

Spiritual Family Gatherings

This week (July 6, 2010) my husband and I are back in the Chicago area, where we both grew up. We're enjoying a few days with his family first, and then mine. Both of us are from large families; I'm #1 of seven children, he's #3 of six. Most of our siblings have children, and some have their own grandkids, which means a lot of people when we gather.

There are no intentional, earth-shaking conversations, but important conversations happen while we're just hanging out with each other. They're important because they solidify our connections with each other.

In our families, there's fun too. Different kinds of fun, since our family cultures are quite different. In my husband's family, we enjoy "the littles," being their charming toddler selves when they have sufficient sleep and food. (And we give grace when they're not so charming because they need a nap or a snack.) One of the things my family is looking forward to is a gig where my brother's terrific band is playing. He's a marvelous keyboardist and entertainer, and they cover other people's songs. It's fun to clap and sing and watch Brother Bill bounce and sway at the piano with an enormous amount of energy, rejoicing at the way he displays his giftings.

The reason we came up here is for a family reunion fueled by Facebook connections. Some of us have reconnected online, and it will be good to spend time face to face as adults for the first time. Others of us only see each other every few years at a wedding or funeral, and it will be such a blessing to just gather together simply to be together.

Family connections are different from any other. Blood relatives share genes and family history that have their own special kind of bonds. Cousins can enjoy a unique connection with each other that goes beyond same-age friends.

So often, God gives us earthbound experiences and illustrations to help us understand spiritual truths. When I think of the biblical injunction to “forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as is the habit of some” (Hebrews 10:25), I think about how God wants us to connect with and enjoy our spiritual family the way we can enjoy our physical families.

When we hang out with our spiritual family, important conversations can happen simply because we’re together. There is fun to be had in these families, especially when people exercise the gifts God gave them.

There is certainly a different depth of connection with our spiritual family. We are blood relatives, because we are bound together by the blood of the Lord Jesus, Who bought us for Himself. We share spiritual DNA and the privilege of being family as well as friends.

And, at least in the cultures I am aware of, anywhere in the world, where the spiritual family gathers, there is always food. When we gather together, we should always remember why we are family, Whose family we are, and invite Him to the party. We can and should always remember the Lord whenever we break bread together, even if the bread is hot dog buns!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/spiritual_family_gatherings

Leaving Christianity

Last week (August 3, 2010), writer Anne Rice—author of *The Vampire Chronicles*—publicly renounced Christianity, but not

Christ, on her Facebook page. In 2004 she had come back to her Roman Catholic roots after a foray in atheism, during which time she wrote her vampire books. She later identified these books as reflecting her quest for meaning in a world without God. Embracing Jesus as her Savior, Anne announced that she would henceforth “write only for the Lord.” Her next two books were *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* and *Christ the Lord: Road to Cana*, chronicling the life of Jesus.

But now she’s had enough of the church:

“For those who care, and I understand if you don’t: Today I quit being a Christian. I’m out. I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being ‘Christian’ or to being part of Christianity. It’s simply impossible for me to ‘belong’ to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group. For ten years, I’ve tried. I’ve failed. I’m an outsider. My conscience will allow nothing else.”

A few hours later, she followed up her post with this:

“As I said below, I quit being a Christian. I’m out. In the name of Christ, I refuse to be anti-gay. I refuse to be anti-feminist. I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control. I refuse to be anti-Democrat. I refuse to be anti-secular humanism. I refuse to be anti-science. I refuse to be anti-life. In the name of Christ, I quit Christianity and being Christian. Amen.”

She reaffirmed her faith in Christ with a lack of faith in Christianity an hour or so later with the following post:

“My faith in Christ is central to my life. My conversion from a pessimistic atheist lost in a world I didn’t understand, to an optimistic believer in a universe created and sustained by a loving God is crucial to me. But following Christ does not mean following His followers. Christ is infinitely more important than Christianity and

always will be, no matter what Christianity is, has been, or might become.”

This breaks my heart, for several reasons.

First, she has a valid point about what “Christianity” has been shaped to look like in many churches and in many individuals: that it’s more what we’re *against* than what we’re *for*. See the book [unChristian: What a New Generations Really Thinks About Christianity. . . And Why it Matters](#). Shallow discipleship has created an ugly characterization of what the Church, and Christians, are supposed to look like.

Second, she doesn’t understand that while Christ is the Head, the Church is His Body. No one can take themselves out of the Body of Christ without harm, just as a physical body is harmed if one hand chops off the other. Christianity is about Jesus, not the unfortunate misunderstandings of what it means to follow Him. But God calls us to do life in community, not on our own. Maybe Anne needs to find a different faith community than the one she’s been in.

Third, in a battle between her cherished beliefs and values and the Bible’s, hers are winning. Spiritual maturity means we submit ourselves to the authority and power of the Scriptures and of the Holy Spirit, resulting in our transformation. And that includes changing the way we think when our thoughts and desires collide with what God has revealed as truth. No one wins, in the end, when we refuse to be informed and formed by what God says, but Anne Rice cherishes her beliefs more than those of the Jesus she wants to follow. That is tragic.

I’m praying for her eyes to be open on several levels. I invite you to pray for her as well.

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