

First of all, I would like to thank Alan for doing the Torah Portion. He wants to train for ministry (compared to me, he is still a young man) and so once a month, he will be sharing a Torah Portion and once a month he will be sharing a message. It is nice to have people who can preach for me if I am under the weather or have to go away.

So now, I want to share with you how to keep G-d involved in every area of our lives. I want to do it in three sections so we can get the bigger picture. Ephesians 4:6,7 is a wonderful passage on prayer. It says we should worry about nothing, but in everything make our requests known to G-d. In today's darkening, internet world, this is not always easy to do.

So much craziness and cruelty is happening locally and globally that there is never a lack of bad news, while too often there is a lack of good news. As I was preparing this message I realized that some people can be quite strange about keeping G-d involved in every area of their lives. They can both be a little weird and, sometimes, even a little creepy. I knew a man who would pray every morning to ask G-d what he should wear. I told him about someone else who prayed the same thing and G-d spoke to them: "I am your Father, not your mother, get up and get dressed".

I like to pray while I am driving. Don't worry, I keep my eyes open, but one of my arms is usually waving in an animated fashion. I do get some weird looks, but I am praying for people and not about which route I should take to get where I am going. Keeping G-d involved in every area of our lives does not mean we stop making choices and have to hear from G-d all the time about everything.

I also think we need to listen to the answers G-d sends our way and not try to whine at Him until we get our own way. I have shared about the answers to prayer which YHVH gives before (no, yes, not yet, none of your business). Prayer is not so much about getting what we want from G-d as it is about asking for His help so that we can walk with Him, no matter what circumstances we have to endure in our lives, be they ever so good or ever so bad.

Sometimes an answer takes a long time to come and sometimes we just need to lift up our friends and family before G-d, even if we are not asking for something specific. Prayer should be a conversation and not a monologue, even if some of the answers are just quickenings in our hearts to assure us that we have been heard. I really like getting those.

We need to look around at the circumstances of our lives and bring spiritual order to how we react to the mountains, the valleys and to the rivers we have to cross. Sometimes we will pass through all kinds of tribulation, small and great and sometimes we have to watch people and situations we are praying for go from bad to worse. Sometimes we have no clear direction in how we should act, so sometimes we need to take risks.

Sometimes we can do the wrong thing for the right reasons and I have even seen people do the right thing for the wrong reasons. Praying for people does not make them more reliable, it should just give us greater wisdom and courage in how we relate to them. Sometimes it may take nearly a lifetime for some prayers to be answered. My older brother is not a believer and does not appear to be drawing any closer to the L-RD, but I still pray for him, along with all the other members of my extended family, believers and non believers.

When we pray, it should increase our confidence that the hand of G-d is active in our world and, indeed, in everybody's life in the whole world. I have been known to pray as I watch the news and whenever, whatever I am doing, reminds me of someone or something which needs prayer. Even when I know something is not going to succeed, I pray for the courage and the wisdom to go down with the ship without being afraid.

Fear is fantasizing about failure and I want to learn not to be afraid, even though my heart breaks sometimes for those I love who are going through deep valleys. You have probably heard that Patti's mom is not doing well. We are not so much afraid to lose her as we are afraid that we will worry so much that we cannot enjoy her final hours with us. She is one of the sweetest people I have ever met and is beloved by so many people.

She has never screeched at me, even though sometimes I have deserved it and has lived the ups and downs of her life with dignity and the patience of Job. I am not sure she was thrilled to get me as a son in law, but as the years passed, I won her over. She remains one of my favourite people, and not just because she always laughs at my jokes.

Prayer could be seen as a virtual spiritual hug you send to someone, or more correctly, ask G-d to send on your behalf. People need encouragement and courage even more than they need the things that life can provide for them. And keeping your eyes focused on the coming Kingdom, while remaining full of faith and obedience, is probably the most difficult task any believer can face. I do not so much want to pray for people to escape from danger, as I do that they would not lose their way and be trapped by all the hopes and fears that this dark world keeps on trying to snare them with.

I want to face the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune with the same peaceful calm that comes when things are going my way. Too many believers and even spiritual leaders, get so pushy and demanding with G-d, that they come apart at the seams when things go from bad to worse, instead of from good to better.

A mature believer is neither a pessimist nor really an optimist. He or she is a spiritual realist, facing whatever comes their way with courage and the conviction that G-d never loses control, ever. The cure for bitterness and anger is when we place everything before G-d and ask Him how He wants us to relate to it. And this may take a lot of time and prayer!

In the trenches of WWI, many believers became angry bitter and lost their faith because they never thought G-d would let anything so awful happen to them. Many unbelievers came to faith in the same bombed out trenches, because they realized that G-d had higher purposes and that the horror around them would not last forever. Corrie Ten Boom shared her faith when she was sent to a prison camp and did not lose her faith, even when her sister died and when some of the guards tortured her and the other inmates.

May the Messiah teach us to worry about nothing, but submit everything to G-d and to His unshakable sovereignty. My second point deals with how we should pray when we do not really know what to pray for. This is not from a lack of faith, as much as it is an admission that we are only people of limited understanding, even as we want to lift people and events up to G-d in prayer.

