

# **OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FLIGHTDECK**

- LIFE LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH AVIATION -

*by Jerry Tobias*

*"I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw."*

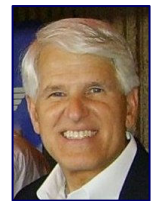
*Proverbs 24:32*



U. S. Air Force E-4B (Boeing 747-200) flightdeck

## **BOWING BEFORE THE BOEING**

### ***...KEEPING THE FIRST THING FIRST***



The Boeing 747 is an incredible machine. The fact that its 400+ tons can even get into the air is as amazing to me now as it was when I first flew it over twenty years ago. Amazing, too, is that - even as huge and heavy as it is - the 747 is one of the best-handling and easiest-to-fly airplanes ever built.

Being assigned to fly the military version of the 747 in the U. S. Air Force (the E-4B) was a great opportunity. It was a fantastic job, and I enjoyed every part of it. Our squadron was made up of some really talented people, and we boasted of being the youngest 747 pilots in the world. The balance to that, of course, was that we were also the lowest paid!

The E-4B mission was fascinating, and we did things with the airplane that no one else was doing at the time. Inflight refueling behind an Air Force tanker, for example, was routine.

Everything about the assignment was challenging, intriguing, professionally exciting and, subsequently, very rewarding.

Our squadron offices were located right next to the flight line, so we occasionally walked from our building out to the airplane. That's when the 747's size was most impressive. Approaching the airplane from ground level gives a true perspective of just how big it really is (a view that is usually lost when boarding from an airport terminal jetway).

It also seems huge when sitting in the cockpit during ground operations, taxiing, etc. Once airborne, however, the 747 is so nimble and the wings so far behind you (and mostly out of sight) that it seems like a much smaller machine. Contributing to this "small" sensation is the fact that, due to the way the fuselage tapers at the front, the cockpit is not exceptionally large. In fact, many smaller airplanes actually have wider cockpits.

But, approaching the 747 from the ground was always a thrill, and I will never forget the sense of amazement that I felt when I looked up at it from that vantage point or when I walked underneath the fuselage. I will also never forget the very powerful lesson that I learned one very humbling and fearful day!

I have never heard an "audible" word from the Lord. There have been times in my life, however, when I sensed a word or a warning so clearly that it might as well have been audible. This was that kind of experience.

I was walking one day - by myself - from the squadron building to the E-4B to prepare for a flight. That's when it happened. A thought shot through my mind, seemingly, out of nowhere. It was strong but simple, *"You might as well bow down."*

"What?" I thought. "What was that?"

Then I sensed it again. *"You might as well bow down. You might as well bow and worship that thing. It's much bigger in your life than I am."*

I slowed my pace across the flight line to process the experience. There was absolutely no confusion or uncertainty of the message. I *immediately* knew that this thought was from the Lord - and that it was true. My shock was quickly replaced by a sense of pain, grief and remorse from having allowed this to be so. But I knew it was a fact. I *had* been enjoying this airplane to the point that it had become "first" in my life. It was a very fearful moment. But it was also, somehow, a very tender moment.

I knew that I had grieved my God by what I had allowed to dominate my thoughts and my affection, but I also sensed that God was not as much angry with me as He was hurt by my lack of relationship with Him. I knew that He wanted me to know that He loved me so much that He would show me in a very clearly understood fashion what was going on in my heart.

And, what was going on in my heart was really *idolatry*. Idolatry is simply giving anything in life place over first seeking to know, love, worship and obey God. That includes objects (like the 747), jobs, position, power, bank accounts, property, possessions, hobbies, sports, recreation, family, church, ministry, this newsletter - *anything* that is given a greater place or is treated as more important than a relationship with the Living God.

Well, I took the message very seriously. I re-evaluated my life and my priorities, and determined that I would do whatever was necessary to never let that happen again. It didn't mean that there was anything wrong with flying the 747 or that I couldn't enjoy it. It just meant that I needed (and need) to constantly be aware of what is really first in my life.

What's first today? Is it my adoration of and relationship with my Creator, my Redeemer, my Lord? Or, have I allowed something else - *anything else* - to become the center of my heart, my life, and my existence?

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***My soul finds rest in God alone.*** Psalm 62:1

***You shall have not other gods before me.*** Exodus 20:3

***Love the Lord your God with ALL your heart and with ALL your soul and with ALL your strength.*** Deuteronomy 6:5

***The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods.*** Psalm 16:4

***Do not despise the Lord's discipline...because the Lord disciplines those He loves.***  
Proverbs 3:11-12

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THE BOTTOM LINE? In the midst of difficult and troubling times, *no position or possession* can give us peace nor sustain us through pain, suffering or loss. *Only God* - because of the relationship that is possible through His Son - *can (and will) sustain us*. And, at the end of life, *no thing* will matter. *Only God will matter*.

But, that same Eternal God wants us to know and love Him *now*. He wants to be the purpose for our *living*. He also wants to be first in our hearts and lives *so that we might trust Him* and experience His faithfulness and His great peace through every trying time, every circumstance, and every minute of each day.

And, He wants us to worship only Him...for ***He, alone, is worthy. He, alone, is Lord.***

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