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Baptist senator offers advice for grief-stricken

By Bob Allen

WASHINGTON (ABP) -- "Get up and do what is there and presents itself to you immediately. . . The thing that God has given for you to do that day, do that."

That's advice for thousands of grieving Americans who lost loved ones in Sept. 11 terrorist attacks from U.S. Sen. Jean Carnahan, who endured her own public tragedy nearly a year ago.

Carnahan's husband, Missouri Gov. Mel Carnahan, perished Oct. 16 last year in a plane crash while running for Senate. Their son, who piloted the private plane en route to a campaign appearance, was also killed.

After her husband's death, Jean Carnahan allowed her name on the ballot in his place and was subsequently elected.

She offered insight from her own grieving process Sept. 20 in an interview on ABC's "Good Morning America" television show.

Carnahan, a Southern Baptist, said it's natural to wonder why when tragedy strikes. "Why me? Why now? What have I done? I don't deserve this," she said. "You think all those questions you think later you wish you hadn't asked."

However, she added, "You look back in the Bible, you see even Job asked the question, 'Why me?'"

She said "connection" with others is a part of the healing process. "That is why it's so important for us to come together in candlelight services, in church services," she said.

Dealing with a personal tragedy in the public eye brings added pressure, Carnahan said. "There's such a focus of attention on you, and you wonder, 'What's expected of me?'" While feeling pressure to handle grief appropriately, Carnahan advised it's likely "not going to happen that way" for many people.

Asked if she can now think about her husband and son without sadness, Carnahan said: "I think about them every day, of course. I certainly think my husband would be proud of what I'm doing."

Asked by interviewer Claire Shipman, senior national correspondent, what advice she would offer those just beginning their grieving process, Carnahan said: "They'll not feel a year from now as they feel today. Time will heal. . There will be blessings in their life they cannot foresee at this moment."

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Falwell retracts statement from '700 Club' interview

By Bob Allen

LYNCHBURG, Va. (ABP) -- After first claiming that comments attributing terrorist attacks on the United States to God's judgment were taken out of context, Jerry Falwell now says his statement was "indefensible" and "stupid."

After watching a tape of the interview several times, Falwell said Sept. 20 on "Good Morning America," he concluded, "I misstated my own deeply held conviction that the hijackers, the terrorists, along with those who harbored and funded them, are solely responsible" for attacks in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

Earlier, Falwell told a television audience on the "700 Club" religious program he believed the attacks indicated that God had removed a hedge of protection around America because of sin. "I really believe that the pagans and abortionists and the feminists and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People For the American Way -- all of them who have tried to secularize America -- I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen,'" he said.

"Well, I totally concur," interviewer Pat Robertson responded.

Condemnation of Falwell's comment was widespread. Critics included the White House and Falwell's former colleague, syndicated columnist Cal Thomas. Even Robertson backed off, saying he appeared to agree with Falwell only because he misunderstood him.

"What better spokesman for the Taliban?" pondered syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman. "Our fundamentalists agree with theirs. God is on their side. America's sins are to blame."

Amid such criticism, Falwell said Sept. 20, "No human being, including myself, knows when God is executing judgment."

Falwell pledged to continue his opposition to abortion and what he termed efforts to "secularize" the nation, but said: "I do not believe they endanger America. I misspoke entirely."

Because of his "total failure to accurately state what I was trying to say," Falwell said, he left "the impression of a vengeful God."

"One stupid statement I made is indefensible," he said. "It is not a blip. It is a mistake."

Falwell said the comment contradicted other statements he has made.

"I do not blame God," he said. "I do not blame any human being. This is the act of terrible zealots who hate us because we love and support Israel."

"I'm sorry. I have God's forgiveness, and I ask yours," Falwell said.

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Chaplains note hunger for community in New York

By Ken Camp

NEW YORK (ABP) -- Baptist chaplains helping to coordinate pastoral ministry in the wake of the World Trade Center disaster encountered "unusual openness" to spiritual matters and a desire for human contact uncharacteristic of the typical fast pace in New York City.

"Where in the past people walked through the city with their eyes avoiding contact with others, since last Tuesday residents look into the eyes of one another as they pass on the streets," said Milfred Minatrea, director of missional church strategy with the Baptist General Convention of Texas. "It seems they are hungry for community."

Minatrea is one of three chaplains from Texas serving at the request of the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board.

They are working with Metropolitan New York Baptist Association, providing immediate pastoral ministry for rescue and recovery workers, as well as seeking to develop a long-range response system to help churches provide grief counseling and other ministries.

