

WEAVING

Back in the 90's, there was a sort of trivia game called "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon." The concept became better known as "Six Degrees of Separation."

The theory is that we are linked by as few as six people to almost anyone, especially someone famous,and many found the concept was fascinatingly true.

That notion comes as no surprise to ethnic Mennonites... who are very skilled at playing the "Mennonite Game"—which is the drawing of blood lines to countless people.

If we think about it, we'll discover that we are connected to thousands of people and to many, many things.

Our actions, thoughts, passions and associations form a complex web that ties us to a wide assortment of people and activities.

And, our web / our connections are constantly changing because our purchases, travels, interests and our active relationships leave fresh new footprints. Some paths/ links are more pronounced / stronger, yet they all tie us to the world we live in a varied myriad of direct and indirect connectivity.

Our many tentacles – the web we form—makes us stronger and more influential. *Knowing someone who can get you good tickets to a Flames' game is a nice advantage.*

Some connections are very strong, some are quite weak,... and some are less than desirable.

Such as our link to oil companies each time we buy gas... or to the bullets that are fired in Afghanistan with our tax money.

Granted, those are feeble ties, yet they are still part of our web.

Some ties are stronger than others because of the energy / our personal passion that we pour into them,... and repetition of use also fortifies the bond.

Have you ever felt sad when you got rid of an object, such as a car?

Familiarity and personal experiences can be a strong glue.

Many factors effect how we get attached to things and people, and some are even surprising.

The Stockholm Syndrome is when captives forge a sympathetic loyalty to their captors, even when there is abuse. That strange affection happens to 27% of victims.

And, to be sure, hate and anger manufactures strong connections to what or who is despised.

Moreover, we can be persuaded to enhance and strengthen our ties.

Commercials encourage and reinforce loyalty to a product, making the link more durable.

A sense of reward prompts us to beat a heavier path.

Fear and the sense of a self-preservation need pushes people to make interesting links, such as to money, investments and even the affirmation of brute force,.... *for defensive reasons, of course.*

Nevertheless, we do have a degree of control over what we are attached to.... and to the intensity of those attachments.

We can chose to get involved with MCC or a church, and we usually select our friends and partners, ... hopefully selected with wisdom.

My mother loved to use aphorisms.

One was, "If you hang around dogs, you'll get fleas."

It was her way of saying, "Choose your friends—your connections—carefully.

I didn't particularly like her motherly advice, but.... she was right.

Friendships are ties/ passages to people,.... and the flow / the influence can go both ways. So, it is important to consider who and what we are bound to and how we spend our time.

Our web / our connections do expand our influences, and they can make us stronger.... in the same way that a net is much stronger than a bunch of loose and separate ropes.

People working and sharing together can accomplish much more than if all the individuals are working alone.

That is why we have a government, the Foodgrains bank, MCC, churches, and so on.

In addition, churches are stronger when they are connected to other churches. We are more.....

because we are part of MC Saskatchewan, MC Canada,.... and the World Mennonite Conference,.... and the list of our connections are beyond those, too.

Furthermore, our ties/ connections are **not** like links of a chain.

Our strength is NOT determined by a weak link.... because we are interconnected like a weaving. We are in a web / a union / a relationship, and a relationship / the union is more than the sum of the parts.

To thrive.... to fully live..... we need good and healthy relationships.

We need to nurture and celebrate our life-giving connections, especially when God is at the core of those ropes that tie us together.

As a church, we sing together, serve and worship together, share and study together, and eat together—all activities that enhance the bond.

Rejoicing and receiving new members, as we did today, is another way.

Also, sharing in communion together reminds us of our mutual and purposeful bond to Christ in our group and all Christians groups.

In addition, we have ties that go back centuries: to Jesus, John the Baptist and to Abraham.

In the Matthew passage, Jesus chose to strength his tie to John the Baptist.... by taking on John's message of repentance.

The Baptist was a part of Jesus. *Relations have that sort of affect, and so John the Baptist is connected to us, too.*

Jesus then sought to broaden his relationships. He understood the power of being interconnected with others. He called disciples to be a strong tie in his web.

After that, they went out to the people, forming more connections,... preaching the good news and helping those suffering and in need.

They invited people in, especially the weak, broken and alone.

There is truly power and strength in relationships..... when God's love pours through those ties..... realized in Christ.

We know this, and we also know personal relationships can be difficult and challenging, too. All bonafide relationships have tensions and struggles, including churches. **That is normal**,..... unfortunately, reconciliation and grace that leads to healing.... can be sometimes be abnormal.

Paul frequently encountered congregations entrenched in stubborn and self-serving conflicts.

To the Corinthians, he wrote, "Don't be divided, instead be of one accord.... in Christ."

I only wish that broken relationships could be so easily solved with a command. I wonder how the Corinth church reacted?

Nevertheless, Paul's message is true: focussing on Christ,..inviting Love–God into our relationships keeps our connections vibrant and life giving, and therefore... the union / the web thrives and becomes a vision, a healing light for all.

Paul called this dynamic.... "Being saved– The power of God."

Also note that we merely contribute our part / our selves to this process, and each part / our role is often different and unique from others'.

Paul's part was to proclaim the Good News; he rarely baptized anyone.

With love, we give our part, and the relationship grows and thrives.

Love makes strong connections!

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And sometimes, unfortunately, those huge relationship ties are cut or broken, and when that happens the pain and the anguish are intense.

Disconnecting from God affects us in many destructive ways, and.... when a loved one dies..... the sorrow and affliction can be unbearable.

Severed arteries in a relationship steals life from us.

Life is complex, challenging, unpredictable and full of surprises.

Delight, Joyand dread may happen to us.

Divorce is another example of monumental connections being torn up and disfigured.

Is it any wonder that anger is usually associated with divorce?

It takes a tremendous amount of energy and emotion to chop away at all the stout tethers formed over many years. ...terribly sad.

Numerous things, such as neglect, destructive words, illness, physical and emotional abuse, addictions, aloofness and condemnation can tear and rip apart the ties in a relationship.

And, the person– his or her life– is **left** shredded, torn and tattered,...feeling much weaker, and more vulnerable and alone in the world.

In the Newton, Kansas MCC Thrift store, there is a loom by the front window. I understood a number of Thrift stores have looms.

The volunteers gently and patiently take old, worn out and shredded pieces of clothing and carefully weave them together.

With the love that creates NEW they “SAVE” those tattered parts and weave them into a new creation that is strong, interconnected and very beautiful.

That is what God does! That is the Good News through Christ, and that is what we do,..... and that is who we are: weavers woven together. We are weavers woven together.