

'Air-to-air ... prayer to prayer'

By Charles C. Baldwin

One of the most exciting parts of flying an airplane is "air-to-air" refueling. According to "Professor Google," the earliest experiments in aerial refueling took place in the 1920s. "Two slow-flying aircraft flew in formation, with a hose run down from a hand-held fuel tank on one aircraft and placed into the usual fuel filler of the other." That first "fill 'er up, please" must have been fun to watch.

I know the fighter pilots reading this article want to talk about the very cool procedure of coming up behind a big tanker that has a probe ... and the tanker "boomers" (the guy/girl that "flew" the probe out of the back of the tanker) want to talk about how intricate their job is to stick the probe into the refueling receptacle on the fighters. But, I've got the stick/pen for this article so we'll learn about the "probe-and-drogue" method.

My personal experience with aerial refueling was in the Vietnam War while flying the HH-53 Super Jolly Green Giant rescue helicopter. We refueled behind an MC-130 Combat Talon (Call sign "King.") The MC-130 had a flexible hose that trailed from the fuel tank on the left and right wings. The drogue, sometimes called a basket, was attached to the hose with a valve that opened when the probe from the helicopter engaged the basket. The MC-130 had to fly "really slow" for an airplane its size, while the helicopter



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had to fly "fast" for a helicopter. "King" maintained straight and level flight while "Jolly" flew its extended probe into the basket. Then the two planes had to fly in formation while the fuel was transferred.

It was fun. Of course, "clear skies and smooth air" made the whole procedure "more fun." We learned how to refuel at night. The added skill required was for the helicopter pilot to use the "Chinese hat" (button) on top of the collective (the control stick in pilot's left hand) to control a spotlight that was on the nose of the helicopter. So, while flying the probe into the basket, you had to keep the spotlight on the basket. If you add stormy weather with clouds, it turns into a "prayer meeting" in the cockpits of both the

tanker and the helicopter.

On Christmas Eve, December 24, 1972, I was the aircraft commander of an HH-53 crew that flew a nearly-nine-hour sortie into North Vietnam to try to rescue an F-111 crew that had been shot down in enemy territory. We had to refuel three times that day to stay in the area of the downed crew. The A-7 fighters were "escorting" us all day; the MC-130 stayed nearby to provide the fuel when we needed it. It was a very cloudy day and, to make a long and sad story short, the weather never lifted over the survivors and we had to leave them on the ground that night. The fact that we could keep refueling that day kept the hope alive for survivors. I am sorry we could not pick them up that day.

"What's the point," as someone in the church pew might ask! Air-to-air refueling greatly enhances the capability of military aircraft on the field of battle. We can go further, stay on station longer and complete the mission of the day — bombs on target; supplies delivered; injured troops rescued from the battlefield. One might say that we cannot do our mission unless we can refuel.

Almighty God has given us a tremendous gift in our "arsenal" for spiritual warfare. It rhymes with "air" ... prayer. The Bible says, "Pray without ceasing," says 1 Thessalonians 5:17. It certainly can be done at home, at church and at special occasions. The beautiful part is that God is available

any time and any place. We do not have to be kneeling beside our bed or on a kneeler at church. We can be in the middle of the battle ... on a very important conference call ... getting ready to take a test at school ... or even in a still, quiet moment, searching for the answer to a serious problem; any time, any place. Unlike air-to-air refueling, prayer does not need any equipment — just a willing heart. It is not dependent upon good weather or an experienced crew. Just a willing heart. The Giver of the grace and truth is always ready to "deliver."

Michael W. Smith sings a wonderful praise chorus that says,
"This is the air I breathe, this is the air I breathe,

Your Holy Presence living in Me ...

And I, I'm desperate for You

And I, I'm lost without You. ...

This is the air I breathe."

The only way we can make it through the journey is by being "refueled" by the holy presence of the Living God. Pull up to the source of life and receive from Him. Let Jesus, His holy presence, be the air we breathe.

As we use to say to the MC-130 after receiving the fuel, "Thanks, King."

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Starving your enemy

By John Parker

In imitation of Jesus' 40 Days in the wilderness, during which He was tempted by the devil, Christians practice a season of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and self-denial called Great Lent. Lent has a fascinating history — when it formally began, how long the season was, etc. — but for sure, since the days of the first Christians, instructed by Jesus Himself, Christians pray, fast, and give alms.

The most notable aspect of the Great Fast is the actual fasting — that is, an abstinence from certain foods and drinks for a certain length of time, for a spiritual training. It should be stated from the start: While every aspect of fasting in the Christian way concerns food in the most basic definition, fasting is not about food. Fasting can be defined in the following ways:

— Going voluntarily hungry to serve those who are involuntarily hungry.

— Practicing, through food and drink, "not my will, but Thy will be done."

