

The Road to Transformation - Community

INTRO: Whoever said that you can't buy "friends" didn't know about the shallow shortcuts of our internet age. An article in *Hemispheres* magazine explored a number of sites that are dedicated to helping you find online "friends." These companies will create fake users or pay real account holders to follow and like you on various social media sites.

For instance, on the site Socialyup.com you can buy 500 likes for \$30 or 20,000 likes for \$699. For a mere \$10, FanMeNow will find you 1,000 Twitter followers and for \$1,750 you can buy a million followers. If you need to beef up views for your YouTube video, for \$150 you can buy 30,000 views from a site called 500views.com. For \$3,100 they'll make your video go "viral" by getting you a million views.

The article concludes with the following advice: "No matter what social network you're on, you can buy your way to popularity."

TRAN: I would hope that most of us understand that you can't buy friends. Well, you can but they are only digital friends. Real friendship is only possible within the context of community. And community is one of the things that the church should be best at, and unfortunately, many churches do not receive a passing grade.

I. Defining community

A. In short, community is a commonality that unites a group of people

1. So when you are at the Lions game cheering them on in the fourth quarter, you are a community with all those other people - even if you do not know them well
2. Your graduating class, or for that matter, anyone that graduated from your High School forms a community
 - a) So, you remember Curtis Granderson
 - b) He and I went to the same HS - of course we graduated 12 years apart
 - c) However, we are still part of the same community

B. Here is a key to understanding community

1. The deeper, the more foundational the basis for community, the deeper the unity will be
2. So for example:
 - a) You will not be particularly unified with 10,000 at a Lions game other than cheering for the team, and maybe telling a Green Bay fan to go back to his side of the lake
 - (1) That really will be about the extent of it

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- b) Now, you may have a deeper connection to people that share your vocation - even if you don't work with them (sometimes because you don't work with them)
 - (1) You can talk for long periods over engineering, or farming
 - (2) Even sharing lawyer jokes
 - (a) My friend Steve and I share jokes about Christians and the Bible that many other people would not find funny
 - (b) We laugh because of our shared vocations
 - (3) You might not click with everyone that shares your vocation, but you will with many
- 3. Family would be a community that is deeper still
 - a) Obviously in a good family environment, there are deep connection
 - (1) You spend long periods of time together
 - (2) You know multiple aspects of each others lives
 - b) So family is a good example of one of the deepest communities we belong to
- 4. Deeper still should be our spiritual family
 - a) Even above our natural family
 - (1) We have talked about that, how God wants us to put Him first
 - (2) If family and God come in conflict with one another, God comes first
 - (3) If you are seeking to raise your family in Christ
 - (a) Conflicts will be minimal
 - (b) Better still, it means your natural family means so much to you that you are training together to follow Christ
 - (c) I have the privilege of having my immediate family a part of my spiritual family
 - b) We have the most foundational, the most powerful, the mightiest reason that draws us together: our salvation in Christ, and the destination of our souls
 - c) Our commonalities far outweigh any differences
 - (1) Christ is our head
 - (2) The Bible is our guide - even though not all Christians agree on all things, that only makes us stronger
 - (3) Living a life pleasing to Christ is our focus in life
 - (4) Prayer is our common communication tool with our Savior
- C. This should remind us of a verse - Ephesians 4:3-6
 - 1. "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one

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hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

2. These commonalities run deeper than anything else we can name
- D. These are the things that draw people from all walks of life together in Christ
 1. It is why this primarily white collar worker gets along so well with blue collar workers
 2. This is why those that make a good living at their trade can get along with those that are working hard for less
 3. In fact, I would love to see this church become more diverse than it is
 - a) There are a variety of people in our community
 - b) When we are united in Christ, we display God’s glory by unity in diversity
- II. There are however a couple of barriers or roadblocks to genuine community
 - A. The first barrier to genuine community is individualism
 1. Chuck Colson said in his book, *The Body*, “Many Christians have been infected with the most virulent virus of modern American life: radical individualism. They concentrate on personal obedience to Christ as if all that matters is “Jesus and me,” but in doing so miss the point. For Christianity is not a solitary belief system. Any genuine resurgence of Christianity, as history demonstrates, depends on a reawakening and renewal of that which is the essence of the faith—the people of God, the new society, the body of Christ, which is made manifest in the world—the church.”
 2. Colson calls it a virus of American life that many Christians have been infected by
 3. Why is it such a bad thing?
 - a) I think one of the reasons is eventually, it leads to the idea that we don’t need God
 - (1) If we stand on our own two feet, what do we need God for?
 - (2) This is a horrible conclusion - one that none of us would consciously say, but often live like this
 - (a) When we do not read our Bibles
 - (b) When we do not pray
 - (c) When we do not filter the choices of our lives through the beauty and power of the gospel
 - (d) We essentially act as if there is no God
 - i) If you want a quick, easy-reading book about this, get a copy of *The Christian Atheist* by Craig Groeschel

