

Text: [James 1:19-26](#)
Date: January 27, 2019
Title: Healthy Relationships Series Week 4 – “Communication”
Theme: Communication is both incredibly important and incredibly complex.

Intro

Over the past few weeks, we’ve talked about several important issues in relationships

Remember back in December, we talked about expectations

Then anxiety, empathy and boundaries

This week’s topic is really important

I can honestly tell you that EVERY couple I’ve ever done premarital counseling with – no joke –

has said this is the #1 thing they could do better

Communication

Question

What’s the most important thing you have learned about communication in relationships?

Sermon

1

Let me ask you if you have ever been in a conversation like this

“I see the trash needs to go out” *silence*

A voice from the other room: “I know, I know! I’ll get to it!”

You’ve never been in a conversation like that before, have you?

Yeah, I haven’t either

I don’t know where I come up with such crazy ideas

You all are great communicators, I’m sure

You NEVER jump to conclusions

You NEVER read something between the lines that wasn’t there

You NEVER let your judgment get clouded by past experiences

Now why is this funny to us?
Because we've all been there
We don't often talk about it, but we've all been there

Communication is both incredibly important and incredibly complex
Important, because communication is literally the lifeblood of any
relationship
Where there's no communication, there IS no relationship
But it's a skill that I doubt any of us really get right more than about 70% of
the time

2

What we're going to talk about today in terms of communication,
kind of builds on everything we've talked about before – expectations,
anxiety, empathy, boundaries, all of it
You've already heard those sermons.

But communicating well means adding a few new dimensions.
I can think of four, at least.

The only acronym I can come up with is PITHy (slide)
Which actually is a great way to think about communication too: what you
say ought to be PITHy – short and sweet.

POSITIVITY – no one wants to listen to someone who is constantly
negative about life, about people, about situations, whatever.
And in relationships, a single negative comment is going to land
harder than about 100 positive ones. So be generous with the
good things you say.

INTEGRITY – making sure that your words and actions line up with each
other. People just stop listening to hypocrites. Today's scripture talks
about that – the idea that we've got to be doers of the Word and not
hearers only. The world isn't interested in hypocrites.

TRUTHFULNESS – I know that this is hard today...sadly, we seem to have
moved beyond a fact-based society. But here's the thing: you have to
accept reality, even when it's painful and maybe even a little
embarrassing to hear. And that goes both ways. We should be clear,
accurate and direct in what we say. Don't sugar-coat things.

HUMILITY – You have to be able to admit when you’re wrong. It’s ok to lose an argument every now and again! Sometimes you have to ask yourself: would I rather lose this argument or keep the relationship? Changing your thinking about something is not a sign of weakness. It’s a sign of maturity.

3

Now, let’s check and see what the scripture has to say about these things
James is a great book for tips on communicating
Because more than anything, what James emphasizes is our need to hold
our tongues
Which is pretty good advice that we get over and over again when we read
the Bible

So what does James say?
“Let everyone be quick to listen
slow to speak
slow to anger”

So what do we need to be QUICK to do? That’s right.
QUICK to listen – but SLOW to speak, SLOW to get angry.

There are literally dozens of verses about learning to keep silent¹
And it’s really important

But understand, listening is more than just not talking
It’s about putting down your phone
Leaning in, and engaging

Too often, what passes for listening is really just biding your time
Thinking about what you’re going to say, waiting for your turn to speak
But done well, listening is about respecting the person sitting across from
you
By giving them your full attention

4

In any system of communication, there are four parts:

The sender, the receiver, the signal (the message) and the noise (all the stuff that gets in the way) (slide)

Let's go back to where I started, in the example about a couple arguing about the trash

When someone got angry, what do you think they were reacting to – signal or noise? (Hard to say, but probably noise)

And where was that noise coming from? (Inside their own heads!)

There's an interesting way to think about this, that comes from a German psychologist who is an expert in interpersonal communication, Friedmann Schultz Von Thun

He called it the four-sides model (slide)

And what he says is that there are actually four layers to every instance of communication, each of which may be more or less important depending on what I'm trying to get across

The **first** layer is the fact: "I see the trash needs to go out"

So, I saw it. It's full. Facts.

The **second** layer is something about myself – something I'm revealing about what's important to me.

What I want, what I don't want, who I am, how I'm feeling.

So maybe that layer is being HEARD as: "I'm feel like I'm always taking the trash out."

The **next** layer is what we'd call the relationship layer – something about what's happening between us. Maybe that's being HEARD as:

"You're not holding up your end of this relationship." Yikes!

The **final** layer is an appeal – something we're trying to get across about what we want someone else to do. So here, that's being heard as:

"Get up and take out the trash!"

And so, how does the hearer respond? "I know, I know! I'll get to it!"

Now, that's how the HEARER interpreted those four layers

Was it accurate? There's no way to be sure. It could have been.

It could have totally missed the mark.

There's no way to know unless you ask the speaker what he or she
REALLY meant.

What was the intended content of those four layers?

I don't necessarily expect you to remember the layers or Friedmann
Schultz von Thun

The point is that everything we hear gets passed through a whole series of
filters:

tone of voice, body language, history of that relationship, where we are in
the moment (maybe we're feeling guilty for not helping more?)

5

Which brings us back to this idea of being QUICK to listen
SLOW to speak
SLOW to anger

Communicating is much more complicated than we tend to think it is
It's not just about what we say, or how we say it
It has everything to do with how we're being HEARD by the other person

Listening is an imperfect art
And there's no guarantee that in the end, the person who is listening isn't
getting it wrong
That's frustrating when we think about it – think about me up here,
speaking to a bunch of people – as hard as I try to be clear,
everyone is going to walk out of here with something different
and why, every once in a while, I end up in an argument with someone
about something that I said that I didn't really say!

So when we find ourselves in a place of misunderstanding or argument, we
need to learn to ask a lot more follow-up questions than we do
Because when we do that, we get insight into the other person's thought
process
We learn what they're REALLY thinking and feeling – which is GOOD for
the relationship
And that can keep us from jumping to conclusions next time – being QUICK
to anger

6

Can you imagine what would happen if everyone practiced this?
A world where Republicans and Democrats listened to each other – where
we were willing to put in the effort to separate signal from noise?
Maybe we could even avoid another shutdown in three weeks.
Perhaps that's too hard to imagine!

But let's bring it down to a level that IS imaginable
Your own house, your own family
What would it look like if we learned to practice these things?
If we DIDN'T assume that we could read minds?
If we really took the time to ask what someone was trying to say?
And then had the presence of mind to communicate in a PITHy way –
With positivity, integrity, truthfulness, and humility?

Imagine how much better our relationships would be
If we could be quick to listen
Slow to speak
Slow to anger

This week, commit to working on your communications skills
And see what kind of a difference it makes

Amen.

By Joe Monahan, Medford UMC, Medford NJ

¹ https://www.openbible.info/topics/being_quiet