

Fatal Familiarity

The place is an Air Force base in the Far East in 1941.

Fighter aircraft were landing after a mission over enemy territory. It was a clear sunny day and the fire fighting crews on the perimeter of the airfield were relaxed, they were **not** expecting any problems as **no** aircraft had reported in any damage.

P450 dipped out of the blue sky on its final approach. The fire-fighting crews watched this top notch pilot as his aircraft crossed the boundary fence.

Then they saw something which electrified them into instant action, their vehicle engines roared, tyres and sirens screamed as they streaked towards the main runway.

What had they seen?

As P450 made a very slow below recommended speed approach over the boundary fence a sudden gust of wind lifted one of its wings. Terror must have struck the young pilot, the aircraft too slow and sluggish to respond, he made a panic-filled thrust on the throttles, the engine roared in response but it was too late.

Nothing could now change the inevitable.

No skilful manoeuvring.

No frantic surge of power from the engine.

Nothing could prevent the scream of ripping metal on the unrelenting concrete runway.

The aircraft turned upside down, the pilot trapped in the cockpit soon to die in a holocaust of flame as the high octane fuel tanks burst.

Within a very few moments the dedicated fire fighters were on the scene but all they could do was to recover the lifeless, charred body of the young pilot.

This young man's death was totally futile, no medals, no glory, no future, no recognition, nothing but a memory in other people's minds who knew him, but that will soon fade.

In those last few seconds this young man knew he was about to die in a wall of flame.

Every human being could be taking the same course in life which would end in facing a wall of flame that would snuff-out their life eternally, ending up just a fading memory in the minds of others who knew them.

Why did this young pilot die?

We all need to know, to avoid the same fate.

I, like many other young men, trained to serve my country as a fighter pilot.

Our training was very demanding and exacting.

Methodically one thing was drummed into our minds, if we lost respect for the rules that governed safe flying, our aircraft could kill us.

We all wanted to survive.

In my station this message was reinforced by certain events.

One pilot missed out one item on his pre-takeoff check list. He ended his life crashing into the side of a Welsh mountain.

My roommate also missed one pre-takeoff check, on a night flight he crashed off the end of the runway.

Amazingly, we found him still alive but unconscious, strapped into his cockpit, having left all the rest of his aircraft scattered over two fields.

In spite of these rules and bitter examples we also knew one other thing.

All the rules we were given had their safety margins. We could fly for thrills below the recommended height and speed and still survive.

To my shame I did fly below power cables, and I did fly into gravel pits doing tight turns around the cranes with grabs extracting the gravel. I did “*shoot up*” a main line railway train flying a few feet above the rails, lifting the aircraft above the on-coming engine at the last moment. By the way, I got strongly reprimanded by my camp commander for that escapade. He was travelling on the train, heard the roar of my aircraft and noted my aircraft number.

Pushing my aircraft past the safety limits became a way of life when I was in the RAF, until one day when I should have ended my life in a ball of fire as my aircraft plunged into the ground.

How did I find myself in such a situation that should have been fatal? And how was I saved from deserved death?

One basic rule for all pilots was that we should **not** fly when we had a head-cold.

I had passed all my tests to receive my wings except one, aerobatics, when I caught a heavy head-cold.

All the rest of the flight had completed their tests and the passing-out day, when we received our wings, was only days away.

This situation was just too much for my ego. I filled myself with every medication I could lay my hands on and the next day presented myself to the Medical Officer to be passed for flying.

I presented myself to my instructor and he said I should go up solo and get my hand back in after several days off flying.

He would then go up with me and authorise the passing of my final test.

Between 15,000 and 20,000 feet I began to perform loops, rolls and other aerobatic movements.

But the mucus of my cold was forced up into my frontal sinus by the gravitational force that my manoeuvres produced and I blacked out.

I came to in a power dive, with my airspeed off of the clock.

As I pulled out of this dive gravitational force took over again and I blacked out for the second time.

