Trending

Unfriended

April 19, 2015
Last of 3 services!

PRELUDE – Made New

Songs – Made New

Your Grace is Enough

Video Announcements – Rick/Shannon Feature Song – "For What It's Worth"

Battle lines being drawn, nobodies right if everybody's wrong. People in the streets carrying their signs mostly say "Hooray for our side"; Stop hey what's that sound everyone look what's going down.

As I was driving in to work one morning, this song came on and I found myself thinking it embodied how I was feeling that morning. I was feeling all wrecked inside from watching the venom that was spewing all over my facebook wall. Bruce/Caitlyn Jenner; The Supreme Court decision; the Confederate Flag; and many other hot topics were lighting up my wall and I was watching people I cared about fling mud left and right, insult the intelligence of people on the "other side" of them, question the integrity and character of others. It was so heartbreaking.

I remember stopping in with Rick to check on something and mentioning just my heartbreak over this and several other instances where social media was bringing out the less than desirable in those I love...and in me. He looked at me and said something like well Shannon sounds to me like you have found your sermon topic for July and it fits so nicely in to my hot topic series.

So, over the past month or so, I've been reading a lot and I've found more than enough articles that point to this growing hostility on the internet. The internet and social media weren't created with this purpose. In fact, in an article by former Reddit (a very popular on-line site that features entertainment, news and social networking) CEO, Ellen Pao, she says,

"The foundations of the Internet were laid on free expression, but the founders just did not understand how effective their creation would

be for the coordination and amplification of harassing behavior. Or that the users who were the biggest bullies would be rewarded with attention for their behavior. Or that young people would come to see this bullying as the norm — as something to emulate in an effort to one-up each other. As the Electronic Frontier Foundation, which was founded to help protect Internet civil liberties, concluded this year: "The sad irony is that online harassers misuse the fundamental strength of the Internet as a powerful communication medium to magnify and co-ordinate their actions and effectively silence and intimidate others."

What was started for good, what was meant to increase the exchange of ideas, the global connectedness through networks and the ability to maintain relationships and form new ones was being twisted.

And I'm certain if you are on social media, you too have seen the yuck that can be found there. Cyber bullies, trolls, haters roaming the internet wreaking havoc. The stories of people's lives getting ruined or even ending because of incessant, non-stop hate, venom and public shaming.

Recently several teenage girls who I'm friends with on FB posted a disturbing YouTube video of a woman with acne and the comments she received on-line and then the video shows her putting on makeup and the comments that were posted then. Truly it was an awful thing to see the hate that was directed at this woman. The extremely

derogatory words and venom that spewed over her appearance first as someone with acne and then as someone who was trying to cover it up. The video ends with some encouraging words for those who suffer but I found myself more concerned with the words that were tearing her down. Most of us know that you could hear 100 compliments and that one comment that shreds us is the one we will so often obsess over.

And after seeing that along with all the nastiness over the recent issues, I found myself thinking maybe we should just flush the whole thing down. Social media is just becoming a giant wasteland of garbage with more bad than good.

And as I considered that thought, I wondered if perhaps I was just old and jaded. Maybe it wasn't as bad as it seemed to me so as Rick mentioned in his blog post last week (which by the way if you don't get you can sign up via our website or app) I decided to ask my son.

Steven is our oldest and is going in to his senior year. He's been on social media since he turned 13, so about 5 years. For him (and his generation), social media has (and most likely will) always be a part of his social constructs. So I asked him about his view of social media and whether or not it had changed, let's listen:

VIDEO CLIP 1 (duration: 15 seconds)

Starts with "I would say its definitely shifted...

Ends with ...myself included"

What was meant for good has been twisted and is turning nice people into haters, triggering negative responses in many of us.

Now don't get me wrong, social media still has lots of redeeming qualities. It's great for seeing what's going on with out of town family and friends as well as those you see everyday. It's a great place to see vacation pictures, babies being born, weddings taking place, learn about new restaurants, read insightful articles, etc.

I like Social Media or this message would be all about quitting it.

What bothered me most about what I was seeing on FB and also in my own reactions was this movement from just disagreeing with someone and a movement more and more towards some behaviors that create this hateful environment, devolving into mud slinging and insulting one another.

I'm not talking about reasonable criticism where one disagrees with someone on a topic but rather hateful discourse where people clearing are not listening to one another and are cutting down the character of others.

An example of this is a friend of mine on FB who lives out of town. She was commenting about a gal she knew growing up who had been brought up on charges child abuse. She

was lamenting, being sad over what happened to this gal to lead her down this path.

