

Reclaiming True Friendship in the Facebook Age

Technology has connected us superficially. But the Holy Spirit can knit us together supernaturally.

Two weeks ago I attended a men's retreat in Georgia with some of my closest friends. Chris, Eddie, Rick, Michael, Ray, Robert, Medad, Quentin and James were in the audience with 120 other guys. We spent 2 1/2 days together—worshipping, attending teaching sessions, praying in small groups and eating our meals together. Nobody wanted to go home. It felt like heaven because we enjoyed being together so much.

“In this sophisticated age of social networking, when everyone is supposedly ‘connected,’ we are as self-absorbed and isolated as ever. Digital technology has trivialized relationships to the point that we ‘friend’ or ‘unfriend’ a person with a click. You can have 5,000 ‘friends’ and yet be the loneliest person in cyberspace.”

When it was time to leave I asked all the guys to come near the stage. We linked arms and sang a simple chorus I haven't heard in years. You may remember the words:

*Bind us
together, Lord, bind us together / With cords
that cannot be broken / Bind us*

*together, Lord, bind us together / Bind us
together with love / There is
only one God, there is only one King / There is
only one body, that is why we can sing ...*

That song was popular during a simpler time, at the tail end of the Jesus movement in the 1970s when church wasn't as trendy and professional as it is today. Back then we didn't have savvy marketing strategies, media-enhanced sermons and hipster preachers. But what we lacked in coolness we made up for with deep relationships.

Call me old-fashioned, but I think we need a return to that simpler style. Not only is the world crying out for genuine love, but Christians are too. In this sophisticated age of social networking, when everyone is supposedly "connected," we are as self-absorbed and isolated as ever. Digital technology has trivialized relationships to the point that we "friend" or "unfriend" a person with a click. You can have 5,000 "friends" and yet be the loneliest person in cyberspace.

I meet many believers, especially men, who are starved for real relationships but find it too painful to make them. This is partly because we tend to emphasize the importance of a vertical relationship with God but spend very little time teaching people how to make their faith horizontal. And in charismatic churches, we often are too busy chasing an electrifying personal experience with God to place

any value on
community.

Those of us who pride ourselves on
being experts on the Holy Spirit have neglected one of His
most important
roles. He is not just the One who heals us, anoints us and
empowers us to work
miracles. The Spirit is also the One who unites Christians
with a holy bond and
draws us into close fellowship with each other. He forms us
into a tightly knit
family.

The Greek word *koinonia*, translated “fellowship,” first
appears in Acts 2:42,
immediately after the Holy Spirit’s outpouring on the first
disciples. This is
because genuine fellowship—the knitting of our hearts to each
other—is a
supernatural work of the Spirit, a manifestation of His power
that is no less
important than dreams, visions, speaking in tongues or
prophecy. (*Koinonia* is
also attributed to the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 13:14 and
Philippians 2:1.)

Even a cursory reading of the New
Testament proves that *koinonia*, this
powerful bond of the Spirit, was what held the early church
together and fueled
its growth. The first Christians had no marketing plans, no
church growth
gurus, no Twitter or Facebook, no concert tours. But they had
a gushing love
for each other, a holy affection that glued their hearts
together to form a
cross-cultural, multi-racial family.

When the Holy Spirit came on the early church, He changed everything about the way they related to each other.

“And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common ... and they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:44, 46b-47, NASB).

It is the Spirit who enables true community. He gives us the grace to humble ourselves, take off our armor of pride and open our hearts to each other. He enables us to forgive and mend our rifts with each other. He connects us, and then nourishes every connection with His love.

If you find it hard to make close friends, or to enjoy a deep level of fellowship with other believers, then ask the Holy Spirit to help you. He will heal the hurts of your past. He will free you from the fear of betrayal and rejection. And He will connect you with real friends. Just as He knit the hearts of David and Jonathan, and just as He knit the heart of the apostle Paul to the saints in Ephesus, Thessalonica and Philippi, He will give you close relationships. This is part of your inheritance as a child of God.

I see a spiritual awakening on the horizon, but it is not what many of us imagined. Yes there are

miracles and clouds of glory awaiting. But what will stand out the most—and make the biggest impression on unbelievers—is not our fiery sermons or our charismatic power but our passionate love for each other.

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