Noting that only a few credentialed chaplains will be granted access to the "ground zero" disaster site, the Texas Baptists identified for NAMB and the association more than a half-dozen possible venues where chaplains potentially could serve.

After a few days spent working the perimeter of the disaster site and streets of Manhattan, the chaplains received credentials on Sept. 19 to enter "ground zero."

They were assigned to the morgue, to offer counsel and prayer for recovery workers as they reclaimed bodies from the wreckage of the World Trade Center towers.

A small multi-state team of certified crisis responders was tentatively scheduled to arrive in New York over the weekend to continue providing ministry. In coming weeks, additional teams may be deployed both in Manhattan and to churches in communities surrounding New York City, said Jim Young, chaplaincy liaison for Texas Baptists.

In their first two days in New York City, chaplains Minatrea, Michael Haynes of Temple, Texas, and Hugh Atwell of Fort Worth "literally walked the island from 84th Street south," Minatrea reported. He said people they met on the streets demonstrate a willingness to talk about spiritual issues.

On numerous occasions, people have approached the uniformed chaplaincy workers to say, "Chaplain, thank you for being here," he added.

"That simple comment frequently opens the door for deep conversation," he said. "Clearly, the tragedy of last week has resulted in a window of opportunity in which people are spiritually hungry."

Minatrea said he particularly was touched by an encounter with a single young man named Oliver, a Manhattan resident whose parents recently moved to North Texas.

When Minatrea met him, Oliver was sitting on a park bench in the midst of one of the city's many unofficial memorials to victims of the attack. In places throughout the city where desperate friends and family members have posted photos and personal information about missing loved ones, grieving citizens have surrounded the photos with flowers and candles.

Oliver told about his struggles to cope with the reality of the attack and the loss of friends who were missing and presumed dead.

"He grieved alone and continued coming to the park as a way of staying in touch with the losses of so many people," Minatrea said.

"We spoke of faith and hope beyond the tragedy, and I asked Oliver if he would like me to pray with him. He indicated that he would appreciate that, and that it had been a long time since he had practiced his faith."

Specifically, the young man asked the chaplain to pray that God would help his parents understand why he wanted to stay in New York. After the prayer, Minatrea asked Oliver if he could contact his parents when he returned to Texas.

"I could tell them that I visited with you for a while and that you really are doing all right," Minatrea said.

Beaming, the young man eagerly accepted the chaplain's offer and gave him a phone number to call. Just before Minatrea left, Oliver wiped a tear away and said, "Thank you so much for being here."

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Chaplains help military in time of national alert

By Ken Camp

FORT HOOD, Texas (ABP) -- As personnel at military installations await word of possible deployment to unknown locations for uncertain assignments, Baptist chaplains are helping them deal with doubts, fears and questions of right and wrong.

Capt. Paul Blundell, chaplain with the 312th Military Intelligence Battalion at Fort Hood, Texas, recalled that on the day the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon were attacked, he had the opportunity to pray during command and staff meetings.

"No one left," he said, noting that normally at least a couple would have slipped out during the prayer. "All remained, silent, still, heads bowed. I was awed, dumbstruck with my mouth hanging open."

Later that evening, Blundell went to the field with one of his companies to conduct a service. Normally, he said, five or six people would have attended, but this service drew more than three times that number. Blundell asked if anyone had friends or family members in the area of the attacks, and nine said they did.

A Catholic in attendance asked the chaplain if he had any Catholic prayers to offer. Blundell handed him a copy of his field worship manual, directing him to the right page. The young man found the "Hail Mary" and read it for the five Catholics present.

"The emotions were deep and the concerns heavy," Blundell recalled, noting that one soldier had a parent missing in the World Trade Center attack. "We prayed. The stillness reached to heaven, the hearts were open, the minds searching for meaning, the pain tangible."

On Saturday evening after the Tuesday attack, a soldier called the chaplain to say he and his wife wanted to be baptized. Blundell met with the young man and his wife to ask probing questions about their understanding and commitment. He also explained his own understanding about believer's baptism by immersion.

The couple professed their faith in Christ, and Blundell and another chaplain baptized them together.

"They were just a part of the 15 that were baptized that day," he said.

Maj. Joel Lytle, chaplain with the 1st Cavalry Division, 3rd Brigade at Fort Hood, said he had been "doing all kinds of counseling -- from soldiers related to victims to fears of military action." He added that chapels had been open for prayer, and special services were ongoing.

