

## Wise as Serpents

**Matthew 10:16: Behold, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. Be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves.**

After the effective terrorist attacks using American commercial jetliners, people keep saying "Nothing will be quite the same ever again." What does that mean? How can we get at that so it starts to make some sense? Back in 1987 I had a World Trade Center/Pentagon experience. A pimping operation using a very sophisticated scheme enticed away someone I loved very much and then forcing drugs into her and confronting her with semi-automatic weapons put her out on the streets to sell herself so they could get the money. We could very easily call these people "terrorists".

I had had the false notion that being a pastor, being at least somewhat faithful to God, having raised three of our children to be college graduates, that life was good. Just keep one's nose clean, build with the right building blocks and life will turn out fine. I really truly thought I had a winning formula that protected me from the heartbreaking power of evil. I was dead wrong. My world was shattered.

President Bush talked about terrorists hiding in the shadows. I experienced that. Never did I personally meet any of the people who created this disaster in my family and my own heart. They invisibly had the control and I was left helpless. They were not even there for me to get mad at. It was like I was dealing with a mirage.

Later on after several pimping people had been involved and much damage had been done and total control obtained, the doorbell rang one day. Here was a guy with my loved one bringing her home to get something. He had a big "Cheshire cat" grin on his face. He absolutely knew that she was brainwashed to a point that there was nothing I could do. My stomach churned within me. He was dropping her off and would be back to get her in ten minutes. My mind raced. Should I kidnap her, take her off to some cabin and hold her against her will? I looked in her eyes. I could see she was not the loved one I had known. A major transformation of her very sense of herself had taken place. I felt awful. I experienced a sense of helplessness and despair that totally torpedoed my "winning formula". The message I understood at that moment was that I had to "let go". When he came back, off she went with him.

For three years I went to support groups. My "safe" world, my "normal" life had been exposed and found wanting. Fear, anger, guilt, rage, shame, helplessness were not feelings I wanted to have but I had them anyway. My little world where I felt invincible and smart was gone and if I were to be true to myself, I really could never go back to that world. It is there all the time to escape back to that normal, head-in-the-sand world and not look at how vulnerable, how sheeplike I am. Winston Churchill said, quoted in our Sept. 13th, 2001 paper ironically, "Men occasionally stumble on the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened." I have had the choice many times. Do I continue to look at my mortality and blind sides and begin to discover how to be "wise as serpents"? Or do I yield to the magnetic pull of living as though what happened was a bad nightmare I will quickly put out of my mind? We Americans, having had our own vulnerabilities exposed at some points, have the same choices to make. Will we return to denial? Will we ask God to teach us wisdom?

*Jesus, you looked evil in the face and dealt with it. Give us grace in you to do the same. Amen.*