

ALWAYS GOD IS LISTENING
Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch
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TEXT: Psalm 116

This weekend, we have all been remembering the attack of 9/11 twenty years ago. I don't know about you but seeing all those scenes on television brought back a lot of memories and I even felt myself getting a little choked up – hearing the stories again about the lives that were lost and the heroism of the first responders and medical personnel that helped care for folk that day. It truly was a day that changed America – and touched all of us in one way or another. I know each of you, who were alive back in 2001, have a story about where you were when you first heard about the attack – and who the first person you called to talk about what happened.

I read a recent Upper Room devotional by Dennis Fisher that told the story of Stanley Praisman who was working on the 81st floor of the World Trade Center South Tower, when he saw an airplane flying directly toward him. Praying a quick prayer of desperation, he dove under a desk for protection: “Lord, I can't do this! You take over!”

The horrific impact of the crash trapped Praisman behind a wall of debris. But as he prayed and cried for help, Brian Clark, a worker from three floors up, heard and responded. He found Praisman, and the two made their way through the rubble and darkness, down eighty flights of stairs. Praisman and Clark were two of only eighteen survivors from the impact zone or higher in the South Tower that day.¹

“Lord You take over!” “Help me Lord!” Prayers said in a time of crisis – and prayers spoken in conviction that God would hear and answer! Oh, how we need to know we have an “Always God” - always with us and always hearing us ... no matter what we are going through – no matter our situation – God is there, and He hears us – ALWAYS!

All throughout Scripture we hear that God listens to our prayers – He hears our cries and knows our thoughts. In today's Scripture reading from Psalm 116, the psalmist cried out to God for deliverance and knew God heard his prayer. Turn with me to the book of Psalms – the 116th chapter and let's read the first 5 verses.

¹ I love the LORD because he hears my voice and my prayer for mercy.

² Because He bends down to listen, I will pray as long as I have breath!

³ Death wrapped its ropes around me; the terrors of the grave overtook me.

I saw only trouble and sorrow.

⁴ Then I called on the name of the LORD: “Please, LORD, save me!”

⁵ How kind the LORD is! How good he is! So merciful, this God of ours!

God hears our voice – and even bends down to listen! Think about it – when we want to really hear the person we are talking to clearly – we get closer, lean in, and listen carefully. Well, Scripture tells us that is what God does for us. He really wants to hear us – so He bends down, stoops to get close to us and listen to whatever is on our hearts. He hears our cries and knows our thoughts. We can be assured that when we pray, God is listening. Time and again God says – call on me – you have a direct line to me. I will hear and I will listen.

Jeremiah 33:3 says: *‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’* And then in Jeremiah 29:12-13 – God says, *“When you pray, I will listen. If you look for Me wholeheartedly, you will find Me.”*

Now when you think about it – that is a really powerful and incredible invitation: to have the Creator and King of the universe say that He will bend down and listen to our prayers, if we just call upon Him. And that He will not only listen, but He will answer! But is it a promise we really believe and claim?

Sometimes, we question that, don’t we? We ask God, ‘Can you *really* hear me?’ or ‘Are you listening, God?’ Satan would like us to believe that God doesn’t hear us ... that He gets tired of us ... or that we’ve gone to far, done too many bad things, that He can’t hear you. Or sometimes we think God has a whole universe to run – with all sorts of big problems all over the world. That’s what God focuses on; He’s not going to listen to my small problems. I don’t need to bother Him with my issues.

The truth is the God cares and loves each and every one of us – and wants to be in relationship with us – hearing everything about us. He is as close to us as our heartbeat and our next breath. And so, as it says, in Scripture, He knows our every thought, even before we speak it and is ready to answer, even before we are done praying.

Isaiah 65:24 says, *“I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!”* He is ready and willing and able because He cares for us so much.

