

Series on Christian Communication by Doug Hamilton

In the 1967 movie *Cool Hand Luke*, the actor Paul Newman is sent to prison for public drunkenness and vandalism. While there he has an attitude to rebel against the prison system, including attempting escape multiple times. On one of those times the prison captain decided to make an example of Luke by roughing him up. As Luke lay freshly-beaten at the bottom of a ditch, the captain, Strother Martin, made a very profound statement to communicate Luke's behavior problems. He said, "What we have here is a failure to communicate." This became one of the most memorable lines in movie history. I mention this line from the movie to bring up this morning's lesson title "What We Have Here is a Failure to Communicate." It is the first lesson of a three-part series.

Becoming a Christian does not make us perfect, but forgiven. At the point of baptism we are cleansed of our sins, but there can still remain a failure to communicate. People do not plan this, but they fail to plan and that is the result.

1. Why do we have a failure to communicate?

a. Lack of Communication Skills

- i. James 1:19-20 *This* you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak *and* slow to anger;²⁰ for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.
 1. Quick to Hear: Be a great listener by waiting for the other person to finish the entire account, not just one at a time.
 2. Slow to Speak: This is not refer to stuttering or talking sloooooow, but to be careful and gentle in the words that we do use.
 3. Slow to Anger: As hard as it is, we must resist the temptation to demonstrate frustration in our communications with others.
- ii. Poor demonstrations in other non-verbal skills can be just as devastating and further cause a failure to communicate.
 1. Gestures
 2. Body Language
 3. Facial Expression
 4. Eye Contact
 5. Paralanguage (Voice quality, rate, pitch, volume, speed)
- iii. Poor communication skills have led many to have a failure to communicate.

The story is told of Franklin Roosevelt, who often endured long receiving lines at the White House. He complained that no one really paid any attention to what was said. One day, during a reception, he decided to try an experiment. To each person who passed down the line and shook his hand, he murmured, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." The guests responded with phrases like, "Marvelous! Keep up the good work. We are proud of you. God bless you, sir." It was not till the end of the line, while greeting the ambassador from Bolivia, that his words were actually heard. Without batting an eye, the ambassador leaned over and whispered, "I'm sure she had it coming."

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b. Lack of Humility

i. Philippians 2:3-8 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸ Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

1. When people are selfish and conceited, they do not communicate with people, but talk down to or over one another. Conversation with this type of individual is about him or herself, not with others in mind.
2. When someone knows that you care for them and vice-versa, they will want to be part of your heart and thoughts. They will trust and open up to you at new levels of healthy conversation.
3. Jesus set the greatest example of the communication in that He did not exalt Himself, but demonstrated the greatest humility the world had ever seen. He gave Himself on the cross to show His love for us. Greater love hath no man than He lay His life down for His friends (John 15:13) and did so in that while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8). Jesus did not have a failure to communicate.

In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi wrote that during his student days that he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed the teachings of Jesus in the Bible was the solution to the caste system which was dividing the people of India.

So one Sunday he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, the usher refused to give him a seat and suggested that he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. "If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu." That usher's prejudice and lack of humility not only betrayed Jesus but also turned a person away from trusting Him as Savior.

c. Lack of Perspective

- i. Psalm 44:21 tells us that God "... knows the secrets of the heart."
- ii. Psalm 94:11 "The LORD knows the thoughts of man..."
- iii. Psalm 139:3-4 "You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all."

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1. Simply put, God, and ONLY God, knows the thoughts and intents of the human heart. He knows every single thing about us. Many times we like to pretend that we have all the facts about the other person, but we are only fooling ourselves. We actually think that we can fully comprehend where another person is coming from, but usually we are wrong.
2. We must always assume that we do not have all the facts in our communications. When we do, then we will always engage in a quest to know. A lack of the proper perspective will always hurt others in the end. If assume we do not know everything and search out what might be behind the communication, then we might find out more about that individual and what might be behind it.
 - a. Phobias
 - b. Depression
 - c. Illness
 - d. Stress
3. Add in the differences among the human race and it also can give us a new perspective. People come from different cultures, different races, different backgrounds, different spiritual giftedness and dozens of other factors. All these things can lead us to have a failure to communicate. Something as simple as opposite sex can even cause understanding,

In a Harvard study of several hundred preschoolers, researchers discovered an interesting phenomenon. As they taped the children's playground conversation, they realized that all the sounds coming from little girls' mouths were recognizable words. However, only 60 percent of the sounds coming from little boys were recognizable. The other 40 percent were yells and sound effects like "Vrrroooooom!" "Aaaaagh!" "Toot toot!" This difference persists into adulthood. Communication experts say that the average woman speaks over 25,000 words a day while the average man speaks only a little over 10,000. What does this mean in marital terms? . . . On average a wife will say she needs to spend 45 minutes to an hour each day in meaningful conversation with her husband. What does her husband sitting next to her say is enough time for meaningful conversation? Fifteen to twenty minutes--once or twice a week!

-Gary Smalley and John Trent, *Husbands and Wives*.

4. Good Communication always begins with a willingness to explore and understand better where the person is truly coming from. When we fail in this, what we have is a failure to communicate.

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d. Lack of Time

- i. Hebrews 10:24-25 "...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.
 1. This human interactive words like "one another" and "assembly" involves taking the time to interact with another. Too often a person has a failure to communicate because they are not taking the time to get to know someone better.
 2. We all have witnessed many misunderstandings and miscommunications coming forth out of this environment. Relationships are built over time and unless that person will make the time to do so there will always be a failure to communicate.
 3. This can be true in a church body, a marriage, a parent/child relationship or a friendship. Whenever there is neglect of the investment of time, communication will never flourish.

Charles Francis Adams, 19th century political figure and diplomat, kept a diary. One day he entered: "Went fishing with my son today--a day wasted." His son, Brook Adams, also kept a diary, which is still in existence. On that same day, Brook Adams made this entry: "Went fishing with my father--the most wonderful day of my life!" The father thought he was wasting his time while fishing with his son, but his son saw it as an investment of time. We must always understand that the investment of time is the foundation of communication.

Conclusion:

There are other reasons why we have a failure to communicate, but these are the four primary ones. If we just employed good communication skills, demonstrated humility, eagerly sought out a fully accurate perspective and reserved the time to do so, things would better. We could actually eliminate the statement, "What we have here is a failure to communicate."

In the next lesson we will use the Bible to find some good techniques to use for furthering the communication of the Christian. In lesson three we will focus on what to do when communication completely breaks down and how to resolve it. Hopefully the series helps us to be better communicators for Christ.