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**Presentation Transcript
With the Windows Open
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The title of this presentation is *With the Windows Open*.

There are portions of the Old Testament that don't really make sense to me. Some of them have to do with accounts, or events. I read them and I know that I'm missing something, because it just doesn't seem to connect. I usually think, when that happens, that it has to do with the difference of my culture and the culture that they were in, in ancient times.

I remember the first time I read the Bible I learned that in ancient Israel, if a man died and he had no son, and he had an unmarried brother, then his brother was supposed to marry his widow. I remember thinking, "Well, that wouldn't go down too well today." But it wasn't until much later that I learned that that was called the levirate marriage, and it was a custom in Israel and mentioned in the Bible as well.

And there are other times when I have read the Psalms, and they just seem so repetitive. Have you ever noticed that? It seems to be the same thing over and over again. Well, it wasn't until later that I learned that the Psalms are poetry, and one of the art forms that the Hebrews used in poetry was a very sophisticated type of repetition that just doesn't come across in English. It just sounds like what it is to us – repetition. But in their language, it had a lot of meaning that we miss completely.

But then there are those places in the Old Testament, where the meaning just penetrates right through all the language barriers, all the cultural differences, and all the aeons of time that are transpired between then and now. And it's just simply as clear as a bell. I want to read you a story like that today – a clear-as-a-bell, can't miss it Bible story. It starts in Daniel 6, verse 1. It says:

Dn. 6:1 – *It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps to be over the whole kingdom. And over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. They had a heirarchical management system set up. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the*

governors and the satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. So he was such an excellent administrator, he just shined above the others, and the king decided – or thought about – making him sort of his assistant to oversee everything.

V-4 – *So the governors – verse 4 – and the satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom, but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful, nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, “We shall not find against this Daniel, unless we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” So these governors and satraps thronged before the king, and said thus to him, “King Darius, live forever!”* What does that mean? Well, back then, they believed that the king was also a god. So that’s what gods do, right? They live forever. *All the governors of the kingdom, the administrators and satraps, the counselors and advisors have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any God or man for thirty days except you, O King, shall be cast into the den of lions.”* They made this presentation to him.

V-8 – *“Now, O King, establish the decree and sign the writing so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which does not alter.” Therefore, King Darius signed the written decree.* So now there’s a law that for thirty days nobody can worship any God except for Darius.

V-10 – *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.* So he’d done this all his life. As a small child he prayed to God – on his knees three times a day facing Jerusalem. *Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God, and they went before the king and spoke concerning the king’s decree. “Have you not signed a decree that every man who petitions any God or man within thirty days except you, O King, shall be cast into the lions’ den?”* The king answered and said, *“The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which does not alter.”* That was one of their things. Once something was written into law, not even the king could change it – the law of the Medes and the Persians. There’s a lot of modern counterparts to that today, too. A lot of people have poured a lot of concrete around a lot doctrines and a lot of positions they have, and aren’t willing to change it. This was sort of the precursor to all of that, I guess.

V-13 – *So they answered and said before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the captives from Judah, does not show due regard to you, O King, or for the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.”* And the king, when he heard these words, was greatly displeased with himself – he realized he’d been tricked – and set his heat on Daniel to deliver him. *And he labored till the going down of the sun to deliver him.* So he was trying to figure out a way to save Daniel from going into the lions’ den.

V-15 – *Then these men – in verse 15 – approached the king, and said to the king, “Know, O King, that it is the law of the Medes and Persians that no decree or statute which the*

king establishes may be changed.” So the king gave the command, and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions. But the king spoke, saying to Daniel, “Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you.” I kind of think that may have been a question, because he doesn’t realize that God’s that kind of God until a little bit later. And then a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet ring and with the signets of his lords, that the purpose concerning Daniel might not be changed.

