



Communication is one thing people cannot avoid. Even if you refuse to communicate, you are still communicating your refusal. For something that is such a unconscious and global element, people are pretty bad at it. Think about the number of times you have been misunderstood, misinterpreted, misread, and mislead. In fact, sometimes it feels like we miss more than we succeed.

God wants to be an intricate part of human communication - on a global and personal level. He gives us tips and clues about how to communicate well with others - and with Him. The question is whether we are willing to take the time and make the effort to become better communicators. Or will that always be the responsibility of someone else?

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THE DEFENSE SERIES



Clear as Mud

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE

PARTICIPANT EDITION



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- How do you rate yourself in the maintenance skills:
 - Being loving: _____
 - Being honest: _____
 - Being timely: _____
 - Being sensitive: _____
- How could you improve your communication maintenance skills?

- Looking at all of these issues, how well do you incorporate each of them into your prayer life?

- Pray and ask God to help you to learn how to communicate better. Ask Him to give you courage to repair injured and broken relationships. Pray that you will keep love at the forefront of your communication. Ask God to guide you in improving your prayer life by applying these communication skills.

Communication

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Game of Telephone

As a group play the classic game of telephone. Your facilitator is going to tell the first person a message. They are going to whisper it to the next person, and so on. Each person can only say the line one time. Compare the line after going through the whole class with what the facilitator said.

THINK ABOUT IT

- What are some ways that you communicate well?

- What are some ways that you communicate poorly?

- Would you say that most people you encounter are good communicators or poor? Why?

Communication is a fragile thing. For something that is so basic, and such an ingrained part of our lives, it should be hearty and resilient. But it is easy to break and damage – and surprisingly very few people know how to do it well.

READ IT

Genesis 11:1-9, Acts 2:1-12

- God gets involved in human communication on a _____ scale _____ in the Bible.
- At _____, God counteracts the efforts of the people

to become _____ to God by creating _____.

- This shows without God, communication is _____ and _____.
- At _____, God steps back into human communication and brings _____. Every person could hear in their _____.
- There are three elements to communication: _____, _____, and _____.

THINK ABOUT IT

- How can you see the legacy of Babel in our world today?

- Have you ever seen a time when you saw clear communication you knew came from God (a teacher, small group, pastor, parent, etc.)? Explain.

LISTENING

READ IT

James 1:19, Proverbs 8:6

ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE

Poor listening has hurt us all. We may have missed out on an important message because we weren't paying attention. We may have had someone blow off something important to us because they were "somewhere else." But all of this can be fixed by applying some simple listening skills.

DAY FIVE

READ IT

One of the most unpleasant and dreaded things people face is confrontation. When combined with conflict, stress, and rejection, these become like the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. People will do anything to avoid these encounters – but as a result they damage their long-term availability to communicate. A natural part of owning a car is maintenance. When something goes wrong with your car, you take it to a mechanic to get the problem fixed. If you don't do this, your car will not work right. There is also preventative maintenance – things like oil changes, tire rotations, alignments. This is just as important as fixing major problems – because they will turn INTO major problems if not done. If you don't change your car's oil, there will be damage to the engine. At that point, the \$30 oil change becomes a problem that requires thousands of dollars of repairs.

It is the same way with people. Sometimes we want to overlook something small or irritating so that we don't cause a conflict. The problem is, the more we ignore the problem, the bigger it is going to get. Instead of having a small issue that could be resolved with a quick chat, you now have created a huge problem with massive ramifications.

Think about your own life and the people in it who drive you crazy, hurt your feelings, take advantage of you, wound you, let you down. It could be co-workers, fellow students, parents, siblings, church staff. However, most of the time we don't want to deal with it. We don't want to "make them mad." There is a fear that we will be labeled as "petty" and "trivial" due to our concerns. (That's why Michael didn't talk about the problems with James.) Maybe there is someone who hurt you, but you don't want to look "like a baby" by confronting them. Or maybe you did a number on someone and don't want to deal with it because you don't want to look like a jerk. Not only is all of this unhealthy, but also it is unbiblical – and it destroys communication.

