

HEALTHY COMMUNICATION – Part I

SERMON – August 11, 2019

What is communication and what do we do when we communicate? Communication is imparting or exchanging some information or news. As we communicate with each other, we are sharing ideas, opinions, facts, or values.

According to Business Dictionary, communication is a two-way process of reaching mutual understanding, in which participants not only exchange information, news, ideas and feelings, but also create and share meaning. When we communicate, we are transferring thoughts, information, emotion and ideas through gesture, voice, symbols, signs and expressions from one person to another.

Last week, I read about two old ladies who were sitting on a bench one warm summer day.

- One was listening to the sound of the crickets chirping.
- The other was listening to a choir singing in a church just down the road.
- The woman listening to the choir said to the other woman,
 - o “My, isn’t that heavenly music?”
 - o “Yes,” replied the first. “And I understand they do it by rubbing their legs together.”

These ladies were communicating with each other, sharing their experiences, their feelings and their knowledge. But it seems they had just a little problem in their communication. The words they used in their conversation were clear and understandable. But their focus, the meaning behind their words and their message, was misunderstood. They put their message in words, but they heard each other’s words from totally different perspectives.

Their communication is humorous, but this kind of misunderstanding can occur any time in our daily lives. Communication problems and misunderstandings are always a major factor in relationships.

We all have moments of misunderstanding. How can we learn to communicate better in eliminating misunderstandings? If we want to have less stress and more enjoyable moments in our lives, we constantly have to improve our communication skills.

Healthy communication is such a vital aspect to any relationship between two people. Often it can be really challenging to know how to properly and effectively communicate with another person. This is especially true when we need to talk about tough topics that might cause tension or would cause division between two people.

Some people have a default channel on which they send and receive messages, experiences or feelings. Some people don’t like to talk. They are having hard time to communicate, to put their thoughts and feelings in words. They like to stay quiet. Sometimes you have to beg them: “Say something”.

Non-verbal communication is communication, too. By NOT saying a word, we are still communicating. We are communicating through our eyes, body language and NOT speaking. We are sending information to each other in every interaction.

Learning and practicing effective communication is the key to a long-lasting and healthy relationship.

This Sunday and next Sunday, we will take the time to learn and practice better communication skills for the sake of our relationships with spouses, children, friends, co-workers, neighbours or even with strangers. Our relationships would be much happier if we increase our communication skills.

Today, I would like to present to you the 4 Sides Model of Communication by Friedemann Schulz von Thun, a German psychologist and expert in communication. My hope is that learning, knowing and using the model will be helpful for our future communications. We will focus on ears, messages, intentions, beliefs and values.

This model says that a sentence, an observation or a message can be sent as four different pieces of information: **every message can reach us in four different ways, and we can receive that in 4 different ways. (Dr. Kraus & Partner)**

An Example:

We see two people around the table eating a home-cooked meal together. The one who didn't cook says:

Sender: "There is something green in the soup."

Factual Information: *There is **something** green.*

Appeal layer: *Please tell me what it is!*

Relationship layer: *You cooked, so you should know what it is.*

Self-revealing layer: *I don't like greens in my soup.*

Receiver's perception

Factual Information: There is something green.

Appeal layer: I should only cook what you know in the future!

Relationship layer: You think my cooking is questionable.

Self-revealing layer: You do not know what the green item is, and that makes you feel uncomfortable.

Because of the perceived intention of the message, the receiver might answer: "If you don't like the taste, you can cook it yourself!" The sender was misunderstood.

This soup example shows how amazingly the sender and receiver misunderstood each other. There is a huge potential of argument in misunderstanding each other. This can lead to a fight.

This message “there is something green in the soup” can be misunderstood individually. The sender just noticed the green stuff in the soup – maybe some new spice. But the receiver will understand the message depending on the ear she listens with. She might rightly hear the other person, but she might also just hear it as frustrating comment. She might listen to that sentence based on their relational problems or marital problems. “He likes to criticize me and now he has a problem with that green stuff in the soup.” This leads to misunderstanding, frustration and potential conflict.

1. The sender is sending a simple message. There is no any bad intention in this comment.
2. The receiver analyses the information heard, by matching it against her beliefs and values as well as her experiences and her state of mind. This all happens very fast and subconsciously.

I am sure that none of us want to waste our time and energy on misunderstandings. For this, we have to learn to **Check-in AND Check-back**.

The first step is awareness about what’s happening.

> Check-in: Think

Sender:

1. What is my intention? Is my intention to criticize? To say bad things about her soup? NO, NOT AT ALL !
2. Which information DO I want to send? I just want to find out what this new spice is.

Receiver:

1. Which ear am I listening on?
2. What information might my partner be sending?
3. How else could I understand this message?

Do we have bad experiences about our partners, who like to criticize and comment about anything we do or say?

Do we have unresolved issues in our relationship?

Check-back: Validate

Sender:

1. Make intention to send a **clear detailed** message, explaining what you want to say.
2. Ask what your partner heard and what they make of the conversation.

Receiver — Ask if you understood correctly:

1. “So do you mean...?” please explain
2. “So do you want me to...?” debrief

3. “I want to make sure we’re on the same page, ...”

We have to be very careful of: how we deliver our messages and how people perceive our messages, how we verbalize our statements, what kind of facial expressions and body language we use. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes and try to think with his brain, and ask yourself how your comment will impact him and your relationship.

I highly recommend that everyone should use this model, as well as checking-in and checking-back.

Practice, practice, practice... Like everything new, this, too requires practice!

May God help us to learn how to communicate with each other in a better way.