He hears every cry and treasures every tear. He rejoices with us in our praises and weeps with us in our sorrows. He knows everything that is going on inside of us – both good and bad. And He will judge our thoughts and our motives when we pray – and will know what is in our hearts. God knows the sin that is in our hearts that can separate us from Him. But God sent His Son to break down that barrier that sin causes. And so, as we believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, *“We can come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. And there we will receive His mercy and we will find grace to help us where we need it most!”* Always!

God even hears our prayers when we don’t know what to say or how to say it – because we are so confused or burdened with grief. Romans 8:26 tells us that *“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”*

There are times in my life when all I can do is speak the name of Jesus – or say, “Come Holy Spirit”. Maybe I am really stressed, or I just don’t even know what to say or what to do. When I stop and just call out “Jesus” – I can start to feel that peace that I was missing or the direction and the wisdom that I was really needing. God hears those simple prayers – and the Holy Spirit intercedes for me.

I am so grateful to know that no matter what I am going through – in good times and bad – in times when I can pray with great words or when I have no words at all to say – God is there and listening. God is always with you – always listening – and always loving you. ALWAYS! And He will give us the help and strength right where we need it most!

And that is true even in times of tragedy and crisis that we just don’t understand - tragedies like 9/11 as well as others in our own personal lives. We don’t always understand why they happened – or why God intervenes in some cases and not in others. But I believe, no matter what, God is still there with us and will help us through those difficult times. He holds us in His everlasting arms and will carry us through!

Shortly after 9/11, a woman named Stacey Randall wrote a poem that answered where God was during that awful day...and where God is in all those difficult times and how He hears us. It’s called “Meet Me in the Stairwell” ... a letter from God. Ad it goes like this:

‘MEET ME IN THE STAIRWELL’

You say you will never forget where you were when
you heard the news On September 11, 2001. Neither will I.

I was on the 110th floor in a smoke-filled room
with a man who called his wife to say ‘Good-Bye.’

I held his fingers steady as he dialed. I gave him the
peace to say, ‘Honey, I am not going to make it, but it
is OK ... I am ready to go.’

I was with his wife when he called as she fed
breakfast to their children. I held her up as she
tried to understand his words and as she realized
he wasn’t coming home that night.

I was in the stairwell of the 23rd floor when a
woman cried out to Me for help. ‘I have been
knocking on the door of your heart for 50 years!’ I said.

‘Of course, I will show you the way home – only believe in Me now.’

I was at the base of the building with the Priest
ministering to the injured and devastated souls.

I took him home to tend to his Flock in Heaven.

He heard my voice and answered.

I was on all four of those planes, in every seat,
with every prayer. I was with the crew as they
were overtaken. I was in the very hearts of the
believers there, comforting and assuring them that their

faith has saved them.
I was in Texas, Virginia, California, Michigan, Afghanistan.
I was standing next to you when you heard the terrible news.
Did you sense Me?
I want you to know that I saw every face.
I knew every name – though not all know Me.
Some met Me for the first time on the 86th floor.
Some sought Me with their last breath.
Some couldn't hear Me calling to them through the
smoke and flames; 'Come to Me... this way... take
my hand.' Some chose, for the final time, to ignore Me.
But I was there.
I did not place you in the Tower that day.
You may not know why, but I do. However, if you were
there in that explosive moment in time, would you have
reached for Me?
Sept. 11, 2001, was not the end of the journey
for you. But someday your journey will end.
And I will be there for you as well.
Seek Me now while I may be found.
Then, at any moment, you know you are 'ready to go.'
I will be in the stairwell of your final moments.
Love, God²

PRAYER

INVITATION

RESOURCES

¹Dave Fisher, "Emergency Prayer", Our Daily Bread Devotional
<https://odb.org/deeper/remembering-9-11-facing-tragedy-finding-hope/2>

²Poem by Stacey Randal, 2002, "Meet Me in the Stairwell" as quoted in Effective Church.com,
<https://www.effectivechurch.com/a-remember-god-always-meets-us-when-and-where-we-need-him/#more-10956>

BENEDICTION

And now may the rich blessings of God
And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
And the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit
God with you and be yours in increasing measure.
God bless and keep you always. AMEN