The comments below her post blew up with people chastising her for siding with a child abuser, for taking the side of the perpetrator instead of the children and they called in to question whether she had any business working with children which is her career.

They completely missed what she was saying and her intent. She was not saying what the woman did was ok, she was not approving of it, she was simply wondering why and how this woman had come to this.

And I feel like I've been seeing that more and more. A failure to communicate and what

starts as a brush fire ignites into a forest fire of harsh words and insults.

As I spent time reading and reflecting and then talking with Steven, I began to identify some of the mindsets and behaviors that seemed to be turning these nice people in to haters.

In this clip, Steven hits on the first mindset.

VIDEO CLIP 2 (1 minute 7 seconds)

Starts with "When someones posted something...

Ends with...unnecessary aggression"

We see others as objects, not humans.

Did you catch what he said? When we interact over social media it's very easy to forget about the person on the other side of the screen is a person. It seems like you are just arguing with text. You forget about what the other person has been through, etc.

Rick hit on this same idea in his series Communication Matters from March of this year...he said far too often (especially when we are upset, hurt or irritated) we view others as objects, they are objects in our story. We devalue their opinions, their beliefs, their feelings, their experiences.

In order for us to lash out against someone, we have to lose touch with their humanity. We have to value them less.

So what does that look like?

Well, you might be viewing others as objects if you...

- -Minimize their experiences
- -Devalue their right to have an opinion that varies from yours
- -See them as something to be fixed and you are the one to fix them
- -Shut them down for disagreeing with you.
- -You spend less time trying to understand what they are saying and more time trying to prove your point.

- -You get frustrated when they don't respond, like, comment, etc. in a way that you want.
- -You post negative or critical information about others in your life: friends, spouse, coworker.
- -You post passive aggressive rants about how people don't measure up in hopes that those who are not behaving the way you want them to will get a clue.

When we get sucked in to this mindset, we become more and more self-absorbed and we lose touch with the fact that we are relating to other human beings who also have experiences, feelings, opinions, etc. We begin to treat others in a way we would never want to be treated.

The second mindset that I've picked up in me and others is this tendency to

Assume the worst about others.

When we assume the worst about others we fill in the blanks with what we assume to be true. We don't trust that they are good hearted people.

You might be assuming the worst if:

-You see a post about friends participating in some activity and you assume they purposefully left you out and are posting it just to rub it in.

- -You read other people's happy news as a way to one up you. You think they are posting about their great job, new relationship, kids accomplishments, etc. as a way to show you they are better than you.
- -You post about a tough time you are going through and your "so-called friends" don't respond, remark, or call so you assume that they don't care about you or they are selfish.

When we assume the worst about people instead of believing the best we assume that we are relating to people who have malicious intent toward us and in some cases that might be true but more often than not we are reading malice where there is none and we are horrible-izing people who are good people. They are not perfect but they also are

not people who are trying to intentionally do us harm.

The third mindset is

We adopt a tribe mentality.

When we fall in to this tribe mentality we seek out others who are in our tribe, who believe like we do and hold our same opinions and then we launch a war against them. The tribes that oppose us. We see them as the enemy.

Let's watch as Steven explains his perspective on this.

VIDEO CLIP 3 (1 minute 47 seconds)

Starts with "That sort of demonizing...

Ends with...which you just don't get over social media."

This same idea was illustrated in a book I just finished a few weeks ago called Scary Close. In this book, author Donald Miller who is by the way a follower of Jesus and hails from the left in his political persuasion. Anyway, in this story Don is talking with a Democratic political strategist. So Don is asking him about his job and the guy says,

"My job is to scare the hell out of senior citizens in southern Florida and convince them their medical benefits are going to be taken away," he said.

"Is that true?" Don asked.

"Not really," he said with a bit of regret in his eyes.

"But that's not the worst part," he continued. "The worst part is what we all do to each other. When a campaign gets to the national level, it gets ruthless. On both sides. You would think these candidates are big enough to take it, but nobody can take it. Every day on a television somewhere, you're being lied about. Your character is being assassinated. People turn and walk away from you at the grocery store. They pull their kids close. I've seen very powerful men reduced to tears. I've seen it happen with my candidates, and I'm sorry to say I've done it to others."

We (Don and the guy) talked for the better part of two hours. He talked about how when

he was young it was almost fun. It was a war. But he's old enough now to see the damage. The most frightening thing he said to me was this: "Don, you'd be surprised at how easy it is to convince the American people that a perfectly good man is a demon."

Don goes on to say, "I believe God is a fan of people connecting and I think the enemy of God is a fan of people breaking off into paranoid tribes....and I think...scaring people from the territory we feel compelled to defend is playing in to the hands of dark forces."