V-18 – *Now the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no musicians were brought before him. Also, his sleep went from him. Yup, he wasn’t really sure, was he? That was a question. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste to the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried out in a lamenting voice to Daniel. And the king spoke to Daniel, saying, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you continually serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?” And then Daniel said to the king, “King, live forever. My God sent His angel and shut the lions mouths so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him. And also, O King, I’ve done no wrong before you.”*

V-23 – *Then the king was exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no injury whatever was found on him, because he believed in his God. And the king gave the command, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and cast them into the den of lions – them, their children and their wives – and the lions overpowered them and broke all their bones in pieces before they ever came to the bottom of the den.*

V-25 – *Then King Darius wrote to all peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth, “Peace be multiplied to you. I make a decree” – now he’s kind of wised up to what was going on and he’s going to make a decree of his own now. “I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom, men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel. For He is the living God, steadfast forever. His kingdom is the one which will not be destroyed, and His dominion shall endure to the end. He delivers and rescues. And He works signs and wonders in heaven and on earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lion.” So Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.*

So here’s some things that I learned from this story. I learned that working with the king was dicey business back in those days. You never knew what was going to happen, and the king had all power. I learned that the king and everyone else thought the king was a god. It’s kind of like religion today. There’s a lot of superstition in some of it. I learned that the king had the kind of power that nobody in the world has today. He had absolute power. I learned that people aren’t all that different than the way they used to be, because there were lots of politics in the world back then, just like there is today. Other people were jealous when Daniel was promoted. Fancy that. We wouldn’t know anything about that, would we? They wanted to keep him down so they could ascend. I also learned that back then, they were really into cruel punishments. The mentality was that fear was a strong deterrent, so when they killed somebody, they made it as terrible, as dramatic and

as public as possible so that others would be afraid to try the same thing. I also learned that revenge was really big in those days. So, if they did something to somebody, they tried to kill their wives and kids, too, so that the kids wouldn't grow up and get revenge on them. Those are some of the things that I've learned.

But what is the point of this story? The point is that Daniel trusted God and God protected and blessed Daniel. But, you know, I think that there's something else that I see in this story. I think it's something I've been learning recently. There were other people that were out to get him and Darius passed a decree that anyone who prays to any God other than Darius will be thrown into a den of lions. And what was it that Daniel, then, did? I'm going to read you verse 10 again.

Dan. 6:10 – *Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home, and in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.*

Now what really jumps out at us here? Well, it's not so much that he prayed, because he was in deep trouble. People always pray when they're in deep trouble – even, sometimes, people who don't know if there is a God will pray when they're in deep trouble. But it's that he prayed with the *windows open* – like he always did. You know, I can see somebody praying silently in the middle of the night, for fear that the satraps and the governors would hear and turn him into the king. Or maybe with his face in a pillow. Or maybe out by a noisy creek, where nobody could hear him. But not with the windows open when your life is on the line. I mean, that's pretty amazing, isn't it, what he did there. He was confessing his faith and he wasn't hiding anything. He didn't do anything different. You know, what you see is what you get when you look at Daniel the prophet. He just *was* Daniel the prophet. He worshipped God. He didn't care whether there was a decree or not. "I'm a Jew. I worship the one true God. I've always prayed three times a day with the windows open, and I'm still going to pray three times a day with the windows open."

What was the end result of that? What was the end result? Well, one end result was that he got in trouble. But that really isn't *the* end result, is it? Another end result is, that God protected Daniel and Daniel was blessed more than ever. But there's something else that happened there that I didn't understand until just recently. I learned that the end result of Daniel praying with his windows open was that King Darius was *convicted* that Daniel's God *was* God. That did happen in that story, didn't it? He made a decree that said, "In Media and Persia" – which was the great world-ruling empire of the time – "Daniel's God is the true God," and he made it okay to worship that God in Media and Persia.

Did Daniel know that was going to happen? Probably not. Probably not in his wildest dreams did he ever contemplate such a thing. He probably mostly thought about that lions' den. So what's the point? Well, the point is, I think – for me – this story is that when you're not afraid to pray with the windows open, who knows where that's going to go? Who knows who's going to listen and how that's going to affect people. Who knows

who's going to be called or drawn to God. When we're not afraid to practice our faith before other people, when we're not afraid to *share* our faith with other people, well, that's when God can use us to do powerful things in the lives of other people.