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- ii) He talks about how we often acknowledge God but act like He is not really there - individualism at its worst
- b) Individualism also leads to the idea that we don't need others
 - (1) If we don't need God, we certainly don't need others
 - (2) That would just be invasive to have others pointing out areas of our lives that are not in sync with God
- 4. The problem here is that the Bible does not talk about life as a Christian like that
 - a) In fact, the Bible is written and designed with the idea that the Christian life cannot be lived without God or without others
 - b) When it comes to God
 - (1) God says things like "This is how you should pray...give us this day our daily bread...lead us not into temptation"
 - (2) These are things that we are dependent on God for
 - (3) It's just that we, in our day, and in this country, think we are privileged and entitled in many cases
 - c) When it comes to each other, the Bible makes it clear that we are living in a community with one another
 - (1) There are 47 "one anothers" given to Christians in the NT out of 100 "one anothers" are mentioned
 - (2) One third of them are about unity
 - (3) One third are about love
 - (4) 15% are about humility
 - (5) The rest are not easily set in a category
 - d) I do want you to look at one of these - Hebrews 10:24-25 (p. 1211)
 - (1) You know what the word spur is referring to? It's actually a great translation
 - (a) It refers to stirring up, or provoking
 - (b) We are to provoke each other to love and good deeds
 - (c) We are to be an irritation to one another toward not giving up meeting together
 - (2) Other examples of "one anothers" are
 - (a) Love one another
 - (b) Forgive one another
 - (c) Bear one another's burdens
 - (d) Greet one another with a holy kiss
 - (3) Here is my question for you - how do you do those things following the American virus of individualism?
 - (a) How do you bear one another's burdens under individualism?
 - (b) How do you love?

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- (c) How do you spur one another on if you are the only one in the room?
 - (d) Better, let me see you greet one another with a holy kiss by yourself - look like a kid practicing his kissing technique in the mirror
- B. The second barrier to genuine community walks along with the first - being out of our comfort zone
1. Let's face it, even doing the "one anothers" can be uncomfortable
 - a) Giving preference to one another
 - b) Regarding one another as more important than ourselves
 - c) Being of the same mind as one another
 - d) Washing one another's feet
 - e) The list can go on and on demonstrating how you might get pushed out of your comfort zone
 2. Take a look at this VIDEO: The Comfort Zone
 - a) It seems the comfort zone is also a bubble that keeps us from many things we should be doing for the church and for our own spiritual health
 - b) Yet that comfort zone can be just that - comfortable
 3. Let me tell you what else a comfort zone can do:
 - a) It can keep your learning as a monologue instead of growing into a more vibrant dialogue
 - (1) You can only learn so much from the good looking preacher yakking at you from the stage
 - (a) This is monologue learning
 - (b) In college you call it lecture style
 - (2) Yet, if this is a comfort zone for you, stepping outside of it opens you up to the much more dynamic means of learning
 - (a) You start a dialogue with one, two, or many people
 - (b) You grow from their experiences, and their learning of God's Word, and they can grow from yours
 - b) Second, a comfort zone keeps you from transformation
 - (1) While there can be legitimate reasons to remain in a comfort zone for some, the average person is simply cutting themselves off from being able to be transformed
 - (2) Transformation happens when we stretch ourselves in new ways
 - (a) Much like lifting weights
 - (b) When you lift, you literally make tiny tears in the muscles so the muscles can repair themselves and transform into a stronger you

