

Young people: Have a great summer!

Summertime... and the living is easy!

So goes the well-known song from George Gershwin's 1934 musical, "Porgy and Bess."

If you can no longer claim the title of *Young Person, Child* or *Teenager*, do you remember when you were one? How carefree those long summer vacations were? If I were a betting man, I would wager that most adults reading this have fond and vivid memories of the worry-free summers of their childhood and teen-age years.

I certainly do! Some of the pictures that come to my mind are:

- Spending day after sunny day wandering through the miles and miles of Liverpool docks, watching the hustle and bustle as the huge passenger and cargo liners from all over the world were tugged in and out of the port to be loaded and unloaded.
- Camping with Jimmy Flynn and his Mum and Dad at Black Rock Sands near Porthmadog in North Wales. Long days of climbing cliffs, swimming and diving in the ocean.... only interrupted by Jimmy's Mum calling us back to the tent for a meal, an ice cream or a new layer of sunscreen. Yes, they did have sunscreen in the last century!
- Strolling, in my later teen years, around the eight hundred-year-old ruins of Furness Abbey... peaceful and cool with its ancient red sandstone beautifully contrasted against the green of the "Valley of Deadly Nightshade."

Just a few of my nostalgic memories. Those happy summers now seem such a long time ago.

But that's enough about me! What about you, young people? You are now approaching your long-awaited summer break from school. You have quite a few weeks off to enjoy. What will you do with that time? And who are you going to spend it with?

In this article, I would like to urge all of our young people to... well really, just to have a great summer! To make it a summer to remember!

What are you going to do with your time?

An often-asked question is this: Have you effectively planned to fail because you've failed to plan? Are you just going to let the summer slip by without doing anything much at all? Or do you have some plans made?

Sometimes it's fun to do things on the spur of the moment. But, on the other hand, there's nothing worse than phoning around your friends to get together for an impromptu activity... and finding out that they're all busy doing something else.

So plan ahead!

Do something special!

Yes, do something that's special for you!

For instance, why not go to a concert?

A couple of summers ago, I enjoyed a summer concert that was very special for me. It starred the New Zealand born opera singer, Kiri te Kanawa, accompanied by the Vancouver and Victoria Symphony Orchestras. The concert was staged in the stunningly beautiful grounds of Victoria's Royal Roads University. The ivy covered tower of Hatley Castle nestled amongst its trees and gardens and backed by the purple majesty of Washington's Olympic Mountains rising out of the Pacific Ocean: these gorgeous vistas competed for the attention of the audience but only succeeded in complementing the fabulous music that came from the stage.

Perhaps opera and classical music aren't for you. They can't be, otherwise I would have seen you there! Perhaps you'd like to take in one of the other upcoming concerts in your area. I know very well that many of you have discovered the fact that there's more to the music world than just rock. Now I'm not against rock music, per se. Like all musical styles, it has its good and it has its bad. There's lots of it that I, for a relatively old fogey, do enjoy. But there's good quality in most other styles of music too. Some of you enjoy country music. Just yesterday, when I was filling up with gas, I noticed that the young gas station attendants were tuned into our local country music radio station rather than one of the rock stations. Perhaps you'd like to take in one of the many country music festivals which take place all across North America in the summer months. If you like musicals, you might enjoy "Joseph", "Les Miserables" or one of the other spectacular musicals which might be playing at a theatre in a city near you.

Whatever style of music you enjoy, advance planning is necessary for you to attend any of these concerts. You will of course need to save up the money for your ticket and it's wise to buy your ticket in advance in order to avoid a sold-out situation or, worse still, the dreaded scalpers!

Take a hike!

No, I'm not being obnoxious! I'm suggesting that you literally organize a hike! In summers gone by, some of the young people of our local congregations, have taken the opportunity to hike the West Coast and Juan de Fuca trails on Vancouver Island's majestic Pacific coast. These are activities I would love to try when time and energy allow. Most areas of Canada, the United States, Britain and, no doubt, most other countries have beautiful hiking trails. Besides the benefit from the exercise and comparatively fresh air, walking in the great outdoors can teach us so much about God's wonderful creation.

A short hike can be done on the spare of the moment; but longer, overnight hikes require careful planning. You'll need good hiking boots. You'll need to break them in - to get your feet used to them and them used to your feet. Your camping gear will have to be checked over to make sure it is all in serviceable condition. Last but not least, you need to get your body in condition for longer hikes. We often hear stories of unprepared newbie hikers having to be airlifted out of the West Coast Trail or the Grand Canyon because their bodies were completely unprepared for that much intense continued activity.