Capt. Stephen Allen, chaplain with the 311 Human Systems Wing at Brooks Air Force Base, met on the Sunday immediately after the attack on New York and Washington, D.C., with airmen new to active duty and with youth for Sunday school.

Some wanted to see terrorist Osama bin Laden dead. Others wondered about the appropriate use of force by Christians. One airman with a unique perspective commented: "My father was murdered by my cousin. I despise what he did, but I don't hate him to the point I wish he was slaughtered."

Allen said he wrestles with how the attack challenges one's understanding of Jesus' admonition to love your enemies. He personally finds justification for force when it is used to protect innocent people.

"As a Christian, I find peace in fighting terrorism because I know God expects us to protect our families," he noted. "I don't condone going after terrorists for vengeance. However, I'm the first in line to take whatever measures necessary to protect my wife, two sons and daughter. If that means deploying across the globe to apprehend people set on killing Americans, then I believe God expects nothing less."

Allen expressed sorrow at the hatred that grows out of violence and feeds on itself. He pointed to a news account of Americans waving the flag while burning pictures of bin Laden.

"How sad to think our nation could resemble the PLO-occupied West Bank. How sad to think our children could be inspired to hate rather than respect," he said.

Christians have the opportunity to let others see their "conduct and courage" in times of tragedy, Allen noted. And believers have a responsibility to pray, not only for national leaders and mourning families, but also for the families of terrorists. Each terrorist, he noted, was "someone's son."

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Baptist far from home when tragedy struck

By Ferrell Foster

DALLAS (ABP) -- Eating at a McDonald's restaurant is a treat in Odessa, Ukraine, and teacher Royce Rose had promised to take his students there the night before their final class.

They, however, refused the gift. The date was Sept. 13.

"We don't feel like we can celebrate," the students told Rose in the aftermath of terrorist attacks on the United States. "That was pretty significant," he said. By American standards, "these guys eat nothing."

Ukraine is in Eastern Europe and once was part of the Soviet Union.

"The empathy of people over there for what Americans were going through was just tremendous," said Rose, director of the office of theological education for the Baptist General Convention of Texas. He spent two weeks teaching education administration at Odessa Baptist Theological Seminary in early September.

It was about 4 p.m. in Odessa on Sept. 11 when attacks in America changed the world. Rose didn't learn of it until about an hour and a half later.

Upon his return to the seminary from a meeting, Rose's interpreter asked if he had heard the news. He hadn't. They went to a classroom to watch televised reports.

"I can't even describe the emotion," Rose said. He watched TV for about 30 minutes. "That was about all I could take."

As the week passed, Rose said, "I was feeling trapped." There was only one flight each day from Odessa to Vienna, and he didn't make it out as planned on Friday.

On Saturday, as he prepared to board his airplane, Rose handed his passport to a customs official. As the uniformed man returned the passport, the usual stoic expression disappeared, and he said, "Good luck."

That night, in a Vienna hotel, Rose watched television again for the first time since Sept. 11. He mixed sleep with CNN through the night.

"I'm a very visual person," Rose said. "I began to realize then what people in America were going through."

The next morning, at the Vienna airport, Rose waited through longer lines than he had ever seen at an airport; but he made it on the packed first flight to Chicago.

Back in the U.S., there were no crowds. People who were home were not hurrying to get anywhere else. Rose's flight to Dallas/Fort Worth was about two-thirds full, and D/FW airport was "just almost empty."

Asked what Baptists in the Ukraine think of the crisis, Rose said there was a "good deal" of talk about God causing this to happen. They do not view the United States as a "godless place," but they were talking about this bringing America to God.

"There seemed to be less talk about national issues and more concern for individuals," he said. Ukrainian Baptists are praying this will be an opportunity for American Christians to share their faith.

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Baptist Peace Fellowship calls for nonviolent response

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (ABP) -- With military retaliation for Sept. 11 terrorist attacks seemingly imminent, a group of Baptist peacemakers urged the world's leaders to seek justice through nonviolent means.

The Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America issued a statement Sept. 19 expressing "profound and intense grief" over acts of terrorism resulting in deaths in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

"Our sorrow extends to all the victims, their families, co-workers and friends," the statement says. "We mourn the pain and suffering these events have brought and will bring forth. We express profound admiration and gratitude for the many people, professional and volunteer, who continue to work tirelessly in rescue and recovery efforts and in caring for survivors."

