

The Value of Hanging Out

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I have just spoken to a lady from Germany about her kids in college while my Lebanese friend was standing by. Both work at the local coffee shop where I am writing this piece. Just prior to that I spoke with other acquaintances from South Korea who own a T-shirt business at the city market downtown. Business is not so good for them right now, but they smile and talk with me most mornings I'm there.

I met yet another Korean worker at this shop this morning. It was our first actual discussion, although we had said hello from time to time. She has only been in the country for five months, and, much to my surprise, is a Sunday School teacher at the Korean church in town.

This is not all. Even earlier this morning I met my dentist for a time of mentoring right here in the same place. Prior to that I had a great talk with the building inspector for Parkville, the little town within Kansas City where I have my office. I met another friend and had some discussion about spiritual matters for a few moments prior that meeting. He manages the Christian bookstore. I had a brief "hello" with his wife as she came in later. And I at least got to wave to yet another friend who is one of the regulars at the shop. He's the local chiropractor.

Building relationships—this is the value of hanging out. I'm making a determined effort to do that, and I wish to recommend it to you. Not just any kind of hanging out will do, of course, but there is a purposeful hanging out that I believe God smiles on.

Not long ago I wrote this in my Commonplace Book, the notebook I use to record my observations from my reading and thinking: "It is an interesting question: What did Jesus do in a given week?"



That simple question was answered by going through the book of Matthew. I wrote fourteen pages of observations on the peripatetic life of Christ as to how Christ employed his time. As a conclusion to it all I had to say that Jesus basically just hung out. Of course, it was "divine" hanging out.

Christ constantly moved about a small area, especially around Capernaum, which could be considered his home town, and Bethany, the home of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, a favorite hub close to Jerusalem down south. He never kept hours or had an office. He always "ate out." He never seemed to have organizational meetings. He spent lots of time with his followers, dined with "sinners," answered lots of questions, taught when he could get a crowd or small group of listeners, took special times to pray and get away to stay focused, made use of the synagogues to raise issues, healed and did miracles. It seems that much of his time was spent just being among people, and in that context he did what he was sent to do. Paul, of course, did similarly.

Now, we have to go to work. And that in itself is a mission field. And I do not pretend to say that a person should not do that. But somehow along the way we have forgotten how important it is to be among people in a way that lends itself to relaxed, friendly, or even sometimes intense, philosophical talk. Like fire comes from sparks falling on dry tinder, so God can and will do things through us most powerfully when we are "in the context" of those we most want to see impacted with our message. We must find some informal place for meeting people. The rewards are too good to forfeit.

If God has planted his love and the fruit of his spirit into you, that amazing work of God is largely wasted if we stay away from people. When a man or woman is full of godly character, that simply must be seen somehow or it is like "hiding our light under a bushel." If you are somebody in Christ (and you are), then let it be observed by getting in the right context. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

Here is the idea:

1. Find a hanging out place, or several, in your area. This will be easier for some than others. I've even spent some time in the local hamburger place. For most this will have to be early in the morning before work, but others may be able to invest a bit more. The morning usually attracts the "regulars" that you will be best able to connect with.
2. Learn the names of the people you meet. It is good to jot their names down somewhere for reference.
3. Take your Bible and spend time reading it, writing notes in your notebook, or reading a good Christian book while out.
4. Keep a friendly, approachable look about you. Speak to people. Introduce yourself and find out about them. Focus much of your talk on them. They'll also be curious about you.
5. Seek to get to the layer of philosophical talk. What do these new friends believe about important issues of life and death? This makes for deeper and more significant relationships.
6. You will find that they will be curious about you and your beliefs also. Talk freely about what you believe and how you approach life.
7. Make friends, real friends, who will be important to you no matter what their spiritual preferences are. Love them for who they are.
8. If you have read something interesting that you can pass on, by all means do so, especially if it has something to do with the true love of your life, Jesus Christ.
9. Expect God to do something. Christians make a difference! You might help a fellow believer or a person who does not have a spiritual bone in his body. You

never know what God may be doing. The world reacts and responds to "lighted" Christians.

If you had just three years to make a major impact on the world, what would you do? Jesus spent His three years in constant motion, being with people as much as possible, and pulling away as necessary to pray and meditate. He gave special attention to the disciples, but, regardless, it was people that Jesus was about.

Now I realize my proposal can be misunderstood in a world that majors on production. Many rate their importance by how busy they appear to be. Well, there is a lot that I do and my wife sometimes calls me a workaholic, but I'm seeing things a bit better these days. I would like to be more like Christ who felt it was of utmost importance to be around people as much as possible.

And, hey, I've written this article while I've been hanging out!

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