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- (3) When we step out of our comfort zones, transformation is possible
- III. The primary way a church builds community is through small groups
- A. There are a variety of small groups, and groups of friends that naturally form
1. However, there can be a difference between a group of friends that meet at Maria's for lunch, or breakfast before heading to work, and what we are looking at as a small group
 2. The difference is whether or not the basis of the relationships are centered on God's Word, or something else
 - a) So, a group of engineers meeting for breakfast before work, talking about life, current events, and projects at work does not constitute biblical community
 - b) But that same group of engineers that meets for breakfast, talking over work, life, what God has been teaching them lately, how they are honoring or not honoring their spouses the way they should, they read a short passage from the Bible, they pray, they genuinely care for how each person is glorifying God in his or her life - that is creating biblical community
 - c) Did you notice the differences?
 - (1) An obvious one is that the Bible and prayer are involved
 - (2) Also, there is a level of caring and sharing taking place there that is not present in the first group
 - (a) It should remind us of James words in James 5 - "Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another"
 - (b) Each person cares for how God is being glorified or not glorified in each other's lives
 - (c) The focus isn't even on any one person and their sins or triumphs - the focus is on God's glory
 - (d) Each person desires to see God glorified in everyone's life
 - d) This is the difference between biblical community and community life that most people experience
 - (1) It is a shame that few Christians really embrace or experience biblical community
 - (2) When God's glory is what is being sought:
 - (a) We rejoice with those that have amazing news of how God was at work in them recently
 - (b) We are saddened when God is not glorified in our actions, and pray for the person that might need prayer
 - i) That was the thing James was trying to teach people to seek
 - ii) After confession came what in the verse? PRAYER

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- (1) Not condemnation
 - (2) Not shunning, or yelling, or even disappointment - prayer
 - (3) Prayer for that person, and pray for, as the Lord's prayer says, "not to be lead into temptation, but to be delivered from evil"
 - (4) It is dependance on God
3. So I just got a little off course from where I was planning to head, but it is so important that we understand biblical community
 - a) If the Bible is all about God
 - b) And we understand that our sole focus is God, and what glorifies Him, breaking out of our comfort zone in community becomes possible
 - c) We are all there to glorify God and support those in the battle who may be having a tough time glorifying God right now
- B. The outflow of this is really what we call at this church, Life Groups
1. A Life Group is simply a small group that meets to glorify God with their lives
 - a) We call them life groups because we believe that groups like this bring life and vitality to our spiritual lives
 - b) We need our brothers and sisters to help each other
 - (1) I have witnessed this a few times in the men's Bible study over the years
 - (2) When a younger father would ask questions of the older fathers in the room to learn from their years of wisdom and biblical understanding
 - (3) When taking a large men's group and dividing it down into smaller groups and watching more interaction, more discussion of personal life issues in relation to the biblical lesson
 - (4) Then biblical community is beginning to happen
 2. Life Groups can be traditional in their look or non-traditional
 - a) Here is what I mean
 - (1) A traditional group is a small group of men, women, couples, whomever, that meets usually at a home or the church for Bible study, prayer and biblical fellowship
 - (2) A non-traditional group is a small group of men, women, couples, people with a passion for specific ministry but may meet in non-traditional locations, or meet for different reasons

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- (a) So if they are a ministry team meeting to help the needs of a single mother in town, they can still be able to grow in biblical community
 - (b) Or in one of the previous examples, a group that meets at a restaurant for breakfast before work for a short devotional and conversation about life, and how God is working in their lives - that is a non-traditional group but still building biblical community
3. Our Life Groups needs to be reworked a little bit
- a) So at present I will not be pushing for everyone to join a Life Group
 - b) I think the better plan would be to take the time to reset properly with the mission of the church the leadership is working on
 - c) Now a reset will include
 - (1) Training for group leaders
 - (a) I have little doubt there are folks out there that may have thought about leading a group, but felt a little timid
 - (b) This is one way the church wants to help you break out of your comfort zone, and equip you for ministry
 - (2) Resetting will include helping people understand how Life Groups fit into our goals and purpose for the church
 - (a) How might God use a Life Group in your life
 - (b) How can you use a Life Group to help a friend or neighbor progress in their spiritual life
- C. The important thing to take away from this is to understand that Life Groups are not just something you can participate in as one of many activities in the church
- 1. Life Groups are vital to your spiritual growth
 - 2. In order to grow in biblical community, to truly have those relationships that will help move you along in your spiritual life, you need to be involved in a Life group
 - a) Will they be perfect? No
 - b) Will they be messy? Yes
 - c) Honestly, that is one other way that God uses to help you grow - people and situations that can be messy
- D. Biblical community - it is essential to genuine spiritual growth
- 1. The prayer challenge will help you pray for how God will use this essential tool in your life

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PRAYER CHALLENGE: Father, thank you for placing me in a spiritual family that has its foundation in You. Give me the desire to grow in community with my brothers and sisters - even when some are harder to like than others. As I take this step out of my comfort zone and trust more people with who I am, Lord, bless my spiritual growth as a result. In Jesus name, Amen.