

Introduction

Communication is something most of us can struggle with at some time. Poor communication is the cause of most relationship issues and can be one of the hardest things to learn to do well.

Without communication we would not exist. God communicated and the Holy Spirit created. His creation speaks louder than anyone or anything else ever.

Psalm 19:1 – 4a

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech; they use no word; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”

The way we communicate can set the course of our whole relationship with someone.

James 3:2 – 6

“We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”

What is communication?

Colins Dictionary defines communication as:

'The act or an instance of communicating; the imparting or exchange of information, ideas or feelings.'

Communication is not just a word thing; it is an action, word and listening thing. Communication should always be a 2-way exchange between people. If not, then there is no communication, but rather a lecture being delivered by one person to the other. So good communication between people should leave both people feeling heard, appreciated, understood and confident.

If we are communicating effectively, then we actually reduce the risk of any misunderstanding or conflict.

Communication

As parents we can't wait for our children to be able to talk so they can communicate to us what they want or need in words rather than with cries or non-verbal cues. We think they can't communicate with us, but in reality, we are just not listening.

As mentioned, communication is not just about reciting words and that's it. We communicate to each other every day in many ways text, phone, email, letters, actions, facial expressions, etc. These are all communicating our thoughts, emotions, ideas, etc.

It has been said that communication is 90% non-verbal. I am not sure whether it is that high, but we all know that someone's actions and body language can definitely change the way their words are interpreted. Research has shown that we communicate much better face to face where we not only hear the words, but we also hear the inflections in the voice, emotions in the voice, we see the facial expressions of the person speaking, see the body language etc.

It may not always be possible to communicate face to face so when we are unable to do so we have to be mindful that the receiver is not going to get the full picture. When we read words, we can put our own slant on them. By that I mean we get a text from someone who maybe we have had a misunderstanding with, we read the text based on our past communication with that person.

When we want to communicate with anyone, we need to ensure we are communicating in such a way that they cannot take what we have said the wrong way. And sometimes sending emails or texts are not the answer to the problem; sometimes they magnify the problem.

This is why Jimm mentioned at our last training session on how to have healthy relationships we should avoid texting or emailing things like apologies, correction, etc. These types of communications really need to be done either face to face or at the least over the phone.

James 1:19

"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,"

Communication is not just about getting our story across, but it is also about understanding what the other person is saying to us. We need to be very good at listening not just hearing. Hearing is using our ears; we are aware of noises and sounds. Listening requires us to use other senses seeing, hearing, and even touch to interpret what is being said. Hearing is physiological using only the ears; listening is psychological and uses our brain to interpret the message.

I believe that if we become good listeners, we will become better communicators. If we have learnt how to listen, then we know what helped us to listen and understand and therefore we become better at communicating.

There are different ways in which we listen:

1. **Empathic listening:** listening to understand eg someone shares a personal story, etc you're focused on the other person, instead of yourself.
2. **Appreciative listening:** listening to enjoy yourself eg listening to music, a motivational speaker, or attending a religious ceremony.
3. **Comprehensive listening:** listening to learn something new eg listen to a podcast, the news, or an educational lecture, like a class.
4. **Critical listening:** listening to form an opinion of what someone else said eg you're debating with someone or when you're listening to a sales person.

Active listening—or listening to understand—falls under the category of empathic listening. This type of listening helps you build strong relationships, gain a deeper understanding of your friends and colleagues, and even deepens your own sense of empathy. (from an article by Julia Martins for Asana)

How to be a better listener:

In our relationships we need to become better at empathic listening or active listening. Active listening can take time to develop, but we can learn with practice how to do this. So how do we do this:

- **Avoid interrupting:**

We need to avoid jumping in and adding our own opinions or thoughts. Sometimes we think we know where the conversation is going so, we sort of jump in, but this is not active listening. All of our attention and energy must be focussed on what the other person is saying. We have to try and put any thoughts or comments about what they are saying out of our heads and LISTEN to understand where they are coming from.

- **Listen without judgement:**

This is not talking about positive or negative thoughts, but any thought we may have about what the other person is saying. By doing this, having thoughts about what the other person is saying, we are focussing on what we think instead of what they are saying. Try to put aside any thoughts that come to you. it's OK if you think differently, simply focus on what they have to say to you

to better understand them. Don't plan what you are going to say. This will disengage you from actually listening to them.

