

Adolescence and Facebook : Ramifications for Adult Leader Connections and MicroTechnology.

1. What is one negative observation that you have made over the last year when it comes to teenagers using technology?
2. What is one positive observation?
3. What are biblical examples of relationship development? (For instance, Adam and God had a relationship, what were the stages in that relationship?)
4. What are the ramifications and consequences of adult leaders using social networking with their students? Positive? Negative? How about parents?
5. Should we use facebook as a means of relationship development?
6. What is the difference between ease of connection and community?
7. What sort of obvious generational differences in understanding exist in regards to facebook and social networking from your context?

## Book Review of “The Church of Facebook” – By Chris Rollman

For years, I have been fascinated by the issues in social networking that pertain to relationship building and development. I have often wondered if there is a false relationship that is happening because of the medium of technology, specifically the “Facebook.” There seems to be authenticity issues, self identity issues, informational overload issues, and a myriad of other such problematic regimes that plague or screens in the office, at home, and at play.

As I have begun to think about the “community of faith” I wonder if we are in the midst of a revolution that is literally shaping the things to come as we speak. Jesse Rice writes in “The Church of Facebook” that we are absolutely in such a phase. We are living what people in the 60’s lived when air conditioning was introduced as a viable means of cooling a house. Things changed. People began to move out of their Victorian style homes and into ranch homes because the deep porches were no longer needed to protect the home from the brutal heat that was customary in the southern United States. There was a movement towards the south in terms of people migration. People stopped being on their front or back porches because they could now spend the majority of their times indoors and air conditioning, the means of conditioning the environment, absolutely revolutionized the current world as it was known. Facebook is doing some of the same things in our culture. Sure, there are some of the same principles and values and contexts that are translated from schoolyard and parking lot to the digital world of facebook (for instance, the conversations about who might be dating who, etc) but now there is a new definition for the word “Friend.” No longer is friend someone who stood around in the circle of people that one would stand face to face with, rather, friend is someone that can have access to all information that one might put on display using the social networking tool called facebook.

The book does a great job of explaining cultural shifts, pragmatic opportunities for ministers, and principles of leadership in a digital age. The author does not take a rejectionist approach nor does he take an all or nothing approach with his use of technology and a digital world. Rather, he suggests that we must wrestle with faith and praxis as it pertains to generations and communities of faith. The movement of our world suggests that a community of faith is (at least theoretically) viable only online where people have not seen another person’s eyes to know who they are but rather an exchange of information allows for enough of a connection to be called community. Rice argues against this concept but says that we, as ministers, must be willing to supplement our relationship building with this digital communication device known as social networking. He likens this concept to Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at the well with facebook being the well that we must be willing approach and engage those who are there and then follow them into their city for further dialogue with close proximity.

Overall, the book does a great job of capturing what facebook is and isn’t as well as making some pretty clear distinctions within the concept of ‘facebook protocol.’

## FOR FURTHER READING

<http://www.insidefacebook.com/2009/06/02/total-us-time-spent-on-facebook-up-700-in-the-last-year/>

The above is a fascinating article about the rise in total time spent on facebook. It shows the cultural shift to this mindset of writing ones' own story in relationship to everyone else's as a way of building relationship and coping with life. It shows the cultural shift towards relationships, using whatever means possible.

[http://www.themonkeycage.org/2009/05/does\\_time\\_spent\\_on\\_facebook\\_hu.html](http://www.themonkeycage.org/2009/05/does_time_spent_on_facebook_hu.html)

Many folks will say that facebook is killing the academic world, but this just is not the case. Read the above article. Could it have anything to do with the fact that we are trained to think and focus with very brief attention spans?

<http://mystateline.com/content/fulltext/?cid=128292>

Does facebook affect sleep patterns? Read above article.

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204660604574370450465849142.html>

Food for thought. It's interesting that this is a blog and he takes this approach. J

<http://www.makeuseof.com/tag/5-tools-to-track-how-you-spend-time-online/>

One of the things that I have put into place in my life is tracking some of my online activity so that I can evaluate if I am effectively building relationships in both the digital and real world. You might check out the tools at the above website and suggest them to some of your students and then have some of the discussions about what is helpful and healthy in time spent in some of these areas.

