

# Why Do We Visit?

She had been waiting. The coffee table was set. It was a festive day for Senja. She was getting visitors! My wife, children, and I entered the house filled with the charm of yesteryear. We sat down to visit and began asking her about leaving the Old Country and coming to the New World. My children, separated by over 80 years of life and experience from our white-haired, warm and friendly hostess who walked across her quaint living room assisted by a cane, took it all in. They were able to get a taste of my childhood when there were so many more first generation immigrants to visit. Senja made them feel important by talking to them through her wide smile. Her broken English only added flare to the unique experience. Senja told us of how God had led her to His kingdom through her neighbor, and we talked about our mutual faith and the common destination. We left assuring one another with the sweetest message, “Believe all sins forgiven in Jesus’ name and blood.” To this day, my children remember that visit so long ago.

## **Treasured Memories**

Looking back through the years, I, too, remember, with my siblings, sitting at the feet of my aunt and preacher uncle, and those believers who were close to my mother and father. There was that man and woman from Finland, the train-whistle guy and his white-haired wife, the lady who always gave candy in church, and so many others. When we gathered, the hymns rang out with warmth and familiarity. As a little boy, I felt safe and happy. Christian love brought security.

My wife recalls a similar time. She, the youngest in her family, had “old parents,” and they often visited the “old people.” She sometimes wished there were kids to be with at those elders’ homes, but now those visits are some of her most treasured memories that more than compensate for the lost playtime. She remembers one time when her family hurried to get all the farm chores done early so they could together go out to eat at a restaurant—indeed a rare experience! As they were about to leave, a car pulled in the driveway. Then a knock on the door: “Are you going to be home this evening?” “Oh, yes!” her mother replied with a warm smile on her face and both hands extended in greeting. The disappointed children nibbled on what they could from the pantry. From those visits, listening to conversations of the elders, she learned life’s lessons and Christianity of the heart.

## **We Need Each Other**

With today’s fast pace of life we rarely just pop in on someone. Often we are even afraid to call to “invite ourselves” to someone’s home or to invite guests to our home. “They have something else going,” we often think. “They’ve been so busy lately. Surely they don’t want company.” We spend the time wondering what to do. By the time we decide, it’s too late to do anything. The fast pace of life has stolen visiting time from many. For many of us a large part of our human interactions have become “electronic.”

Why, then, do we visit? As people we need to feel connected to and liked and supported by others. “As people we’re created to with each other be” (SHZ 420:1). Most importantly, visiting strengthens faith, provides Christian fellowship, and provides answers to our specific questions. Sometimes we go visiting downcast from the cares of life and leave strengthened and encouraged. On the other hand, we all need quiet time, too. Sometimes too much interaction with people at work, school, and the events of everyday life require us to rest our minds and bodies.

## **Managing Technology**

While technology has opened new possibilities for connection to people not present, sometimes even far away, it has also

taken away from face to face connection. As a family we enjoy visiting my 93-year-old mother. In those visits I have noticed that too often too many of us are answering text messages, searching the web, checking GroupMe, and so on. Grandma gets left out; I can see it on her face. I compete for being the biggest offender.

Once when we were visiting in another home, my son had to reprimand me when I was spending too much time on my phone researching something that had come up in the conversation. Do we always need such immediate answers? Someone recently said that we can't even have any "good arguments" anymore with Google around. When we're gazing at our phones, we should ask ourselves: Who are we visiting with? The folks around us, or those not present? Are we fully engaged in the conversation with those around us? Sometimes I have left a visit feeling empty and unfulfilled when I have spent too much time on the screen, not engaged in the conversation.

### **A Tie that Binds**

When I look back at those visits that have gotten left in my mind, they are the ones in which I have felt connection to the dear friends I have visited. They are the times when we shared the smaller and bigger things of life. We listened and talked in proportion to the two-to-one ratio of ears and mouths our Creator gave us. Most importantly, the visits in lasting memory are those where the songs of Zion have warmed my heart, questions of faith have been discussed and understood by faith, and I have heard the reassuring gospel message, "Believe all sins forgiven in Jesus' name and blood." Then I have left comforted. Then I have left content. It felt good to be there.

### **Keith Waaraniemi**

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How can we overcome the obstacles to visiting?
2. While visiting are we timid to bring up questions of faith or to suggest singing songs of Zion?
3. How can we minimize "electronic noise" in our visits?
4. What is your favorite visiting memory?

### **A "Home and Family" Idea**

To encourage more visiting, the Glendale, Ariz. congregation's Home and Family committee is arranging congregational "hops" on the first Friday of each month. All members are encouraged to take part. One person is in charge of finding four or five host families each month. A sign-up poster is put up with slots for the recommended number of guests at each home. There is no structure for the evening other than singing. Everyone brings a snack to share.

"So far it has worked great and the response has been positive," Home and Family rep Stephan Forstie says. "It's a good icebreaker for people who have not typically visited in the past."