THINK ABOUT IT

- What makes you the most uneasy about communication maintenance?

- How does being sarcastic allow a person to exert power over another person or group of people?

- What are some steps you can take to minimize or eliminate sarcasm from your communication practices?

- Pray that God will help you to be forthright and honest in how you deal with people. Ask Him to strive to avoid double talk and hidden message - and rather to focus on truth and love in your dealings with others.

Most people like to talk. But those same people are horrible at actually listening to the other half of the conversation. They are thinking of what to say next, coming up with arguments, checking out other people in the room. They may even be hearing, but they are not listening.

ONE THING AT A TIME:

- To show a person that you truly _____ them, give them your _____.
- If you cannot do that, then have the _____ to say that – and then schedule a better time where you can be _____ and _____.

EYE CONTACT:

- For some, poor eye contact is tied into _____.
- For others, it may be due to the _____ industry.
- Some could be that they are struggling with _____.
- Keeping good eye contact is a way to tell the person talking that you are completely _____ on them.

WAIT YOUR TURN:

- While the other person is talking, they are the most _____ thing. Wait to make sure your response is _____ and _____ – and that it is not stealing their thunder or turning things to you when they are supposed to be about them.

HEAR THE MEANING

- Make sure that you have picked up on both the _____ and the _____ of the words

- Are there _____ to the words said?

OBSERVE NONVERBAL CUES

- _____ percent of communication effectiveness is generated by nonverbal cues.
- _____ percent of all communication is from some other source than speaking.

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Come up with ways to tell someone they need a haircut without saying the word "haircut."

Act how the following emotions would look – without words:

- *Happy*
- *Angry*
- *Insulted*
- *Sad*
- *Bored*
- *Have to go to the bathroom*
- *Insecure about the world tensions and domestic political outlook*

EXPRESSING

READ IT

Proverbs 12:22, Ephesians 4:25

- The best thing you as a communicator can do when you are expressing yourself is to be _____, _____, and _____ – while being _____
- People appreciate others who are _____ and _____ and _____.

DAY FOUR

READ IT

Sarcasm is linked in with people's inability to communicate and be open with each other. Speaking in a sarcastic manner is like having a piece of armor between you and the listener. You are able to send mixed messages through tones, looks, and words – where the message and the meaning rarely match. Sarcasm allows a person to hide their true feelings, to be cruel without repercussions, and to exert power over another person.

And through it all, God is not happy. He is not happy because it is in direct opposition to the His Word - which tells us to have respect and to submit. Sarcasm is a way to circumvent that respect and submission. You may speak the right words, but you do it in a way that you still know you are fighting. God is also not happy because the intimacy that communication is supposed to strengthen continues to be damaged. By sending mixed messages, we keep walls up between each other – giving people more things to do before they can actually see our true selves. We are intentionally going back to the aftermath of Babel instead of the clarity of Christ.

THINK ABOUT IT

- Are you are sarcastic person? How?

- How does being sarcastic allow a person to hide their true feelings?

- How does being sarcastic allow a person to be cruel without repercussions or consequences?

DAY THREE

READ IT

The best thing you as a communicator can do when you are expressing yourself is to be respectful, loving, and sensitive – while being honest. Sure, there may be bumps in the road. But you are going to find that people appreciate speaking to you if you respect them enough to say, “I know that I am taking a chance here, but I don’t want to force you to harvest my meaning.” Think about what qualities will make people gush. “He’s just a genuine guy. What you see is what you get.” “She’s so real and transparent. She doesn’t hide behind some fake version of herself.” “He’s not playing some game.” People appreciate others who are real and genuine and honest. We can’t stand pastors or politicians or celebrities or athletes who say one thing and do another, who make non-committal speeches where no one could possibly get upset, or who hide behind some public persona while being something opposite off camera. But we do the very same thing – just on a smaller scale.

THINK ABOUT IT

- Would you consider yourself a genuine person? Do others?

