**Communication Skills**

**“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” James 1:19 *KJV***

**“My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry . . .”James 1:19 *TNIV***

1. **What is communication?**

Clear communication takes place when the message conveyed is understood in the way intended by the speaker. Effective communication involves the mutual sharing of information, knowledge and feelings in such a way that the relationship can undergo growth. Communication can be either effective or ineffective. We tend to refer to communication as “good” or “poor.”

1. **Major components of communication**
2. Sender (the one who transmits the thought)
3. Message (thought intended to be transmitted)
4. Channel (phone, mail, face to face)
5. Receiver (the person to whom the message/thought is sent)
6. Feedback (action taken, the response of the receiver, anger, acceptance, the resulting state of the relationship, growth/decline of the relationship)
7. **Factors affecting effective communication**
8. Environment (temperature of room, privacy level)
9. Interference (distracting noises)
10. Lack of clarity or articulation
11. Frequent interruption
12. Angry outbursts
13. Refusal to be objective
14. **Nonverbal communication**

“Mind not only what people say, but how they say it; and if you have any sagacity, you may discover more truth by your eyes than by your ears. People can say what they will, but they cannot look just as they will; and their looks frequently reveal what their words are calculated to conceal.” (Driver and van Aalst. *You Say More Than You Think.* 2011).

**Body language or Non-verbal communication, including…**

1. Facial expression (Hostile/pleasant/sad/doubtful)
2. Body posture
3. Gestures
4. Silence
5. **Listening Keys to Effective Communication**

**“Let every man be swift to hear.” James 1:19 *KJV***

**“A wise man will hear and will increase in learning.” Proverbs 1:5**

1. Have good eye contact.
2. Give focused undivided attention.
3. Be aware of your body language (Give positive, respectful signals.)
4. Listen to the message behind the words. (Active listening)
5. Interject with remarks like, “I see what you mean,” or “Yes, I understand,” or “Really?”
6. When what the person is saying is not clear to you, clarify by asking questions, such as “Are you saying that . . .?” or “Do you mean . . .?” (Do not try to interpret what you do not understand. It is perfectly OK to ask the speaker to explain to you.)
7. Put aside your biases and try to understand the other person’s point of view. (This means you have to listen with patience).
8. Do not prejudge or try to read the other person’s mind. Get the whole story first before attempting to make a judgment.
9. Be patient. Avoid interrupting and filling in remarks or details for the person.
10. Do not be anxious to defend yourself.
11. Listen empathetically. Sympathize with the feelings expressed.
12. Ask appropriate questions.
13. Ask open-ended questions.
14. Create trust and safety in the relationship.
15. Keep all information confidential if the speaker requests it or if the matter is highly sensitive. (If the speaker talks about wanting to harm himself/herself or wanting to harm someone else, this is not a matter for confidentiality. You are legally required to report this.)
16. **Speaking Keys to Effective Communication**

**“Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Colossians 4:6**

**“Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely . . .” Song of Solomon 4:3.**

**“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of thy mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.” Ephesians 4:29**

**Guidelines**

1. Choose or set the right atmosphere, the right time, place or opportunity. (Proverbs 25:11)
2. Think before you speak.
3. Don’t resurrect dead issues. (When clearing up a misunderstanding, confine your conversation to the issues of the moment.)
4. Do not talk too much. It is not good to monopolize the conversation.
5. Do not put words into the other person’s mouth.
6. Do not be quick to change the topic that the other person is speaking on.
7. Try to be genuine and not artificial.
8. Avoid interrupting.
9. Use a pleasant tone of voice.
10. Do not use remarks that will humiliate the other person.
11. Avoid using generalizations. (“You never/you always.”)
12. Use “I” messages instead of “You” messages.
13. Be sensitive to the other person’s feelings.
14. Talk about the other person’s interests.
15. Be liberal with compliments and avoid criticism.
16. Do not attack or use abusive language.
17. Control anger and other negative emotions.
18. Speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15).
19. Read and study James 1:19,20.
20. Read and study Proverbs 1:5

**GROUP ACTIVITY:** Separate into groups of five. Read quickly **Proverbs Chapters 15 – 18.** Make a list of communication principles you discover in these chapters. Share these principles with your group.

