

Why I gave up on Facebook!

By Pastor Andrew Ong



If you do not know what this icon is, then you are certainly belong to a very very small minority in Singapore indeed.

An article in the Singapore “Business Times” 28th Sept 2011 edition said that Singaporeans are the most avid users of Facebook in Asia with the average person spending more than half an hour a day accessing their Facebook page.

This does not surprise me as I see my wife, teenage children and seemingly everyone around me on Facebook, accessing Facebook and uploading and posting on Facebook at all times of the day.

Well, I was on Facebook but have now given it up.

When I mentioned this to the EP Express committee, I was met with astonishment, dropped jaws and exclamations of “how can that be!”.

Delighted that they had stumbled upon a rare sub-species of human being, they asked me to write my story...

When I initially started on Facebook, it was great fun – uploading pictures, making witty(to me anyway) comments, keeping in touch with the latest in my friends lives. I especially enjoyed looking at their latest holiday and travel photographs.

But over time I became more and more disillusioned and depressed with my Facebook experience. Looking back, I was forced to address several issues:

1. Are my Facebook friends helping me grow in Christ? Am I helping them?

I initially found Facebook to be a great way to keep in touch with friends and knowing what was happening to them.

However, I started to know too much about them. For instance, did I really want to know of how my Christian friends would be dressed questionably for a night out, staying out very late on Sat nights and missing church the next day, seemingly drinking too much and posting comments which seemed inappropriate for Christians or otherwise being a poor Christian witness in the world.

This just got me down.

And even more so when I felt helpless because I did not know how to communicate with them about my concerns. My understanding of the Bible teaches me that friends are given to us by God to help us in our walk in Christ – to encourage us when we are doing well, comforting us when we are down, rebuking us when we sin, correcting us when we are wrong.

Proverbs 27 teaches

¹⁷ As iron sharpens iron,
so one man sharpens another.

My problem was that I found it very hard to actually know what to say within the word limit of the comments post. And come to think of it, would the person actually appreciate the comments or would I just be seen as a self-righteous busybody? They obviously uploaded their post because they were proud/happy/pleased with their experience. Would it embarrass that person in front of his/her other friends if I put negative comments on his/her wall?

I found that all I could do was to register my like or dislike. And together with the other 52 likes/dislikes, it was all quite meaningless.

Ultimately I found that instead of being a biblical friend who helps another grow in godliness or knowledge of God, I just became a therapeutic friend who wrote short encouraging notes.

The final straw was when a “Christian” relative of mine was supposedly evangelising another relative. On Facebook, I was “entertained” by his

Facebook page with a steady diet of pictures showing them getting drunk at a bar together, going to the karaoke, occasionally attending a church with a dubious reputation, shopping trips to buy the latest designer wear. What made it worse was the steady stream of banter of sexual and coarse innuendo on my “Christian” relatives page from his friends.

God’s words clearly said

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. Col 3

But I found the media of social networking to be superficial and shallow, I couldn’t do or say anything. No teaching, no admonishing, no nothing. Sigh... I didn’t feel that this was helping my Christian life or my relatives.

2. Have my Facebook friends come to replace face to face friendship and fellowship?

Another problem I found with Facebook was that my social networking was taking the place of my personal contact and communications.

Ever see a family or a group of friends at dinner and everyone is on their smartphone checking their Facebook or twitter? Why does that happen? Because social media such as Facebook is so easy and attractive and enjoyable.

Compared to the hard work of sitting down and actually concentrating and listening and taking to heart what a friend is saying, it is much easier to scroll and click. Compared to hard work of discourse and discussion, the dynamic back and forth exchange of thoughts, feelings, ideas, hopes and dreams, it is much easier to be merely updated of events.

This happened to me recently when a group of friends came from overseas for a gathering. After much time and effort was put into finding a suitable time and place to get together, one of the friends was continually pre-occupied with his social networking on his handpone. He preferred to check on what his friends were doing on social media rather than getting to know the friends in front of

him.

God's word in the book of Hebrews 10:24 says And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. ²⁵ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Christian friends spur one another to love and good deeds and encourage one another in the faith in light of Judgment day. This can only be done by coming together face to face. This is so because the practical acts of love and good deeds can only be done when we are in community and face to face with one another.

God has also made us so that we communicate with our whole being – facial expressions, tone of voice, touch, warmth of gestures – all play an important part in our communication. Social media does not allow that.

I then realised that social media was becoming a substitute for the harder work of building and maintaining relationships that are personal and face to face.

It dawned on me that time was inelastic and a zero sum game – if I chose to spend time on social networking, then it could be destructive by taking time away from personal relationships. The apostle Paul wrote that our time was valuable and that he spent his time building others up in Christ.

²⁸ We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹ To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. Col 1

As quoted in the Business Times article, the average Singaporean spends half an hour a day on Facebook. Imagine if a Christian spent that half hour everyday meeting up 1 to 1 with another Christian brother or sister instead. Imagine if they spent that time reading the Bible, sharing their worries, encouraging one another, and praying for one another.

In the light of Judgment day and eternity, wouldn't that be more profitable? Wouldn't this help one another grow in Christ more than spending time on social media like Facebook? Wouldn't that lead to deeper and more fulfilling relationships among God's people?