

God Connections

A few relationships in my life have been so important, I knew God had made the connection. One of these was my friendship with writer and pastor Jamie Buckingham.

His endorsement of a fledgling publication called *Charisma* turned out to be vital to our early success with the magazine. Every month, Jamie and I would have lunch and talk over whatever was going on. I had lots of dreams—and doubts—and Jamie walked with me through some pretty big transitions.

Since Jamie's death, Jack Hayford has filled the role of a spiritual father to me and to my wife. Over the years, mentors have helped us connect with key staff or authors we'd never have known. For example, my first connection with authors John Hagee and John Sherrill was through Jamie.

I've learned through these connections the importance of networking—of attending seminars and conventions, cultivating personal relationships, connecting with customers or joining with others to spread the word about issues affecting the church and society. It's how, with God's help, I've built this media ministry.

Besides Jamie, I've outlived several mentors. So now I look to a peer group of 10 Christian businessmen who meet several times a year since 2001 for "iron sharpening iron."

Each man is successful in his own way. One is a former NFL player. Another has a huge real estate company that was voted one of the best places to work. Another is a state legislator. Sometimes we bring in a speaker. But mostly we bring "issues" to discuss, ranging from family problems to how to fire a problem employee to whether to sell a company.

I know how important it is to sow into others as others have

sown into my life, so now younger leaders, including a few young pastors, look to me as a “father.” And, of course, through the books and magazines we publish, we try to mentor.

But times are changing. The new buzzword is “social networking”—a term that shows the interest people have in “connecting.”

Recently, after an intense time of seeking God for the future of *Ministry Today* magazine, I realized I could connect our readers to each other rather than to merely informative and helpful articles. Since I’m naturally networked, I could envision how this connection could grow out of what I do every day. It would be a relational, not apostolic, network. We’d include a *Ministry Today* subscription, books, discounts on Christian products and several networking meetings per year with top leaders tied to themes in each issue.

Mostly, we’d provide mentoring and coaching in several ways—mainly through weekly conference calls and webinars with “fathers” and “mothers” in the faith whom I know personally.

I knew I was on to something after I shared my vision for the Ministry21 Network with a pastor friend who e-mailed me back in 10 minutes and said, “Count me in.” At that point there wasn’t even anything to join!

I e-mailed several other people, and all of them joined. So we intend to officially start the network on July 1. This is the first time I’ve shared the idea publicly.

The name Ministry21 Network describes our purpose—to connect ministry leaders in the 21st century. Jesus taught connection; it’s what discipleship is all about. It’s why we must be connected to others in the body of Christ—so we can grow, be accountable and be coached during whatever stage in life we currently are in.

My purpose here was to share my vision for the Ministry21 Network, not to sell you on joining. But you can get more information online—and give us your feedback—at

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Though this particular network won't be for everyone, all of us must be connected to others.

Whether you are in ministry or not, you need connections in your life. I believe God will bring them to you in the right way and at the right time—just as He did for me—to help you grow, develop and become all He wants you to be.

Steve Strang is the founder and publisher of *Charisma*. Follow him on Twitter at *sstrang* or become a Facebook fan of *Charisma*.

Connecting by the numbers:

- 9,000 denominations worldwide
- 45,000 churches within the National Association of Evangelicals
- 5.8 million monthly visitors to
- 400 million people on Facebook
- 75 million Twitter users
- 65 million LinkedIn members

