

HEARTSPEAK

TAKES ON SOCIAL NETWORKS

What twitter

by Michael Mancha

Can Tweeach Us

Twitter. It's all the rage these days, isn't it?

Here's one way of knowing when something new has become a hit. When its name becomes a verb, then it has caught on. Raise your hand if you've heard one of these statements:

"Dude, just Google it."

"Hey, MySpace me later."

"Oh yeah, I texted her yesterday."

"I blogged about it last night."

Tweeted, Twoated – Twitter isn't just a social hit; it's a phenom.

For those who've been wandering in the desert this year, Twitter is simply micro-blogging. You have 140 characters to say what you want and post it to your personal Twitter thread. You find other Twitter users and "follow" them, which means their posts also appear on your Twitter page. You can follow whomever you like, and they can follow you. That's it.

Sounds simple, right? As it turns out, the whole Twitter movement is not that simple.

For those I've talked to about Twitter, feelings usually fall into one of two categories: 1) Love it; use it all the time or 2) Hate it; it's the stupidest thing on the Internet.

When the popular social networks MySpace and Facebook first arrived, they too had their share of criticism. People's feelings about Twitter are much more black and white — love or hate. This could be because the main idea behind Twitter is — you! It's just a tool to tell people what you're doing, feeling, eating, saying, thinking and where you're going, what you saw, what you overheard, and so on. Most social networks are about connecting with friends and, well, being social. But on Twitter, the catch phrase is "What are YOU doing?"

Now evidence has shown that Twitter isn't just a "me" thing. For example, when the terrorist bombings happened in Mumbai, India, last November, Twitter was the first place information began circulating — before the media got it. News agencies post their headlines on Twitter. Apple and other tech companies often use it to leak rumors and new info to the public. Several months ago, NASA Twittered, minute by minute, the launch of the space shuttle.

Between all the good and bad, believe it or not, there is a

valuable lesson to be learned from Twitter. A Bible story in the book of Acts can shine some light on this.

After escaping from Berea, Paul found himself in Athens, where people worshiped many gods. They were so religious, in fact, that they made a statue for the gods they didn't yet know so they wouldn't offend any. Paul came across this idol labeled "To the unknown god."

Being the good Jewish man he was, Paul knew the people of Athens were violating God's commandments. This bothered him very much, but rather than point a finger and tear down their idols, Paul chose a better approach. He made an earnest attempt to understand and reach them on their level.

"Men of Athens!" he said, "I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. . . . For in him we live and move and have our being. As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'" (Acts 17: 22-24, 28, NIV). Hearing this, some in Paul's audience were moved and eventually converted.

Beyond the "what" of their idolatry, Paul tried to understand the "why." To him the people of Athens were desperate to believe in something, and all he needed to do was help them see what they were actually seeking: the Lord God.

We too should seek to understand, not what people do but why they do it. As humans, you see, we long for acceptance and may even be desperate for it. We may seek it through love, through our talents, and or simply through social networks. Most of the time these connections can be harmless. The danger, though, is that someone can easily become focused on looking to them to satisfy their ultimate need for acceptance that only God can give. Do you know anyone like this? Maybe this describes you.

Think about this. When Jesus met the woman at the well, He offered her living water so she wouldn't ever thirst again. Can you imagine what people would be like if everyone chose to honestly look to God as the source of real love and acceptance? How much fuller our lives would be if a perfect God defined our self-worth — instead of Twitter?

Would Jesus Join facebook?

by Emily Osburne

“Please, spare me the lecture on texting,” I overheard an eye-rolling teenager blurt out in the grocery store. Her mom, not in the mood for an attitude, grabbed the phone and threw it in her purse.

WHAT TEENS THINK

“Why are adults always on our backs about technology? If they aren’t griping about texting at the table, they’re looking over our shoulder as we post to a friend’s wall.

“And I don’t get why magazines and newspapers preach about the dangers of online predators showing up on social networking sites. I have never allowed a random guy access to my profile. It’s all a bunch of hype, if you ask me.”

WHAT PARENTS THINK

“I just want my son back. We used to sit on the back porch and talk, but now I can’t get him to look up from his phone. He’s glued to so many screens: the computer screen, the TV screen, and the little screen on his flip phone that buzzes about a hundred times a day!”

So who is right in the technology battle? Are young people simply using a new medium to express themselves and connect with friends? Are old people out of the loop? Actually, those are the wrong questions.

The right question is “Would Jesus join Facebook (or MySpace, Twitter, or Digg)”?

NEED TO CONNECT

The technology may be new, but the question isn’t. Teens in the 80’s fought with their parents over using the phone. Teens in the 50’s begged to watch TV, just as young people in the 20’s waited for the mailman. Then would Jesus have talked on the phone, watched TV, and written letters?

Probably so. After all, everyone wants to connect. In fact, God made us to be social creatures. Since the beginning of time, guys and gals of all ages have used every ounce of creativity to draw near to their buddies. Your desire to text is no different than your granny’s desire to write a letter to her beau. Even in the Garden of Eden, when Adam was chillin’ with all the animals in the garden, God noted, “It is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18).

God created Eve so Adam wouldn’t be alone, even though Adam had perfect communion with God. We are undeniably created to be social. Social networks are proof that our hearts are designed for closeness with others.

DOWNSIDE

But can you achieve closeness through social networking? In a way, yes. In seconds, you can access your entire clan of friends. You know how many bowls of Cheerios they ate for breakfast. You can see your gal pal’s new haircut and view a random street sign that your friend thought was funny because it read, “Dips. Do not Enter.” If nothing else, social networking keeps you in the know about who broke up with whom and where to meet for pizza after the game.

Truthfully, though, the depth of conversation doesn’t go past the shallow end when communicating through a screen. Social networks and texts can never replace face-to-face interaction. Even Paul, who connected to friends through letters, said, “We made every effort to see you” (1 Thessalonians 2:17, NIV).

Everyone wants a best friend, but you probably won’t reach that level only by reading words on a monitor. How can you react to your friend’s funny face through three little letters: *lol*?

Another problem with overusing social networking is that it intrudes on life. Do you ever feel like you are ALWAYS ON, ALWAYS CONNECTED, ALWAYS AT SCHOOL? Solitude is becoming extinct along with VHS tapes and books. Your quiet time can be spent with God or simply alone with your thoughts. It’s impossible to be everything God created you to be if you’re never alone with Him, allowing Him to whisper to your soul. The beeping, buzzing, and ringing can drown out the gentle nudges God is giving you.

TAKE CONTROL

So would Jesus join Facebook? Why not? He loves people. He came to proclaim the truth, and He can use anything to reach out to those He loves. However, Jesus didn’t walk through the crowds in Jerusalem, distracted by incoming status updates on His iPhone. He was so present in the moment that He felt when a desperate woman touched His cloak, trying to be healed. That kind of awareness isn’t possible with our eyes glued to a computer screen 24/7.

Decide to take control of your technology, rather than allowing it to control you. Remember what Paul wrote: “And even though ‘I am allowed to do anything,’ I must not become a slave to anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12, NLT). You have the power to turn off the computer long enough to hang out with the fam. You own your phone; it doesn’t own you. They’re called Crackberries for a reason. With such addictive technology, be sure to set a few boundaries.

Emily Osburne writes from McDonough, GA.

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