When I came to the second time I was flying straight and level a few feet off the ground and had time to lift the aircraft over a line of trees directly in my path.

When you perform aerobatics you always take your wing tabs off to ease the aircraft movement.

When I came too the second time my wing tabs were on to enable the aircraft to fly straight and level hands off.

I personally had **not** put these wing tabs on!!

Don't ever tell me I haven't got a personal guardian angel who knows how to fly an aircraft.

To release the pressure on my brain from my blocked frontal sinus I had to have an operation which ended my flying career.

As Christians, when we first had our eyes opened by the Holy Spirit as to why we exist as human beings we read and tried to obey the command found in Philipians.

Philippians 2:12-13 [NIV] *“Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, **continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling**, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

We did fear and tremble before God, disobedience to what God commanded was unthinkable.

1 Peter 4:18 [NIV] *“And, **“If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”***

This stirred us to great action.

Deeply thankful for what God has done for us through Jesus Christ we became childlike and eager in our response to God's commands.

What about now, after several years in God's church?

Is there still the same excitement and grateful obedience or have such things faded?

Do we find God's Word has become so familiar that it does **not** now spur us to action?

What is familiarity?

“An intimate acquaintanceship with something.”

This attitude of mind can grow **without** any outward signs until it is beyond control.

The origin of familiarity is older than humanity.

Familiarity is one of the reasons that the archangel Lucifer became Satan, the enemy of the God who had created him.

Isaiah 14:12-14 [NIV] *“How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! **You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.”***

Lucifer allowed his deluded pride cause him to lose his position as archangel at God's throne.

Ezekiel 28:11-17 [NIV] *“The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy*

*mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. **Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendour.** So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings.”*

Here we read of the position that Lucifer held before familiarity and pride caused him to fall out of God’s favour.

This archangel, Lucifer, had –

Great powers of perception

Saw the glorified Creator God

Knew of God’s power and beauty

Knew the inner working of God’s government

Knew God’s great plan for humanity

Lucifer was familiar with all of this but he saw what he thought was a weakness in God’s nature. God’s mercy.

Do we act as if this is a weakness in God’s character?

Because we are familiar with all the scriptures that show this mercy, do we presume on that mercy?

Do we try to live with one foot still in the world that God condemns?

Do we indulge in the ways of this Satan-driven society, expecting to be forgiven every time we transgress from God’s way of life. Believing that as God has forgiven me in the past and to prove it I’m still alive, He will continue to forgive me.

We may be making a big mistake if we believe this.

God has given us time –

Time to overcome our weaknesses.

Time to develop godlike character.

Time to do a work of witness to those who do **not** yet know the true Creator God.

But familiarity is the product of time.

It takes time for this cancer of familiarity to grow.

But as soon as we become slightly familiar in our attitude towards our relationship with our Creator God, we are as good as spiritually dead from this cancer of familiarity.

Are we gradually presuming more and more on the love and mercy of God?

Psalms 19:13-14 [King James] “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great

transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.”

Are we growing more slack in our overcoming and doing the work that God has called us to fulfil?

Hebrews 3:12-13 [NIV] *“See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”*

Familiarity is a very deceitful sin.

Remember the mistake that was fatal to the young pilot and to me, if God hadn’t intervened!!

Seeing how close we can get to the ultimate limits of God’s spiritual safety margin must never become the way of life that we live.

Jeremiah 15:6 [Amplified Bible] *“You have rejected and forsaken Me, says the Lord, you keep going in reverse. Therefore I have stretched out My hand against you and destroyed you, I am weary of relenting [concerning your punishment].”*

Did you see that statement!

What God is offering every human being is such a great and wonderful future we should never allow familiarity to lessen a burning desire to receive that future.

Luke 13:6-9 [NIV] *“Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig-tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig-tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ““Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig round it and fertilise it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.””*

God expects fruit in our lives that He can harvest and use to further the expansion of His Kingdom, created family. A reasonable response to the massive investment He has made in our lives through the sacrifice of His Only Son.