## ARTICLE #1

Social networking sites, such as Facebook, are putting attention span in jeopardy, says Baroness Greenfield. Photograph: Chris Jackson/Getty Images

Social network sites risk infantilising the mid-21st century mind, leaving it characterised by short attention spans, sensationalism, inability to empathise and a shaky sense of identity, according to a leading neuroscientist.

The startling warning from Lady Greenfield, professor of synaptic pharmacology at Lincoln college, Oxford, and director of the Royal Institution, has led members of the government to admit their work on internet regulation has not extended to broader issues, such as the psychological impact on children.

Greenfield believes ministers have not yet looked at the broad cultural and psychological effect of on-screen friendships via [Facebook](#), [Bebo](#) and [Twitter](#).

She told the House of Lords that children's experiences on social networking sites "are devoid of cohesive narrative and long-term significance. As a consequence, the mid-21st century mind might almost be infantilised, characterised by short attention spans, sensationalism, inability to empathise and a shaky sense of identity".

Arguing that social network sites are putting attention span in jeopardy, she said: "If the young brain is exposed from the outset to a world of fast action and reaction, of instant new screen images flashing up with the press of a key, such rapid interchange might accustom the brain to operate over such timescales. Perhaps when in the real world such responses are not immediately forthcoming, we will see such behaviours and call them attention-deficit disorder.

"It might be helpful to investigate whether the near total submersion of our culture in screen technologies over the last decade might in some way be linked to the threefold increase over this period in prescriptions for methylphenidate, the drug prescribed for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder."

She also warned against "a much more marked preference for the here-and-now, where the immediacy of an experience trumps any regard for the consequences. After all, whenever you play a computer game, you can always just play it again; everything you do is reversible. The emphasis is on the thrill of the moment, the buzz of rescuing the princess in the game. No care is given for the princess herself, for the content or for any long-term significance, because there is none. This type of activity, a disregard for consequence, can be compared with the thrill of compulsive gambling or compulsive eating.

"The sheer compulsion of reliable and almost immediate reward is being linked to similar chemical systems in the brain that may also play a part in drug addiction. So we should

not underestimate the 'pleasure' of interacting with a screen when we puzzle over why it seems so appealing to young people."

Greenfield also warned there was a risk of loss of empathy as children read novels less. "Unlike the game to rescue the princess, where the goal is to feel rewarded, the aim of reading a book is, after all, to find out more about the princess herself."

She said she found it strange we are "enthusiastically embracing" the possible erosion of our identity through social networking sites, since those that use such sites can lose a sense of where they themselves "finish and the outside world begins".

She claimed that sense of identity can be eroded by "fast-paced, instant screen reactions, perhaps the next generation will define themselves by the responses of others".

Social networking sites can provide a "constant reassurance – that you are listened to, recognised, and important". Greenfield continued. This was coupled with a distancing from the stress of face-to-face, real-life conversation, which were "far more perilous ... occur in real time, with no opportunity to think up clever or witty responses" and "require a sensitivity to voice tone, body language and perhaps even to pheromones, those sneaky molecules that we release and which others smell subconsciously".

She said she feared "real conversation in real time may eventually give way to these sanitised and easier screen dialogues, in much the same way as killing, skinning and butchering an animal to eat has been replaced by the convenience of packages of meat on the supermarket shelf. Perhaps future generations will recoil with similar horror at the messiness, unpredictability and immediate personal involvement of a three-dimensional, real-time interaction."

The solutions, however, lay less in regulation as in education, culture and society.

Greenfield argued that the appeal of Facebook lay in the fact that "a child confined to the home every evening may find at the keyboard the kind of freedom of interaction and communication that earlier generations took for granted in the three-dimensional world of the street. But even given a choice, screen life can still be more appealing."

She quoted one user saying they had 900 friends, another saying the fact "that you can't see or hear other people makes it easier to reveal yourself in a way that you might not be comfortable with. You become less conscious of the individuals involved [including yourself], less inhibited, less embarrassed and less concerned about how you will be evaluated."

But Greenfield warned: "It is hard to see how living this way on a daily basis will not result in brains, or rather minds, different from those of previous generations. We know that the human brain is exquisitely sensitive to the outside world."

## ARTICLE #2

**F**ew would contest that life's most precious gifts are: a lifelong best friend; an intimate and compatible one-flesh relationship with a marriage partner; an understanding and unconditionally loving parent. Most humans treasure such rare and special interpersonal connections; "they can finish my sentences" kinds of companionships that seem to complete and satisfy our souls innate yearning for connectedness.