"We acknowledge and understand the outrage and fear that generates a retaliatory response," the statement continues. "It is based on a proper need for accountability and justice. However, we call upon world leaders to seek justice through non-violent means, efforts that can build toward the prospects of peace instead of war."

The Charlotte, N.C.,-based fellowship believes "peacemaking and peace-building [are] essential to our Christian discipleship," according to the statement. "We follow Jesus who called us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Even though it is difficult to do in the wake of severe violence, we look for ways to transform conflict that lead to justice in a peaceable manner."

The statement quoted two famous advocates of non violence.

-- Mohandes Ghandi: "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary. The evil it does is permanent."

-- Martin Luther King Jr.: "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

The statement calls on constituents to specific actions of prayer, providing aid for relief and educating themselves in "conflict transformation."

"We also call for further education and understanding of the social, economic and political circumstances that provoke acts of terrorism. We call for advocacy in support of those who are treated with hostility due to their race, religion or political beliefs."

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-- By ABP staff

Medical center offers help for both body and soul

By Mark Wingfield

HARLINGEN, Texas (ABP) -- When Bruce Leibert talks about putting faith into practice, he has a specific kind of practice in mind -- medicine.

As director of the Family Practice Residency at Valley Baptist Medical Center, Leibert strives to produce doctors who will walk their faith as much as they talk their trade.

Leibert was hired five years ago to create a unique residency program at the 500-bed hospital, which is an affiliated agency of the Baptist General Convention of Texas. The program was initiated by Valley Baptist Medical Center President Ben McKibbens.

Leibert, a former Army major and Desert Storm veteran, attacks the task as a Christian soldier, marching as to war against both physical and spiritual illnesses. He calls it practicing "excellent medicine for an excellent Lord."

Residents who are involved in the South Texas program often call it the most amazing thing they've ever seen in their medical training.

"You can learn how to be a good doctor anywhere you go," explained third-year resident Chad White. "Here, you learn how to minister to your patients, how to pray with your patients. You see an example of how to pray with your patients, how to witness to them, how to lead them to Christ."

The medical training does not take a back seat to ministry, however. For Leibert and the program's five other faculty members, ministry and medicine go hand in hand.

Faculty member Nancy Rickerhauser recalls the criticism lodged against the program by a former student, who was not a Christian. While not criticizing the medical training, the student complained, "You can't separate the Christian nature of the program."

What was meant as an insult actually was a compliment, Rickerhauser explained, because it confirmed that the faculty has succeeded in intertwining their faith and practice.

Faculty members not only teach about faith, they model for the residents how to be Christian doctors, not doctors who happen to be Christian.

"I had doctors I worked with in medical school who were Christians, but I never saw them do anything other than what other doctors do," said White, who grew up in First Baptist Church of Hamlin, Texas, and went to medical school after graduating from Howard Payne University.

Not so at Valley Baptist Medical Center, he said. The practice of prayer and the discipline of Bible study permeate everything the residents and faculty do.

"Our staff are a beautiful example of people who love the Lord," Leibert said. "They model that Jesus Christ must be a part of medicine or medicine fails."

So the daily morning report time begins with case studies and medical teaching but ends with a missions emphasis and prayer time. Before heading out to see patients in the clinic or make rounds in the hospital, residents and faculty members join hands and pray.

Residents participate in local churches and in a weekly Bible study at the clinic. Their spouses also have a weekly Bible study led by Leibert's wife.

Once a week, some of the residents and faculty members load up their gear and head across the border into the Mexican colonias, where they work in conjunction with Texas Baptists' River Ministry.

Once a month, the residents participate in a spirituality forum, where they talk in depth about how to bring matters of faith in their practice.

And in the Harlingen hospital and clinic, the physicians regularly ask patients if it would be OK to pray with them before leaving. And almost always, the patients say yes.

The argument that doctors should not talk about religion with their patients because the patients are vulnerable doesn't wash with Leibert. "When I offer to pray with someone, I'm vulnerable. I'm going to show a big part of who I am."

But from his vantage point, the vulnerability pays off.

For example, he recalls an older man who came into the hospital dying of lung disease. He was scared and angry as a team of the family practice physicians stood around his bedside.

One of the doctors sensed that "this was the right time to share the gospel," Leibert said. As a result, the dying man enthusiastically professed faith in Christ and was reconciled with several family members before dying.

"We practice good medicine with the best hope we have in Christ," he asserted.