Now you all know that I hold credentials with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

I believe in both the power of prayer when we pray with our understanding and also when our understanding is not involved. In Romans 8:26, Paul says that sometimes the Spirit prays through us and he is referring to praying in tongues. I pray in tongues extensively, but never at the top of my lungs and I am not prone to rolling around and writhing on the floor. I have been in Pentecostal services which made my skin crawl as I was being deafened and people were jumping up and down so much, that the floor began to shake. The Spirit never moves us to be unruly and loud as out of control soccer fans. Rioting and worshipping are not the same.

I have been in other Pentecostal churches where we joined our voices to sing in the Spirit and the love and peace was overwhelming. Speaking in tongues is something which the Scriptures teach, but it is not always understood, both by those who believe in it and by those who do not believe in it.

When I lift people up in prayer, part of that prayer is usually uttered in tongues. Not because I am lazy and want to take shortcuts to be sure G-d hears me. It is just that when I do not know what to pray, I speak in tongues so that the Spirit can pray through me. You will not usually hear me speaking in tongues or praying in tongues from the pulpit, but I use so many languages when I talk, that some of you would not know the difference! I am available if you want to have a peaceful discussion about what the Scriptures teach about this special prayer language. I may even produce a brochure on the topic.

My last section deals with people who clutter their lives with all kinds of mysticism from both Jewish and Christian sources. The Chabad Lubavitch movement believes in and practices a lot of Kabbalah, which is Jewish mysticism, largely based giving special meaning to the Hebrew letters of the Torah. Various Chabad leaders have added to the teaching and feel that the true, hidden meaning contained in the Torah is what people should be seeking, instead of just relying on the usual meaning taught by the Torah.

There has always been a tendency in Judaism to find mystical meaning underneath what the Torah teaches. Two historical Rabbi's took opposite views on this hidden meaning the Torah was supposed to have. Rabbi Akiva taught that each letter of the Torah had any number of special meanings which could be accessed by playing with their numerical value (like Greek, Hebrew uses letters for numbers) to come up with a new hidden meaning or message from YHVH.

He was opposed by Rabbi Ishmael Ben Elisha who taught that the meaning of the Torah was found in the ordinary meaning of the words it contains. Twice, he convinced the Sanhedrin to banish Rabbi Akiva and not accept his mystical views on the Torah. Rabbi Akiva came back a third time and now Judaism is based largely on his mystical approach to the Torah. Much of the Talmud (book of Jewish wisdom) contains this mystical approach. Anything which does not accept the face value meaning of the Torah and other parts of the Bible, represents the imposition of unbiblical doctrines on the intended meaning which G-d inspires.

Our desire to have G-d involved in every area of our lives, should not involve slipping into mysticism of any kind. Prayer needs to be a surrender of our requests to G-d and should never be an attempt to understand the secret things, which belong to G-d alone (Deut. 29:29). Truly, he will never reveal His mysteries and those who seek to discover these hidden things will fall into the trap of mystical make believe at the hands of various teachers whom I describe as spiritual terrorists who will do and say whatever they can to overthrow the actual meaning of the Bible.

Among historical Christianity, this kind of nonsense is called gnosticism and teaches that we can only know the truth of G-d through a mystical, emotional experience that cannot really be explained, but must be experienced. There are so many branches of this kind of folly and even though most churches have fought hard against it, its influence has sometimes seeped into their doctrines.

When I study the Bible, I want G-d to enlighten me, but I am not looking for an emotional experience which will show me hidden things in the Bible that are invisible or hidden. What the Bible says, the Bible means and that includes all of its content from the Torah to the Revelation. Sometimes G-d leads me to certain passages and sometimes He quickens my heart/spirit to let me know that I have been heard and that He is pleased with the paths I am taking.

The Scriptures remain our only authority to evaluate all and any spiritual experiences and prayer should never degenerate into a form of mystical meditation where we are supposedly taken to secrets and to depths that are only available through some kind of inner light. I believe in and support intense Bible Study and fervent prayers, but even though some of the content of the Bible will always remain a mystery, YHVH will never bypass our understanding to show us things which He has supposedly hidden throughout His Word.

Even great thinkers like Martin Luther applied allegory to get new meanings and messages from passages of the Bible where this meaning was never intended. I have even known some people who practice what I call lucky dipping. They would just randomly open their Bible and point to a verse that was supposed to be a special message from G-d.

The story is told of a man who tried this kind of foolishness. He asked G-d what he should do and flipped open his Bible and was startled to see that it said: "and Judas went out and hung himself". Confused he asked G-d if He was serious and again flipped open his Bible and he pointed to the place where it said: "And you go and do likewise". He really became quite distressed and lucky dipped for a third time: "and what you do, do quickly".

Luckily, he did not follow this fortune cookie kind of silliness. G-d can quicken your heart and sometimes even speak to you about what you should do in a particular situation. But He will never bypass your understanding nor violate what the Scriptures teach. I am more than willing to go to people I trust for their advice, but I am careful not to receive advice which either violates the teachings of the Bible or does not resonate with what G-d is quickening to my heart.

Just a point in passing. When G-d wants to speak to us, He will never speak to us through another person before He speaks to us directly. People can help us better understand what YHVH is saying to us, but when people come to me with a message from G-d which G-d has not spoken to me about already, I do not receive it. Sometimes Israel received very specific and severe prophetic warnings, but they were always given under the authority of the Scriptures and usually came when G-d had already spoken to the people and they had refused to listen.

I want everything in my life to be done decently and in order, even as chaos may be swirling around me. G-d's involvement in every area of my life will bring love, peace and joy and not the chaos which too many mystics fill their hearts and lives with. Shabbat Shalom.