

THE SECRET OF COMMUNICATION Proverbs 25:11

INTRODUCTION:

Last week, my brother-in-law and I sent some e-mails back and forth. Mike asked me about something I had said in an e-mail to Mom. He said that Mom wanted to talk with him about it and he wanted to make sure that what I had written was still accurate. I wrote back and said it was.

The next e-mail from Mike said, "I resent what you wrote to your Mom." Now where did *that* come from, I wondered. So I e-mailed Mike and said I was sorry but my intentions were good. Mike said that my reply left him a bit confused; his intentions were good, too. It was only after I telephoned my sister that I found out that when Mike said, "I resent what you wrote to your Mom" what he meant was, "I re-sent what you wrote to your Mom."

Now, I thought I was communicating clearly. Mike thought he was communicating clearly. But there was certainly no shared understanding between us. And communication has not happened until there is shared understanding.

For the seven weeks between Mothers' Day and Fathers' Day, we have been looking at seven small secrets for a happy home. Today's is no small secret. This is a big one. Today, we are going to look at communication as an important ingredient in a happy home.

In Proverbs 25:11, Solomon wrote:

*A word aptly spoken
is like apples of gold in settings of silver.*

Isn't that beautiful? "A word aptly chosen is like apples of gold in settings of silver."

The word "aptly" in the text translates a Hebrew word, found only once in the entire Bible, which conveys the sense of "*in season*". The King James Version of the Bible rendered the term "fitly" and the New American Standard Version uses the phrase, "*A word spoken in right circumstances.*" But any way you slice the apples, you still get the meaning that carefully chosen words are precious.

Job, in the midst of his suffering, had something different to say about words. After his friend, Eliphaz, suggested that Job deserved to suffer because of his sin, Job said, "*How painful are honest words!*" Job did not consider Eliphaz's words to be like apples of gold in settings of silver. To Job, what Eliphaz said must have seemed more like sliced lemons in a glass of medicine.

Perhaps the difference is that in the book of Proverbs, Solomon wrote about carefully chosen words. Job, on the other hand, was reacting to some very thoughtless, tactless, ill-timed and insensitive words.

I've been known to say things that are insensitive. Have you? Job's observation was that Eliphaz's words were painful. I've hurt people by things I have said. Have you? Maybe we can all learn to communicate a little better.

As you undoubtedly know, there are messages all around us. Even while I am preaching, there are a lot of other messages in this room, too. And while I could be talking about people who whisper, pass notes or text message during the sermon, that is not what I mean.

Radio waves carrying words and music fill this room. But we don't hear any of it. The reasons we don't hear the radio signals may be the same reasons we don't hear the people in our home. For the sake of illustration, let's use a radio as a figure of what we need so we can have effective communication.

I. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION REQUIRES THAT WE HAVE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

I have a large, antique radio that I treasure. It is a 1941 Zenith model 10A1 that sold for \$90 when new. Today, radios like this one, sell for between \$450 and \$500.

But this one is priceless. It belonged to my grandfather. As a child, I used to sit in an upstairs bedroom in grandpa's old farmhouse in Douglas County and I would listen to White Sox baseball games on that same radio.

I love that old radio. But I rarely listen to it. It works well. I can get lots of radio stations on it; even dozens of short-wave broadcasts from foreign countries and ship-to-shore communication. Some days, I can get Morse Code transmissions. But I don't listen to that old radio very much because the station I listen to most often is an FM station and that old 1941 Zenith doesn't receive FM signals.

Sometimes, when attempting to communicate with other people, it can feel like you are broadcasting on the FM band and they are only equipped to hear AM transmissions. Effective communication requires that we have the right equipment and that does not simply mean a mouth and two good ears.

The right equipment for communication includes desire. To communicate, you've got to want to. Effective communication and shared understanding

are not easy and they are not automatic. It takes effort. If either party lacks the desire, the ability to communicate will be thwarted.

Respect for the other person is an important piece of equipment for good communication. If anyone feels disrespected, taken for granted or ignored, real communication will never occur. The other person will be quite guarded, his defenses will go up and your message won't get a fair hearing. Respect really is an indispensable component for communication.

Listening is an important piece of equipment for good communication...not just receiving sound but actually listening for understanding. All too often, we don't really listen to one another. We hear words but we don't discern the thoughts, the emotions and the meaning those words could convey.

The right equipment also includes time. Words fired in passing often miss their mark. To communicate effectively, we must take the time to think about what we are going to say and how best to say it. Then we must think about what the other person has said and why. If we are thinking about how we are going to reply even before the other person has finished speaking, we will probably miss the meaning of what is said. It takes time to communicate well.

I do not pretend that this is an exhaustive list of equipment needed to properly communicate but I'm quite certain that these elements must be present for shared understanding.

II. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION REQUIRES THAT WE HAVE THE MATCHING FREQUENCY

Not only do I need the right equipment to pick up the signal of a radio station, I need to tune in to the right frequency. Even if I have a radio equipped with an FM receiver and even if I have it switched to the FM band, until I adjust the tuner to the correct frequency for the station I want to hear, I cannot receive the signal.

Sometimes, in the home, the same thing can take place. One of the kids starts to talk to Dad but he has his face buried in the newspaper or glued to the television. They are not tuned in to the same frequency.

Dad tries to talk to Mom but she's preoccupied with thinking about what to fix for supper and how to get the laundry washed, dried and folded before work tomorrow so she isn't really listening to him. They are not on the same frequency.

Your son or daughter comes home from school and tells you that the rip in the jeans was on a slide into home plate during PE and that because of

that slide, their team won. Your child is excited about the winning run and you are upset about the torn pants. Your kid expects you to be pleased but you are agitated. You are definitely not on the same frequency.

Maybe Dad comes home from work and starts to talk about some serious mistake he made on the job. He begins to relate how he got yelled at by his boss and blamed by his subordinates. If Mom doesn't understand what he is really saying, she may try to tell him what he did wrong that caused the mistake. She may start to explain what she thinks he ought to do tomorrow to make amends for his error. She might even point out that this is not the first time he's made the same blunder and that she told him the last time how to avoid it.

If she isn't on the same frequency he is, she may very well miss the fact that what he really wanted was for her to understand how badly he feels, how insecure he is in his job and how much he needs to be told that she still loves him.

Effective communication requires that we not only hear what the other person is saying but that we also listen for what that means. We try to tune in to the mood, the emotion and the feeling behind the words. That is what it means to be on the same frequency.

III. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION REQUIRES THAT WE HAVE THE SAME LANGUAGE

Do you remember me saying that Grandpa's old Zenith radio will often pick up Morse Code? It doesn't do me much good, though because I don't understand Morse Code.

That radio can also receive short wave transmissions from other countries. I always thought that was pretty neat when I was a kid. I could sit in the east bedroom of that two-story farmhouse and tune in stations and hear what sounded like German and Japanese and Spanish and other languages I could not even guess.

That was kind of an interesting novelty for me. I would tune in the signal as clearly as I could and I'd put my ear close to the speaker and try to hear between the static. But there wasn't any communication taking place because I did not understand the language that was being spoken.

I've had the same experience when some of you have talked to me about the oil field. Terms like "pulling unit," "rotary table" and "traveling block" sounded like a foreign tongue to me. And I still can't seem to keep straight the difference between a roughneck and a roustabout. When people start to talk "oil field" around me, it is like they are speaking another language.

There are times it can seem that way in the home. And it is not because one person is speaking technical jargon. It may be that that person is speaking about feelings when you assume she is speaking about facts. The language of facts and the language of feelings are not the same.

He may be speaking about the past when you think he's talking about the present. He talks about an argument that the two of you had last year and if you don't understand his language, you might miss the fact that he is really talking about the same disagreement that is between you today.

Were you ever joking when someone took you seriously? Or the other way around? You weren't speaking the same language, were you? You never intended that quip, that witticism or that jibe to hurt. But you didn't know that her Mom used to put her down for the very thing you just made a joke about. You thought you were telling a joke but what she heard was an insult.

On your planet, "*plump*" is an endearing term. Not on hers.

In your language, "*bald*" is just another hair color but in his language, it is a term for old and undesirable.

To Dad, "*turn that thing down*" means lower the volume quite a bit but to his teenager, it means an argument is fixing to happen.

The playwright George Bernard Shaw claimed that, "England and America are two countries divided by a common language." Youth and adults can be two generations divided by a common language. Men and women can be two genders divided by a common language. So we ought not to be too surprised that communication in the home can be more of an art than a science.

CONCLUSION:

But when we have the right equipment, when we are tuned to the same frequency and when we are using shared language, something marvelous can happen: communication resulting in shared understanding takes place.

God created us in His image and part of being made in the image of God is our capacity to communicate. God did this not only so that humans can communicate with one another. He also did this so that He can have a relationship with us. God builds that relationship with us through the use of words. He has put His mind into our language so that we can know Him and respond to Him. That is an amazing thing.

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And He has also given us the capacity to build relationships with one another. And again, the principle tool we use to build those relationships is words.

Communication is an important thing. It's a powerful thing. That is why God takes it so seriously. God takes communication so seriously that some people, most people in fact, will never hear about God unless we tell them. He has entrusted His word to us and He commanded that we share it with the world.

INVITATION: #438 – *“Jesus Saves!”*