- How do you rate yourself in these expression skills:

- Being respectful: _____
- Being loving: _____
- Being sensitive: _____
- Being honest: _____

- What are some things you can do to improve your ability to express yourself well?

- Pray and ask God to help you to show you how to incorporate love, sensitivity, respect, and honesty in your conversation. Ask Him to help you consider your words in light of how they will be received.

SARCASM

READ IT

Matthew 5:37, Colossians 4:6, Ephesians 4:29, James 5:12, Matthew 12:35-37

- Sarcasm has become the _____ of most younger people.

HIDE TRUE FEELINGS

- Sarcastic people never have to be _____.
- We also make the other person feel _____.
- Our sarcastic response keeps us from having to say it – and it makes them feel dumb because they want us to.

CRUEL WITHOUT REPERCUSSIONS

- You can say exactly what you _____ without having to deal with the _____ response.
- The sarcastic person takes advantage of their history of double meaning to get the satisfaction of saying what they mean, while keeping everyone else in the dark.

POWER TRIP

READ IT

Exodus 20:12; Matthew 19:19; Ephesians 6:1,2; Colossians 3:20; 1 Peter 2:13-17

If you are constantly saying things that require the people around you to have to figure out what you are really saying, you are in control. They have to do all the work. They are the ones at risk. They are the ones who may not be able to figure it all out – which takes the burden of expression off of you. If they misunderstand you, it is not your fault. They should have known better. After all, they know you and know what you really feel.

THINK ABOUT IT

- What are some ways you do not say what you mean?

- Are you using sarcasm on a regular basis? How can you begin to stop relying on it?

MAINTENANCE

READ IT

Ephesians 4:3,26; Matthew 18:15

BE LOVING

- When _____ love is present in a person, they put others in front of themselves.
- Love is the one thing that can actually help deal with _____ issues in our relationships.

BE HONEST

- Most people deal in _____ of honesty.
- Both _____ things and being too _____ are damaging to a relationship.

BE TIMELY

- Allowing things to sit there for days before dealing with it allows for _____, _____, and _____ to set up shop and begin poisoning.
- While it may be helpful for a cooling off period after a conflict or confrontation, addressing the issue while it is still fresh keeps things accurate, and it also keeps from “dragging up past issues.”

- Rate your ability in each of the following listening skills:
 - Doing one thing at a time: _____
 - Making good eye contact: _____
 - Waiting your turn: _____
 - Hearing the true meaning: _____
 - Observing nonverbal cues: _____

- Based on your ratings of your listening skills, would you consider yourself a good listener? What are your weakest area in listening?

- What are some things you can do to work on your listening skills? How can you apply those this week?

- Pray that God will help you to realize when you are not listening well. Ask Him to show you how to make the people talking to you feel important and cared about. Pray that you can be more attentive and compassionate in your listening.

DAY TWO

READ IT

When it comes to listening, many people find it very difficult to give their full attention to the speaker. They get jittery or bored. They want to share their lives, and do not really care all that much about what is being said. As a result, they miss out the message. They may miss a word here or there, but overall does that really matter? It does matter. It matters because it shows disrespect for a person. It says that you are too busy to care, and they are not important enough to get you to stop what you are doing. You are very clearly telling them that their business is not anywhere near a priority to you.

Now, this is a real big problem when that same attitude is extended to your spouse, your family, your close friends. These are the people that you should see as a priority. But these same poor listening skills are applied to them too. They begin to wonder if you really care about their concerns – which makes them more hesitant to share with you. It insults them, and makes them feel unimportant. If you don't believe it – just think back to a time when it happened to you. Maybe you were a kid and came in to tell your father about something great that happened, but he wouldn't take his eyes off the tv screen. Maybe it was someone you were dating, and you were trying to communicate insecurity to him – but he kept looking everywhere else but at you and immediately switched subjects. Maybe you had a minister who just gave you a typical, emotionless church answer to a really big dilemma you were facing.

Poor listening has hurt us all. We may have missed out on an important message because we weren't paying attention. We may have had someone blow off something important to us because they were "somewhere else."

