

The Lost Art of Lingerin

Getting beyond superficial relationships in a fast-paced world.

Shawn Young

Don't apply the "cheap and easy" mentality of consumerism to relationships with God and each other.

Have you ever noticed how long it takes to make microwave popcorn? "Delicious popcorn in only three minutes!" Well, that's what it says on the bag, but standing there waiting for it to get done seems like an eternity.

We live in a microwave society. We've come to expect that everything in life will take only three minutes. But the best things, the most important things in life, cannot be microwaved. Our relationship with God and our fellowship with one another are two of the greatest things in life, yet we have scarcely understood how these relationships grow. It troubles me to see things like The One-Minute Study Bible. Do we really expect to have a meaningful relationship with God if all we can give him is one minute of our time? In the same way, we fill our schedules with so many "good" things, that we don't have time for true fellowship with other believers in Jesus.

When I first came to the University of Nevada at Reno, I noticed a trend among the Christian students. They made themselves busy going to every Christian concert, fellowship night and party, but struggled with shallow relationships. Just because we do more doesn't mean we are doing better. We American Christians have taken the "cheap and easy" mentality of consumerism, and applied it to our relationships with God and each other. As a result, we have many acquaintances but few committed friendships. We know trivial things about God and about other people and have stopped expecting anything more. We are surrounded by Christians, yet we have a nagging feeling of loneliness. Our efficient machines which promised to give us more leisure time have only increased our expectations and anxiety about being more productive. We have lost our appetite for the deeply satisfying rewards of true fellowship. The fact is, we are afraid of real Christian fellowship because it takes—you guessed it—*time*. If it can't be cooked in under three minutes, we don't want it. Somewhere between the microwave and the microchip, our society has lost the great art of lingering.

Last fall our Bible study leaders made a small but radical decision. They were meeting each week to study the passage they were going to lead the next week. They loved learning together, and would often take two hours just to study the passage because they wanted to answer every question thoroughly. Halfway through the semester, we evaluated how the leaders' meeting was going, and the leaders all agreed that two hours was not enough time to prepare for Bible study and still deepen their relationships with each other. So they decided to add another hour to the meeting just to share more about their lives with one another. This is a refreshing sign in a culture where Christians bring cellular phones to church, check their watches ten times during the service and then bolt for the exit as soon as the pastor offers his closing prayer. Our leaders are discovering the lost art of lingering—allowing enough time to discuss the really important things in life and taking time to get to know one another.

It didn't take long for us to see the benefits of lingering. One time, one of our leaders took the opportunity to share about her struggle with sexual temptation. This led to other leaders confessing their temptations, and then we spent more time in prayer for healing. On another night, we talked about our families and how they've influenced us. As we took turns talking, it was clear that as a group we were moving to a new level of trust. I was astonished at how much I didn't know about the people I was leading with!

If we want to experience the meaning of true fellowship, we must learn to make the conscious choice to linger. It will require making fewer commitments to all those good things so that we can go deeper into some of the *best things*, including relationships with people. We need to have unhurried conversations without the nagging worry that we are going to be late for something else. There are nights when I sit in the busy campus coffee shop just because I know I will see someone from our group with whom I can have a relaxed but meaningful conversation. Some of my most enjoyable times in ministry have happened in that coffee shop as I listened and asked questions late into the night.

Learning to Linger

The first step is to set aside ample time. Most people have to schedule their lingering at the start. When you hope to linger with someone, don't schedule other things too close to it. Allow an hour or so for extra lingering!

Since I love to snowboard, and it takes at least three hours to get in a good "ride," I always take along someone I want to linger with. The 45 minutes in the car each way is great for talking. I've spent several wonderful times with my friend Mark on the slopes. Other kinds of road trips are also good for rich conversations and shared experiences.

On commuter campuses, you have to take advantage of the times when you can get together. On our campus, some of the leaders just wouldn't go home after our large-group meetings because they wanted to further their conversations. Perhaps you could also linger with your pals somewhere after large-group meetings.

We're all busy, so you have to create time for lingering. Ben and Ardrena were busy freshmen who found that they were really encouraged by conversations with their Bible study leader, Estelle. Since she worked nights at the front desk of a dorm building, Ben and Ardrena decided to sit with her during some of her shifts so they could talk more about what they covered in Bible study as well as discuss other things on their minds.

Ask questions. So many great conversations get started by a thoughtful question. Linger is not watching TV with other people in silence, but rather an exchange of thoughts, ideas, stories and even Scripture. It is personal interaction that benefits the heart, soul and mind.

Our fellowship has started some dorm Bible studies in the late afternoon around 4:00 p.m. This is so the group members can more naturally spend extended time with each other by eating dinner together after Bible study.

In our blinding, busy, breathless world, we are becoming lonely, unconnected and shallow. Current culture claims that we are into hanging out together. In reality, we are at risk of losing all sense of community and belonging. Some of us sit alone in our rooms before a glittering screen and grow isolated. Others of us squeeze God and other important relationships into the cracks of our overbusy lives and wonder why we feel so empty. The machinery of today's culture that promises productive satisfaction doesn't deliver. As difficult and costly as it may seem, we need to "waste" more time on the things that really satisfy our deepest longings. Lingering is just one good way to "rage against the machine."

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