

Audio Adrenaline Lead Vocalist: An Incurable Disorder Ruined My Voice, but God Did a Miracle

“Are you Mark Stuart? From Audio Adrenaline?”

Oh, great. Now I have to talk over the noise of an airplane.

The airplane had taken off from Port-au-Prince for a short flight to the Dominican Republic, over the mountains and, hopefully, around the coming storm. It was a regional prop plane, not much more than a tin bucket with twin engines. The smell of oil and gas fumes filled the cabin. About a dozen people were aboard, and it was hard to hear above the din of voices and engine noise.

The flight attendant couldn't hear my voice, so I just pointed to my in-flight snack choices. She set a corn muffin and coffee on my fold-down tray table. I was opening the muffin wrapper when the guy next to me asked the question. I applied pressure to my vocal cords and scratched out a “Yup” the best I could. He worked for the Luis Palau organization, and Audio Adrenaline had played at some of their largest outreach events. He asked why we retired. I told him about my voice. He'd seen many miracles in their work throughout the world and believed God could heal my voice.

“Do you believe in miracles?”

I used to be a skeptic, but I've seen God do too many things beyond my reason to maintain disbelief.

“Yes. Yes, I do.”

He was so convinced God wanted to heal my voice that he asked

if he could pray for it right then and there. I wanted my voice healed too. I was lost without it. Hands and Feet struggled without the Audio Adrenaline platform.

I'd recently bumped into one of my childhood heroes, Russ Taff, who said he'd suffered from vocal issues that sounded similar to mine. He took a year off, and his voice came back. It gave me hope that maybe mine would too. If my voice was healed, I could put the band back together. We could raise money. Or I could start a solo career and regain control of my life. Although my voice had been prayed over many times, this one felt special. I said yes, he could pray for my voice. Maybe our closer proximity to heaven would help God better hear it.

He put his hand on me and started into prayer: "Dear God ..."

At that exact moment, our plane hit the outer band of the hurricane Hanna. It felt like we'd hit a mountain. Or something bigger. We dropped like a rock.

I opened my eyes, and my snack and drink hovered midair. The plane was falling. The cabin filled with screams. I called out to Jesus, but no one could hear my voice. Passengers freaked out. Those who weren't buckled were lifted from their seats. The plane listed. It was out of control. This was it. The plane slammed into an air pocket and jolted to the side. It felt like a hard landing without landing gear. Baggage and snacks and drinks bounced everywhere. I couldn't see land or sky out the window, only the darkness of storm clouds.

Then, just as quickly as the plane had dropped from the sky, it was perfectly calm. A Haitian man thought we'd crash-landed. He bolted from his seat to the door and tried to open it. We were still ten thousand feet above the Caribbean. He pulled the door lever and started pushing on the door. A flight attendant tackled him. The man was in shock, screaming in Creole. It took a couple more passengers to restrain him.

The inside of the plane was a scene of mass chaos. Also, my voice wasn't healed.

As the airplane recovered, my first thought was that I should not have let that guy pray for my voice. Not only because we nearly crashed when he did, but because of something my pastor had recently said. There are three idols that drive us: comfort, control and approval. When left to our own devices, the decisions we make in our lives reflect our need for one or more of those idols. My focus on my voice reflected all three.

Once our plane settled, I sensed God telling me he didn't need my voice. He needed my attention. After the airplane incident, he had it. Up to that point, all my attention and prayers and the prayers of others were that God would perform a miracle and heal my voice. I wanted it fixed so I could regain control over my life. And comfort. And approval. When you pray for healing and don't get it, it doesn't mean God isn't working on what you asked him to. It means he is working on what he wants to, and that is something bigger and more beautiful than we know to pray for.

The miracle wasn't that God was going to fix my voice. The miracle was that God was going to use me with a busted one.

A few months later, I was back with the Vanderbilt voice doctor, and she finally came up with a diagnosis. I suffered from spasmodic dysphonia, an incurable vocal disorder caused by muscle spasms interrupting the pathways between the brain and vocal cords. Some people improved with Botox shots injected in the muscles around the vocal cords. But Botox didn't help. A doctor at UCLA was having limited success with a complicated surgery involving incisions through neurological pathways and letting them grow back and heal themselves. It sounded risky. I passed and just thanked the doctor. I appreciated the closure.

I talked with others who had the disorder, and through

research and practice came up with ways to improve my speaking voice. I started by holding my throat when I spoke, putting slight pressure on my vocal cords. The support helped the spasms to relax, and over time, there was enough healing that I don't always have to hold my throat.

I'll never be able to sing again. But I can at least order a chicken sandwich. {eoa}

Taken from Losing My Voice to Find It by Mark Stuart. Copyright © 2017 by Mark Stuart. Used by permission of Thomas Nelson.

Mark Stuart, perhaps best known as the lead vocalist for the Christian rock band Audio Adrenaline, is a songwriter, singer, speaker, missionary and advocate for vulnerable children in Haiti. Although he calls Franklin, Tennessee, home, he travels full time with his wife, Aegis, and their two children, Journey and Christela, in their family RV.