

*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.*

Matthew 13:9 says: "Let anyone with ears listen". Many have claimed to have actually hear the voice of God speaking to them and many have "heard" the word of God through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Let me share with you Paul's story about hearing a voice that encouraged and educated.

A man tells the story about a special friend he made while just a boy. When quite young, Paul's father had one of the first telephones in their neighborhood. Paul was too little to reach the telephone, but used to listen with fascination when his mother talked to it.

Then Paul discovered that somewhere inside the wonderful device lived an amazing person – her name was "Information, Please" and there was nothing she did not know.

"Information, Please" could supply anybody's number and the correct time. Paul's first personal experience with this genie-in the-bottle came one day while his mother was visiting a neighbour. Amusing himself at the tool bench in the basement, Paul hacked his finger with a hammer. The pain was terrible, but there didn't seem to be any reason in crying because there was no one home to give sympathy. He walked around the house sucking his throbbing finger, finally arriving at the stairway.

The telephone!

Quickly, Paul ran for the foot stool in the parlor and dragged it to the landing. Climbing up, he unhooked the receiver in the parlor and held it to his ear. "Information, Please," he said into the mouthpiece just above his head.

A click or two and a small clear voice spoke into Paul's ear.

"Information."

"I hurt my finger," Paul wailed into the phone.

"Isn't your mother home?" came the question.

"Nobody's home but me" Paul blubbered.

"Are you bleeding?" the voice asked.

"No," he replied. "I hit my finger with the hammer and it hurts."

"Can you open your icebox?" she asked. He said he could. "Then chip off a little piece of ice and hold it to your finger," said the voice.

After that, Paul called "Information, Please" for everything. He asked her for help with his geography and she told me where Philadelphia was. She helped him with his math. She told Paul that his pet chipmunk, which he had caught in the park just the day before, would eat fruit and nuts. Then, there was the time Petey, the pet canary died. Paul called and told her the sad story.

She listened, then said the usual things grown-ups say to soothe a child, but Paul was inconsolable. He asked her, "Why is it that birds should sing so beautifully and bring joy to all families, only to end up as a heap of feathers on the bottom of a cage?"

She must have sensed his deep concern, for she said quietly, "Paul, always remember that there are other worlds to sing in." Somehow he felt better.

When Paul was nine years old, his family moved across the country to Boston. Paul missed his friend very much. "Information, Please" belonged in that old wooden box back home, and he somehow never thought of trying the tall, shiny new phone that sat on the table in the hall.

As he grew into his teens, the memories of those childhood conversations never really left him. Often, in moments of doubt and perplexity Paul would recall the serene sense of security he had then. He appreciated now how patient, understanding, and kind she was to have spent her time on a little boy.

A few years later, on his way west to college, Paul's plane put down in Seattle. He had about half an hour or so between planes. He spent 15 minutes on the phone with my sister, who lived there now. Then without thinking what he was doing, Paul dialed his hometown operator and said, "Information, Please."

Miraculously, he heard the small, clear voice he knew so well, "Information." He hadn't planned this but he heard myself saying, "Could you please tell me how to spell fix?"

There was a long pause. Then came the soft spoken answer, "I guess your finger must have healed by now." Paul laughed. "So it's really still you," he said. "I wonder if you have any idea how much you meant to me during that time."

"I wonder," she said, "if you know how much your calls meant to me. I never had any children, and I used to look forward to your calls." Paul told her how often he had thought of her over the years and asked if he could call her again when he came back to visit his sister.

"Please do," she said. "Just ask for Sally."

Three months later Paul was back in Seattle. A different voice answered, "Information." He asked for Sally. "Are you a friend?" She asked.

"Yes, a very old friend," Paul answered.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you this," she said. "Sally has been working part-time the last few years because she was sick. She died five weeks ago."

Before he could hang up she said, "Wait a minute. Is this Paul?"

"Yes," Paul replied.

"Well, Sally left a message for you. She wrote it down in case you called. Let me read it to you."

The note said, "Tell him I still say there are other worlds to sing in. He'll know what I mean."

The similarities between Paul and anyone of us is striking. I am not putting God in the category of "Information Please" but let's be honest about it. How many times have we invoked God's name in search of answers questions from the mundane to the very critical? And, then, gaze heavenward, waiting for an answer?

The Bible contains approximately 650 prayers and we are encouraged to call God up with our petitions and questions and concerns. And we are also urged to listen to God, to hear God's response to our prayers. There are over 500 references in the Bible to "hearing". Even before the telephone, the writers of the Bible recognized that there had to be a two-way

communication between us and God and God and us. And what is required on our part, after we have prayed to God to fix our lives, we need to listen and hear, not as Paul heard Sally and that may happen to some, but between one another, in the world around us, in the stars, in the silence - "Be still and know that I am God."

Let's talk about Senior moments. We all have them and become alarmed when the car keys go missing or in my case I cannot find my glasses and then realize that they are on the top of my head. Embarrassing to say the least. Most specialists put this down as distraction over load. How many times have I walked downstairs on a critical mission only to arrive in the living room and have no clue what I was going to do? But then, I also realize, that I was thinking of forty-eleven other things as I was on this so very important undertaking!

We are so easily distracted. And what Jesus is telling us today is STOP! Stop and hear me out. I have been telling you from the beginning how to fix it but your head is in the clouds. You have ears, don't you? Then listen to me!"

God has been talking to us from the beginning of time. The Gospel of John reminds us that "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was with God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." Information Please" has been with us from the moment of creation; it preceded the Encyclopedia Britannica's and the telephone. Answers to our questions are readily available and always have been.

Close with a reading from the Book of Proverbs: "If you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God."

AMEN