

Your Flight of Faith

by Babbie Mason

Even though I have no desire to fly an airplane, the flying process has always intrigued me. I had a hunch that flying an airplane was very much like walking by faith. A conversation I had with Eric, an airline pilot who just retired from flying commercial and military airplanes for more than 30 years, convinced me that I was right.

Eric described the experience of flying an aircraft this way: "There is great potential for your body and your emotions to play tricks on you. They may actually lie to you, sending information to your brain that is not true.

"While flying in fog or bad weather when visibility is poor, it is possible for your body to experience a sense of unsteadiness. This condition is called vertigo or spatial disorientation. This happens when a malfunction in the inner ear occurs, leaving a pilot in a state of confusion.

"In layman's terms, this means you think you know which end is up—but you're wrong. In some cases, your body will tell you that you are flying right side up, when in actuality you could be flying upside down!"

Does that sound like anything you've ever experienced? How many times have you been in a valley of decision where your faith was telling you to do one thing and your feelings were telling you to do another?

Faith will often contradict your feelings. Your feelings are controlled by your emotions, which cannot always be trusted.

Your faith, on the other hand, is founded upon unchanging biblical principles, which can always be trusted. A very wise woman once told me, "When you can't feel God with your feelings, feel Him with your faith."

Eric said that airline pilots are trained repeatedly not to listen to their bodies or rely on their emotions. They are trained to put complete faith in the aircraft's instrument panel. The information on the instrument panel will tell them how to fly the airplane safely, even in bad weather. For pilots, Rule No. 1 is: "Trust the instruments."

Eric told me that a pilot must spend countless hours in training before he ever enters a real aircraft. He must commit himself to hours of rigorous preparation, during which he will learn how every instrument in the aircraft's cockpit functions before he ever leaves the ground.

In a controlled environment, he will fly under a variety of circumstances. If he desires to be a good pilot, he must study and learn how to operate an aircraft under all possible conditions. Rule No. 2 is: "Study the manual."

Air Traffic Control watches the craft at all times on a sophisticated screen and gives the pilot critical information and instructions about the takeoff, cruising and landing of the aircraft. A pilot may be requested to make an increase or decrease in airspeed, change altitude or observe other instructions.

It is imperative that the pilot comply with these requests, or he risks the safety of not only himself and his passengers but also the passengers on other aircraft. Rule No. 3 is: "Obey the commands from Air Traffic Control."

In addition to having been a pilot, Eric is a Sunday school teacher in his home church. He gave me one of the finest lessons I've ever been taught when he made clear the analogy of the pilot and the believer. He asked me, "When life gets tough and you find yourself in a personal fog, will you be led by your emotions to fly by the seat of your pants, or will you trust the facts?" Trusting the facts of our faith—not our emotions or our circumstances—is what it really means to "walk

by faith, not by sight.”

Eric asked me if I make it a habit to study the manual—the Bible—and exercise what it teaches me. No one in his right mind would try to fly an airplane without first reading the manual. Then why do so many of us try to live life without reading God's instruction manual?

We need training, purpose and direction. We need someone to lead us along to help us discover truth and apply it to our lives. We must lean on the Lord to help us read and understand God's Word, His instruction manual for life.

Eric drove home my personal lesson about faith with this last point. He reminded me that we must always listen for instruction from the Holy Spirit, the believer's Air Traffic Controller. The Holy Spirit watches how we live at all times and gives us daily guidance on each direction we should take.

If we are disobedient, our actions will cause reactions. First our disobedience will affect us. Then it will affect those who are closest to us, our family and other loved ones.

Sin has a ripple effect. Before long, one act of disobedience can affect countless lives.

If we are obedient, however, we will reach our destinations safely. Others who accompany us on our journeys will enjoy the ride as well. Developing a keen ear that is bent toward the Holy Spirit's instruction will afford us many rewarding moments on our journeys of faith and allow us to reach our destinations.

Has this ever happened to you? One moment you believe God for the impossible. The next, you are drowning in a sea of doubt, controlled by your feelings.

The bottom line of faith is summed up in simple terms. Believe it before you see it. Faith is your positive response to what

God has said. When a heart is full of faith, it will always do what it takes to dispel doubt and fear.

You have to go with what you know, not what you feel. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God. So the more you hear, the more you know.

Your faith and God's Word go hand in hand. That means if you allow the enemy to choke out God's promises, your faith will begin to dry up with it. When that happens, you are sure to falter in your walk.

To prevent this, you must starve your doubts by feeding your faith a steady diet of the Word of God. Keep your eyes on Jesus and your ears tuned to His Word.

Walking by faith is hard work. Like building a house with a hammer and nails, it will mean being bumped and bruised. It will require sweat.

You will shed tears of disappointment. You will even have to tear down some things and start over again. It will demand that you throw off anything that threatens you and your relationship with Christ.

But with the help of the Holy Spirit, you will be able to run the Christian race with patience. Keeping your eyes on Jesus, the One in whom we place our faith, is the most important thing, as the Scriptures point out: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:1-2, NIV).

We don't live in a perfect world. Far from it. Sometimes things won't go as you think they should. That is when trusting in God's sovereignty is essential.

Even the giants of our faith failed. But they are called giants because they picked themselves up, dusted themselves off and went on to complete their missions.

You can be a champion of faith too if you always keep Jesus in view. Then you can speak faith to the issues in your life, sing praises to God in the face of your enemies and walk on top of the deep waters of doubt!

Charles H. Spurgeon, a great author and theologian of the church, once wrote some words that inspired me to compose a song titled "Trust His Heart." I think his words say it best: "God is too wise to be mistaken. God is too good to be unkind. And when you can't trace His hand, trust His heart."