You know, I love to tell stories. So I'm going to tell you another one. This is a story of something that's been happening to me lately. It's about one of the interns that works at the mental health clinic where I work. We'll say her name is Mary. The way we work at our clinic...there's usually a therapist to work with the child that's having a problem, then there's a family therapist to work with the family, and then there's somebody to go to school with the child, and somebody to go into the home and coach the family – mainly the parents – on how to properly raise their kids. This young intern, Mary, and I were working together on this one family case, and so we were in the office one day talking about it. It's the first time we'd ever really had much of a chance to talk to each other. She's probably about...I think when I met her, she might have been twenty-four. Something like that.

So we came out of the counseling room, having talked, and she said, "Do you have any children, Bill?" I said, "Yes, I have two daughters." She said, "How old are they?" I said, "One is going to be thirty-eight this year, and one's thirty-six." And she said, "No way!" I said, "Yeah, I'm sixty-years-old." She said, "Shut up! There's no way you're that old!" I said, "You're my new best friend!" (Laughter) "Thank you, thank you, thank you for thinking I am *so* young." So that was kind of a fun thing that we joked about for awhile. We started talking together about our cases more, and just about things in general when things were a little slow. She would ask me a lot of questions about therapy. And I would help her figure out what to do with her kids she was working with. And I was really impressed with how good she was at it.

In the course of just getting to know her better, I learned she'd had a really hard upbringing. Her mother was a drug addict and things had not gone well. Her dad didn't protect her from her mother, so there was a lot of bad feelings toward both of them. I learned that she married a guy that's six-foot-ten. People around town refer to him as that *tall* school principal out in Rio Rancho. He used to play basketball for the New Mexico Lobos. She has a little boy who is three-years-old. She mentioned praying about her son once, and I asked her if she went to church. She said that she was *trying* to go to church, but she couldn't figure out where to go. A lot of the experiences she had going to church didn't help her much, so she was kind of frustrated about that.

She asked me one day where I went to church. And I told her I attended this small study group and that I was a Sabbatarian. She didn't know what a Sabbatarian was, so I asked her if she'd heard of the Seventh Day Adventists? "Well, yes." "Well, they're Sabbatharians." I told her that I also observe all the days called the *feasts of the LORD* in the Old Testament, and that we believe they are New Testament observances as well. She hadn't heard of any of those either, so I had to rattle some off for her. I told her about going to the Feast – I think we were going to Destin that year – and she thought that was really neat, but she was somewhat confused about why I would do that. At that point that

was all that was said about religion, and we wound up working on some more cases together. And that caused us to talk even more and get to know each other even more.

One day, she and I, and one other young intern – her name is Sue – all got stood up by our clients at the same hour. So we decided to go to Starbucks, which is right across the street. We went to Starbucks...and they're going to the University of Phoenix, taking marriage and family classes. And they were talking about this class they were taking on attachment. So I told them about this seminar that I'm going to do this afternoon – that I'd been working on and had been giving around the country, where we integrate attachment theory with the Bible. I could tell that meant nothing to Sue, but Mary was pretty interested in that.