And because of this compassionate connection with patients, it is not unusual for residents and faculty members not only to attend the funerals of their patients who die, but often they are asked to speak at those funerals.

The family practice residency at Valley Baptist offers a climate diametrically opposed to the dysfunction often portrayed on television and in movies. Leibert has intentionally created a family friendly environment, where residents' and faculty members' children are free to visit and see what goes on.

Resident and faculty member families get together for social events once a month, and each year they all pack off together for a weekend retreat.

"We're here to train up families to serve Jesus Christ, not just doctors who happen to have families attached," Leibert explained.

Although he's not an overbearing or even always-visible figure in the residency program, Leibert is the driving force behind the program's energy. An active member of Calvary Baptist Church in Harlingen, he is part father figure, part educator, part friend and many parts encourager to the residents.

White described Leibert as a Chihuahua -- and he meant it as a compliment to describe Leibert's boundless energy hardly contained in his small physique. The wiry ex-Army major is "the most active encourager and witness I've ever seen," he said.

In addition to being a training ground for Christian doctors, the family practice residency at Valley Baptist seeks to address a critical shortage of primary care physicians along the border. Cameron County and adjoining Hidalgo County are classified among the lowest ratio of primary-care physicians to resident population of all counties in the United States.

Addressing this problem was one of the primary goals of Valley Baptist Medical Center, Leibert said. When the clinic opened five years ago, just the addition of the initial staff and residents significantly increased the availability of family practice physicians in Harlingen.

And six of the program's 17 graduates have remained in the area to establish their own family medicine practices. "That alone doubled the number of family doctors in this town," Leibert reported.

Six other graduates of the program now serve as family doctors in smaller Texas towns like Waxahachie, Dumas and Muleshoe. Three serve in the armed forces.

In Harlingen, Valley Baptist built a stand-alone building for the family practice residency across the street from the hospital. Patients come there just as they would any other doctor's office. About three-fourths of the building houses the exam rooms, offices and procedure rooms of the clinic, while a small portion provides faculty offices, a briefing room and cubicles for residents, as well as two bedrooms and a bathroom for residents who are on call at night.

The modern, attractive facility serves both the wealthy and the poor. And Leibert insists that both are treated the same.

No one is required to pay before being treated. And no one is required to wait longer to see a doctor because they don't have the right insurance. "Jesus wouldn't separate the Medicaid patients from the others," Leibert insisted.

In this doctors' office, there's little need to stop and ask "What would Jesus do?" because those in charge are working hard to model a Jesus lifestyle every day. And the key to that often is prayer.

As a physician, there are "a lot of things I can't fix," Rickerhauser acknowledged. "Through prayer, you're acknowledging in a way that 'I can't fix this, but we're going to someone who can.'"

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Baptist editors offer early reflections on terrorist attacks

By Bob Allen

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (ABP) -- Interrupted in the middle of production schedules by news of terrorist attacks on America, editors of weekly, bi-weekly and monthly Baptist newspapers offered early reflections in editorials.

"We'll never forget Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2001," wrote Marv Knox, editor of the Texas weekly Baptist Standard. "We'll remember where we were when we learned a plane crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers in Manhattan. We'll recall the sickening feeling when we heard (or saw) a second plane slam into the other tower, and we knew this was no accident. We'll recall the rage we felt when we heard a third plane slashed into the Pentagon, as well as our confusion upon hearing that a fourth plane plowed into a rural Pennsylvania field.

"The world -- at least the United States -- changed last week."

Alabama Baptist Editor Bob Terry said the incident introduced the nation to "a new reality."

"Sept. 11 brought a new sense of vulnerability to America," Terry wrote. "Before that date we thought terrorism occurred in Tel Aviv, in Cairo, in Gaza, not in the United States. Now we know better. Terrorism happens in New York and Washington and Oklahoma City. It can happen anywhere. Any of us can be in the wrong place at the wrong time. That reality makes us feel exposed, like we are not fully dressed."

John Pierce, executive editor of the independent newspaper Baptists Today, reflected on unexpected changes in plans caused by disruption in travel schedules. "Plans were not all that were changed on Sept. 11, so were our perspectives. At least I hope they were," he wrote.

Pierce said life would soon return to normal, when things like speaking engagements and sporting events again seem important. "But the oft-forgotten understanding that these -- and so many things that occupy our time -- are penultimate concerns to the greatest issues of life will hopefully be closer to the surface now than before."

Editorials also touched on the need of all Americans to make sense of the tragedy.