[Warning! Don't let the next few sentences lose you. Reread them until they make sense or say a prayer for understanding. Once understood, this will be the key to one of your life's mysteries: how to plug in and find closeness and meaning.]

As rare and precious as the aforementioned relationships might be there is something even more satisfying and fulfilling.

**Spiritual Oneness; a connection at a deeper level than shared experiences, compatibility, or even genetics are able to generate; where closeness is not based on your likenesses, but your divinely designed interdependent differences.**

Near the end of His earthly mission, Jesus prayed that His followers might share the oneness that He and His Heavenly Father shared. That spiritual connection has a source. It is shared Spirit. After He was crucified and resurrected, and just before he ascended into heaven, Jesus promised to "pour out" the Spirit of Truth over the whole earth. Later, when His promised Spirit came upon the Disciples they started acting much differently than they had even when they walked with Jesus; all the things that He taught them and showed them now seemed to be integrated and "liveable". What caused this change? They now could commune with God like Jesus did. Sin had been dealt with and through His multiplication of self through His Spirit Jesus could now live in their recreated hearts.

There is nothing more fulfilling than the closeness that we can now experience with our creator as He restores oneness. That oneness that God had with Adam before the Fall in the Garden of Eden. The oneness He shared with Jesus. Through Jesus He made a way for his creation to share that oneness again. Generations of believers have known it; but only in small numbers. For some odd reason there has never been a widespread understanding, appreciation for, and experience of this blessing.

That connection to God has another benefit that we are discovering anew in this day. We can share that oneness with each other because we share His Spirit. Integral to that oneness with each other is a design for interdependence. He gives us all a supernatural ability to do things that help each other. He designed them in such a way as to be ineffective or useless without the opportunity to exercise them in the loving of others. We are not fully enjoying His design until we use those abilities to help each other. By helping others we deepen this oneness with God and each other.

What are the characteristics of this oneness; first with God, then each other?

[The following is a scriptural digest. As I read a book of the Bible I see a pattern develop that reveals the author's main intent in writing it as he did. The author of the canon of scripture ultimately is God, but He fully allowed the mind and personality of the writer to join Him as He communicated his Truth. What I found as I read the Gospel, Letters and Revelation of the Apostle John was the theme of Oneness with God. Here are the verses that jumped off the page as I read and my thoughts as they took focus.]

**God the Father takes the initiative in Love;** we follow His lead. No better example exists than what we see in How God related to his Son as he walked the earth. Jesus was one with His Father in eternity prior to coming to earth. (see John 1:1) John's Gospel takes every chance to confirm this origin. But when Jesus became a man and lived among us He had to grow into this oneness as a human, just as we do. One of the first things we hear Jesus express was this awareness of who His true Father was; "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" (Luke 2:49 NIV)

**Oneness grows out of Heavenly Love.** We know His Father loved Him greatly from all the "proud Father prophecies" that foretold His coming from the beginning; from the "birth announcements" made through Dreams, the Stars, His Angels, and the Holy Spirit, to Joseph, Mary, Elizabeth, Simeon, Anna the Wise Men and the Shepherds; from the protection He provided when Jesus was a baby in Mary's Womb from those that would have had Him killed. But as a good father does, He allowed Him to grow into manhood without fanfare. At the end of the few verses we read concerning the childhood of Jesus are these simple words: "The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." (Luke

2:52 NASV)

That is all we hear, that is, until the time was right; then all heaven broke loose again! He had the Glory and Angels of Heaven there to affirm His Sonship in the baptismal arms of John the Baptizer (whom God had already appointed as the Preparer of the Way for his Son).

Now that the right time had come the Father further affirmed His Sonship by allowing Him to manipulate matter (turn water into wine – without the grapes!) John calls His miracles “revealing his glory”. Jesus then reciprocates His pride in His Father. He shows “a consuming zeal for His Fathers house” by driving out the market merchants from the Temple Courts. Later John the Baptist says more about the Love the Father has for His Son: “The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.” (John 3:35.36 NIV) Not much later in Johns recounting of His life, Jesus is heard saying: “My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work.”

