**Excerpt 1:**

The day that halted my generation’s leisurely flight [through our world], I reported to work as usual as the tragedy up the coastline hit the news.

“Did you hear that a plane just hit the World Trade Center Tower in New York?” the church receptionist asked me as I passed her desk on the way back to my office.

That’s weird, I remember thinking. Why is the church receptionist suddenly playing anchor woman? She’s never passed on a headline before.

But this was not enough to jar my oblivion. The news was still calling the crash an accident and thus, my reaction was somewhat shrugging disregard, mustering only momentary empathy for the family of whatever pilot had manned what I expected was a twin-engine plane crash.

This, I’m afraid, is the way I hear—or rather *don’t hear*—the daily news. I consider whatever trauma or tragedy is reported for just a minute before letting my music or my shopping list sweep it away.

It wasn’t until the plane was identified as an airliner that my heart joined my head in the listening. And it wasn’t until a second plane crashed and the FAA grounded all planes that I began to realize how my generation’s concept of our world was crashing as well. ~Excerpt from Part IV of [Picking Dandelions: A Search for Eden Among Life’s Weeds](http://amzn.com/0310292476)

**Excerpt 2**

That day we did what nearly every church in the country did. We opened our sanctuary, mid-afternoon, for spontaneous prayer. On an average week, like almost any week that preceded September 11 in our lifetime, residents probably would’ve been more likely to respond to a fish and chips special at a local beach bar than to an opportunity for midweek prayer. But on this day the other events on our agendas seemed less important than when we had written them.

Next to the towers crumbling, “pick up the dry cleaning” became a trivial note.

Within minutes, a steady stream of people from across the country began flooding into the sanctuary. A tiny bit of sad perspective flooded in too, as my friends and I noted that we could not recall such widespread willingness to break from hurried life to pray at any other point in our lives. But unusual or not, by late afternoon, burdened silhouettes of Jackson residents filled the chairs—sitting, leaning forward head in hands, and even kneeling. I could not remember the last time I saw someone break away from social norms to kneel while praying either.

But that’s what pain does. It can open things—church doors, minds, hearts and even possibilities. ~Excerpt from Part IV of [Picking Dandelions: A Search for Eden Among Life’s Weeds](http://amzn.com/0310292476)

**Excerpt 3**

The immediate and generous response of our small city, which—on a normal day—is six hundred and fifty miles from Ground Zero, made it seem like New York was our next door neighbor. Thus, by the time all the follow-up emails and phone calls had been exchanged and we announced our clearance to help man the Salvation Army’s relief stations in New York, Jackson was falling all over itself to support our new endeavor.

Before this point, recruiting volunteers or donations for service projects sometimes felt more like asking people to give up vital organs while they were still living and in need of them. After the towers fell, however, asking for help became akin to asking people for a simple cup of water. Residents arrived weighed down by armfuls of donations, as if the items they were bringing poured out of their faucets for free. ~Excerpt from Part IV of [Picking Dandelions: A Search for Eden Among Life’s Weeds](http://amzn.com/0310292476)

**Excerpt 4**

The typical buzz of New York’s streets had been replaced by the steady crank of machinery and generators—a rumble that we adapted to surprisingly quickly, like the tick of a clock you didn’t even hear in the background.

Nothing was as it was just a few days before.

Any other day, for example, this much chaos and effort would’ve signified some sort of city festival. Now, a street fair of blue and white tarped tents lined the sidewalks to serve as a makeshift town, ready to shelter the nearby relief workers with food and services. The ground that would’ve normally been kept clear by city sanitation workers, if not for an occasional stray leaf or piece of litter, was dusted with a thin coating of shredded paper and glass particles, as if a local Office Max had been incinerated and its contents dumped on the scene like unwelcome confetti.

…Standing there in soaked rain gear, shivering, my voice jumbled through a weighty mask, I had some of the most compelling conversations of my life with people who became close friends out of necessity rather than through years of passing each other in the hallway each day. ~Excerpt from Part IV of [Picking Dandelions: A Search for Eden Among Life’s Weeds](http://amzn.com/0310292476)

**Excerpt 5**

In the first week after September 11th, it was my dad’s dream come true: It seemed like every human on the planet had become a New York Yankees fan. During the downtimes at Ground Zero, longtime Cubs and Braves fans could be found saying, “Wouldn’t it be nice if—after all this—the Yankees won the World Series?” And then they would add, “Just this year though.”

Unfortunately, the Arizona Diamondbacks later determined that New York’s comfort would not come via Major League baseball, as they defeated the Yankees in the best-of-seven series that November.

At the time, though, it seemed like everyone wanted New York to find some small good to tide it over until the city could flourish again. Emergency personnel, of course, worked through the night and through the day and through the next day, logging weeks worth of overtime they’d never be paid for. Department store chains sent their delivery trucks to transport literally tons of bottled water to the disaster site. Cruise ships arrived in the harbor to feed and house volunteers, cell phone companies handed out free phones to relief workers so they could keep in touch with their families, and therapists administered free counseling and even massages.

I could not believe that in this unlikely patch of ground, what was growing reminded me so much of Eden.~Excerpt from Part IV of [Picking Dandelions: A Search for Eden Among Life’s Weeds](http://amzn.com/0310292476)

**Excerpt 6**

I don’t know who among us had faith before we arrived, but it seemed as if nearly everyone found it or recovered it somewhere in the crevices of Ground Zero.

The relief workers on site were stretched to exhaustion as we forced our eyes awake at night—days after the last survivor had been found, but still days before all the searching would end. Regardless of your prior beliefs, when you find the end of your own energy supply, it is at least tempting to look for some source of renewal outside yourself.

This is why I often found myself praying furiously—as I had in childhood—for things like the safety of the firefighters who refused to stop searching for fallen comrades even as rain poured down on the wreckage….Even my prayers were sometimes interrupted by the unidyllic blasts of of a bullhorn warning that parts of the tower might crumble further, in which case we were told simply to run in the opposite direction.

While the tower lay in pieces, shreds of people’s lives lay exposed in Union Square as stunned family members frantically searched for news of their loved ones. …Talk about God was as common as talk about the weather. Questions like, “Why did this happen?” and “How will we go on?” became the standard replacement for the usual “How are you?” and “Nice day we’re having” greetings.

…I’m convinced God was there somewhere too, browsing about the tents and the conversations, reuniting with people he had not talked to in ages and lapping up quality time with others before the moment passed and our to-do lists invited us back into oblivion, to routine tasks like picking up dry cleaning or washing our cars.” ~Excerpt from Part IV of [Picking Dandelions: A Search for Eden Among Life’s Weeds](http://amzn.com/0310292476)