

Communicate

This is a session on the thorny topic of communication.

Communication is central to our lives. Without it, nothing would function. If we get it right, we can see things happen effectively. Where communication is wrong we can see trouble, aggravation and even worse. We'll take a look from a Biblical perspective and try to apply it to our everyday lives. The word 'communicate' or 'communication' aren't found in the NIV translation at all. Why? Because the whole Bible is one long communication. From God to us. And in response, back to God. Then from us to each other.

This is a long session and could easily be done over 2-3 weeks.

Why this session?

We've done this session because of many experiences within the church and Christian work, where communication has regularly been non-existent or abysmal - often leading to frustration, confusion, tension and the inability to work effectively. Poor communication can damage people and their work for God, so we must all be careful in this area.

This is here to help all of us communicate better and to stop this area of the enemy's attack. As you move 'up' the leadership structure (by becoming more of a servant!) this will become an increasingly important part of your ministry. So take note now.

We pray this is a very practical guide to communication to raise issues and help you improve.

Hopefully this session communicates effectively with you!! :-)

Jose Mourinho

On a BBC TV interview, Gary Lineker asked Jose Mourinho what his secret was for team spirit. Jose replied that one of the keys was communication – with, to and from the players. As one of the most successful managers (leaders) in football, I think we should look and learn carefully from what he says. Especially in our churches and businesses, where poor or non communication will cause problems and even failure.

*After his stint at Man Utd, I'm not sure that his communication went well!

Habakkuk 2

Verses 2-3 say, 'Then the LORD replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.'

The key part of this is in verse 2. The background is that in Chapter 1 and the start of Chapter 2, Habakkuk has been crying out to the Lord for help. Verses 2 and 3 are the start of the Lord's reply to Habakkuk's second complaint to God.

If we break down the verse we'll see:

1. God tells Habakkuk to write down the revelation from God so people can read it and so it is recorded.
2. More than writing it down, Habakkuk is charged with making it plain - and on tablets - so that a herald may run with it.

This is a picture of communicating God's vision - so that people can understand, read and hear it. However, we can see a fundamental principle about communication..

1. Our communication can be recorded or spoken - sometimes the more mediums used to do this the better!
2. Our communication must be simple / plain / easy to understand. This is so people can receive our communication effectively.
3. The vision must be extra clear so that people can 'run with' this vision or communication and then pass it on accurately, so that the vision can be made into a practical reality.

Would this kind of communication describe your communication skills? In my experience, it doesn't across far too many Christian ministries which then wonder why they don't succeed or grow. It's often practical reasons, rather than spiritual ones, believe.

Exercises

Around the theme of communication. You could do the Chinese Whispers game – or use one of the technical games from this website. Try the game called 'The Puzzle' on our Resources > Games > Technical Games page. Or you could use a Team Game.

Otherwise, use the game where you set up an assault course in the room. Create teams. On each team, one person has to do the assault course (but blindfolded). The team can only communicate to that person through whistles or claps - so they have to set up their own code to enable the blindfolded person to move successfully around the maze.

Story

When I was at school I was a member of the Army Cadets. On one of our first weekends away, we did some outdoor adventure activities. One of those was rock climbing and abseiling. Loved it. The instructors took us to a rock face and did some basic techniques with us. However, for some reason I was not there when they explained how to belay.

Belaying is when a person on the ground helps someone up / down a rock face by being an anchor point. The belay rope / person is there to give the climber slack when climbing and to catch hold of the climber if they fall off the rock. A mate of mine started climbing up the rock face about 10 metres up when suddenly he fell. I was on the belay rope, having not been trained in what to do. So I tried to lock the 2 pieces of rope together to stop the rope slipping. Wrong. In fact what I should have done is to pull one part of the rope backwards, locking the rope. But I hadn't been told. The result? My mate went flying down the cliff face, headed towards some nasty rocks beneath. Fortunately, 1 metre above the ground I managed to hold the ropes together, holding his weight. But it was a close run thing.

