

Prayer... for Young People

A few years ago, I showed a Mickey Mouse telephone to a group of children and I asked them what they thought it was. They all knew, of course.

I then showed them a piece of fibre-optic telephone cable and asked them to identify it. Only a few of the older ones had any idea.

A length of cable similar to the piece I showed to the children stretched all the way across Canada from Port Alberni, British Columbia to St. Johns, Newfoundland. Although that cable might have been replaced by now, that particular specimen was connected to submarine cables that crossed the Pacific Ocean from the Port Alberni terminal and the Atlantic Ocean from the St. Johns terminal.

That cable contained 144 glass "wires" called "fibres." Each one of those 144 fibres was as thin as a strand of human hair but, at that time, was able to carry 32,256 telephone conversations at the same time! So a length of this cable with its 144 fibres could transmit a total of 4,644,864 calls at once. Newer fibre optic systems can transmit 129,024 or more conversations on each fibre. That is 18,579,476 telephone calls on our 144 fibre cable at the same time! This capacity continues to increase as the months and years roll by.

This simultaneous transmission of telephone calls is called "multiplexing." However, it was God, not telecommunications engineers, who invented multiplexing. He was doing it thousands of years before Alexander Graham Bell made his first historic telephone call.

If men and women are able to develop systems that can carry thousands of conversations on a single piece of thin glass wire, and if they have the ability switch them to the right people occasionally, is it so strange that God, who is so much greater than man and anything that man can make, is able to listen to and respond to thousands of prayers at the same time?

This brings me to the purpose of this article, and that is to encourage our young people in God's church to pray... to pray regularly... to pray every day. So let me ask you... do YOU pray every day? Like some adults, some young people have different reasons for not praying. In this article, I would like to give you some Bible answers to just two of those reasons.

The first reason that some people don't pray is that...

God Doesn't Answer Right Away

Let's go back to the subject of telecommunications for just a moment:

A hundred or so years ago, the installation of the first telegraph lines in the Shetland Islands off the coast of Scotland prompted unusual responses from some residents. As one man stood looking at the wires being mounted on the high poles, a businessman said to him, "What a wonderful thing this new invention is! When it is finished, we will be able to send a message two hundred miles or more and get an answer within an hour!"

The other man seemed unimpressed. "There's nothing very great about that," he answered.

"There isn't? Do you know of anything better or faster?" asked the businessman.

The man, thinking of Isaiah Chapter 65 and Daniel Chapter 9, replied, "Did you ever hear of getting an answer *before* the message was sent?"

The businessman looked dumbfounded, and continued on his way, thinking it was just a strange, meaningless comment. Little did he realize the biblical truth behind that reply:

**Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.
(Isaiah 65:24 RSV)**

God can read our hearts and always knows our needs. Often, even while we are praying, His answer is on the way. Now let us look at a scripture from the ninth chapter of Daniel. It is possible that Daniel was a teenager when this event happened:

Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking Him by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and made confession, saying, "O Lord, the great and terrible God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love Him and keep His commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances; we have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.

While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God; while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He came and he said to me, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding.

At the beginning of your supplications a word went forth, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly beloved; therefore consider the word and understand the vision. (Daniel 9:3-6 & 20-23 -RSV)

Young Daniel was still praying when Gabriel – who is actually not a man, but a great archangel – flew swiftly to him from God's throne with the answer. Prayer certainly is faster than any other modern means of communication. God sometimes answers prayers very quickly. Daniel's answer was on its way before he had even started the main part of his prayer!

