

Paraklēsis: Network

String, or thread is a pretty useful thing. Think of all that you can do with a length of twine. Binding, securing, weaving, fishing (if you have a hook,) dragging, climbing, whipping, flossing, archery, fire starting... it's a great tool and weapon. There's a good reason that someone invented a "survival bracelet," which is a long length of strong, thin cord, configured (braided?) in a way to make an aesthetic pattern that can be worn around your wrist. I imagine it could save your life if you found yourself stranded in the woods, Naked and Afraid. The configuration of the string can greatly vary its utility. I'm thinking of a net. Really it is just a string, knotted in a clever way to catch fish, small game, soccer balls, butterflies, etc... Nets have been around, helping us for a long, long time. Allegedly, the first nets used for hunting were from thousands of years BC.

It seems that the two (English) words "net" and "work" were first put together in the mid 1500's. Can you guess where? The 1560 Geneva Bible - [Exodus 27:4](#) (the link takes a while to load...it's a large PDF) The Hebrew that Moses wrote was originally two words "resheth" (H7568) and "ma'āšeh" (H4639) Which is literally "work net" and the passage is describing the grate in the bronze altar.

These days, the most popular use for the word by far is with reference to computers - the "inter-net(work)" and "intranets" seem to rule our lives - and a Google search for the words "net" or "network" will leave you little, if any, other reference. If you're searching for the type of net that is used to catch fish or soccer balls, you need to add other words to your search field.

But, it was only about 70 years ago that English speakers started using "network" with respect to people and their relationships. Good thing it happened, though, as this is my favorite usage of the word. I am a successful mechanical design engineer. I am happy to use the word "successful" because my objective definition of the word is that I get to do something I love and all my bills are paid. And, I praise God for that daily. Other than God's blessing in this, I attribute my success to my network. I never have to advertise, and only three times in my career as a consultant have I had to actively look for work. Most of the time I have to say "no" to jobs because I am too busy. Many people have heard me say, and my kids are surely sick of hearing me say, "your network is your most valuable resource." Others say, "It's not what you know, it's who you know." Your network is a resource that can be cultivated and increased through your own personal effort.

But, just because the term was not coined for use with personal relationships until the 1940's, does not mean that the phenomenon is at all new. I am always intrigued with the letters that Paul wrote to the churches. That man was a networking master, I think. He kept in touch with all the people that he ministered to over the years - even before email! Think about writing a letter while in a prison and somehow getting it delivered across "the world" in the days of sailing ships. I wonder how many letters he wrote that did not survive the centuries. Toward the end of 2Cor 10, Paul makes reference to the benefit we receive when those in our network increase - and vice versa. "...but with the hope that as your faith grows, we will be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you..." Did you know, God has His own LinkedIn page? It's called the Book of Remembrance. "Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name." (Malachi 3:16) It doesn't say that "those who feared the Lord" were in the same congregation, (and I don't believe they were) yet they spoke to each other - somehow. I hope and pray that God accepts my link request!

Years after I recognized the effectiveness that my network had on my "occupation," I realized that the same technique and tool should be used on my spiritual walk. After all, what really is my occupation? I should

occupy myself with drawing close to God. I love my profession; being an engineer is something I really enjoy. But, I am learning that my occupation is to seek an ever closer relationship with my Savior. A semantic argument, possibly, but my networking skills and habits can and should be used for both.

I am reminded of Hal Geiger's presentation on the Sukkot - that it was made of branches that are intertwined and woven like a net. Maybe calling him out will generate some elaboration!

Consider these scriptures with respect to networking:

*"...not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging** one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:25)*

(there's that word again: **parakaleō**)

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (Romans 12:4-5)

"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." (Matthew 18:20)

And again He said, "To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? "It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened." (Luke 13:20-21)

Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

For thus says the LORD, "Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, And shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise and say, 'O LORD, save Your people, The remnant of Israel.' "Behold, I am bringing them from the north country, And I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth, Among them the blind and the lame, The woman with child and she who is in labor with child, together; A great company, they will return here. "With weeping they will come, And by supplication I will lead them; I will make them walk by streams of waters, On a straight path in which they will not stumble; For I am a father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn." Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, And declare in the coastlands afar off, And say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him And keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock." (Jeremiah 31:7-10)

'Thus says the Lord GOD, "When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and will manifest My holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob. "They will live in it securely; and they will build houses, plant vineyards and live securely when I execute judgments upon all who scorn them round about them. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God."'" (Ezekiel 28:25-26)

Surely there are many, many more. What did I forget? We are many parts of the Body and together make a beautiful whole. Let's stick together.

Glory to God & Peace to you.

-Nate

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