

for quantity, thoughtfulness for speed. Today, instead of talking face-to-face, we resort more and more to texting or postings on social media sites. That enables us to stay in touch with a greater number of people than was possible twenty or thirty years ago and to do so much more quickly. As one writer pointed out in the *Wall Street Journal*: “Texting is all about speed and convenience ... It’s about making brief comments ... It’s about getting quick answers (“Love Is a Many-Splintered Thing,” by Jim Sollisch, 8/21/12). OK. That may be a good thing. We’re all busy and we appreciate the efficiency that technology brings. But what happens if all, or most, of our communications take this form? As the *Wall Street Journal* writer pointed out: “In all this hurry, there isn’t time to explore emotions, and the end result is often a deep-seated feeling of loneliness.”

Moreover, are all the people on our Facebook page *really* our friends? Or is the Facebook “friend” a clever marketing euphemism, which we apply indiscriminately to all those who fall within our ever-expanding circle of contacts? You sometimes hear people boast that they have 100 or 200 friends on Facebook. That may be a good thing ... or not. As social psychologists have recently discovered, there is a profound sense of loneliness among people who spend inordinate amounts of time on social media sites. The apparent irony is this: “How can you be lonely with 200 friends?” In her book *Alone Together*, clinical psychologist Sherry Turkle says: “Research portrays Americans as increasingly insecure, isolated, and lonely. We expect more from technology and less from each other.”

When I mentioned the apparent irony of increasing loneliness despite an abundance of Facebook friends, I chose the word “apparent” deliberately. Because any intelligent person, upon reflection, will realize that all those contacts on social media sites do not constitute true friends. Some may be, but many are not. In light of all this, social networking technology (despite its obvious benefits) has a potential downside, which consists of (1) A watering down of traditional friendship to a fragmented relationship of convenience; (2) A blurring of the lines between casual acquaintances and real friends; and (3) An erosion of the virtues that traditionally have made friendship special, to be replaced by the trivial, artificial, and superficial. As a result, many people have deluded themselves into thinking they have more friends than they really do. They’ve confused quantity with quality, popularity with durability, and