

Wednesday May 2, 2012

Prayer does not depend on passwords

By Jim Taylor

Every time I wake up my computer, it asks for my password. I have passwords for my bank account, my credit cards, my e-mail program, three or four different software programs, my cell phone...

The other day, I stuck my chip-enabled credit card into the machine at the cashier's counter. It asked for my PIN – another form of password. I clicked the requisite digits. It didn't accept them.

Wrong password, apparently. And you can't argue with a magnetic stripe.

So much of life today depends on remembering, and using, the right password in the right place. "Don't always use the same password," the instructions always say. But how many different passwords can one person remember?

The instructions also say, "Don't use an obvious password."

I recall visiting a car rental agency. As the clerk fussed with my paperwork, the computer screen behind her said, "The password has been changed. The new password is 'changed'."

Passwords are crucial.

When we go to stay at our daughter's house, to look after our grandchildren, I need a different password to access the Internet. It took me almost an hour to figure out that what I thought was a "6" was actually a lower-case "b".

Without the right password, you can't get in.

Loser don't write history

It feels a lot like what I used to be told about prayer. You need to use the right words, to get through.

When I was young, I was taught to end my bedtime prayers with the phrase, "in Christ's name..." Prayers in church still always end with a similar formula. I think it's supposed to persuade God that we have the right password; otherwise God won't pay attention.

The great tsunami in the Indian Ocean occurred about eight years ago. In the wake of it (no pun intended) we heard stories about people caught by the huge waves rolling ashore and then sucking everything back out to sea.

One of those stories came from a local man doing evangelistic work in Indonesia. As he went under for what might be the last time, he cried out, "Lord Jesus, save me!"

And sure enough, the next wave hurled him back up the shore to safety.

In his view, this proved the efficacy of his Christian faith. He had the right password.

Presumably, therefore, the hundreds of thousands who died didn't have the right password. They belonged to less effective faiths.

What we don't hear from, of course, are the Christians who also cried out to Jesus and didn't get saved. Because they're not around to tell their story.

It's said that only the victors get to write the histories.

No, I don't believe that you need the right password to get through to God.

I don't know what God is. But I am sure what God isn't. God is not a vending machine programmed to dispense the desired response if you insert the right coins. Or a juke box that plays pre-recorded selections when you push the right buttons.

If there's only one God, then making contact with that God doesn't depend on knowing the right passwords.

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YOUR TURN

It seems I'm not the only one who had some childhood memories to grieve. Jim McKean shared his experience: A couple of years ago I found out that the house my father died in was for sale. It was our family home, but [it] was not a place that held a great deal of happy memories. That aside, recently I was wondering whether it was still for sale. I Googled the address and found out that it was. I started to make inquiries, not knowing why.

"Now I know why. I needed to grieve those childhood memories.

"Thanks for the reflection as you have helped me understand grieving on a whole new level."

Steve Lawson commented, "I find in the ministry we are dealing with memories all the time - other people's and mine, especially every time I conduct a funeral. There, I am dealing with a whole family with memories at a raw edge of time for their lives, and every time it seems to me [also] a re-working of my own personal memories.

"The other day on a TV program, I heard the line, 'You are like that because you spent so much time in foster homes when you were a child.' I have resisted that line all my life because that is my story and I have long ago put away the memories, or at the very least, have tried not to blame who I am on my past. Now I try to use 'mindfulness', a constant practice and awareness of the present moment, to help me live the day. Thanks for the article - a good beginning on a very deep and meaningful subject."

Pat Brush recalled, "When I was 9, my beloved grandfather became very ill and died. He lived in Toronto. My mother rushed to his bedside when the call came. I asked to go too, but I was told no because Grampa had not asked for me. That pain was so great that I still feel it. Neither I nor my brothers were allowed to go to his funeral and his death was not spoken of once Mom came home.

"This was all done on the best understandings of child rearing in 1967. I am glad for today's children that more is now understood about children's need to grieve."

Bill Peterson suggested, "One thing that can happen is that one learns/develops methods of shutting off/losing/hiding the pain and emotions. That can include not only the losses from moving away from friends and familiar territory. It can also include dealing with the losses within a family from being alone or from being an only child. Results? One [learns] to become content and satisfied with being alone and living with 'acquaintances' rather than 'friends'."

Ken Phipps wanted to follow up on the previous week's column: "I was quite intrigued with the letters you received regarding flumes. It was a part of my life back in the early years in Penticton. My father and my grandfather, plus several uncles all had orchards, irrigated by flumes. Water was picked up from Ellis Creek, came down the very large flume along the hillside, then orchards received their share of water, carried in miniature flumes, then down ditches to the trees.

"One thing we had to be very cautious when getting near the main flume, was the great danger of rattlesnakes underneath them. Eventually of course, all the flumes were replaced with water pipes for irrigation."

PSALM PARAPHRASES

Psalm 22 moves from that horrible loneliness of "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," to a striking affirmation of faith. As I read it, I thought of the mentors – we have all had them -- who led us along for our own sakes.

25 I owe everything to you;
whatever I am, you made me.
I will not tolerate petty criticism of you.
26 You are always fair and impartial;
you never play favourites.
You treat incompetents with the same consideration as geniuses.
27 That is why you are so widely respected.
28 That is why people trust your wisdom and insight.
29 You show me what God must be like.
For God does not send rain only to the just,
nor sunshine only to the successful.
All have equal access to God's grace,
regardless of wealth or status.
30 So your name will be honored in history;
in times to come, people not yet born will speak well of you.
31 They will continue to say, "I owe everything to you."

YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca. Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- David Keating's "SeemslikeGod" page, www.seemslikegod.org;
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, isabel@traditionaliconoclast.com
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Wayne Irwin's "Model T Websites." a simple (and cheap) seven-page website for congregations who want to develop a web presence <<http://www.modeltwebsites.com>>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.

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