So, we're on our way back from coffee, and Mary said, "Bill, can I ask you a question?" I said, "Sure." She said, "Now if this is out of line, you let me know." And I said, "Okay." She said, "Could you take some time to talk to me about my attachment to God?" "Well, that's not out of line. I'd be happy to talk to you." So, we set a date and we had that talk. She came to my office and I could see that she was pretty nervous. I told her that I was really glad that we could talk about God together. She seemed to relax a little bit. I asked her what the problem was, and she said, "Well, I'm just so off and on about God. Sometimes I feel really excited about it, but I just can't seem to maintain a consistent relationship." She said, "We try to go to church, and it lasts for awhile, and then we quit." She said, "I just feel so judged when I go to church. And when I try to read the Bible, I feel like it's so harsh and judgmental. It makes me feel bad." So we explored how her childhood relationship with her mother was interfering with her relationship with God. At one point she asked me what she should do. It was more in the context of being on and off, you know? So I asked her if she was baptized? And she said, "Yes, I am." I said, "Well, when were you baptized?" She said, "When I was thirteen." I said, "When you were baptized, did you understand what that meant?" She said, "I didn't then, and I still don't." I said, "So I'm going to assume that you've never really read the Bible." She said, "I haven't." "So you're taking other people's word for your religion." She said, "Essentially, yes." I said, "There you go." I said, "You need to read the Bible." She said, "But it's so big. And it's so old. And I don't understand it." And I said, "It's intimidating. It *is* a big book. And it *is* written from the past and we don't understand a lot what happens there, but here's what you need to do. You need to get a modern translation of the Bible. You need to put it by your bed. And every morning or every evening you need to read a chapter or two of it. Skip the 'begats.' Skip the building of the temple. And read it for story flow. Understand, before you start, that the beginning and the end – in between those two is the whole story of God's dealings with and relationship to us – how it all got messed up in the beginning, how it's all going to get fixed at the end, and everything that happened in between. And if you get stuck or bored, you can always call me, and we can talk about it." She seemed pretty happy about that.

While we were sitting there, she asked me this question. I want you to think about this. She said, "Why do you go to church on Saturday?" Do you know why she's asking me that question? She wouldn't care why I went to church on Saturday, except there's something about *me* that she finds compelling – there's something about the way I *do*

religion that she's curious about it. She doesn't understand why I'm so different. And so she's asking me that question. So I told her that I believe that observing the Sabbath teaches us things about God that we can't learn any other way. Now, what is it about that answer that's important? "Well, I keep it, because if I don't, I'm going to be a no-good, ignorant pagan like you." I mean, if you use a legalistic, judgmental approach to talk about the Sabbath, all you're going to do is turn people off. But if you hold out the hope of learning something more about God than they already know, you've got interest among people who are interested in knowing more about God. Now the people who aren't, they're *not* interested, and that's just fine with me. But the people who want to know more about God, they're interested.

The next question was, "What's your group like?" Now, why would somebody want to know that unless they're thinking about, maybe, coming to it? Right? I said, "Well, we're really small. Most of the time we just sit around a table and study our Bibles together. We usually eat while we're doing that. It's very informal. And after we get done studying, we pray together. Then we sing some songs, though we aren't very good singers." She laughed, and said, "That's really cool."

A few days later I got this card in the mail from her, that was just so appreciative of taking the time to help her resolve her ideas or thoughts about Bible study and why she couldn't seem to maintain a consistent, committed relationship to God. Later she invited Elaine and me out to dinner with her gigantic husband and her gigantic little boy. He's three and he looks like he's six. I wonder where he gets that from? And I really like him. He's a great guy. So we got home from dinner and Elaine said, "She's so beautiful! And she's so sweet! And she's so smart!" And I said, "Yeah, she's really a nice person." The next day I went to work, and Mary was there, and she came over to me, and she said, "I really enjoyed meeting Elaine. She's so beautiful! And she's so sweet! And she's so smart!" I'm not joking! That's exactly they both said it. So I thought, "Oh, okay. There's another connection. That's good." So we invited them over for dinner.

I think what's happening is...I think she figures if her husband gets to like me, that maybe he'll be more interested in church, because I'm a church person. I don't necessarily think it's about going to our church, although she did ask some pretty interesting questions at the beginning. So we invited them over dinner and we had a really good time. And they were going to invite us over, except that she got pregnant. So she had another baby. And while she was pregnant, she went through a rough spot at – I think it was – about four months? Where she had to lie with her feet up a lot – she was trying to lose it. And I remember when she came back to work, I told her that I'd prayed for her, and she just grabbed on to me and gave me this fierce hug, and said, "That's the most important thing!" Since then, we've been to a Bible bookstore to help her find some Bible helps to study the Bible, because there's a lot of the Old Testament stuff she doesn't understand – just like me. So she's started studying her Bible and she asks me questions every now and then. Who knows where that's going to go? I don't.

