

Pastors Call Tech-Driven Culture to Facebook Fast

Thousands are expected to participate in Wednesday's National Facebook Fast, an event planned by Texas pastors Kerry and Chris Shook to encourage people to refocus on face-to-face relationships.

"You can have 1,000 Facebook friends but not one close friend you can sit down with face-to-face and really share your heart," said Kerry Shook, who with his wife leads 20,000-member Woodlands Church in The Woodlands. "In our society we're more technologically connected than ever before, but it seems like our deep and rich relationships are more disconnected."

Through their New York Times bestseller *One Month to Live*, the Shooks have challenged people to live each day intentionally, as if it could be their last. That call even led to a 30-day, citywide One Month to Live campaign in The Woodlands earlier this year that was followed by ABC News.

The Facebook fast draws from a similar idea. On Wednesday, instead of spending time texting, tweeting, e-mailing or chatting on Facebook, the couple is encouraging people to spend quality time with those around them.

Chris Shook says it's OK to be creative. She suggests meeting up with a friend for coffee, planning a family dinner without distractions such as the television or communication devices, and maybe even visiting someone in the hospital.

"Whenever we can, we try to make an effort to connect in a personal way," said Chris Shook, who experienced first-hand what it's like to be distracted by technology.

Kerry Shook said he doesn't want people to dismiss the pros of

using technology. "We don't want to go back to a time where we were without these things," he said. "Our church uses them all the time to get the message of Jesus Christ out. Our main goal is to help people understand these tools are for networking and connecting, but they're not tools for building deep and rich relationships."Â

Shane Hipps, a teaching pastor at Mars Hill Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Mich., said social networking is a lot like food. "It's not something that will go away, and it's not something that you can go without in this modern age, but you have to use it with wisdom," said Hipps, author of *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*.

While the online community has allowed some people to feel more open about sharing personal things, Hipps said nothing compares to the physical presence. He said no one would advocate for online parenting or marriage, so why would it be any different for relationships in general?

"I'm a big advocate of technology fasts," said Hipps, who compared media fasts to fasting from certain foods. "Your body goes through a season of withdrawals where it's very sad and miserable, but ultimately it recalibrates and finds a new kind of stabilized state, a new homeostasis."

With the release of their latest book, *Love at Last Sight*, the Shooks hope to continue the idea of fostering meaningful relationships. Starting on Sept. 11 the pastors are asking churches and individuals to participate in their 30-day Love at Last Sight Challenge. The four-week program helps participants work on the most important relationships in their lives, whether it's with a spouse, parents, children, friends or co-workers.

Each week focuses on a different art: "The Art of Being All There," "The Art of Acting Intentionally," "The Art of Risking Awkwardness," and "The Art of Letting Go."

Kerry Shook said it's very important, however, to realize that it's impossible to have close relationships with hundreds of people. "Delete some friends so you can really focus in on the people who will cry at your funeral," he said.