And honestly these days it's not just about political platforms but breastfeeding, vaccinations, public school vs private vs

homeschool and every other way we can think our way is better than your way.

We begin to look a lot like this cartoon.

And as we fall in to that tribe mentality we almost always display the first two mindsets...we relate to others as objects and we assume the worst about them.

The last mindset I want to talk about this morning (because I'm certain you all could point out several more but I'm also certain you all would like to leave some time today) is the one that was the most disturbing for me.

It's the mindset that I noticed creeping up in me and in many other fellow believers. This mindset is specific to those who are followers of Jesus and it looks like this.

We value being right over being Light.

I was especially saddened by people of faith who were taking out metaphorical 2x4s and smacking people down with them. Shaming people and climbing up on self-righteous pedestals to point out the sin of others without looking at their own.

It took me back to a time in college. This guy used to frequent our campus. He would set up soapbox in the center of our quad near the bookstore and start shouting at people to

repent...calling complete strangers out as fornicators, harlots and worse simply because they were maybe a short skirt or were holding hands. I remember watching the scene and seeing several people around the fringes of the quad. They were Christians who were pulling people aside and saying please don't assume that God is like this man. He is not a God of condemnation and they would seek to build relationships with the people to share the Gospel with them.

When we look at Jesus' ministry on earth we see that the people he took to task were the religious people. The ones who were walking around pointing out everyone else's sin and shortcomings without taking stock of their own.

That doesn't mean we are all grace with no truth. Jesus was not all grace. He pointed out truth and where people were living in sin but he did that through relationship. And frankly far too often we (I) burn bridges as believers because we want to point out someone's sin and the ways they aren't measuring up outside of relationship.

We forget that we are not called to be "right". The Bible doesn't say they will know we are Christians by our well-stated arguments that clearly show we have the superior intellect.

In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus says:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything,

except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

Unfortunately sometimes we think we are being salt and light but we are so obnoxious in our approach that we push people away from God instead of drawing them near him this is especially true when we are more focused on being right instead of being light.

So there you have it, social media can draw us in to these negative mindsets that turn otherwise nice people in to haters:

We see others as objects not humans
We assume the worst about others
We adopt a Tribe mentality (us vs them)
And We valuing being Right over being Light

So is social media really to blame for this? Should we just get rid of it all together?

Well honestly for some that may be exactly what needs to happen but let's be honest. Social Media really isn't the issue. We are.

I was talking to my husband Price and he was telling me about an article he read recently about the graffiti they were finding on

the walls in Pompeii. You know that ancient city that was swallowed up by volcanic ash. Long long long before FB, people were posting hate on walls. Literal walls filled with insults. Vile, harsh words cutting down others and long before there was a FB.

The truth is friends, we are sinners living in a sinful world. And by sinners, I mean we all are falling short of our intended design by God. We live at odds with Him and with each other. We were created to live in unity with God and with others but instead we fight against that.

We distrust God and others.

We get sucked in to this part of us that feels like we live in a giant game of King of the Mountain. We all struggle with proving we are better. We struggle with this comparison game always feeling like we are one up or one down to someone else in our life. We look good but they look better. We have a lot of blessings but they have more. We strive and claw to find our place and see if we matter.

And when those things go unchecked in us, when they are allowed to perpetuate, then what comes out of our mouth or off our fingertips as we type or text, is harsh, hateful, spiteful.

Because if we are playing King of the Mountain, there can only be one winner. And we will get sucked in to seeing others as objects, assuming the worst about them,

seeing ourselves as the Savior and judge and demanding that everyone fall in line behind us because after all we are God.

In Matthew 12:34-37, Jesus is speaking to a group of religious people and he says,

"For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."

The heart of this matter is our heart. What we have going on in there will determine how we

respond to God and others in real life and in our life on-line.

So my encouragement for myself and all of us on this topic is to remember and really try to live out the two commandments Jesus gave us.

In Matthew 22: 36-40 we read,

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Assuming we don't want to be haters and we want to be salt and light in this world, then we must address our heart. We must seek to Love God with all that we are and love others well.

So what does that look like on this topic specifically?

In order for us to grow in our love for God we actually have to spend time WITH God.

Yay you...you took a step in that direction today by coming to church. Prioritizing your time to be with God, to hear His word, to worship Him with others. Attending services is a great way to spend time WITH God.

You could spend time with God by coming to this upcoming worship concert we have on August 9th. On that night at 4 pm we will have a free concert from Carrollton. Worship concerts are a great way to reset your heart. To clean out the yuck and be reminded of who God is, the depth of His love and grace for you.