But I've kind of been at work with the windows open. That's the way I've been at work. People want to talk about the Bible with me? I'll talk about it. If they ask me questions

about where I'm going – you know, off to the Feast – I tell them. “Well, what are you doing there?” I tell them! They know that I'm different and they don't know very much about it. Some of them don't want to know, you know, but then there are others that are just kind of nibbling around the edges – trying to find out more without getting evangelized. (Chuckles) So I don't do that. I only answer questions. And I only try to help people. I don't know where that's going to go. And I'm kind of learning as I go, because I've never done anything like this before. But I *do* know that letting my beliefs be known, and trying to live by them at work, has made an impression on some folks. And I know it's helped Mary develop a deeper relationship with God. And all this is *so* exciting to me, because God has never done anything like that through me before with an adult. I've helped a lot of children. I used to be a minister in the Worldwide Church of God. And the church I started out in grew from 330 to 660 in four years. And I visited most of the new people that came as a result of listening to the radio program. But I was just representing a church then. I always tried to let my light shine, but it's a whole different thing when somebody comes to you and wants to know why *you* do what *you* do – and they find that interesting and important.

I've been trying to let my light shine, and I don't do a perfect job of it – that's for sure – but I'm trying. It's really exciting to see who wants to come to the light – who's interested in that stuff.

There's another young woman in our clinic, who is just a phenomenal play therapist. She's religious, too. She talks about it. She was telling me all about the Bible study class that their pastor is putting on. She said, “I hear that you're going off to Destin, Florida – or off to Tennessee.” I said, “Yeah.” “Why are you going?” “We're going to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.” “Well, what is that?” “Well, you know, the Passover, Unleavened Bread...” “Oh, the Jewish holidays.” I said, “Yeah, but actually, we believe that they're a part of the New Testament church. And the reason we keep them is, that each of those days pictures a step in God's salvation plan. So, if you keep them, it helps you keep that plan in your mind all the time.” And she looked at me, and her eyes got really big, and this big smile broke out on her face, and she says, “Cool!” (They're all real young there.) And she wants to talk now, too.

She is a hilarious person. We had a party for the clinic – in fact, it was for Mary – it was a baby shower for Mary – and everybody came. We had one of these games where you give a gift – a gag gift. You pick something that's old that you don't want anymore, and wrap it up real fancy, and then people draw to see who gets what. She and her husband – their gift was a framed picture of themselves. (Laughter) So, we have quite a good time at the clinic – a lot of fun people there. But I understand, for the first time in my life, they understand what it means to keep the windows open.

So why are we talking about this today? Well, we're a week away from Pentecost, aren't we? That's the church day, isn't it? We're in Pentecost season. We can see, in the first chapters of the book of Acts, that God intends His church to grow. Our experience of church – at least, mine, from the time I was very young – was that the church grows by corporate evangelism – media, direct mail, magazine ads. I was even told, when I was

eighteen and a freshman at college, that I shouldn't talk to people about religion, because I'd just mess it up. I was a freshman. What did I know? But that really is not the picture that we see in the New Testament, is it? They didn't have corporate evangelism.

Let's go to Mark 4, verse 26. Jesus is going to tell a story now – a parable. He said:

Mk. 4:26 – *This is what the kingdom of God is like. Okay, what is it like? A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.* That's what the Kingdom of God is like. Seeds are scattered out. And whether the farmer that scatters the seeds goes to bed or gets up – without any effort on his part – he doesn't even know how. You know, I used to live in Arkansas – in the Delta – and I had rice farmers, and cotton farmers and bean farmers in my congregation. And they could all tell me, when there was a certain level of moisture, how deep to set the drills to plant the soybeans, or whatever. They knew what kind of fertilizer to put on and when to put it on. But none of them knew how a seed sprouts. That's completely out of our field, isn't it? We don't know how the miracle of life occurs.