Jesus did a lot of walking during His physical lifetime. Walking is known to be one of the best forms of exercise. Like rock music, I don't have anything against jogging, but you'll notice that you never read in the Bible about Jesus or any of the prophets or apostles doing it! But there's lots of walking mentioned in God's Word!

Travel!

I know lots of teens who have taken longer trips in their summer vacation time. Teens from Canada's West Coast have gone to see what the prairies look like... and vice-versa. One young man cycled all the way across Canada from sea to shining sea... from the Pacific Ocean at Victoria, British Columbia to the Atlantic Ocean at St. Johns, Newfoundland. Imagine doing something as exciting as that!

A few years ago, my family and I visited the state of Arizona for the first time. I never would have believed that a desert area could be so beautiful. Thinking about that trip still brings to mind Isaiah 35:1-2:

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God.

When you have spent all or most of your life in one area, it is an enjoyable surprise to spend some time in completely different surroundings. There are few things as exciting to a young person as travelling to new and different places. They don't have to be exotic resort areas. Anywhere different from where you spend most of your year you will find interesting and exciting. I remember being impressed when I was little that the double-decker buses in the town where I was born (Barrow-in-Furness in north-west England) were a different colour to those in Liverpool where I lived and grew up. Small things!

There are lots of examples in the Bible of God's people travelling. The apostle Paul, for example, did a lot of travelling between various countries of the Mediterranean area. Much of their travelling, however, was due to necessity. The day will likely come when you may be required to travel because of the demands of your job. But for a young person, most travel is for recreation and to be with friends and it is, therefore, a joy. Take advantage of it while you can.

Take in a summer movie!

I bite my tongue to even suggest this one. But I know that some of you will do it anyway.

What's your fancy? An adventure movie? Or, for you younger children, the latest Disney offering?

When I was your age (all those years ago!), I often thought that it was a waste of precious summer sunshine to lock myself away in the black hole of a movie theatre for two hours during the summer months. Jimmy Flynn and I tried to reserve our visits to the movies for the rainy days. If there weren't any rainy days... that was great too! One of the nice things about the summer-time is the length of the days. The sun gets up early and goes to bed late. So it's good for us not to waste all of that lovely daylight. We're forced to be cooped up inside for much of the rest of the year, so why do it voluntarily during the summer months? Why not spend as much time as possible outdoors?

Also, and this is not the main subject of this article, please be careful which movies you go to see! Restrict what you allow into your brain through your eyes and ears! You may think you're immune to or unaffected by the things you see and hear at the movies or on television, but you aren't! None of us are... no matter what our age! Just yesterday, a young friend of my daughters, describing the acceptability of a recent adventure movie he had seen, told me that "It was all fine... *[long pause]*... except for the bad language."

In most countries, the movie ads carry warnings about their content. Please take the time to read them and consult your parents if you're not sure. For an interesting Sabbath Bible Study, teens might like to review the Bible's guidelines for entertainment. Here's a brief list of them:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:8)

But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. (Colossians 3:8)

Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. (I Corinthians 6:18)

Thus says the Lord GOD: Enough, O princes of Israel! Put away violence and oppression, and execute justice and righteousness; cease your evictions of my people, says the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 45:9)

After reading these scriptures, teens (and adults too) may join the younger children in opting for the latest Disney offering!

For more detail on this topic, please go to http://www.tcog.ca/Articles/movies_new.htm.

Whatever you do, do it morally

I don't have to say any more on that point... do I?

Whatever you do, do it safely

You may consider your town or village to be a comparatively safe place. But the Millennium is not here yet and, although I'm not trying to frighten you, there are lots of weirdos out there. Liverpool certainly was not a second Eden when I was your age, but the safety of many cities, towns and even villages has greatly deteriorated since then.

Forget the American Express card. Prayer is what you really need! Don't leave home without it! Be sure to ask for God's protection and take care!

Tight budget?

Remember that Jesus Christ wants you to have a good time:

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10)

Years ago, Herbert W. Armstrong wrote an article called "This is the life... real abundant living." That's exactly what God wants you to have. Notice that, in the above scripture, Jesus does not say "have it more affluently"! There is a modification of an old saying that suggests that "Money doesn't bring happiness... but it has been known to raise the occasional smile!" But take it from me: You don't have to have lots of money to have a good time during the summer. There are lots of free and low-cost things to do. I believe there are series of books with titles along the lines of "Free things to do in Vancouver (or whatever the name of your city is)". If you have a good public library in your town, you probably won't even have to buy the book!

Don't make the mistake that so many adults make of trying to "keep up with the Joneses." Your summer happiness does not, or should not, hang on how much money you have, on whether or not you can afford to go to California with Jenny and Gwen, or on whether you have the latest \$200 Nike shoes like the ones Jason and Gary have!