But in addition to these opportunities, you must also spend time alone with God. Just like it's good for a married couple to have friends they do life with or to spend time with their children it's also very important to focus on time just for them to grow their relationship.

We need to do the same with God. Prioritizing and intentionally creating space where we can be alone with Him. To read His word, to be silent before Him so He can speak to our hearts.

This is so difficult in this day and age where we are plugged in and constantly receiving in formation and updates but if we want our online selves to be healthy and less hateful, we will need to intentionally create time to be alone with God and as we spend time with alone with God, he will speak to our hearts. Cleaning our filters, removing the yuck, and helping us to see others as He sees them and removing those mindsets from our lives.

So to help reset our minds, we need to pursue God and spend intentional time with

Him, growing in our love for Him, and then we need to be intentional about growing in our love for people.

Some ways we can do that, specifically around this issue are to:

Intentionally disconnect from the addiction of social media and technology

Social media; our phones; electronics can cause our attention span to decrease, our patience to be minimized and feed that voice inside us that says it's all about me. To help reset our hearts and minds, taking an intentional time out from them will help us to love others well.

Proverbs 4:23 says:

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Calling a time out on this constant feedback and information, allows us to tend to our heart. As we disconnect, we not only connect with God but we can become more self aware of our attitudes towards others.

In our family, we occasionally call time out for our whole family; intentional family time or quiet time to say no to all the outside noise. When I find myself mindless scrolling through FB, or more interested in what people on-line are saying than the people sitting across from me, I know it's time to put the phone/laptop/iPad down.

So whether its an extended break from technology and social media or a self-imposed limitation like only 1x per day, or not while I'm at dinner or not while I'm walking through the grocery store, take some time to determine how you will intentionally disconnect so that you can help guard your heart and grow more in love with God and others.

Then when we do engage with social media (or other electronic communication-texting, emailing, etc), remember these words found

in the book of James, chapter 3:

the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. (James 3:5-9 NIV)

So keeping these words in mind as we go into the world of social media,

Remember the people you are interacting with on-line are real people.

When I asked about what advice Steven would give to his elders about being on Social media, he had this to say:

VIDEO CLIP 4 (1 minute 7 seconds)

Starts with "I would say make sure Ends with...instead just talk with them in real life "

It's so easy when we look at social media and these highlight reels of people's lives to forget what all we don't see. I became very aware of this this week. I was looking on FB and saw some extremely beautiful pictures of some folks I know. They were pics that were full of joy, peace, happiness, and were seemingly perfect.

But when I spent some time considering what I know of them in "real life", I got to thinking what most people don't see if they don't "know" them is the pain, fear, worry and heartache which is not shown in the pictures. We are seeing only the highlight reel and if we aren't careful, we'll miss the full story and forget that these are real people living real lives with real joy and real pain.

So when you are tempted to objectify someone or assume the worst about them, before you go and post something critical or harsh to or about someone, remember they are a real person with real feelings and you would do well to stop to consider them and what might be going in their life just like you would want them to give you that same consideration.

Remember they are a real person with real feelings and they really matter to God, just like you!

And speaking of real people...

Spend time in real life with real people.

Certainly real people in the real world are real messy. They have hurts, habits, and hangups. But we are called to be fishers of men; to be salt and light; to spread the good news that God is about the saving and redeeming of all who would call on His name.

While I was on vacation, I read this book I mentioned earlier called

Scary Close by Donald Miller.

I'm not a good reader and I'm not a fast reader but I devoured the book in a day and a half. The book is mostly the story of Don's journey to be in real relationships with real people. It challenged me and reminded me once again about the importance of engaging in real and authentic relationships.

By the way, this book is available on ereaders but we also have some copies in our bookstore. So if you are interested in a copy you can stop by the Well on your way out. Episcopal Priest and writer, Kira Schlessinger says it like this:

"It can scratch that self-righteous itch to right a wrong, to prove that I am a warrior for fairness and justice by rallying others to my cause simply by typing a few sentences and sending them through digital space. It is much easier to do that than to get involved on the ground in my own community, forming actual relationships with those who suffer or with those who hold different opinions. It is easier to nurse my faux outrage against someone I've never met than it is to do something tangible in the world around me."

I'm reminded of Romans 12:15
Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

Certainly we can and should do that with people both on and off line but our hearts grow in love for people when we have those kind of relationships in the flesh and blood.

Something in our hearts expands when we hug and jump with excitement with a friend when they get great news and when we sit and cry with a friend in their darkest moments. We are reminded once again that we are in community with real people experiencing real things.