**Jesus had lost himself in the doing of His Father's will. That is Oneness.**

Soon after in John's Gospel Jesus is recorded answering the critics of his claims of Messiahship: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. (John 5:19ff) and later: “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:38ff NIV)

There is a great mystery here. The Father and the Son are intrinsically the same. This is the stumbling block that the Jews and the Muslims fall over. How can the God of the Old Testament who said "you shall

have no other gods before me", be one with Jesus. Doesn't that make him two Gods? Are we not idolizing a man when we call Jesus the Son of God.? I do not know how Jesus is who He claimed to be. But He knew. Jesus' claims of such nearly got Him killed before the time had come. His claims became more and more direct throughout John's Gospel.

All of God's authority fell on Jesus. "the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it." Did you read that. God gives life. Jesus gives life.

And: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own" (7:16,17)

And: "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say."(12:49, 50)

"If you knew me, you would know my Father also...The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." (8:19b,) He couldn't have said it more succinctly "**I and the Father are one.**" [Later as he was about to be led away to his death (that He called His glory) he echoed: "I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. "(14:30,31)]

**Jesus repeated it over and over: Essentially God and Son oneness is seen in Jesus' exacting, precision obedience to His Father. [my paraphrase] I do what I see my Father doing; I say what He has me to say, I love my Father! Try it on, if I'm telling the truth you will see the will of God unfolding in your life!**

And, "believe the miracles, that you may know and understand that **the Father is in me, and I in the Father**" (10:30, 38). These were stoning words for His critics. **In these words the Father and Sons oneness has become crystal clear.** Jesus clearly knew He had His Father's approval, having said to His Disciples: "On Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval." (John 6:26b NIV) What better acknowledgement of Love is there than this?

In this context Jesus gives us a wonderful analogy of our oneness using bread and wine:

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. **Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.** Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven" (John 6:54-58 NIV) He also makes it clear that His Father is the Great Initiator: "No one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him"

At the tomb doorway of his dead friend Lazarus Jesus acknowledges His continual communication with His Father with these words: (prayer was a constant waking conscious conversation for Jesus. When He spoke out loud it was so that others could "listen in" - so does His Father -watch)

"Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." (11:41)

John inserts a bit of irony that relates to our oneness too. He notes that the High Priest that year - Caiaphas (who though no fan of Jesus was still used to prophecy the truth by God – he could not help himself) said:

"You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" [then John inserts his own commentary] **He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.** (11:49-52)

As the time came near for Jesus to be crucified He deeply struggled with it but was always quick to resolve to the Father's will:

"Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say?'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, **"This voice was for your benefit, not mine** (12:27-30).

**This is the second time that Jesus has said that the audible**

**communication between Him and the Father was for the benefit of those around. Keep in mind that He and the Father were so close that no spoken words were necessary between just them!**

As the ominous clouds of his crucifixion gather Jesus gives the example of interpersonal humility when He washes His disciple's feet...telling them to do likewise; He then goes on to say "I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me" (13:20) . Notice here that the oneness is being extended to his followers to come. He also gives a new command that will become the discerning litmus of his true followers: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (13:24,25)

He again tries to get the dense disciples (sorry brothers, I would have been dense too) to understand the oneness He shares with His Father and ultimately our relationship in these phrases: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? **Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me;** or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves" (14:6-11) He then promises to send them the Spirit of truth (as a replacement from God to stay with them) and continues: ***"On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him...If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*** 24He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me." (14:20,-21, 23-24).

**These words from our Lord are the capstone of this revelation - "we will come to him and make our home with him". Have heaven's Chief Residents taken residence in your heart? This is**

**profound stuff folks! Not namby pamby religion. This is the creator of the universe shaking your hand and comin' on in! Obey his teaching.... what teaching? All of it. What did Jesus teach? Love God. Love your Neighbor. Love with God's Love. How? Let God Love through you. Obey His promptings to Love! How? Allow His Spirit set up house and the power to obey will be there!**

Jesus then uses the analogy of a vine and its branches to His relationship with His disciples; notice the number of times he says "in, and remain in":

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man **remains in me** and I **in him**, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you **remain in me** and **my words remain in you**, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now **remain in my love**. If you obey my commands; you will **remain in my love**, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and **remain in his love**. I have told you this so that my joy may be **in you** and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." (15:5, 7, 9-12)

Chapter 17 is the pinnacle of clarity of Jesus' desire for His follower's oneness. He Prays: "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—**so that they may be one as we are one**. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, **that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me**. Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and **will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them**."

