LET YOUR FRIENDS KNOW WHERE YOU ARE...

Posted on January 29, 2018 by Eddie

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Category: Observations

Why do apps and websites insist on us sharing everything with our friends (and complete strangers)?

I'm not an online luddite; I share stuff via Facebook and Twitter, I have a LinkedIn account (though I haven't a clue what to do with it) and there is probably a Google+ account in my name somewhere. I'm perfectly happy to share some stuff online, but I honestly don't understand why things are pushed to the extent they are by some apps and services. When I finish a run, my phone tells me to share my workout with my friends so they can see how awesome I am. I've got another app which tells me what is on TV and which suggests that I share what I plan to watch so that my friends will all know (it's probably Midsomer Murders).

I must admit that I was slightly amused this morning by the news that military personnel have been sharing their runs online through the Strava app and have inadvertently leaked the location of secret military bases. Who needs a sophisticated spy network? All you need is a Strava account and Google maps!

There is a serious side to this; there are mission workers who can't share details of the work they are doing with a wider public. It could be because they are working in a situation where the government or the prevailing religion is actively hostile to Christianity and it is almost certainly because publicising their work would put local believers at risk. There are situations where sharing a photo of yourself and a few friends on Facebook can have serious consequences.

The problem is that we are living in a context where it is expected that people will share everything. Where mission partners are able to put great stories and videos on Facebook and where they can instantly share stories of amazing success.

It can be discouraging for people working in sensitive situations to see all of the things that their colleagues in more open contexts can share. More worryingly, in a situation where a blizzard of news and information is expected, it can appear that those working in closed countries aren't actually doing anything - after all, if they had anything to share, they would share it.

My concern is that people will shift their support from those who don't talk about their work (because they can't) to those who can and do share exciting stories on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This is all the more concerning, because it is very often those who are in the hard situations, the ones they can't talk about, who have the most need of committed, long-term prayer support.

OK, I'll admit that I have no hard evidence that this is happening, but given the way that the internet and socialÂ media works, I would be very surprised if it were not. So while we are all clicking "like" on Facebook posts from mission friends, let's also take a moment to pray for people who can't post exciting pictures online, but who are faithfully sharing Christ in places where being a Christian is a dangerous business. This sort of thing is rubbish on social media, but it is how the Kingdom of God is

announced.