As the results of the Reformation continue to manifest themselves in radical individualism, it is not surprising that even Lenten fasting has been reduced in the West to "what are YOU giving up for Lent?" But



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this way has not always been so. The Ancient Christian practice is a common fast, for all who are able. Generally, the very young, the very old, the infirm and the pregnant are relieved of the fast.

As one of my teachers instructs concerning such spiritual disciplines, "Do what you can, when you can, because there will come a time when you cannot."

During the routine year, Christians fast on almost all Wednesdays (the day that Judas agreed to betray Jesus) and Fridays (in memory of the Crucifixion), as well as in various seasons, Great Lent being central.

The common fast is abstinence from meat, dairy, wine,

and olive oil. In the Orthodox Churches, this practice remains a universal spiritual discipline, which brings about the natural encouragement: "We're all in this together." For example, one is not put in the strange position of going to a friend's for supper — you having given up steak, and he, beer —

and you bring him beer as a gift, while he serves you steak. This leads to the rather unbiblical situation of each saying, "Bummer! I gave that up for Lent!" (In actual practice, each of those should enjoy what is offered with thanks to God and with joy, but that is another question.)

Fasting — routine and prolonged — coupled with prayer and acts of mercy, is a vital spiritual weapon that humbles us and gives us clear vision. I am reminded of my days as a soccer player when I was young. We had a coach who would, for an hour-long practice, make us run and run (laps, hills, sprints, etc.) for

45 or 50 of those minutes, leaving only about 10 to play soccer. This was awful from a kid's view. "We are here to play soccer!" But the coach was wise. "If you can play exhausted, you will beat your opponent, because no one will be in better shape than you. You will outlast them." We had many successful seasons like that. Fasting is the same: If you can "play hungry," you will become a true Christian, a real human being.

You see: A hungry person gets snippy, short with others. Every little thing can seem annoying. But coupled with prayer and church services, and the consolation that in the Christian community, one Lenten aim is "to see my own sins, and not to judge my brother," well, we have the chance to take note of our snippiness, self-centeredness, etc., and nip it in the bud. And if we can prolong that practice, it will have a good Christian affect on us in the longer term.

The services of the Ancient Church remind us that the first sin involved food (the fruit of the forbidden tree) and self-will. Generally speaking, our stomachs have become our governors — not just our governors, but dictators: "I am hungry. Eat."

The Lenten fast — far more than giving up dessert or beer — puts the hurt on self-will at mission control: the stom-

ach. One of the fourth century Desert Monks, Abba John the Dwarf, put it this way: "If a king wanted to take possession of his enemy's city, he would begin by cutting off the water and the food and so his enemies, dying of hunger, would submit to him. It is the same with the passions of the flesh: If a man goes about fasting and hungry the enemies of his soul grow weak." In the Scriptures, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God."

And as we begin to set our feet into the waters of the Great Fast, as our stomachs growl and howl, "Feed me!" we can then turn toward the beginning of the spiritual path, saying to our stomachs — to quote one of my favorite movies — "you ain't the boss of me!" Then hearing, in that same growl, the cry of the hungry, we can take some action to practice acts of mercy and generosity, in a personal way, toward someone in involuntary need.

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Now that you have your wings

By Debbie Martinez

It's been a long road — a very long road — and you have just walked out of the courthouse a single person again. You stand on the sidewalk, papers in hand, watching passersby going about their lives and wonder to yourself, "Now what?" You look around feeling lost, tears running down your cheeks and you whisper, "God, help me." And He does. He gives you the strength to move off the sidewalk and into your new life.

His help doesn't always come in huge ways; sometimes it's just the energy to get through the day. But make no mistake, He is helping you. Through it all, He is allowing you to grow into the person He has planned you to be. He is grooming you through adversity to move up and take your place in the life He has set forth for you. All that He asks is that you trust Him and pray. Romans 12:12 says, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

Don't keep looking down and asking why. Look up and say thank you for His protection and His strength to get you to where you need to be. An uncertain future is scary and we are always looking for guarantees but in truth, the only guarantee that we have is that God will walk with us through our life.

"When you pass through the water, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." — Isaiah 43:2

Do not allow the devil to whisper in your ear. Your di-



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orce does not define you nor is it the end of the world. Do not become discouraged or let fear take hold. God is most certainly beside you and as Philippians 1:6 states, "God is not finished with me yet." He is still putting your life in place and trust in Him that it will be better than you ever dreamed possible.

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus

for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." — Ephesians 2:10

I know that it is hard to get up in the morning when you feel like the ground has opened up beneath you, but if you truly have faith and trust that He knows what He is doing, the healing process will be quicker and a sense of peace and understanding will evolve.

Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

God has brought you out of a bad situation or one that would not have allowed you to be all that He knows you can be. File your divorce papers away with a prayer of thanks and asking God for forgiveness, strength, hope, peace and guidance. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you." — Psalm 32:8

Now that you have your wings, what will you do with them?

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