

**On a Wing and a Prayer**  
**By Phillip Sessa**



I stood in horror as I watched thousands of Afghans desperately chased after and were clinging to a US Air Force plane taxiing down the runway. This resulted in multiple people plunging to their deaths after the aircraft took off in the frantic attempt to flee the country after the Taliban takeover<sup>1</sup>.

This plane would soar to heights of 10,000 to 30,000 feet into the air and burst to speeds up to 600 miles per hour. How could anyone believe that one could grip a moving plane at such speeds? Additionally, at that height, the rushing air is difficult and too thin to breathe<sup>2</sup>. Unless one of these people were Spiderman, this was an impossible task.



Perhaps you've heard the phrase, "**on a wing and a prayer**".

This expression originated during World War II. It appeared in a film called *The Flying Tigers* in the year 1942. One of the pilots in the military had lost one wing of his plane, so he was trying to land using only one wing and a prayer<sup>3</sup>. There was a subsequent song by Harold Adamson and Jimmy McHugh the following lyrics are:

***"Comin' in on a wing and a prayer.  
Comin' in on a wing and a prayer.  
Though there's one motor gone, we can still carry on,  
Comin' in on a wing and a prayer."***<sup>4</sup>

This idiomatic expression is widely used to describe doing something under extremely difficult or disadvantaged circumstances and hoping that sheer luck and putting their faith in scant resources and determination and/or God will allow its success. However, for God's people we have a much greater hope given by the True and Living God of Scripture, a hope that is secure and one that remains.

As I pondered on the horrific Afghan scene, and it seemed that this phrase *on a wing and a prayer*, described the mindset of those trying to hang the US plane. Additionally, two questions concerning this scene and this phrase rose in my mind and how God's Word responds to such questions.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.foxnews.com/world/afghans-clung-departing-us-plane-fall-to-death>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mic.com/articles/140216/here-s-the-science-behind-how-you-can-breathe-on-a-plane-and-not-suffocate-at-30-000-feet>

<sup>3</sup> <https://writingexplained.org/idiom-dictionary/on-a-wing-and-a-prayer>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2010/02/comin-in-on-wing-and-prayer.html>

## 1. Is Salvation Monergistic or Synergistic?

Does God sovereignly save (monergism), disallowing man to earn or merit salvation, or do God and man work together to bring about salvation (synergism)? Those hanging onto the plane were trying to gain freedom from the terroristic Taliban on a wing and a prayer trying to hitch a ride to the USA. However, their efforts failed them because they could not gain such freedom in their own strength. And neither

can man gain salvation with the arm of his flesh. Paul wrote in Eph 2:8-8, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. **And this is not your own doing**; it is the gift of God,<sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” The Apostle John wrote, “But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,<sup>13</sup> who were born, **not** of blood **nor** of the will of the flesh **nor** of the will of man, **but of God** (John 1:12-13). However, there were many seated inside the plane that didn’t struggle at all like those trying to hang onto the plane.



Those inside sat comfortably simply putting their faith in the pilot’s ability to fly the plane from danger to safety.

When the rich young ruler desired salvation on his own terms, he walked away from Jesus with his riches but without the salvation he requested and desperately needed. He wanted to hold onto his idolatrous riches and follow Jesus. In Mark 10:23-27 “Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”<sup>24</sup> And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!<sup>25</sup> It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”<sup>26</sup> And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, “Then who can be saved?”<sup>27</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “With man it is **impossible**, but **not with God**. For **all things are possible with God**. Let this truth resound in your heart that you can do nothing to save yourself from your sin, anymore than Lazarus could deliver himself from death (Luke 11). It takes the power of God to awaken a dead sinner and bring them to life (Ephesians 2:1-3; John 3:1-8). Only those in the plane were safe, only those in the ark (Gen 6) were rescued, and only those in Christ are saved from sin (Rom 3:23-24).

## 2. Cultural oppression or Spiritual oppression?

There has been much talk about oppression from those that are pushing the philosophy of social justice. The social justice warriors put people into two camps which are, the oppressed and the oppressors. I don’t usually cite left-wing comedian Bill Maher but his words really shred ‘woke’ complainers attacking America. He listed real-world oppression when he stated, “I’m sorry your professor said something you didn’t like. That won’t be a problem with the Taliban, because you’re not allowed to go to school. In Saudi Arabia, grown women can be jailed for doing the kind of things we think of as routine without the permission of a male guardian. China rounds you up if you’re [of] the wrong religion and puts you in camps. More children in Burkina Faso work than are in school. Only 5% of Burundians have electricity. The homicide rate in Honduras is eight times what it is here. The inflation rate in Venezuela is 2,719%. The Philippines, in the last five years, has put to death 27,000 low-level drug dealers — my old job. In North Korea, people starve to death. The only people who starve here are doing it for a role<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

It seems that many are just speaking as cultural parrots, echoing the social justice narrative much of which spews through the liberal media. As Christians, we are implored by God to look through a biblical lens and not a cultural one (Hebrew 4:12; Phil 2:5; 4:8-9). Scripture uses biblical categories from Genesis to Revelation. These categories are synonymous with one another and would be the righteous verse the unrighteous (Psalm 1), the children of Satan versus the children of God, the sheep verse the goats (Matthew 25:31-32), the good fish versus the bad fish (Matthew 13:47-50), those that obey the will of God versus those the obey the will of Satan (1 John 2:15-17; Matt 7:21-23), the wheat versus the tares (Matthew 13:24-30), and those that build their lives on the rock of Christ versus those digging their lives into the shifting sands of this world (Matthew 7:24-26).