And as you interact with these real people both on and off line, you

Control what you can...YOU

You can't control how others use of Social Media. I mean truly today, I'm speaking to you all but I have ZERO control over what you do with this.

I can't make you all go home and spend time alone with God or put yourselves in time out, I can only control what I do.

And with that in mind here's a few pieces of advice to help on this one.

Do not feed the trolls.

I have found myself getting sucked in on this one. There are people out there who love to stir the pot. They have no intention of listening to what you say they simply want to wreak havoc.

Remember this verse:

"Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. Matthew 7:6

If someone is displaying troll behavior on-line (ie stirring the pot), do not engage with them. Rather just pray for them and let it go. Trust me you'll be better off in the long run.

Limit communication if needed.

I can't control what people post and neither can you. If you find yourself getting repeatedly irritated by someone's posts, if you are finding yourself having a hard time believing the best about them, if you are wanting to respond harshly to them, it might be time to put some distance between their on-line self and you. On FB, you can unfollow them which just means you won't get regular updates from them. If the yuck goes away...yay...if it continues, you might need to have a real life conversation assuming they are someone you see in real life and not an out of town or friend from the past. In that case, just unfollowing should help. Unfollowing is different than unfriending. Unfriending burns a bridge. Unfollowing may help keep it intact.

And finally, use your words to build others up, not tear them down.

Help restore social media to what it was created for...you can't control the trolls and others' behaviors but you can control yours.

Help create a healthier place by monitoring your own feedback, posts, comments, etc.

I love this interview with Dr. Douglas Groothuis, Professor of Philosophy at Denver Seminary conducted by Tony Reinke of Desiring God. In the interview the professor says,

"We need to have integrity when we are online. We should do it prayerfully. We need to resist impulses. And I don't always successfully do this. I have deleted not a few Facebook posts," he said. "But remember that we are doing this before the face of God and we are interacting with eternal beings. We are having an effect on people's destinies, even through a Twitter message. I think if we take that kind of approach it gives

us a sense of gravitas and we are less likely to become flippant. Glibness and flippancy are terrible vices in our age. So many times in Scripture we are told to be careful with our words. Proverbs says this over and over again. We are told to be careful how we speak and let our words be few (Proverbs 10:19–21; 17:27). These technologies allow us to talk endlessly. It may not be the physical voice, but it is some kind of message."

"I think we need to edit ourselves more," he said, iv

Truly this whole concept of the power of our words could be a whole series...oh wait it already was. I want to strongly encourage you if you find yourself struggling with speaking or typing words that tear others

down instead of building them up, revisit the series

Communication matters from March.

Rick covered so much excellent stuff. So much so I almost just re-read you all his messages from that series. I will repost the link to those messages on our FB wall today but you can find them on our website and also at our app.

But just as a quick reminder in that series we took a

detailed look at these words from James..

Be quick to speak, quick to get angry and slow to listen.NOT

Oh wait...that's not right...far too often that's what do but

James encourages us

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

James 1:19-20

So as we close,

Let's remember these words from Ephesians 4:23,

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for

building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Of course as believers we know that our ability to Love God and Love Others is something that happens when God is first. We have to come to him first and allow him to do work in us.

So I want to invite you all in the next minute to get quiet, to spend time with God letting him speak to your heart.

While Nathan plays there will be a slide that prompts your thinking. After that I've asked our band to come play a song that reminds us that everything we say and type, has tremendous power.

Let's pray...

Reflection: Nathan instrumental

Feature: Words

Closing Benediction:

Lord let that be true of us. May our words

whether spoken or typed build others up not

tear them down.

For those of us who have said we want to

follow you, help us to fight the need to be

right and helps us to be light in this dark and

hurting world. Help us to monitor ourselves,

to bring joy and hope and healing, truth and

grace and to point this world back to you. Let

our words bring glory to you God!

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Amen.

Closing Comments:

Teacher Supply Giveaway-This week..please pray...11 am help

Remember next Sunday we begin our new service times. What time are you coming? 9 or 10:30. 9 am has breakfast treats©

Oh and as you leave, enjoy these tips for social media from Steven.

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https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/we-cannot-let-the-internet-trolls-win/2015/07/16/91b1a2d2-2b17-11e5-bd33-395c05608059_story.html?tid=sm_tw

ii Donald Miller, Scary Close, pages 123-124

http://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6105/who-would-jesus-publiclyshame?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm

_content=WHO%20WOULD%20JESUS%20PUBLICLY%20SHA ME%3F&utm_campaign=E-news%2006172015

iv http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/six-ways-your-phone-is-changing-you