Notice the context of this parable.

Luke 13:3 [NIV] *“I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*

A stark warning.

Luke 13:5 [NIV] *“I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”*

Repeated to make it very clear.

Luke 13:24 [NIV] *“Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.”*

Warns it will not be an easy life to live.

Luke 13:28 [NIV] *“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.”*

There will come a very painful time when we wish we had **not** become so familiar with God’s Word, the Christian Bible, and the grace of God it mentions that we become “lukewarm” towards living a Christian life.

Revelation 3:14-16 [NIV] *“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. **I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.**”*

God abhors a “lukewarm” approach to His Word, the Christian Bible.

Zephaniah 1:12 [Amplified Bible] *“And at that time [the end time that started at Christ’s resurrection and will end at His second coming] I will search Jerusalem [symbolic of the Christian church] with lamps, and punish the men who like old wine are thickening and settling on their lees, who say in their heart, the Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil.”*

Familiarity with the seeming unchanging world can cause us to deceive ourselves as to our relationship with our Creator God, **not** believing there will be a day of judgement.

What are we doing if we find ourselves in this attitude of mind?

We are thumbing our noses at God and His way of life, maybe without realising it.

King David was aware of danger that can come to all of us as time passes.

Psalms 39:4-5 [Amplified Bible] *“Lord make me to know my end, and to appreciate the measure of my days, what it is. Let me know and realise how frail I am, how transient is my stay here. Behold, you have made my days as short as a handbreaths, and my life-time is as nothing in your sight. Truly every man at his best is merely a breath! Selah.”* [Pause and think calmly of that!]

Time is a unique commodity:-

The supply of time is inelastic.

Time does **not** increase with demand.

Time is totally perishable.

Revelation 22:11-12 [NIV] *“Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.” “Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.”*

The final words in any letter or presentation are always the most important, summing up all that has gone before.

The implication is that for some time will run out!!

They will leave it too late to turn their lives around and start to follow their Creator and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

How can we avoid this fatal situation?

Never lose our sense of urgency.

Luke 12:15-21 [NIV] *“Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. **And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”’** “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who*

will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ **“This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich towards God.”**

A warning directly from the mouth of our Saviour and soon-coming judge.

Isaiah 9:13-14 [Living Bible] *“For after all this correction will you not repent and turn to Him, the Lord of heavenly armies? Therefore the Lord in **one day** will destroy the leaders of Israel [symbolic of the whole Christian church] and the lying prophets. For the leaders of His people have led them down the path to ruin.”*

Hebrews 4:12 [NIV] *“**For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.**”*

God’s Word, the Christian Bible, is a very effective tool to wake us up to reality.

Hebrews 4:13 [NIV] *“**Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.**”*

There is no place where we can hide the way of life we are living from our Creator God.

Hebrews 4:14-15 [NIV] *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.**”*

Jesus Christ our High Priest, the One who intercedes on our behalf before the Father’s throne, is well aware of human frailties.

Hebrews 4:16 [NIV] *“**Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**”*

We need to be bold in our prayers to God.

Hebrews 5:7 [King James] *“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and **was heard in that he feared;**”*

Jesus Christ as the physical Son of Man used fear, a reverent submission in His prayers to ensure He fulfilled the will of the Father.

How much more is it for us to follow His example?

Hebrews 5:14 [King James] *“**But strong meat** belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*

This article is feeding “strong meat” to all who study it.

I am also seeking to stir you all to action by exercising your senses.

Hebrews 6:4-6 [NIV] *“**It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.**”*

Every Christian has experienced all these things. The same Greek word translated “fall” is translated “drift” [**Hebrews 2:1**].

We do **not** make a definite decision at any one moment, but drift away from God without perceiving we are creating a larger gulf between us and our Creator and His desire for our future.