

Giving Up Control

Now I lay me down to sleep... This is one of the most recognized childhood prayers ever written. I pray the Lord my soul to keep... It gives comfort to children facing the darkness of night. If I should die before I wake... It acknowledges the fact that we are mortal. I pray the Lord my soul to take... and gives control of our lives to the One who controls all things.

Each time I'm deployed away from home I am faced with the reality that I will not be close enough to my family to assist in an emergency. As a husband and father it is natural for me to take on the role of protector. My stress builds when I am unable to fulfill my role because of my commitments elsewhere. Isn't it ironic that while I fight to protect my country, I can't be close enough to protect my own loved ones?

This time I'm in Saudi Arabia fighting a war with Iraq, and I was struck the other day when I overheard another husband and father on the phone to his family. Though I felt embarrassed to be in a position to eaves drop, the closeness of our work place made it impossible for me not to hear. There was desperation in his voice. He had felt a premonition that some evil would befall his family while he was gone. Though I felt he was being reassured from the other end of the conversation, it didn't seem to ebb his fears.

It caused me to think of my own situation. Why was I not feeling the level of fear he was exhibiting? Sure I was concerned about my family. I know how much more work they have to take on while I'm gone. At times they have to make decisions and take on responsibilities that should be shared by me. As far as fear though, I learned a long time ago that even when I am with them, I have little ability to protect them from all forms of evil. I am forced to leave that control in God's hands, so I pray to Him for protection and I give up that control.

During pilot training we were taught the danger of two pilots fighting for control of an aircraft at the same time. As a student, when you get into a situation that you can't handle, you state "You've got the aircraft." The instructor will then acknowledge he has control by saying, "I've got the aircraft," and gives a little shake of the stick to give you a physical reassurance he's now in control.

While supervising a group of airmen in tactical planning for combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom, I became overwhelmed with the number and complexity of missions we were responsible for. I would lay awake during my rest periods trying to figure out how we could better accomplish our duties. Despite my best efforts to lead, it seemed like there was no way to improve our techniques enough to accomplish all that needed to be done with the minimal manning at my disposal.

In the depths of desperation I realized my planners and I were out of control. Though I had been praying every night, this time I prayed for God to take control of our lives and our work. I felt a little shake of the stick as the weight of responsibility lifted from my shoulders. Now with the faith that God would fly this crew safely to its ultimate destination, I felt confident to make changes in our processes that I'd been afraid to make in the past. Then additional manning came my way. I watched as everything steadily improved. In addition, I was relieved from the responsibility for the ultimate success or failure of events.

The Bible says, “It is I, I the LORD; there is no savior but me. It is I who foretold, I who saved; I made it known, not any strange god among you; You are my witnesses, says the LORD. I am God (Isaiah 23:11-12). He doesn’t ask us to take on god-sized tasks like protection from the unknown. He must find humor in watching us flit about thinking we can do His job. Then He waits for an event to come along and remind us we need Him. Now, I lay me down to sleep... Over here, I can still find some comfort in that prayer.