Make no mistake here, the biblical categories don't mesh with the social justice categories, they oppose and contradict one another. James displays this truth writing, "Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and saltwater? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water" (James 3:11-12).

Bill Maher continued his words asking, "*Have you ever heard of honor killings, public beheadings, throwing gay men off of roofs, arranged marriages to minors, state-sanctioned wife beating, female genital mutilation, marriage by capture?*" he asked. "*What's the lesson of Afghanistan? Maybe it's that everyone from the giant dorm room [whining] session that is the internet should take a good look at what real oppression looks like*<sup>6</sup>."

I don't see anyone that believes America is oppressive, and systemically racist, trying to escape the country by hanging on a plane! This country was formed to flee oppression, especially religious oppression to gain religious freedom. Rather than look at the foundational Christian values that came with the Puritans, this country was built upon, many decidedly want this country to hand over its prosperity. They want to saw off the limb of prosperity from the tree of values by which the country was founded upon. Now of course no country is sinless because no country is the Kingdom of God. Our country has stopped and moved past slavery and eugenics, suppressing women's voting, and several other issues as well. However, we still allow abortion (the barbaric murder of children), pornography, gender reassignment, sex trafficking, the black lives matter that chose to riot and loot (breaking the sixth commandment (by destroying and stealing the goods and property of others), and a host of other sins.

The social justice warriors would have us believe that the USA is an oppressive country, yet many are fleeing their countries to come to the USA. Are we to believe that these people want to leave "the good life" in their countries to such an oppressive country? All countries are filled with sinners and therefore with sin. The answer to sin is not to be "woke", but to be born again! We are not called to be "woke", but alive in Christ! Paul write (Ephesians 2:4-7) "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead in our trespasses, **made us alive together with Christ**—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Those that follow Christ can only do so because they are made alive in Christ, seated with Christ, in the Kingdom of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. Those in Christ are temporarily in the kingdom of this world but not of it, they are insulated, but not isolated from this world, as they bring the Gospel to this dark and sinful world.

The worldview proposed by the social justice warriors is unbiblical, contradictory to Scripture, because it is itself an oppressive philosophy. It specifically attempts to oppress the gospel, and the church, which is the bride of Christ. Unfortunately, and sadly many professing Christians have bought into and tried to mesh it with Scripture. However, this oppressive philosophy is in fact Satanic because **it opposes the sufficiency of the Word of God** (2 Tim 3:16). Hebrews 4:12 states, *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

Recall “how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and **healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him** (Acts 10:38). Those that were oppressed could not be set free by the Jewish leaders, neither the Pharisees (conservatives) that lorded it over the people (Matthew 20:25; 1 Peter 5:3), or the Sadducees (liberals) that dismissed miracles especially not in the resurrection of the dead (Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18–27; Acts 23:8). Neither could they be set free by the Gnostics who professed to have a secret esoteric (which means only understood by a few) knowledge was the source for salvation. But Christ by the power of God healed all oppressed by the devil, devilish thinking, devilish speaking, devilish living. Only God’s Word can set free one that is oppressed by ungodliness, or one that is truly an oppressor against God’s people (i.e. the Apostle Paul before he was converted) (Acts 9). The social justice warriors cannot set anyone free from spiritual oppression because they are a proponent of it. They do this by rioting, pushing cancel culture, and preaching woke philosophy and their intersectionality matrix.

Charles Spurgeon addressed the poisonous cesspool of the compromise among Baptists in England, by penning the following titled “The Downgrade in the Churches” writing:

*A chasm is opening between the men who believe their Bibles and those who are prepared for an advance upon the Scripture. . .The house is being robbed, its very walls are being digged down, but the good people who are in bed are too fond of the warmth. . .to go downstairs to meet the burglars. As Baptists spiraled downward, Spurgeon saw the issue was fundamentally based upon their lack of commitment to the Word of God, as noted in his words, **“Inspiration and speculation cannot long abide side by side. . .We cannot hold the inspiration of the Word and yet reject it.***

In closing, all those in Christ Jesus do not need to try to hang on by a “wing and a prayer” for dear life by dead religious works, or mere wishful thinking, but can rest securely in Christ alone. We have a great hope in Christ who uphold the universe [and us] by the word of His power (Hebrews 1:3). David gives us the biblical wing and prayer we need, penning his prayer in Psalm 91:4, **“He shall cover you with His feathers, And under His wings, you shall take refuge”**. Steve Lawson shares that David likens God’s relationship with His children as an eagle protecting its young. God covers believers with his wings and feathers of faithfulness (Psalm 17:8; Deuteronomy 32:11). His abundant and everlasting faithfulness guards and guides his own from all harm like a shield and rampart depicting God as a mighty warrior protecting us in the day of battle.

**Selah:** Are you covered in His protection? Can you look back over your life and see His hand upon you keeping you for His purposes? Give Him thanks for His faithfulness, and the faith He gave you to believe upon Christ, who alone provided salvation.

Until the nets are filled!