"The haunting question of 'Why?' never will be fully answered," wrote Trennis Henderson of Kentucky's Western Recorder. "The more urgent question -- 'Where do we go from here?' -- is a question every American can help answer.

"In the shadow of last week's horrific acts of evil, Americans are demonstrating an unwavering spirit of resolve, compassion and hope. Rescue efforts, prayer vigils, blood drives and financial gifts all are steps to help our nation unite and move forward as we cope with human sorrow.

"Where do we go from here? 'Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good,' Romans 12:21 counsels. Just one week after Sept. 11, 2001, Americans already are showing the world our best."

Terry observed: "Sometimes we may wonder where Jesus is when tragedy strikes. "We may ask if God knows we are alive and if he cares. ...

"Jesus said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' He promised, 'I am with you always.' Whether it is a massive disaster like the events of Sept. 11 or a personal tragedy through which we pass one at a time, know God is present and God cares for you."

Lonnie Wilkey, editor of the Baptist and Reflector in Tennessee, was encouraged that so many Americans were turning to their faith for answers.

"I cannot recall in my lifetime the numerous references made by the secular media and government leaders about trusting in God and praying for our country," Wilkey wrote. "I don't remember ever seeing so many people from all walks of life join in prayer gatherings all across this country. Americans are beginning to see, perhaps some for the first time, that the only hope America has is in God. My prayer is that 'awakening' will last."

Editors praised Baptists and other Americans for the outpouring of compassion for victims and rescue workers and urged restraint in retaliation.

"I witnessed with admiration our New Mexico Baptist pastors and other church leaders scramble for ways to lead their churches to respond appropriately." wrote Baptist New Mexican Editor John Loudat. "And I have not seen any inappropriate responses as they have led their churches in a variety of ways.

"Some called prayer meetings within only a matter of minutes and hours, and multitudes took advantage of those opportunities. Some encouraged their people to set aside denominational differences and join with other believers in community-wide and interdenominational prayer gatherings, and they were reminded that we Baptists aren't they only ones who love Jesus. Some encouraged their people during that first awful day as the situation was unfolding minute by minute to take in all the information they could and seek the Lord individually and with their families and then fill their churches the next night during regularly scheduled activities, almost all of which turned into prayer meetings.

"I attended one of our churches on Tuesday evening and another on Wednesday evening and appreciated the prophetic words shared from the pulpits to people hungry to know how God would have them respond."

Arkansas Baptist Editor Charlie Warren called for "justice, not vengeance" in response to the terrorist attacks.

"Sometimes I am really proud to be a Baptist," Warren wrote. "Baptists nationwide are responding to victims of the tragic terrorist attacks and to rescue workers with love and compassion. They also are advocating justice rather than vengeance and retaliation, despite feelings of fury toward the terrorists who delivered such a senseless blow to our nation.

"While standing behind our President and Congress, we must urge our nation's leaders to take the high road in responding to these events. America must demand justice while taking care to protect innocent lives. I was disturbed by a CBS poll that indicated that 77 percent of Americans favor retaliation even if it means taking the lives of innocent civilians. As believers in the Prince of Peace and the sanctity of life, we must abhor such attitudes. The life of an Afghan man, woman or child is as precious to God as you or I. America

must not itself stoop to the level of terrorism in retaliation to terrorism, regardless of the level of devastation we have just experienced."

Knox added a similar thought. "We must not view all who appear similar to the terrorists as terrorists themselves," he wrote. "Extremists who kill in the name of a god do not represent the beliefs and attitudes of millions who wear the same religious label. We must resist the temptation to treat all of them the way the terrorists treated us."

Biblical Recorder Editor Tony Cartledge used his weekly editorial to respond to comments by Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson blaming the attacks as God's judgment on forces seeking to "secularize" America.

"Falwell's diatribe was indeed a theological statement, and it was bad theology," Cartledge wrote. "Unfortunately, many others share the religio-cultural myth that America was purposefully established to be a Christian nation and that our founding fathers entered into a covenant with God, resulting in a history of blessing and protection from enemies.

"This view is at odds with both history and the Bible."

"'New Testament' means 'New Covenant,'" Cartledge wrote further down in the editorial. "God's new covenant is with all people of all nations who will accept him by faith -- not with any one nation that pledges to fly the Christian flag in the public square.

"America has its share of sinners, no doubt. And, some of our national policies are certainly short of God's ideal for human behavior. But I cannot believe that God would employ mass-murdering terrorists to punish America for breaking a covenant that does not exist."

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