know. May God bless you!!



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CHAPTER ONE

The Attack

Tuesday, September 11, 2001 started out like every other Tuesday I'd ever encountered. It was a beautiful, quiet day and I was taking a break from my fulltime job as a pilot for United Airlines in order to fulfill my part-time military obligation as a Colonel in the Air Force Reserve. My duties on that particular day placed me in the National Military Command Center (NMCC) at the Pentagon. Little did any of us know, as we swung our feet out of bed that morning, that it would be a day whose impact would be felt for the rest of our lives.

While on duty in the NMCC, it was my job to keep tabs on any logistics related issues my boss may have needed to know about as various military operations played out around the world. The brave

young men and women of the U.S. military are in harm's way in lots of places besides the Middle East, so those of us back at headquarters can be busy from time to time lending support. As this particular Tuesday dawned, I wasn't terribly busy. That was just fine, because my master plan was to finish several projects during what I'd hoped would be a quiet block of days. Actually, that plan was working well until I happened to look over at another officer and noticed that he and two colleagues were intently staring at the TV above their desks. Out of curiosity, I walked over to see what had them so enthralled. Images of smoke pouring out of one of the World Trade Center towers filled the screen. I made a beeline back to my desk and tuned in the news on my own set.

CNN's resident aviation expert was speculating as to what may have happened. One of the first comments I heard was "We think an airplane may have hit the tower... maybe even a commercial sized, twin engine jet." The exact cause was obviously still unknown. Even though the weather in NYC was perfect, the expert was asked whether or not a navigation malfunction could have caused the problem. Commercial flights are virtually always flown according to a plan that *could* be executed solely by reference to instruments in the cockpit. But anybody flying on a clear day like that would be doing so primarily by looking outside, so an instrument malfunction was out of the question.

I was anxiously waiting to hear whether or not an airline was involved. Not long afterwards, I

overheard an officer on the phone say something about American Airlines. As horrible as this event was, I have to admit I breathed a small sigh of relief to know that, at first glance anyway, my United Airlines family didn't appear to be involved. The pace of conversations in the complex was picking up, so my attention was directed to several different places. Just then, I happened to look at the TV screen as the second airplane slammed into the other tower with the resulting fireball.

Shortly after the New York City part of the disaster played out, somebody in our work area reported that a hijacked aircraft was heading for Washington D.C. I had the incredibly helpless sense of being in the middle of a situation that was spiraling out of control and wanting to be able to do something about it. The Pentagon is obviously big and has a very unique shape that makes it easy to identify from the air. There was no reason, however, to assume that we had a significantly higher chance of being hit than any other high value target in the D.C. area. All of that notwithstanding, however, I felt unusually exposed and vulnerable. Shortly thereafter, those feelings became real in a shocking way when I heard a distinct, muffled, double BOOM. Actually, it wasn't as ear shattering as one might think. It was more like a massive industrial sized air conditioning unit kicking on, but obviously too loud to be that. Someone came in from a few offices over and said, "This building just moved!" Oddly enough, I didn't feel the building move. I only heard the noise.

Within a short time, many of the folks who worked in offices right above us began to filter downstairs for two reasons: situational awareness tools were in the NMCC and smoke was starting to ease into their workspaces. Within a matter of just a few moments, the building's alarms began to sound, directing everyone to evacuate. Surprisingly, we never did leave the building. The NMCC is pretty well environmentally controlled. Surgical masks were handed out, though, in case we ever had to leave the immediate area. The smoke just outside our office complex was thick enough that it was uncomfortable to breathe, but not dangerous. That alarm continued to blare for hours. On several occasions, I silently cursed the guy who designed it because, so far as I could tell, it didn't appear to be possible to turn the alarm off in those parts of the building where people didn't intend to evacuate. I just wanted to be able to hear myself think instead of listening to a continuous warning telling me to get out.

A short while later, someone else reported that another hijacked airplane had just crashed. By this time, I honestly began to wonder whether or not I was witnessing the end of the world. All I could think of was Tim LaHaye's description in his book *Left Behind*, wherein vehicles of every sort start crashing because their Christian drivers, pilots and engineers had been taken up into heaven when Jesus Christ came back to rapture His church. The only reason I knew that wasn't happening was the fact

that I was still here. Thanks to a very short prayer of salvation I'd recited in High School, my life has been in the palm of God's mighty hand ever since. I have fire insurance. It isn't insurance against the type of fire those terrorists caused that day. It's the kind you can only get by hopping up off the throne of your life and inviting Jesus Christ to have a seat! I know this may come across as a little presumptuous to the average non-Christian out there, but if airplanes start crashing because of the Rapture, I'll be watching that scene play out from within His tender loving arms instead of a smoky section of the Pentagon. That is His promise and I believe it with every bit of my soul.