- **Model positive nonverbal behaviour:**

As you are not actually talking during this time, you should model or show the other person you are actually listening and not just sitting there. This is done using nonverbal actions such as facial expressions, body language, posture, gestures, etc. Things like making eye contact, not sitting in a closed fashion, try not to fidget, nodding and smiling when appropriate, not multitasking, etc. Let them know you are paying attention to what they have to say.

- **Paraphrase and summarise**

Once they have finished, you can paraphrase and summarise what they have said to clarify you have understood them correctly. This should be done before adding any comments or thoughts of your own. By doing this you are showing them you were totally focussed on them and what they had to say.

- **Ask specific, open-ended questions**

When they have finished, if necessary, ask open-ended questions to gain further clarity on points they have raised. Don't add your own judgement here or to the questions, remember this is about being focussed on understanding them and their thoughts. Ask questions like:

Tell me more about that....

How did you feel?

What made you believe that.....or think that....

What did you mean by that....

I'm not following you or understanding you, could you please explain?

Avoid questions like: Why would you think that? You didn't really mean that, did you? That doesn't make sense.

How to improve communication:

All the active listening in the world will only go so far. God's word is filled with scriptures talking about this very topic, communication. If we want to be better communicators, then we need to spend time in God's word finding out what He has to say on the subject and what His word says we can do about it.

Luke 6:43 – 45

"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of."

We can change what comes out of our mouths by changing what is in our hearts; or more precisely what goes in our hearts. If you know you have a problem with what comes out of your mouth, then you can do something about it.

Ephesians 4:29

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”

**Florence Littauer, Silver Boxes.*

1 Peter 3:8 – 12

“Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Conflict Resolution

One of the down sides of poor communication is conflict. Conflict can happen in every relationship and how we deal with it can make or break it.

The greatest conflict resolution ever has been the way God resolved the conflict between us and Him.

2 Corinthians 5:18 – 19

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”

God does not want us to be in conflict with others. He wants us to be reconciled to one another and to have peace with each other. He has been very passionate about conflict resolution since the fall because ever since then we have all lived in broken relationship with the Father.

God has provided us with powerful reminders of how to deal with any conflict in our relationships. I think it’s important to note that in each instance it starts with us and our actions.

For us to take responsibility for our part in any conflict and to act accordingly.

Matthew 5:23 – 26

“Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”

Matthew 7:3 – 5

“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank

out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

God's word also tells us to deal with conflict differently depending on the type of conflict we are dealing with.

Small or not too harmful conflict:

God encourages us to overlook these offenses or conflicts.

Proverbs 19:11

“A person’s wisdom yields patience; it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.”

So, if a person offends you, forgive them and don’t hold it against them. This type of conflict resolution would mean you overlook the small offense and choose not to bring it up to the person ever, or to anyone else. This is only for minor offenses.

Major conflict or offenses:

These conflict situations are not to be overlooked, and we are given a conflict resolution process for these situations. We are to confront the person who has ‘wronged’ us and deal with it in a biblical way to restore a right relationship with that person.

Matthew 18:15 – 17

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be

established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

While these steps usually relate to church discipline, they can also be used to bring about biblical conflict resolution in any relationship.

Biblical Conflict Resolution Steps:

1. **Pray for the situation first always.** Ask the Holy Spirit to help you as you go about resolving the conflict.
2. **Talk to the person one on one.** This is always the first step. Most of the time it will be a misunderstanding or miscommunication that has resulted in conflict. These can be dealt with quickly and easily between the two people. If resolved, pray together for your relationship, better communication in the future and for any offence to be gone.
3. **If not resolved, take 1 or 2 other people.** If you are unable to resolve the conflict just the 2 of you then take 1 or 2 other people with you. However, don't just take anyone,

be sure to take someone with wisdom and will give good counsel to you both. This could be Christian friends, family members, or even therapists. If you resolve the conflict at this point again pray for each other etc.

4. **If not resolved, take it to the church.** This would be what you would do with a church member. The idea would be they would be convicted by the Holy Spirit, confess their sin, repent and the relationship would be restored. If this does not happen, then we are instructed to treat them as a pagan or tax collector. Or basically, like someone who is not in fellowship with the congregation. We do not shun them but be wary of dealing with them in the future. If they come back in the future asking for forgiveness and wanting to resolve the conflict, then we are to forgive them and restore our relationship with them.

We are called to love one another and forgive just as the Lord forgave us. We should have no room for bitterness, hate, or anger toward other believers.

We always need to remember that the goal of biblical conflict resolution is to bring people back into a right relationship with each other. There should be no offence,

grudge, bitterness between you. Just as there is no offence, grudge, bitterness between us and God because of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 13:4 – 8a

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”