

How Many Friends Do You Have?

Matthew 16:26, Acts 2:42-47

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I have moved 12 times in the past 22 years, so I've gotten used to the checklist of things that need to be set up at each new house. Back in 1996, we used to have land lines but now we don't even bother with setting them up when we move. Today we just use our cell phones for everything. Technology has advanced so much in such a short period of time, but it doesn't come without a cost. We have gained many useful tools that have potential for good. For example Skype allowed my son to interact with his grandparents even though they were far away, so they wouldn't be strangers when he met them face to face. But technology is also driven by the world's values and perspectives. Its growth feeds off a need for information, attention, instant gratification, and global connectivity. When we focus on how many likes and how many friends we have on social media, we are conforming to the pattern of this world. But how many of our social media friends do we actually spend time with? If we continue on this path, we lose true community. Thus following the world comes at a cost to our soul. Matthew 16:26 tells us that following Christ means denying oneself what the world offers in exchange for one's soul. So what does true community look like for those who follow Jesus?

First, a Christian community is Christ centered. All groups are held together by some kind of affinity, something all members have in common. For example the PTA members all have children at the same school, and the Instapot Facebook group members all own an Instapot. The difference between these groups and a Christian community is that church is centered around something wholly outside ourselves. It's not about what we own or what we do, but what someone else did for us. We all share in the salvation and love of Christ through faith (Philemon 4-6). Therefore this community can have diversity in terms of age, personality, race, and class, as long as we all worship Jesus. Ephesians 1 reminds us of all the blessings we share in Christ, and how we are all brought together under Him. And Ephesians 2 tells us that we are joined together into a holy temple, with Jesus as the corner stone.

Second, the community is local. We physically meet together and interact face to face. Although technology can help us keep in contact with missionaries, and brothers and sisters who are far away, church is a locally engaged group where we are supposed to spend time together. Acts 2:46-47 shows us that after Pentecost, the church continued to meet together, to worship in

a local space. The experience of going to church together is different than listening to a sermon online, just as watching a movie with friends is different than watching it by yourself at home. We receive God's word together and worship Him together, in a local space. Verse 46 also says they broke bread together. Everyone has to eat, so we might as well turn it into a community event.

Third, Acts 2:44-45 tells us that the Christian community is generous. The focus here is not on selling all our possessions, but on striving to meet everyone's needs. Our hearts should be on the needs of others, not just on how much we give. Whereas other communities demand services, fees, hours, or votes from members, the Christian community is one where everyone tries to meet each other's needs. 2 Corinthians 8 talks about the Macedonians, who gave generously in their poverty to meet the needs of the church in Jerusalem. Their generosity went beyond what they had, in order to meet a need.

Finally, in Acts 2:47, we see that the result of a Christ-centered, locally gathering, generous community is that God adds to their numbers. Their community was attractive, and as a group their witness was powerful. This is the fruit of a Christian community. God doesn't only use our evangelism to witness to others, He also uses the life we live together to witness.

So how does technology fit into this? We have to realize that so much of technology is not essential for Christian community. Let us not give up meeting face to face with each other. Technology's role should only be to strengthen the connections we already have, not to replace them. It should facilitate face to face conversations and help us exercise generosity. Let us not be distracted from Christ, and let us not trade the essential elements of church community for the things the world offers. Let us follow the example of the early church so we will not lose the community we desperately need.