Sometimes, although God always hears right away, He *chooses* not to answer right away. When He does not answer immediately, it is for a very good reason and, even though we may not always get to know what that reason is, it is usually for our own good! But please never, ever fear that if God does not answer your prayer right away or that He does not give you the answer that you want, He has not heard your prayer or that He is unable to help you:

Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or His ear dull, that it cannot hear. (Isaiah 59:1 RSV)

Now, let us look at the second reason some don't choose to pray:

I don't know how to pray properly

No one should feel guilty about not knowing how to pray properly. The disciples of Jesus and of John the Baptist had the same problem:

He [*Jesus*] was praying in a certain place, and when He ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, 'Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.' (Luke 11:1)

Jesus' answer is covered here in the book of Luke, but it is described more completely in Matthew chapter 6:

When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

**Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.
Amen.**

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:5-15)

This so-called "Lord's Prayer" is not really a prayer. It is more of a guideline on how to pray, and a list of things to pray about. We know this because Jesus tells us in verse 7, "Do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do." The King James Version puts it this way: "Use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do." If we, as so many people around the world do, repeat the twelve lines of *the Lords Prayer* day after day after day, the words will become so overly familiar that they will become meaningless and we will be disobeying Jesus' simple instruction not to use vain repetitions.

In His prayer guideline, Jesus teaches us the order of importance of what to pray about. Briefly, that order is this:

1. Praise and thank God,
2. Ask for things,
3. Praise God.

Let us take a closer look at Jesus' prayer outline, and let's see what we can learn from it. Let us see if it answers our questions:

Who should we pray to?

Jesus answers. He says we are to pray to our heavenly Father. God the Father.

**But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you... Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven,
(Matthew 6:6, 9 RSV)**

Although we can and should include Jesus in our prayers to God the Father (after all, He is present with His Father and is certainly listening to our prayers too), we are not to pray to or through apostles, prophets, so-called "saints" or through Jesus' mother Mary. These were all merely human beings. They have not yet received their reward. They are dead and in their graves, and are not in heaven with God the Father and Jesus Christ! By the way, please do not think that you have to pray in *Olde English* using words like "thee", "thou," "ye", etc. God can understand all languages . . . even modern English!

What should we talk to Him about?

Again, Jesus answers:

Hallowed be thy name. (Matthew 6:9)

To hallow God's name is to accept that His name is already hallowed or "holy." After all, no man can ever make anything holy. The best we can do is to try to keep holy what God has made holy. Included in this phrase, however, is included praise and thanksgiving to God the Father and Jesus Christ. We should praise them for who they are, for what they are and for how great they are. We should thank them for all they have done for us in the past... specifically for what they have done for us over the past twenty-four hours since we last prayed.

Thy kingdom come. (Matthew 6:10)

Pray for Jesus Christ and His Kingdom to come... to come to this world to make it better. We cannot, of course, change God's time schedule for the end of this age. But God wants to see His children sighing and crying – possessing the deep desire – for this world and its *way of get* to be put out of its misery, and for His Kingdom – in which everything will be done according to His "way of give" – to be ushered in:

And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. (Ezekiel 9:4)

Although Jesus Christ has not yet returned to take over the rulership of the world and to straighten out the mess that mankind has made of it, God's Kingdom does, in fact, already exist (Luke 17:21). God the Father is its King; Jesus Christ is its Crown Prince. The angels are its heavenly representatives and the members of God's church – including their obedient and respectful children – are its human representatives. We might pray that we can become more effective representatives of God's Kingdom right now.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

One of the most difficult things for a human being to do is to get his will in line with God's will. But make no mistake about it: God's will WILL be done! Whether or not we get in line with it, He WILL do His will! Whether we like it or not, He WILL do His will!

But, just like the coming of His Kingdom, our loving Father prefers His children to possess a fervent desire for His will to be done. He wants us to do our best – with His help, strength and Spirit, of course – to get our wills in line with His.

Pray for God to do His will on earth today, and that He will do His will through whoever and whatever means He thinks best. Pray that, as God the Father, Jesus Christ and their holy angels are doing God's will in Heaven, He will do His will on earth through His ministers and through all of the members of His church – including His young people.

Give us this day our daily bread. (Matthew 6:11)

Pray that God will give us all of the things that we need.