It was quite surreal to watch news reports of the Pentagon burning while knowing that I was standing in the building being featured on TV. It was like starring in a live movie and simultaneously being part of the audience as well. The other extremely unsettling notion that began to descend on a few of us in the complex centered on the possibility that another aircraft, for all we knew, was headed for our location as well. After all, two were used to attack the World Trade Center towers—why not two on their target of choice in Washington, D.C.? We just didn't know. Every so often, eyes seemed to meet in a silent stare that begged for an answer as to whether we would be hit again, and possibly killed, or left to live another day.

I went into the conference room occupied by the One-Star General in charge, just to see if his team

knew anything else that I didn't already know. Just as I walked in, things were getting quite busy. Various bits of official conversation, like "U.S. under attack from the air," and other similarly menacing things permeated the atmosphere. Conference calls could be heard on overhead speakers and the full might of the U. S. military was stirring to life. I immediately thought this had to be a nightmare, and that I would wake up any minute.

Not long after witnessing all of that, I became aware that my hands and feet were beginning to shake, my heart seemed to be racing, and my breathing was coming in short, rapid bursts. I was beginning to feel the onset of mild physical shock. That should not have come as any big surprise, given everything we were going through. Leaving the conference room, I was suddenly overwhelmed by the desire to have a very intimate conversation with God. It was almost like He was tapping me on the shoulder. For the first time in my life, I was confronted with the reality that I truly might not live through the day, so, to put it simply, I commended my soul to Him. It was not a matter of giving up—just an acknowledgment that He might be calling me home. Basically, I told Him I was ready to come quietly. Right on the heels of that conversation, however, He acquainted me with an aspect of my walk with Him that still needs some work. Every single one of us will leave loved ones behind and/or dreams unfulfilled when we die. I found it very hard not to dwell on that as I contemplated what my fate might

be that day. I have to learn to trust God more fully for absolutely every single aspect of my existence, including the part where my body will eventually cease to exist. None of us will ever be made to take on more than we can bear. Knowing that my wife and children might actually have to lean on that promise, while not necessarily uplifting, certainly was instructive.

I really don't know how long the intimate time that God and I shared with each other lasted—probably no more than a minute or two, and perhaps shorter than that. It didn't end in any particularly noteworthy way. I just came out of my reverie and got plugged back into what was going on. To stop my hands and feet from shaking, I concentrated on slowing down my breathing and maintaining control, but at one point I did have to go sit down for a few moments. I tried to convince myself that I just needed to calm down and focus on the tasks at hand. I wouldn't be much help to anyone if I had to use up all of my energy just trying not to fall down. Again, it was a little surprising to experience symptoms of physical shock, but all of that just reminded me that being a Christian doesn't guarantee a life free from fear. It just guarantees that we won't confront it alone.

Approximately thirty more minutes of activity had passed when an unusually pronounced hush settled over the immediate area. Just then, I looked up and saw the Secretary of Defense, Mr. Donald Rumsfeld, enter the complex with his entourage.

Ever since I'd begun my assignment on the Joint Staff, I'd wanted to meet some of the military brass, and now here was the full show. Eventually, several four star generals including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Shelton, showed up as well. By now most of our efforts were centered on setting up a CAT (Crisis Action Team). This separate team of military personnel was preparing to work in a large complex of cubicles positioned quite a ways from the NMCC where I'd been during the actual attack. It is at this point that I believe a true miracle occurred for my wife, Susan. Shortly after the Pentagon was hit, I tried to call her to make sure she knew I was OK. As relentless as that effort was, I could not get an outside phone line. A coworker had gotten a line and was on the phone with his wife. He offered to have her contact Susan and let her know all was well. I obviously jumped at the offer and gave him my home phone number. A few minutes later, we made eye contact from across the room and he gave me a "thumbs-up," indicating contact had been made. I immediately put my thoughts of the home front on the back burner. A few hours later, I was at work in one of those CAT cubicles. I don't know how many workspaces were in this complex, but I was one among hundreds busily answering phones and reacting to the emergency. Until we could figure out who everybody was and where he or she was sitting, our standard operating procedure whenever a call came into the complex was to hold up the handset and yell the name of the person that

the caller needed to reach. If within earshot, that person would then come over and take the call. After having been in the CAT for all of five minutes, the officer in the cubicle *right next to mine* held up his phone and yelled my name. That surprised me, because nowhere near enough time had elapsed for anyone to know that I'd been moved into the CAT. I took the phone and, in a very business-like manner said "Colonel Goodrich." I then heard my poor, frantic wife tearfully say, "Your voice never sounded so good!" I don't know whom my coworker's wife had actually called several hours before, but it obviously wasn't Susan. In desperation, after trying every number she had on an old recall roster I'd given her, she found one more number labeled "Crisis Action Team" and that one just happened to land her right next to me! Needless to say, I felt terrible. Those hours must have been torturous!

