

What I Wish Generation Z knew about 9/11

If my calculations are correct, the high school senior class this academic year will be the first ever to feature kids who were not born when 9/11 happened. Equally as stunning, I think it is reasonable to assume there will be college graduates this year who have no significant memories of that day. This generation, the one immediately after the Millennials and often referred to as Generation Z, will be the first to not truly remember the day America was attacked on our homeland in a way we hadn't been before or since.

Like just about anyone who was old enough to have memories, mine from that day are sharp. I was a graduating senior at Welch College. I worked every morning at the YMCA from 7 AM to 8 AM and that day I realized I was going to be late for my first class so I went and got a haircut instead. They had TVs in the barbershop. Like millions of others, I was very confused as to why one of the towers in New York was on fire. Like millions of others, I saw the second plane hit live as it happened.

So much has changed since then. Netflix, Twitter, and Facebook either weren't invented or weren't public yet. We were six years from smartphones being a thing. And even though Amazon had been born, it was a shadow of what it is today.

Some things changed significantly because of that day, like air travel. Homeland Security was created. And some things we experienced that day and the time afterwards in the realms of politics and culture are things we will likely never experience again.

Here are just a few that I hope the generation coming up with no memories will take the time to learn and appreciate.

Because we all need history; not just facts on a page, but stories from those who saw it firsthand.

First, I wish this generation knew what it was like for the country to be unified.

I wouldn't want anyone to ever have to go through the trauma of that day, where 3,000 died and thousands more had their lives drastically altered for the worse. But something that rose from the ashes was a countrywide unity that I do not think we will ever see again. By the end of his second term, George W. Bush was an extremely unpopular president. But after 9/11 his approval rating—for the country as a whole, not just Republicans—peaked at 92%[1. https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/President_Bush_Approval_Rating_92%]. Few things on a national scale have brought me patriotic chills like Bush walking out to the mound for Game 3 of the World Series at Yankee Stadium, seven weeks after the attacks, in a bulletproof vest, waving at the crowd, giving the thumbs up and then throwing a beautiful strike for the first pitch. Lee Greenwood's "God Bless the USA" played on TV and radio and American flags flew everywhere. Policemen and firemen were the toast of the country, especially in NY.



I'm sure there were a few people who didn't join in and those who were Muslim or are very sensitive to Muslims probably remember those days quite differently. Even as an evangelical Christian I do not want to overlook this. But simple data proves that the country was united greatly in the face of tragedy.

The last 15 years or so have seen so much political division I feel confident no president will ever reach that height ever again, meaning that we will never be that united again. My fear is that not even a non-polarizing president, unlike our last and current one, could unify us. Even if we do experience something like 9-11. God forbid we ever do.

I wish this generation knew how surreal that day was.

The adjective "Surreal" and the phrase "It felt like a movie except it was real life" have been overused the last 17 years describing the event. Yet it's hard to say it uniquely without

losing accuracy. That is exactly what it felt like.

I bet I spent 8 or 9 hours in front of a TV that day. I'm sure others spent more. My Bible College had a chapel service dedicated to praying for what was going on but who knew what to think or say?

Even after all the details emerged It was hard to know how to react. Even those who don't like country music probably remember Alan Jackson singing ["Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning?"](#)—an emotive, contemplative and beautifully written song about that day. For my money, that was how most people I knew felt. It captured the mood of the country perfectly to me. You better believe I called my mother to tell her that I loved her. People were going to church and holding hands with strangers, people were giving blood and people were staying at home and clinging to their families. And more than anything, many were just stunned and shocked for many days after.

I wish this generation knew how people looked to Heaven in those days.

Much of the evidence is anecdotal and less is statistical, but even without that I think most people I knew sensed a increase in the general feeling of "I need to pray and go to church" after 9/11. One pastor, Ed Young, says his church attendance went up by several thousand the Sunday after 9/11. Tim Keller says his nearly doubled. Beyond that, it seemed people were praying all over the country, out of sheer desperation and helplessness. To be frank, because the US is quite pluralistic, it reminded me of Jonah 1 when the men on that boat were faced with tragedy and they all cried out to their gods.

I wish this generation knew how fleeting it all was.

One of the more immediate sobering memories I have post-9/11 is that there was a backlash against something New York policemen or firemen did at some point. I thought, "Their time to be honored is apparently over." Church attendance leveled off very quickly and in some cases reduced. Bush became less and less popular. And 17 years later, there is confusion for people like me as to when patriotism becomes nationalism[2. That word is loaded these days so understand I mean it as simply as I can: the feeling of superiority as an American to the point of demeaning other countries.]—a question that seemed odd back then.

But there's a life lesson in all of this. Much of life, even the good, is quite fleeting. As a Bible-teaching Christian I can't help but think of Ecclesiastes and its message of how dark life can be when you try to find meaning and purpose in what is fleeting. I am proud to be an American but I also fully believe that all people of all cultures are fundamentally flawed morally. And I do not find meaning in how unified our country is or is not, or how many people come to my church or how my president is perceived. I find it in Jesus Christ and him crucified. And in what he calls me to do. Which is make a difference to my home, church, neighborhood and country in practical and daily action.

More than anything I wish Generation Z knew that 9-11 was a huge reminder of how desperately the world needs the grace of Jesus Christ. Because that is my most significant memory.