Notice that Jesus teaches us to pray, "Give *us our* daily bread"; He does not say, "Give *me my* daily bread." So we should pray for the needs of others first. Who, of all the people you know, both in and out of the church, are sick, or hungry, or troubled, or sad, or lonely? Pray first that God will help those people out. Then, if you have enough time left, pray for the things that *you* need. God knows your needs even better than you do. He knows what you need even before you realize that you need it! Beware of asking for a long list of the things that you *want*. God is not Santa Claus. Nevertheless, because He loves His children more than we can comprehend, He might give you a limited amount of the things that you want, if you are unselfish with the things He has given you previously, and if He thinks they might be good for you in the long run.

**And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors;
(Matthew 6:12)**

Notice that there are two parts to this section of Jesus' prayer guideline. First, we are to pray that God will forgive our debts. The things that we have done wrong. Our sins.

You might think that, because you are not yet an adult, that you're too young to actually sin. Not so! If you break any of God's laws, you are sinning, no matter how old you are. (I John 3:4)

I am certainly not trying to put thoughts into your heads with these examples, but if you were to throw a rock through your neighbour's window and a police officer were to catch you in the act, it would be useless for you to say to him, "I'm only thirteen years old, so the laws against vandalism don't apply to me." Or if you were leap off the edge of the Grand Canyon, it would be useless for you to complain on your uncomfortable journey down towards the Colorado River that God's laws of gravity are not supposed to apply to unbaptized minors. God's government does not hold with age discrimination. His law applies to everyone.

In the second part of this twelfth verse of Jesus' instruction on how to pray He tells His disciples to pray for forgiveness "as we forgive them that trespass against us." He adds a further comment to this right after the main body of His prayer outline:

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

What He is saying here is that you can only expect God to forgive you for doing wrong things if you are forgiving toward others who have done anything wrong against you.

And lead us not into temptation. (Matthew 6:13)

The original Greek word for "temptation" is "peirasmos" and it has two meanings. The first meaning – and the one that Jesus' context (i.e. debt, trespasses and sins in verse 12; evil and the Evil One in the second part of verse 13) seems to indicate that He is talking about here, is the influence or enticement of one person to another – usually to do something wrong. Now God does not do the tempting. He will never influence you to do something wrong:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man: (James 1:13)

This kind of tempting to do wrong can come from other people or it can come into our minds from Satan, who is the greatest enemy of God and His children. Pray that God will lead you out of the way of that kind of temptation and that He will help you not to do wrong things. Sometimes it is hard to do what is right when the wrong thing seems so attractive, or when other kids are urging you to join them in doing the wrong thing. But if you pray regularly and ask God to help you not to sin, He will give you the strength you need to resist. Of course, you must do your part by leading yourself out of the ways of temptation. Don't get in with a bad crowd. Choose your friends wisely. Stay away from the bad areas of town, where the bulk of the trouble tends to take place.

The second meaning of the Greek word for *temptation* is *trial* or *proving*. Jesus' context indicates that this is not the meaning He is talking about here. However, trial and proving is not necessarily bad for us. In fact, although trials are often unpleasant, they can be very good for us in the grand scheme of things. Every one of God's children can expect them to some extent. There are very few Christians – probably none at all – who have run the race without a certain measure of trial. From a human standpoint, it is easy to understand why we would want to ask God not to lead us into trials, but He has told us in other scriptures (Luke 14:27; John 16:33; Acts 14:22; I Corinthians 10:13; Hebrews 2:18; I Peter 4:12-19) that we must expect them and that they "come with the territory" of the Christian life.

But deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:13)

Pray that God will protect you from evil. Ask God to protect you from evil things and from "the evil one" – Satan the Devil, that is. The Greek word translated here as "evil" is "poneros" and can mean *evil, wicked, evil things* or *wicked one*.

Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says this about the word *poneros*:

The word is used in the nominative case in Matthew 6:13. This usually denotes a title in the Greek. Hence Christ is saying, deliver us from "The Evil", and is probably referring to Satan.