Who are you going to spend your time with?

Whatever you decide to do this summer, let me suggest that you do it together with family members and church friends. I'm not saying that you should not spend time with your good friends who are not in the church of God. But, in many or most cases, there are some good reasons why you should spend *more* of your time with "church kids" than with "non-church kids."

Spend time with Jesus Christ

Believe it or not, by spending time at church activities and with other church kids, you are, in effect, spending time with Jesus Christ, the very Son of God!

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20)

And if you get together with other church kids because they are fellow-kids in the church of Jesus Christ, then you are gathering in His name, and He will be in the midst of you! Don't just get together at church services. Attend as many church summer activities as you can: planned and impromptu outings, camp-outs, barbecues, fund-raisers, picnics, etc.

Don't be a loner! Don't just do your "own thing"! Get with the group! If you take the time to read the second chapter of the book of Luke, you'll find that Jesus Christ, in His physical youth, had a natural desire to spend time with His physical family and relatives.

And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon Him. Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when He was twelve years old, they went up according to custom; and when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing Him to be in the company they went a day's journey, and they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintances; and when they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him. After three days they found Him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. And when they saw Him they were astonished; and His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." And He said to them, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" And they did not understand the saying which He spoke to them. And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man. (Luke 2:40-52)

But He also had the spiritual desire to be in His spiritual Father's house with other believers and Bible students. The New Testament church hadn't yet begun; otherwise He would have wanted to be with its members! The young Jesus enjoyed being with believers much senior to Himself. He did not confine Himself to His own age group, nor did He reject all others of different age groups as being inferior species. A fine example for our young people.

Visit Jesus Christ

Again, believe it or not, by visiting sick and shut-in church members you can actually visit Jesus Christ! Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 25 that if we visit His brothers and sisters who are ill, we are effectively visiting Him, and that He will richly bless us for doing this.

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and He will place the sheep at His right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' (Matthew 25:31-40)

There are lots of opportunities for this kind of visiting right now. There are quite a few brethren who are recovering from operations or from serious illnesses; also shut-in members who would love to have you visit them. If you don't know of any sick brethren in your local area but you do know of some who live a long way from your home, why not send them a letter or a card?

Referring to the above scripture from Matthew 25, Martin Luther King used to ask his audiences and congregations, "Who are 'the least of these?'" What he meant was this: Should we restrict our care just to our brethren in our local branch of our church? What about non-church neighbours and school friends? Does God really want us to ignore them when they are going through tough times?

Visiting the sick is another area that requires planning. Talk to your parents about this kind of visit, and phone the person in advance to make sure he or she is up to having company.

Got the Summertime Blues?

Don't have a good friend to spend the summer with? Who said, "There ain't no cure for the summertime blues?" Okay, okay! Eddie Cochran said it... or rather, sang it! Ten points if you got that one right! But take a look at the sixth and seventh chapters of the book of Matthew where Jesus Christ talks about providing the needs of His people. First, you have to ask God for what you need, in this case, a friend:

Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him. (Matthew 7:7-11)

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

Then, keeping your priorities in the right order, have faith that God will provide what you have asked for:

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. (Matthew 6:25-33)

God knows of your need for a good friend, even before you ask. But He wants you to ask anyway. Please get your priorities right! As a young person in God's church, you are special. No, I'm not saying that you are *better* than other people. But you have been given some special knowledge about God's Kingdom and about what is right and what is wrong. If you act upon that knowledge then God will provide you with good friends and with your every other need.

God will give you friends and whatever else you need, but you must do your part. You must put in some effort too. Ask Him in prayer... repeatedly if necessary! Seek friends. Good friends. The appropriate kind of friends for a "child of God" to have. Knock gently on the doors of the lives of those you would like to be good friends with and, if it is God's will, He will arrange for those doors to be opened to you. Remember that God wants to give you good things and His resources and finances are not limited, as are those of your physical parents! This whole concept is briefly summarized in Matthew 21:22:

And whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive, if you have faith.

So if you are asking for good friends, if you have faith that God will provide them, if you are doing your part, if you have your priorities right and if you are patient, then you will have those friends that you so much want and need. The King James Version has what many consider to be a somewhat inaccurate rendering of Proverbs 18:24. It reads:

A man that has friends must show himself friendly.

Whether or not this is an inaccurate translation, it has become quite a well-known saying in the English-speaking parts of the world. I'd like to take the liberty to modify it to imply that "a young person that wants friends must show himself or herself friendly." So, quite simply, if you want friends, be friendly!

The purpose of this article has been to encourage our church young people to have a great summer: first of all, in what they spend their time on, and secondly, in who they spend their time with.

Have a great summer, young people! Make this one a summer to remember!

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