Sometimes, I think the families of military members are the ones who fight the toughest battles. I know that when the roles are reversed and my wife goes out for the day while I stay at home, I like to have some idea as to when she expects to return. Then, if she's not back by that time plus or minus five minutes, I normally go into full-blown panic mode. How she has managed to come to grips with the fact that her husband's whereabouts are, more often than not, a complete unknown to her is beyond me. Be that as it may, on that day God heard her cries and miraculously put us in touch. He also provided me with a very valuable lesson that He'd begun dur-

ing our intimate conversation a few hours before. I mentioned that I was somewhat overwhelmed by the idea that my family might have to cope with the news of my death. He illustrated to me that I wasn't even capable of making a simple phone call, let alone living my family's life for them after I die. He miraculously took care of letting my wife know that I was OK. I believe He gave us that miracle in order to show me that I just need to trust Him! He is a God who is more than capable of seeing to every little detail of every life He's created, from coping with the death of a loved one to completing a simple phone call! The remainder of the day was filled with the type of work anyone would imagine has to be done after a disaster like this. Airlift requests had to be handled, and disaster relief efforts were getting underway. The rest of the day and night were not nearly as newsworthy as the morning had been.

As I look back on this disaster, I can't help but wonder whether or not these attacks have won more souls for Jesus Christ than anything else possibly could have. I can't even imagine how dark and overwhelmingly foreboding our new-world order must look to anyone who is trying to face it without the light of the Risen Christ showing them the way. Let's face it. One of the features of our way of life that we all hold so dear is freedom and our enemies have figured out how to use that against us as a weapon of mass destruction. They've also demonstrated that they have absolutely no qualms about doing so at any time or in any place. We humans are powerless to re-

turn this world to the simpler thing that we thought it was on September 10th. Many of the soldiers we're attempting to engage have lived right next door to us for years, because our system has wanted them to feel free to come here and do so. Right after the attacks began, the FAA grounded all air traffic in the country. How many of those grounded airplanes had hijackers on board? We'll never know, because if there were any, they simply got off their respective airplanes and drove back home.

Now we're dealing with everything from bio-terrorism to power plant security. The Secretary of Defense himself said that it's impossible to defend every conceivable target that could be hit. In other words, virtually every direction this discussion takes ends in hopelessness if we remain determined to use human ingenuity as the solution. Our national leaders are ordained by God to defend us, and that's exactly what they are doing, to the best of their collective abilities. There is no ultimate solution, however, apart from Him. We have only one way out of this nightmare and that is the Triune God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We can't solve this, but He can. September 11, 2001 was not, in fact, the end of the world, so it's safe to assume that He has a solution in mind and a plan for each one of us who were allowed to survive. We just need to have faith. Isaiah 55:8, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord".

There has never been any doubt in my mind that I was *called* to pursue aviation, my love for it has

been so intense. At one time in my life, however, my job as an airline pilot was a large part of my identity. That's no longer true. I used to think that God introduced me to my insatiable love for aviation when I was five years old because He knew that this world would need one more pilot someday and He wanted me to be that pilot. I now believe that He put me here because He knew the aviation world was going to need one more Christian someday and He wanted me to be that Christian. I also believe that my having been on duty in the Pentagon that day was His gift to me as well. My Air Force Reserve job occupies a small enough percentage of my total life that my having been there on that day feels a lot like part of His master plan for my life. I believe it was God's way of giving me an effective attention-getting step to use in my attempts to spread the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. I certainly don't want any looks of admiration for having been there.

What I do want, though, is the opportunity to help folks know that God wants to have a *personal relationship* with every single individual who doesn't already enjoy one with Him. My most heartfelt prayer used to be that I'd get to keep flying and eventually retire comfortably. The prayer is no less heartfelt now, but it's a prayer that everyone who reads these words or hears my voice will come away knowing the name Jesus Christ. If you've never asked Him to come into your life and take control, He's knocking on your door even as we speak. Your

next opportunity to claim His gift of eternal life could be your last. I sincerely doubt that any of the victims who died on September 11th woke up that morning and said, “Yup...today’s the day...I guess I better get to know the Lord!”