There is an old English saying, which has some truth to it, that says, "Speak of the Devil and here he comes." God wants us to be studying about Him and His way of life in a positive manner. He does not want us to be doing a lot of research into the subject of the devil, his demon followers, and their wicked and frightening activities. For this reason we rarely discuss them in our church services and publications. But they certainly do exist! They are out there, and they want nothing more than to do evil to you and me, to harm us, and to steer us into wrong ways – away from God's way of life. Nevertheless, they are only dangerous to us if we give in to them and follow their lead. God promises us His protection from them and, if we resist them, with His help and strength, they will flee from us.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

So, without dwelling on the subject any further, ask God – frequently – to protect you against the devil and his demons, and ask Him to help you to resist them.

**For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.
(Matthew 6:13)**

Some Bible translations include this part of verse 13, and some do not. Still, these words do seem appropriate at the end of a prayer. As you approach the close of your prayer, praise God again and acknowledge His greatness.

At this time in the church, God appears to be giving His people a better understanding of how great He really is... how superior He is in every way. If we think about the words of this closing statement, they reflect this greatness:

- The Kingdom belongs to God. All aspects of it. All of its territory, which includes every millimetre of this limitless universe. All of its subjects, which includes you and me.
- All power belongs to God. Think about this. Nothing is impossible for Him. Nothing! That should be very encouraging for us.
- All glory belongs to God. Researchers of God's Word have only begun to scratch the surface of the magnitude of His great, great glory. David wrote (in Psalms 19:1 and 97:6) that we can obtain a glimpse of the magnitude of God's glory by looking into the heavens and by studying their physical glory and vastness. But, if the glory of the limitless, physical universe is beyond human comprehension, how much more so is the glory of the One who created it? Because we are still human, we see the things of God through a glass darkly:

**For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.
(I Corinthians 13:12)**

Paul compares this to looking at the brilliant things of God through a dark glass or a mirror (most astronomical telescopes use high-quality mirrors in their operation). This is like looking at the glory of the countless stars, planets, moons and nebulae of the universe through the black glass of a welding helmet. We cannot and will not fully understand God's mighty power and glory until we ourselves are changed into spirit beings.

- Forever! All of the Kingdom, all of the power, and all of the glory have belonged to God for eternity in the past, belong to Him right now, and will belong to Him for eternity in the future. Can you fully comprehend that? I know that I can't! But don't worry that you are unable to completely understand the concept of eternity. The fact that we humans cannot fully understand eternal things should prompt us to worship all the more the Eternal One who controls eternity.

Amen. (Matthew 6:13)

This is always the final word we say at the end of our prayers. But what does it mean? Is it a vain repetition? Is it just a magic word that summarizes the requests that we have just made in our prayer, and causes our wishes come true?

No. It is much more than that.

The word "Amen" is of Hebrew origin. It can mean *verily, firm, faithful, surely, truly, of a truth*, and when used at the end of a prayer it can mean *So it is, So be it, May it be fulfilled*.

It was a custom, which passed over from the synagogues to the early Christian Church, that when one of the members had read from the Bible, given a sermon or had offered up a solemn prayer to God, the rest of the congregation responded "Amen," and by doing so made the words that had been said their own.

The word "Amen" is a most remarkable word. It was transliterated directly from the Hebrew into the Greek of the New Testament, then into Latin and into English and many other languages, so that it is practically a universal word. It has been called the best known word in human speech. The word is directly related to – in fact is almost identical to – the Hebrew word "amam" which means *believe* or *faithful*. Thus, it came to mean *sure* or *truly* – an expression of absolute trust and confidence.

So, when you say the word "Amen" at the end of your prayer, do not think of it as just like a magic word (such as "Abracadabra"). Think of the English meaning of the word, or even say it in English... for example, "If this is your will Father, so be it; please act on what I have said to you today; please accept my thanks, and please help us with the things I have asked you for."

To summarize, we have looked at two reasons why some young people choose not to pray: Because God does not answer right away, and because they do not know how to pray. I hope I have been able to offer some Bible answers to those reasons, and as a result, I hope all of you young people will begin to pray... every day!

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