THINK ABOUT IT

- Record a time when you felt that something important you said was not given the attention it deserved. What was done? How did you feel?

- Think about how you usually listen to someone at work. Do you give them your full attention? Why or why not? What about at home?

- If you seize upon the wrong time to discuss something, you may end up doing even more _____ than already had been done.

BE SENSITIVE

- Fight _____.
- Be _____ in your language and approach.
- Be _____ of how your words are being received.

THINK ABOUT IT

- What are some ways that you can improve your "communication maintenance" practices?

- When someone apologizes to you, what do you want them to do? What do you need to hear to know they are genuine? (Chances are this is how you apologize – even if the other person needs something different.)

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

THROUGH PRAYER

LISTENING: Part of prayer is supposed to be allowing God to speak back – through His Word, His Spirit, other godly people. It needs to be an ongoing dialogue that allows for both expression and response.

EXPRESSING: We all know how to send requests up to God. But looking back through this section, we find one area that many of us are very weak in when it comes to praying – being honest. While genuine desire for God's will to be done – and for us to be okay with it – is a noble thing, why is it that we feel we can't be honest with God? We will actually learn our lessons earlier when we ARE honest – it helps to show those things we are harboring that God probably wants to get out of us in the first place.

MAINTENANCE: Just like with other relationships, we need to include apology and confession to God. This draws us back to Him when we drift away. It needs to be honest and thorough and truly repentant.

DAY ONE

READ IT

We see in Genesis 11 and Acts 2 two distinct examples of God's intervention in human communication. In the first story, man was trying to accomplish something without God. At this point, everyone spoke the same language, so it was easy to accomplish tasks. This was something that God had given mankind so that they could fulfill His directives of populating and subduing the earth. But, man turned from God and instead began to focus on his own ideas. Mankind decided to build a tower to God, a task that was really just a testimony to how little they thought of Him. They were really saying they felt they could reach His level – bring Him down to them. (Funny, sounds a lot like the lie the Serpent told Eve.) Anyway, God did not appreciate this, and He decided it was time to break up the free communication that was going on within the population. So He “confused the language of all the earth” and “scattered them over the face of all the earth.” And there is mass confusion.

Babel shows us what happens to communication when God is removed. The Acts passage shows us the opposite point. Here we see what happens when God is included in communication. The end result is clarity. In Acts 2, we see the apostles together, waiting on God to give them directions – just like Jesus told them to do. In an action that we call Pentecost, the Holy Spirit rushed into the room, and into these men. Each one was given an amazing ability to fluently speak other languages – a skill that they then used when they went out into the city. How did this happen? God's people were sitting in prayer asking Him to move and to guide them. He did indeed move – and His appearance brought clarity. It highlighted truth, and dispelled darkness.

So what do these two stories teach us? We need to realize that for us to have a chance at really, truly learning to communicate well with those around us, we must have God's influence. He is the one who brings discernment and wisdom and clarity and knowledge. He is the one who is the source of all good things. And He is the one that can help us to break the natural barriers to good communication. There are three elements to communication, and God plays an important part in each of those. The first element is listening – and not just detecting sound waves, but really being able to listen to what a person is feeling and desiring. That desire to care about others that much is something that God must place in our heart. The second element is expressing – really truly being able to honestly say what you feel and think. That commitment to honesty in a loving manner also comes from God. The last element is maintenance, which covers the areas of confession, confrontation, conflict, and forgiveness. Again, God is the one Who tells us to make things right with each other – and the only One who can actually make things right.

THINK ABOUT IT

- Would you characterize most communication in your world as clear or chaotic? Explain.

- What are some examples of chaotic conversation?

- What are some examples of clear conversation?

- How would rate yourself in your ability to listen? To express yourself? To maintain good communication?

- Pray and ask God to help you to accurately see your communication abilities and liabilities. Ask Him to show you how you can work on things to make sure you are clearly hearing and being heard. Pray for a desire to be loving and caring in your communication.