

## Three Keys to Effective Communication

### Introduction:

1. Words play a key role in almost every conflict.
2. When used properly, words promote understanding and encourage agreement. When misused, they usually aggravate offenses and drive people farther apart.
3. With God's help, we can improve our ability to communicate the truth, yet in a spirit of love. Ephesians 4:15
4. In this message, we will look at what the Bible says about three basic communication skills and then explore practical ways to use them, especially in the midst of conflict.

### First, speak only to build up others.

1. Ephesians 4:29 clearly forbids us from using our tongues in a corrupt way, but rather our words should always serve to edify (build up) others.
2. A good way to avoid corrupt types of communication (slander, gossip, falsehood) is simply to talk less about others. Proverbs 10:19, 11:9, 12
3. Another way to avoid worthless talk is to get in the habit of talking **to** people with whom you are having a problem rather than **about** them. Check yourself when the tone of conversation about a third party has become negative or critical.
4. The Bible commands us to say good things about others and to ask for good things to happen to them, even if they are opposing or mistreating us. Luke 6:27-28, 23:34
5. None of these principles forbid confrontation, but they do require that confrontation be constructive rather than hurtful.
6. When we confront others, we demonstrate love and humility by speaking with patience and gentleness. Galatians 6:1
  - Most often, others will treat you as you treat them. If you are aggressive and overbearing, don't be surprised if an argument develops. If you are patient and gentle, they will probably respond in a similar manner.
7. The best way to test your words is simply to ask yourself, "Is what I am saying (or about to say) likely to please and honor God?"

### Second, be quick to listen.

1. The second element of effective communication is the ability to listen carefully to what others are saying.
2. This is not a skill that comes naturally to most of us. James 1:19
3. Quiet, patient listening does several things:
  - It demonstrates genuine humility.
  - It shows that you realize you do not have all the answers.
  - It tells the other person that you value his or her thoughts and opinions.
4. One of the fundamental elements of effective listening is simply waiting patiently while others talk. This is often very difficult.

5. Unless you learn to wait as others talk, you will seldom get to the root of problems, and may complicate matters with inappropriate reactions. Proverbs 18:13, 15:28, 29:20
6. Three common problems hinder us from waiting while others talk:
  - Jumping to premature conclusions (we are rehearsing our response in our minds while they are still talking)
  - Interrupting others while they are speaking (the human mind can think at least four times faster than a person can talk)
  - Being uncomfortable with silence
7. **After** carefully listening, agree with and acknowledge what you know is **true** before going to points of disagreement.
  - This is so important, especially if you have been in the wrong. Example: “You are right, I was wrong when I said...” or “A lot of what you have said is true. I do need to deal with my attitude...”
  - You must resist the temptation to defend yourself, blame others, etc.
  - Ask yourself, “Is there **any** truth in what he/she is saying?” If the answer is “yes,” acknowledge what is true and identify your common ground before moving to your differences. Proverbs 9:8-9
  - This doesn’t mean you are accepting responsibility for the entire problem. Agree with them in very specific terms.

**Third, heal with wise communication.**

- We must confront others in a clear, constructive, and persuasive manner. Proverbs 12:18
  - When we act like loose cannons we hurt people, we don’t heal relationships.
    - Listed below are a few practical suggestions to do before and during confrontation:
1. Choose the right time and place.
    - Don’t discuss things when the other person is tired, preoccupied with other things, or in a bad mood.
    - Don’t confront someone in front of others. Try to find a place free of distractions.
  2. Believe the best about others.
    - If you don’t, the other person will sense that you have already made up your mind and that it’s pointless to talk to you.
  3. Talk in person whenever possible.
    - Facial expressions and body language speak so much.
    - If you must communicate by written words, have an impartial party look at it and make suggestions. Lay it aside a day or two before you send it.
  4. Plan your words.
    - This is very important. It may be wise to write out several key thoughts before the meeting.
    - Think of two or three ways the other person may respond to your words and plan how you will handle each scenario.

- In responding to an angry reaction, remember Proverbs 15:1.
  - A gentle voice, relaxed posture, and calm gestures always help.
5. Be objective.
    - Use facts whenever you can and do not resort to exaggerating. “You always,” “You never,” “Every time.” People will turn you off.
  6. Use the Bible carefully.
    - It is always good to refer to the Bible as a source of objective truth when you have a disagreement with another believer.
    - It must be done with great care, or it will alienate people rather than persuade them. It is possible to use the Bible to tear people down.
    - Don’t pull verses out of context to serve your purposes.
  7. Ask for feedback (you need to know if they understand your point of view).
  8. Offer solutions and preferences to the problems you’ve identified.
    - Don’t give the impression you have all the answers. Make it clear that your suggestions are just a starting point and offer to discuss any ideas they have.
  9. Recognize your limits (as to what you can accomplish).
    - You can raise concerns, suggest solutions, and encourage thinking, but you cannot force change. Be concerned with faithfulness, not with results.
    - If you speak the truth in love and do all you can to confront the other person effectively, you will have succeeded in God’s eyes, regardless of how the other responds. God will take it from there.