Now, notice verse 28. After all this is done – after the scattering of the seed – and Paul said that he planted and Apollos watered – so you have to do some tending – it says:

V-28 – *All by itself, the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head.* So this is a metaphor for how growth happens in the church.

Do you know who the seeds are in the metaphor? Well, that's you and me. We're the seeds. We're the ones who are carriers of the DNA of the church – just like the seed carries the DNA of the plant.

Have you ever taken a white dandelion and blown on it? And the seeds just go and fly everywhere? That's the picture. That's how the church was to grow. Do you remember when Paul persecuted the church in Acts? It says that the brethren scattered and preached the word everywhere they went? That's the picture. They didn't have permission. They didn't have to. They couldn't not do it. They carried the DNA of the organism with them. What is that? Well, that is Holy Spirit, which is also a big part of Pentecost, isn't it? You know, one of the biggest interventions of God was Pentecost – the creation of the church – an automatic growth-producing organism that just grows all by itself.

I was talking to Guy Swenson on the phone last night. When he left the church that he was in two and a half years ago – a little more now – maybe closing in on three in July – he and his wife had church in their living room. That's what they had. Last Sabbath they had twenty-seven people attending – and there were more new people there than old timers. How did that happen?

I've been thinking about all of this – the experience that I've had with Mary and some of the others, and talking with the people in Kansas City – you know, that congregation that's in Kansas City – that independent group that left Worldwide – and instead of joining United, they went independent? I was there two years ago and there were seventy

of them. This time there were ninety. I went there just a few months ago. I said, “What are you guys doing?” They said, “Well, we tried some advertising, but that doesn’t work. We put stuff on the radio and one person called.” “So, what are you doing?” “Well, we just decided that we’re going to try to take really good care of the ones that come. We’re going to help them find what they’re spiritual gifts are and, if they have any physical needs, we’re going to try to meet them. We’re going to try to make them feel at home here. And every person here knows that that’s what they’re trying to do. We really try to make people feel welcome. And we try to take care of them when they come.” I said, “They all believe the same way you believe when they come?” “No, in fact, we don’t even all agree ourselves. We have a lot of doctrinal differences.” “Don’t you fight and argue about that?” “We used to, but we quit, because we realized that’s not what’s really important.”

You know, I know what I believe. Don’t you? After all this time, don’t you know what you believe? And I believe I know what I know because God taught it to me. Don’t you? So how much luck are you going to have trying to convince me to believe some other way? Not much. And I’m not going to convince you either. Because if I did, I would be meddling in your relationship with God. So why can’t we all just be happy that we know what we know and take care of each other? That’d a good part of what causes a church to grow. That’s what Guy Swenson said they were doing, plus they were doing stuff in their community to help people. And none of the people they have helped have come to church yet. But people *watching* them help others have come, because *they* wanted to help, too. Isn’t that interesting how that works?

I was thinking about how I got *blown* into the clinic that I work in. And it was really a freak thing. I was working in a school and another counselor told me there was this guy who was going to start up a clinic. So I called him up and he invited me over, and we talked, and that was it. It was sort of a fluke that I wound up there. And yet, there are people to talk to there.

Where is God blowing you? Who is it that’s watching you? And watching your light? Can anybody tell that you’re different? Who’s outside your window? Is your window open? Can people *tell* that you worship God? Can you talk to them in a compelling way that makes them feel safe and comfortable, instead of judged and put down? These are really important questions. I’ve been thinking about these questions for a couple of years now. And I don’t have all the answers to them, but I’m trying. And I know that in the Pentecost season, it’s a good thing to think about what God wants for His church and what our part in that is. Maybe a good way to think about that is to just ask ourselves, “Am I praying with my windows open?”