Communication is like this. Because I had not been communicated with effectively, it could have caused a nasty accident. As it was it caused everyone a bit of stress! I had pointed out to my instructors I didn't know what to do but they kept saying, 'you'll be fine, don't worry..'

This is the same in our Christian life and witness and in our lives. Effective, accurate communication is essential, it can be a matter of life and death. Hearing and following that communication is also very important.

The Bible

Give everyone a copy of the Bible (or share). On your own and in groups, write down or shout out what the Bible tells you (without actually reading any of the words). What is it? What is it there for? What does it communicate? feedback all the answers..

Point - I heard a speaker say that the Bible is an amazing book before you even open it. Why? Because it tells us that the amazing God who created the world wants to communicate with us. Think about that..

The Beginning to the End

Right from the start to the end of the Bible, we find God in communication and relationship. Initially, we find that God created the

sky and the earth, then God created light by saying 'let there be light.' When God had finished creating the world and the animals, God created man. Genesis 1.26-27 says, 'Then God said, "Let us make human beings in our image and likeness.." So God created human beings in his image.'

"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen." These are the very last words in the last book of the Bible, Revelation.

Throughout the Bible we find mankind speaking to each other, God speaking, Jesus speaking, teaching and preaching, the disciples teaching and preaching. We find that the Bible was written by different authors across different centuries, that it was then assembled by other people. We know that the Jewish people remembered stories and handed them down incredibly accurately through generations. In all this, God's Spirit guided and God's Word gives testament to the accuracy and truthfulness of the Bible. (John 16.13, 2 Timothy 3.16)

Our communication should be accurate, reliable, truthful and consistent. We need to have this same integrity.

Good communication is SO important

Matthew 5:36-38 (New International Version), Jesus said, 'And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.'

Have you ever felt left out of something? Why is that? Well, there may be many reasons, but the main one will be that you have not had that thing communicated to you directly. For example, someone may say to you, '*are you going on the weekend away in August..?*' You reply, '*I didn't know there was a weekend away in August, no-one told me..*'

You feel excluded because you have not been communicated to.

Or maybe you do the PowerPoint words for your church for the songs. One Sunday, you've prepared all the songs and the leader tells you, '*Oh we're singing this new song today..*' But you don't have that new song. '*I haven't got that new song, no-one told me we'd be singing that song..*'

Again, you feel excluded because you have not been communicated to.

There are many more examples we could all give. But over time these mount up and gradually, because people are not communicated with, they fall away.

Let's think of youth ministry for example. I have young people fall away very quickly from youth ministry because they have not been communicated with. They don't get asked on the socials, they don't know people well enough, they're not made to feel welcome, they didn't get the email, the latest flyer..

Poor, ineffective, or non-existent communication WILL harm your mates, youth ministry, church, relationships. It will. And it is a terrible witness to each other and to non-Christians. It can alienate and antagonize people. So not only do people fall away from a youth ministry or church, they actively begin to disrespect it and reject it. So now you have 2 stages to overcome in order for that person to be 'brought back' and to feel welcomed, loved and valued.

Lack of communication devalues people and ministries. It can cause upset and division. Many a church and youth ministry has had splits because of ineffective communication.

Poor communication is wrong, it is unacceptable and damages the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, let's think of good communication.

Good communication makes you feel welcomed on the weekend away because you've been told about it. Good communication makes sure that young people on the fringe of ministry feel included because they've been contacted. Good communication means that you get the right words for your PowerPoint show ahead of time, not on the Sunday as you're about to start. Good communication is like a well run railway, where trains are on time and arriving at the platform they say they will arrive at. Good communication honours God, honours people and creates goodwill, good relationships, respect and people ready to help and serve.

I cannot stress the importance of good, effective communication strongly enough.

This is more important, the more in leadership you are. If you are the captain of a dinghy on your own and you make a wrong turning, you cause problems for yourself. But if you're the Captain of an Ocean Liner and make the same mistake, you cause problems for 100s of people. Think about that. The consequences of disobeying God or mis-hearing God are serious. The consequences of passing this on to others are very serious.

