

Facebook or Facedown

Outsourcing Our Desperation for Connectedness?

By Jim Jarman

☒ Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.

The incessant alarm jolts me awake from a great dream I already can't remember. My wife stirs and rolls over as I slip from our bed and make my way to the kitchen to put the teakettle on the stove.

It's a new day, another morning.

The gray sky begins to lighten as I sit at our table and patiently wait for the water to boil. As a matter of habit, I flip open my MacBook and in seconds, I'm connected and online. I'm already wondering how many "likes" I've accumulated from last night's Facebook posts. How many people thought what I said was funny? How many liked my photos? How many friends responded "Amen" to the Scriptures and quotes I shared?

I know that if I see a lot of "likes," the day will start off well. I also realize that my mood won't be the same if no one clicked on my post. My heart leaps awake as the spiritual danger I am in dawns on me. My self-worth is becoming dependent on someone else's tap on a touchpad. I am "praying" to others in hopes they will respond. I am defaulting to encouragement and empathy from others rather than from God. The teakettle begins to whistle an alarm.

When we lose our connectedness to the Source of all life, we try in vain for substitutes that fail to fulfill. And desperation intrudes into our lives any way it can. At times it is blatantly obvious and crushes our spirits in despair. Other times we are oblivious to it, and its subtlety is the most dangerous of all.

How can our prayer lives achieve the results we desire when we stop cultivating the intimacy with God that encourages two-way communication? Why is it that desperate times foster fervency in prayer while normal times create complacency?

I sense a need to reboot my priorities.

The Deepest Desire

Deep in the heart of every individual, there is a longing to somehow, in some way, connect with the Creator of Life. This desire goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve walked with God in the “cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8). Once sin clouded the decisions of the soul, humanity tried in vain to hide its shame from God while at the same time sought to reach the heavens through their own efforts.

Solomon writes that God has “set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (Eccl. 3:11). This wise perception still describes the condition of lives today. We have a deep innate longing to be intimate with the One who made us, but we cannot make the connection due to our own sin.

Even after the judgment of the great flood revealed God’s displeasure at humanity’s condition, the peoples of the earth still sought a heavenly connection with the man-made tower of Babel. This structure only served to reveal self-centered pride. Regarding their efforts, the Lord said, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them” (Gen. 11:6). And so God “confused” the languages of mankind.

It would take Christ—and the Cross—to rectify the problem of our alienation.

The Trends of Today

Life today has striking similarities. We are still seeking a universal connection. At the 2013 Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Spain, the International Telecommunications Union announced that the number of active mobile phones globally would exceed the worldwide population by the end of 2014—a staggering 7.3 billion devices (does not include tablets or laptops). Their analysis showed that there would be more than 100 countries where active cell phone units would exceed the country's population (digitaltrends.com).

The implications of social media and electronic connectedness are staggering for the presentation of the gospel. Evangelism and discipleship are taking on new forms in our age. According to Digital Marketing Ramblings (expandedramblings.com), here is a sampling of how many people are using a few select social media sites, apps, and electronic services as of September 2013.

Facebook: 1.15 billion (that's with a "b")
Flipboard: 87 million
Instagram: 130 million
iTunes: 500 million
LinkedIn: 238 million
Ortsbo: 212 million
Pinterest: 70 million
Pandora: 200 million
Twitter: 500 million

Clearly, we need to rethink methodologies in spreading the timeless truths of the gospel. At the same time, we should constantly reevaluate the hold these trends have on our own souls. How often do our electronic links replace the connectedness God designed us to have with Him? Are we rebuilding Babel, thinking that nothing shall be impossible for us? Are we substituting technology for spirituality—and, in so doing, losing the intimacy that a deep prayer life requires for effectiveness?

The Need to Reboot

When times are desperate, we often have an invigorated season of prayer. We are needy and God is gracious. But in seasons of normalcy, we often neglect our prayer life, and our connection with God suffers. How often have I turned the car around because I forgot my cell phone? After all, someone may try to reach me. Would I do the same if I forgot my Bible? Why this disparity in our thinking?

A fireman doesn't start his firefighting training when the siren wails and the engines are rolling. If there's an in-flight emergency, I'm relieved the pilot 30 rows ahead of my economy seat isn't flying his first cross-country route. In order for my prayer life to be effective in desperate times, it needs to be honed in the intimacy I experience with God on a normal day. And anything that intrudes on that closeness with the Lord is a dangerous substitute.

Scripture closely associates our intimacy with God with our authority as believers and our effectiveness in prayer. James, the brother of Jesus, reminds us that "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16). This type of righteousness is not just a positional standing resulting from our salvation, but a practiced one, birthed in faith and the unrelenting belief that God responds to the cries of His children.

In the midst of all his kingly duties, with armies advancing and a nation to rule, David still sang to the Lord:

"One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord, and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble, he will keep me safe in his dwelling" (Ps. 27:4-5).