(17:10-24)

Why are there so many inclusions in John's Gospel focused on this intimate Father / Son oneness relationship and our own ensuing oneness; because it becomes the very foundation to the entire network of relationships that we share in Christ?

As you have seen, the Apostle John told us more of what Jesus said (and very differently) than any other New Testament writer. Much of what he records is solely for the purpose of substantiating the relationship of Christ with His Heavenly Father and ultimately ours with them and each other. John and the Apostle Paul both write extensively about the love and unity that we find in and from God. These passages from John's first general letter to the Church and Paul's letter to the Church meeting in Philippi summarize everything we write about here. You would greatly benefit from reading them over and over until they echo throughout your being and become part of you...in memory and life!

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; **but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. **If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.** And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. **Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him...** We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother." (1 John 4 NIV)

"make my joy complete by **being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.** Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely

look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:2-8 NASV)

**May His Word quench your soul's thirst for truth and spiritual intimacy with your God and His People. Be one!**

## **ARTICLE #3**

### **Biblical Community in Scripture**

Without a doubt, there are millions of different ways to live in "Christian community". Some are good and lead to an increase in faithfulness and spiritual maturity. Others are not so good and only reinforce habits of the heart that keep us far from God. And still others are downright destructive - see Jonestown or the Branch Davidians as examples. Imagine for a moment that you have never heard the Gospel or experienced authentic Christian community. How would one begin to sort through the myriad of options out there to find a spiritual home? And, on the flip side, how can those of us who are engaged in Christian community already continue the hard work of transformation so that we can become a spiritual home for those seeking to follow Jesus? Here are some key Scriptural passages that certainly should guide our thoughts and actions...(all passages from Eugene Peterson's, *The Message*)

#### **Acts 2:42-47:**

*They committed themselves to the teaching of the apostles, the life together, the common meal, and the prayers. Everyone around was in awe—all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person's need was met, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added to those who were saved.*

#### **Acts 4:32-37:**

*The whole congregation of believers was united as one—one heart, one mind! They didn't even claim ownership of their own possessions. No one said, "That's mine; you can't have it." They shared everything. The apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of the Master Jesus, and grace was on all of them. And so it turned out that not a person among them was needy. Those who owned fields or houses sold them and brought the price of the sale to the apostles and made an offering of it. The apostles then distributed it according to each person's need. Joseph, called by the apostles "Barnabas" (which means "Son of Comfort"), a Levite born in Cyprus, sold a field that he owned, brought the money, and made an offering of it to the apostles.*

#### **1 Corinthians 14:26-33:**

*So here's what I want you to do. When you gather for worship, each one of you be prepared with something that will be useful for all: Sing a hymn, teach a lesson, tell a story, lead a prayer, provide an insight. If prayers are offered in tongues, two or three's the limit, and then only if someone is present who can interpret what you're saying. Otherwise, keep it between God and yourself. And no more than two or three speakers at a meeting, with the rest of you listening and taking it to heart. Take your turn, no one person taking over. Then each speaker gets a chance to say something special from God, and you all learn from each other. If you choose to speak, you're also responsible for how and when you speak. When we worship the right way, God doesn't stir us up into confusion; he brings us into harmony.*

**Galatians 3:28-29:**

*In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also, since you are Christ's family, then you are Abraham's famous "descendant," heirs according to the covenant promises.*

**James 5:13-20:**

*Are you hurting? Pray. Do you feel great? Sing. Are you sick? Call the church leaders together to pray and anoint you with oil in the name of the Master. Believing-prayer will heal you, and Jesus will put you on your feet. And if you've sinned, you'll be forgiven—healed inside and out. Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with. Elijah, for instance, human just like us, prayed hard that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't—not a drop for three and a half years. Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did. The showers came and everything started growing again. My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.*

I am sure that these just touch the surface as there are many more we could cite. But I think this gives us a good picture of how the early church sought to order their life together in authentic Christian community. Did they do it perfectly? Nope. All one has to do is read through Paul's letters to see the struggles they had. Thankfully, though, they never gave up and we now stand as inheritors of what they persevered to create under the guidance and with the power of the Holy Spirit. And in a world of rapid change and massive cultural shifts, the question is pressed...what kind of community are we leaving behind? Do we offer a spiritual home for the weary traveler? Or merely a set of religious goods to offer the consumer?