

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."

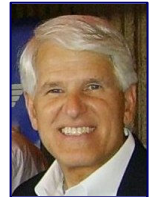
Proverbs 24:32



Bombardier Challenger 604 flightdeck

CLEAR AIR TURBULENCE

...GETTING THROUGH THE TOUGH TIMES



Clear air turbulence is caused both by vertical air currents and by horizontal winds that are changing speed and/or direction. While usually not unsafe, the "rough ride" that turbulence produces is disturbing and unsettling...and no one enjoys it: not inexperienced flyers, not frequent flyers, and - most certainly - not flight crews.

Turbulence actually increases cockpit workloads significantly. Vigilance must be heightened and aircraft performance diligently monitored to ensure that safe flight is not compromised, passengers must be kept informed and reassured, and information concerning potentially smoother altitudes and/or alternative routings must be gathered and considered, new ATC clearances obtained, etc., in an attempt to improve the ride. Crews can never just relax while experiencing or expecting to experience rough air.

From the passengers' perspective, though, not much can be done about turbulence - except to remain in their seats with their seatbelts securely fastened. Trusting that the crew (whom the

passengers may hear from but rarely see) is competent, and that they are doing everything possible to improve the situation, to protect and care for every passenger, and to safely transport all to their destination is also important. This *trust* in the "folks up front" is, in part, what helps to alleviate passenger anxieties and fear.

Perspective is also important. Let me give you an example. A few years ago I had the opportunity to fly a trip from the U. S. mainland to the island of Maui. My wife was also onboard this flight as a passenger. Just after we "coasted out" westward from California that day, however, the turbulence became significant and continuous. The other pilot and I spent much of the flight (as did every other crew on the oceanic radio frequencies) trying to find if and where smooth air existed. It was one of those days, though, when there was just no smooth air to be found.

I later apologized to my wife for the uncomfortable ride, and will never forget her surprising response. She told me that all of the passengers were so excited about going to Maui that she didn't think anyone had been very concerned about the continuous moderate turbulence. *Perspective* ("It's no big deal...we'll be in Hawaii soon!") had helped to keep the passengers' concerns about the rough flight to a minimum.

Even though better forecasts, technology and communication have greatly improved the ability to predict and locate clear air turbulence, it is often so widespread that it simply cannot be avoided. Turbulence will just always be a part of flying.

Turbulence will also always be a part of life. *Everyone* experiences tough times, some of which are more "turbulent" than others. Some of life's turbulence is experienced alone, such as the pain and hurt of broken relationships, the trauma of financial losses or pressures, personal health issues, or the loss of a close friend or loved one.

Other life-turbulence, though, is more widespread, and is experienced by many at the same time. Hurricanes and earthquakes, or our national financial crisis, for example, have and will continue to impact many people.

So, how do we handle life's turbulence? What guides and determines our responses? Well, I'd suggest that *trust* and *perspective*, the same two things that I mentioned above, are very important in determining how such times impact us.

First, *trust* is absolutely essential. But in what or in whom do we trust? There's a line from a song that says, "*The things that you can count on grow fewer every day.*" I think that statement is now more accurate than ever as we watch the changes on Wall Street and in other places and institutions that we previously considered to be unchangeable.

There is One, though, who never changes. "*I the Lord do not change,*" He tells us (Malachi 3:6). Neither does He ever abandon us. "*Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go*" (Joshua 1:5,9). IF we have made Him Lord of our lives (because of the relationship that He made possible), we can trust that, even though we don't know what is

happening, why it has happened, or what other turbulence is ahead, He DOES know. He WILL be with us. He WILL guide us through every moment. There is *nothing* outside of His awareness, His knowledge or His care. He, alone, is worthy of our absolute trust.

Perspective also contributes significantly to how I respond to turbulent or hard times. First, life is not all about me. I am here to love God, to live for His glory, and to care about others. Second, at this writing the world's population is estimated to be something over 6.7 billion people...and every one of them has or will experience hard times. So, trouble or trying times are not unique to my life. And, compared to what many of you have experienced or to much of what we see around our globe (the recent devastating earthquakes in China and Japan that took tens of thousands of lives and affected millions of people, for example), the "turbulence" that I have experienced is really so light that it is almost imperceptible.

Another important perspective, though, is that earth is not my home. I'm just a visitor here during these short, quickly vanishing years as I train for and travel toward my eternal destination. Life really is like a vapor, as the Psalmist said; it's here for a moment, then gone (Psalm 39:4-5). Knowing of my ultimate destination (eternity in God's incredible and awesome presence) and of His promise to guide me and to be my strength through every minute of my life, and experiencing the peace that trusting Him produces really helps to lessen (just like during the flight to Maui) the impact of the turbulence.

I have also learned that God has so much more *purpose* for my life as I go *through the turbulent times* than I could ever have imagined. Difficulties press me to Him, hard times correct my perspectives, and my personal turbulence gives me more empathy and concern for those around me. These "silver linings" all make the sometimes-rough and uncertain ride through life incredibly more purposeful...and considerably less stressful.

"...they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress." Psalm 107:13

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding..." Proverbs 3:5

"God will keep in perfect peace the one whose mind is stayed (focused) on Him." Isaiah 26:3

THE BOTTOM LINE? Yes, our years often include tough times. But, by the grace of God, and by His comfort and His strength, it IS possible to get through even the most severe turbulence...and to learn more about what is really important in the process. ■

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