

Cyber Chat

Cyber social networking has come into its own. Time Magazine named Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, as its Man of the Year 2010. Sites such as Facebook and Twitter played a key role in uniting opposition to the Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak. An editorial in a popular magazine declared 2010 "The Year We Stopped Talking!"

Social networking has changed the way we relate to others to such an extent that we need to take a good hard look at what is happening. Sherry Turtle, in her book, "Alone Together, Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other" asserts "We have come to confuse continual connectivity with making real connections." In an editorial for a USA newspaper the Pope warns of "the risks of depersonalisation, alienation, self-indulgence, and the dangers of having [so called] virtual friends instead of real ones."

"Brodie's Law" enacted into Law this week now makes it a criminal offence to use social networks to intimidate, bully, stalk or harass another person. The problem is that we perceive the person in cyber space as a "real" person but would they be saying the same things to us face to face? Susan, a mother of three teenagers aged 14, 15 and 18 chose for the family to "unplug" for six months. She writes of their experience in the book "The Winter Of Our Disconnect: How Three Totally Wired Teenagers (and a Mother who slept with her iphone), Pulled the Plug On Their Technology And Lived To Tell The Tale."

Blackberries, iphones, ipads, emails, Facebook, Twitter, blogs and mobile phones have revolutionized the way we communicate. Kostenberger suggests that by reducing our communication with each other to 140 letters may be robbing us of the ability to deal with more complex written or spoken dialogue. He asks, "Has the new social media fostered a disposition that is restless, if not scatterbrained, and increasingly inept at handling larger issues?"

If Jesus were a part of this conversation would he be saying, "Remember, social networking was made for humans, not humans for social networking?" The problem for me is the constant invasive flow of information every day. It affects my time and my privacy. We must set boundaries for social networking. Ask yourself before you push "send" "Is this something I'd actually say face to face to this person?" If not, don't send it. Ask God to give you discernment and wisdom in using any of these tools to talk to someone. Prayerfully consider how you can use cyber chat for Christ and his kingdom.

[I am indebted to Andreas Kostenberger for ideas/quotes]