David realized his intimate connection with God needed to

precede his times of desperation. The *Global Post* reports that the Japanese Minister of Education has asked his government to finance special “Internet fasting” camps for Japan’s teenagers. He maintains that the youth of his country are “losing the ability to interact with the real world.”

Perhaps this is a good idea for us, spiritually. Why not fast from technology for one day a week and spend that day seeking the heart of God instead of looking for comments and advice of those who have “friended” us? Do we depend on the blogs and online devotionals to learn what others say about God, or are we hearing the voice of God’s Spirit for ourselves?

What does God say about His own desire for that type of connectedness with us? Here’s what He told one prophet:

- “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13).
- “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness” (Jer. 31:3).
- “Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know” (Jer. 33:3).

What if each morning, I waited to open my laptop or smart phone and instead began the day “checking my messages” from God? What if God really became the first priority in my life—above everything else? How would that closeness change me? How would it change you?

There is desperation in our souls for this type of intimacy with God. It’s the intimacy Enoch had with God when he was transported directly into heaven. It’s the kind Paul and Silas knew when they were singing in prison. John experienced this intimacy in his relationship with Christ because he called himself the disciple Jesus loved. This intimacy was what Moses longed for when he pleaded with God to see His face.

Intimate. Deep. Loyal. Close. Loving. To know the God who knows us. This is the cry of our hearts. This is the longing

God built into us from the beginning. Let's stop outsourcing our desperation and reconnect to the only Source who can fulfill that need.

"And when all the people saw it [the presence of the Lord], they shouted for joy and fell facedown" (Lev. 9:24).

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Power of Persistent Prayer

By Alvin VanderGriend

The New Testament places a great emphasis on persistent prayer. Jesus thought it was so important that He pressed the lesson of persistence home in two separate parables: the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1–8) and the parable of the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5–8). In the friend-at-midnight story, Jesus encourages His followers to approach heaven's door like a shameless neighbor who, despite an initial refusal, continues to knock on his neighbor's door until he gets the bread he needs for his friend. Because of the man's "shameless audacity," says Jesus, "he will surely get up and give [him] as much as [he] needs."

In His friend-at-midnight story, Jesus was not just urging prayer. He was urging bold, persistent prayer. Jesus wants us to understand there is a difference between casual prayer and bold prayer. Casual prayer is weak and ineffective, lacking earnestness and perseverance. Bold prayer is shamelessly urgent and unrelenting in its concern to obtain God's provision for a needy person. It is unwilling to take no for an answer. It stands ready to push through all obstacles.

The Apostle Paul also understood the value of persistent prayer. He commends his coworker Epaphras to his Colossian readers as one who “is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured” (Col. 4:12). The word Paul uses for “wrestling” has the meaning of striving, fighting, laboring earnestly, or persevering in the face of opposition. It was used in Paul’s day to describe combatants who strained every nerve to win a victory. Our English word “agony” comes from the same root. The Colossians must have been awe-struck to think that they were being prayed for with such strain and pain.

Why Be Persistent?

There are at least three important reasons for persistent prayer. The most important reason is *to see God’s will accomplished on earth*. Through persistent prayer we partner with God in working out His eternal plan. Christ is responsible for implementing God’s redemptive plan and defeating Satan, but He chooses to do so in response to our prayers. John Calvin taught that prayer was a means by which the power of Satan could be broken and God’s Kingdom extended.


A second important reason for persistent prayer is that *it moves the pray-er toward God*. Persistent prayer is waiting on God. When we wait on God, we get to be with God and we come to know Him better and better. We come to know that He is a gracious Heavenly Father who is pleased to give good things to those who ask (Matt. 7:11). He is “for us” and will “graciously give us all things” (Rom. 8:31–32). We become so absorbed in His world that His will becomes our will; His priorities become our priorities; His focus becomes our focus. Persistent prayer changes us.

A third important reason for persistent prayer is *to bring us face to face with our own weaknesses and frailties*. As we wait on God to do what we cannot do, we realize anew that we are helpless creatures, doomed to fail without His help. We humbly

admit that our best human efforts are inadequate. Coming to grips with our own impotence, we hold on to His omnipotence. Our faith muscles grow stronger, our spiritual stamina increases, and our prayers get refined. Through persistent prayer God humbles us, teaches us, trains us, and matures us.

Persistent prayer is very important, but it is not easy. Wesley Duewel reminds us: "Prevailing, wrestling prayer . . . can be the most difficult work you can do. It demands total sincerity, intense desire, full concentration, and whole-souled determination."¹ When we determine to pray with persistence, the world, the flesh, and the devil come against us. But God is greater than this nasty trinity of opponents. With His help we can overcome these deadly hindrances and become bold, persistent intercessors.

¹Wesley Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 210.

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