1. **Communicating in difficult situations**

**“Come, now, let us reason together,” saith the Lord. Isaiah 1:18.**

1. **Conflict.** A conflict is “a situation in which two or more human beings desire goals which they perceive as being attainable by one or the other but not by both.” (McSwain. *Conflict Ministry in the Church*, p. 25.)
2. The Inevitably of conflict in relationships

* Different backgrounds
* Lack of information or wrong assumptions (Scott. *Disagreements, Disputes, and All-out War.* pp. 24–26*.)*
* Different orientation
* Difficult people and personality clashes
* Different past experiences
* Different genders

1. Strategies for communicating during conflict

* Draw on your spiritual resources.
* Don’t judge the other person(s) too quickly or too harshly.
* Be patient under pressure.
* Be mature even when others behave childishly.
* Be professional in all your dealings with colleagues, subordinates, or supervisors.
* Don’t let others dictate your behavior by responding in kind.
* Be respectful even to the ill- mannered.
* Be ready to admit your mistakes and to forgive the mistakes of others.
* Listen.
* Think before you respond or comment.

1. Steps in settling conflict

* Admit that there is a conflict.
* Identify who has the need
* Brainstorm to find as many possible solutions.
* Discuss the possible solutions and pick the best one.
* Follow through.
* Reassess to see if the solution is working. ( If the solution is **not** working, try another solution).

1. **Confrontation**

Sometimes there is the need to confront a person who has greatly contributed to problems in a relationship. The apostle Paul urges us to speak the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15). Here are some tips for engaging in a confrontation:

* Study the situation carefully.
* Pray for wisdom.
* Begin with a statement of affirmation. (“There are a number of things I admire about you. However, something has happened recently that threatens our relationship. I feel compelled to discuss it with you. Can we talk about this now?”)
* State the issue clearly.
* Use a calm voice.
* Do not make accusations.
* Choose your words with care.
* Be respectful and exercise self -control.
* Walk away from a situation that becomes too heated. (“I am sorry that things are beginning to get out of control. How about if we end this conversation now and resume discussion at another time?”)
* Use “I” messages.

1. **Crisis**

**“Bear ye one another’s burdens.” Galatians 6:22**

A crisis is turn of events, expected or unexpected, that threatens our happiness, our security and our peace of mind. Sometimes our health suffers during a crisis. Everyone at one time or another will face a crisis. Care and skill in communicating with persons in crisis are important.

1. Things **not** to say/do when communicating with the **bereaved:**

* Don’t try to cheer up the person prematurely. Avoid remarks like, “His sickness was really hard for you. Now you can go on with your life.” Or, “Well, now as a Christian, you can pick up the pieces and move on.”
* Don’t question or pry into the deceased’s assets, financial position or the details of the illness, unless the relatives initiate this kind of discussion.
* Don’t attempt to evaluate the deceased’s relationship with God. Do not say things like, “If only he/she had made her commitment to the Lord, we would have felt better.” Remember the thief on the cross?
* Resist the temptation to sermonize.
* Refrain from giving false assurance. “You’ll be up and yourself again in a few weeks.”
* Don’t struggle to find words. It is OK to sit there quietly and say nothing. People in distress can be satisfied with just a pat or a hug.
* If the person expresses anger at God, be patient and understanding. God understands.
* If the person has had a miscarriage, or has lost a child by death, don’t try to comfort by saying, “Never mind. You are young and soon you will be able to have another baby.” Or, “Thank God you have \_\_\_ more kids.”

1. Things to say/do when communicating with the **bereaved:**

* Begin where the bereaved is, and not where you think they ought to be now.
* Try to understand and help the bereaved express their feelings: “I know you are a strong person; but if I were in your shoes, I would be screaming too.”
* Empathize with the person. Feel his/her pain.
* Be sensitive to his/her feelings.
* Be sure that you yourself have a clear understanding of death, dying, grief, etc. Reacquaint yourself with the “state of the dead” doctrine.
* Watch the body language of the bereaved and know when to keep silent. Remember that silence is sometimes the best eloquence.
* Practice some key comments in private, so you will have an idea of some things you could say:

“I am here for you, no matter what happens.”

“I cannot fully understand what you are going through, but our heavenly Father does, and I care a lot for you.”

“Do not hesitate to call me. I am going to be checking on you.”

“I would like to watch the kids for you for a few hours. Please let me know when we can arrange it.”

“Satan is such an enemy; but God is in control. Would you like to talk about it?”

* Be **confidential** when the bereaved shares sensitive, personal information with you. You are morally bound to be confidential except he/she talks about plans to harm herself/ himself or others.