A Story

A few years back, we had a major problem between 2 girls. This resulted in abusive texts and phone calls and even threats. As it turned out it was over a couple of misunderstandings (as well as a personality clash). To try to resolve this (a couple months into my youth leader time) myself and one of the leadership team brought the 2 girls

together. I had one of the girls tell the other how they felt and what they thought. I then had the other girl repeat back what they thought the first girl had said. I then had the first girl say whether this interpretation of what she'd said was accurate or not. And so on.. Around 2 hours later we'd finished. Did it help? I think so, though some bitterness is still there today. But it's one model of making sure communication is right.

Messengers and our witness to unbelievers

Throughout the Old Testament especially, we find the importance of messengers. We find 72 references to them in the Bible (NIV). These men would carry messages between kings and between armies and even within kingdoms. These men were essential elements, in the days without phones and email. They had to speak what they had been commanded to speak.

We also find that messengers testified and acted because of what God had done..

2 Samuel 5.10-12 - And David became more and more powerful, because the LORD God Almighty was with him. Now Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with cedar logs and carpenters and stonemasons, and they built a palace for David. And David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.

Same with us today. We are to be witnesses and to testify to what God has done for us through Jesus. This is in our everyday lives, to each other and to non-believers too. The messengers helped build a palace for David, testifying to the fact that God was with David. So too today, we should be reliable and faithful messengers to the Gospel, our words and actions testifying to the truth about Jesus.

Some helpful verses from the life of Jesus

Despite his best attempts, even Jesus found that communication was difficult, even his disciples got the wrong end of the stick. But Jesus' life is a role model in terms of persistence in communication.

Here are some verses showing us ways and means Jesus communicated. Jesus also communicated effectively in stories and we should make good use of this method too. Sometimes, the meaning of the stories Jesus told were obvious, sometimes they were hidden, forcing people to think about what they meant. Again, we can learn from this. But Jesus was true to his word and words. He was and is faithful. So should we be..

Luke 2.45-47 - When they did not find him (Jesus), they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Luke 11.28 - But Jesus said, "No, happy are those who hear the teaching of God and obey it."

Luke 24.45-49 - He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

John 5.19 - Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."

John 8.28 - So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."

John 16.12-15 - "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."

How do I improve my communication?

1. Learn strategies to help. If you aren't a great administrator, find someone who is. Or ask for strategies to develop. Write things down that you need to do; keep a diary; set up a computer database or use an appointment system.
2. Are you as an effective communicator as you think you are? Maybe the problem is with you and not with others. Check yourself. Tell people things and get them to tell you back what they think you've said.. Remember that people come from different backgrounds, have different intelligence and abilities. What you say may be misinterpreted.

You may need to say things more than once in different ways.

3. Good communication means you tell the right people the right things, not every person everything. There is trust in communication. For example, it would be an abuse of trust if husband and wife were to tell others very personal things about their relationship they'd agreed to only keep to themselves. Same in all areas. Some things shouldn't be shared too widely as it can cause problems. Ask God for wisdom and God will give freely, but don't be shaky. (James 1.5-8)

4. Watch others who are effective communicators and learn from them, their strategies. Don't just copy, but copy and use in your way and style. But be prepared to change, listen, learn. Ask people.

5. Listen. Good communication is about listening and how you listen. It's about how you engage with others, do you nod and look them in the eye and show you are interested. James 1.19 says, 'My dear brothers, always be willing to listen and slow to speak..' Remember that your communication isn't just about words, it's about body language too.

6. As we've already read from Matthew, let your yes be yes and your no be no. Learn from The Master, Jesus.

7. Are we too forgiving as Christians, to the extent that it's unhelpful? We need to confront poor communication, lack of communication head on. It isn't OK for someone to forget to communicate when they should. We speak only in love, gently and patiently as we all fail. But not saying something, not doing something - is not helping. Amen?

8. Some communication is dependent on the angle from which the listener is listening. For example, if no matter what you say or do, someone has a problem with you - you'll never communicate effectively with them because of their attitude. In these instances, you can only go so far and not worry about their problem! Just keep moving forward and praying.