1. Communicating with one who has recently been **divorced**

People who have experienced a divorce usually suffer pain. There are many issues that they have to deal with. They need an understanding ear and some attention. Here are some things that one can say to the person:

* “I am so sorry that things turned out this way.”
* “I want to assure you that I will be praying for you.”
* “I know that you will need some help now that you are taking care of your family alone. When it is convenient for you, I would be happy to discuss ways in which I may be of help to you.”
* “I will be checking on you regularly”
* “Here is a Bible verse I think will give you comfort.”

It is important to maintain contact with those experiencing divorce, and to avoid taking sides, no matter what we may think we “know.” It is crucial that we never repeat gossip or even supposed “facts” about those experiencing this trauma. They need our friendship and Christian caring.

**GROUP ACTIVITY:** Divide into groups. Choose one of the following scenarios. Discuss how you would handle the situation. Be prepared to role play using the principles just presented:

* **Case #1.** A co-worker has been spreading unpleasant rumors about you. This makes you angry and unhappy. Demonstrate show you will confront him/her.
* **Case #2.** Your teenage son has been in the habit of keeping his room very untidy. In vain, you have tried many different methods to help him. Discuss this situation with him using an “I” message.
* **Case #3.** Mrs. Jones’ husband has just died after a long illness. What would you say to her when you visit her?

**OR**

* The youngest child of one of your church leaders has been killed in an accident. What are some of the things you would say when you visit the family?
* **Case #4.** A young woman in your church has just been divorced. She has three young children and has never worked outside the home. What would you tell her?

1. **Communicating with males**

Communicating with men involves different dynamics from communicating with women. This is, of course, because of gender differences.

1. The popular topics of conversation are usually different.
2. Men are generally more concise in their remarks. Women often tend to use more words.
3. Men tend to be clinical in their communication. Women tend to be more emotional and personal.
4. Women talk to solve problems. Men withdraw to solve problems.

1. **Communicating with God**

**“O God, thou art my God; early will I seek Thee.” Psalm 63:1**

1. Every woman needs to have a devotional life. This is a most effective way of communicating with God. There are definite advantages to this communication:
2. Wisdom for daily challenges
3. Coping with the expectations of people
4. Personal strength
5. Ability to minister
6. Fills a typical female void
7. A chance for introspection (Ps. 139:23)
8. Cements our relationship with God

2. Establishing communion with God

1. Personal devotions
2. Family devotions
3. Prayer partners
4. Prayer walks
5. A personal covenant to walk with God.
6. Discerning God’s will through a study of His Word
7. Developing a sensitivity to sin and claim Christ’s power to overcome
8. Thinking on the pure and lovely. (Philippians 4:13)
9. Talking to God about even the “little things.”
10. Talking with Him all the time. “Pray without ceasing.” (1Thessalonians 6:17)
11. Praising God habitually. (Psalm 119:163)
12. Accepting the gift of God’s grace. (Ephesians. 2:8; Isaiah. 53: 5, 6)
13. Trusting in God’s sustaining power (Jude 24)
14. Forgiving others as Christ forgives us. (Matthew 6:12-15; Ephesians 4:32)
15. Communicating the love of Jesus

In telling others about Jesus, we can be more effective by the way we live than with our words.

1. Our speech
2. Friendship
3. Interpersonal relationships

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow me.’” White. *The Ministry of Healing,* p*.* 143.

1. Living the Word “If any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words, by the behavior of their wives.” (1 Peter 3:1 TNIV)

**CONCLUSION**

We have studied some important strategies for effective communication. Successful communication is a skill. Like any other skill, it must be practiced regularly and conscientiously if there are to be no misunderstandings. The Bible is laden with admonition relating to communication. A sincere study of God’s Word as well as contemporary materials on this subject will help us to become effective communicators and leaders.

“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.” Psalm 19:14

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**I’d Rather See a Sermon**

I’d rather see a sermon

than hear one any day;

I’d rather one should walk with me

than merely tell the way.

The eye’s a better pupil

and more willing than the ear,

Fine counsel is confusing,

but example’s always clear;

And the best of all preachers

are the men who live their creeds,

For to see good put in action

is what everybody needs.

I soon can learn to do it

if you’ll let me see it done;

I can watch your hands in action,

but your tongue too fast may run.

And the lecture you deliver

may be very wise and true,

But I’d rather get my lessons

by observing what you do;

For I might misunderstand you

and the high advice you give,

But there’s no misunderstanding

how you act and how you live.

Edgar A. Guest