

Family Talk

How's the Family Communicating?

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Course II – Unit 7, Lesson 1
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"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature..."
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

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How's the Family Communicating?

This unit will discuss how the family communicates and discipline. This lesson will consider communication, and Lesson 2 will look at how we listen. Communication is how we interact with the world around us. Through communication we express our deepest needs and our highest hopes.

Before continuing, please write three or four sentences describing how you communicate with not only the world around you but with your family. **Write your thoughts on the enclosed Response Sheet and then put it out of your sight until the end of this lesson.** Next we recommend that you read this entire lesson through once. Then go back and study it in-depth before completing the Response Sheet.

I. Introduction

We do not live in isolation. Each of us is surrounded by several environments. One is physical; another is cultural; a third is social. Communications are how we interact with these environments. Communication is not just verbal (talking). It is also nonverbal (body language and voice tone, inflection, and intensity).

Probably the most important group we communicate with is our family. Dealing with nonfamily members is important, but God designed the family to be man's most important social unit. Learning to communicate correctly with those in our family should be one of our major goals.

God tells us how He wants us to communicate with our family. *Love* is the basis of God's plan for family communication—love between the husband and wife, love between the parent and children. The husband loves his wife as he loves himself and as Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25, 28-29). This does not go in just one direction. The wife, also, is to love her husband as she loves herself. Their mutual love and respect is the foundation of their communications. Since anger and violence have no place in love, there is no place for them in a husband and wife's communication. Love is also the foundation of communication between parents and children (Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20-21). The child is to honor and show love, respect, and obedience to his parents. The parents, on the other hand, are not to be tyrants; they are to love their children. They communicate this love by treating their children with respect, by teaching them about the Lord, by helping them learn to live in society, by not treating them as “things” or inferiors, and yes, if the need arises, by disciplining them.

A family that does not follow God's plan uses fear and selfishness as its foundation for communication. Having stolen his brother Esau's inheritance, Jacob's jealousy and selfishness caused him to lie to his father Isaac (Genesis 27:5-41). The failure of King David's family's led to rape, murder, lies, drunkenness, and rebellion (2 Samuel 13:1-29).

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II. Family Communications

A. People Communicate With Each Other for a Variety of Reasons

1. *To transmit information* - This occurs when we exchange factual information with others. It happens in schools, in the workplace, at a trial, and on a television news show.
2. *To share experiences* - This is what happens when two friends tell each other of their fishing, hunting, or shopping trips. It also occurs when they tell each other what happened to them at work or their problems.
3. *To establish closeness and solidarity* - This is the communication that exists between husband and wife, parents and children, and close friends. It is seen when a husband and wife tell each other of the day's experiences. It is seen when a child rushes to his mother or father to tell them that he loves them.
4. *To manipulate or control other's emotions* - This reason is not bad within itself. Through the expression of love, we can try to get others to be more loving. We see this in God's relationship to man. God showed His love to us by sending Jesus. He wants us to respond to His love by loving Him and loving our fellow man. However, too often, this reason is used as an attempt to control others.
5. *To express our needs* - These needs can be either physical, social, emotional, or religious. We tell others when we are sick or injured, hungry or thirsty, lonely or sad.
6. *To get others to do or stop doing something* - A father does not always need to tell a child to be quiet or stop picking on a brother. A curt look or raised eyebrows is often enough.
7. *To control our own behavior.* When others tell us how to do something or what to do, they are controlling our behavior. Also, we control our own behavior when we tell or promise someone that we will do something.
8. *To deceive or protect another* - When a mother tells a child not to cross the street or climb a tree, she is trying to protect him. She is showing her concern and love for him. Deception is a form of lying. It is when we

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represent something as true when it is false. When a mother does not want her daughter to date a certain boy and tells her that he has been in jail, when he has not, she is deceiving her daughter. It is always wrong, regardless of how we try to rationalize that it is really for their own good.

B. Four Directions for Communication

1. *External topics* - This is talking about things; it is very impersonal. When we have just met someone, the weather is usually the topic. When we talk about politics, a movie, a TV show, people we might or might not know, or ideas, we are talking about external topics.
2. *Yourself* - This is when you talk about how you feel, what you think, your experiences, your needs. This is not being self-centered. In any healthy relationship each member must talk about himself or herself. It becomes unhealthy when we talk only about ourselves and ignore others.
3. *Your partner* - This is talking about your partner's feelings, thoughts, experiences, or needs. Your partner could be your spouse, a child, a parent, your boss, a fellow employee, or a friend. This sharing between yourself and your partner is necessary to maintain a healthy relationship.
4. *Relationship messages* - Relationship messages are of a personal nature. They deal with maintaining the relationship and usually are intimate in nature. They go beyond talking about yourself and your partner. You are talking about yourselves as a unit, such as a husband and wife talking about strengthening their marriage.

C. Eight Rules for Enhancing Family Communications

1. *Express feelings and thoughts in clear terms.* Use words that mean what you want to say. Do not use ambiguous terms or words that have double meanings. Also, make sure nonverbal language is the same as your words. When the two are different, your message will be misunderstood and misinterpreted.
2. *Accept responsibility for actions, thoughts, and feelings.* Use “I” phrases. Make sure that your listener knows this is the way you feel and think.

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3. *Acknowledge the hearing and understanding of a message.* Be a good listener. If you do not hear or understand what is being said to you, tell the person who said it.
4. *Allow a free, natural, spontaneous flow of messages.* When communicating, do not make well rehearsed, long-winded speeches. Be natural and genuine in what you say.
5. *Allow for interruptions* - We are surrounded with noise and distractions. These and the person with whom we are speaking can interrupt us. Interruptions are a part of living; do not let them frustrate you.
6. *Refrain from jumping ahead of the message with an interpretation and response.* Let the other person finish what he has to say. It might or might not be what you think he is saying. Do not jump to conclusions in the middle of the message.
7. *Allow each member to have his or her say in negotiating a solution to a conflict.* Remember the old saying, “Two heads are better than one.” The other person has his/her own point of view to a solution. Listen to what he says; you might learn something.
8. *Listen for the level of the message and respond on the same level.* If a person says, “I feel...” you need to respond with a feeling statement. If you respond with, “I think...” the communication has broken down. There is a difference in feeling and thinking.

D. Principles and Misconceptions of Communications

Some of the principles of communications are: communications can be intentional or unintentional; it is impossible not to communicate; all messages have a content and a relational dimension; communication is irreversible; communication is not repeatable.

Over the years myths and misconceptions have grown up around communications. The truth is that meanings are in people, not words; more communication is not always best; communications will not solve all problems; and communication is not a natural ability.

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III. Three Theories Regarding Communications

A. Don D. Jackson

Jackson says “relationships are the fundamental building blocks of a family.” Another way of putting it is that relationships tie the family together.

Relationships are a kind of association in which the members, more or less, meet each other's needs. To meet each other's needs, we have to communicate our needs to the other person. Failure to communicate our needs clearly leads to misunderstanding, friction and a breakdown in the family relationship.

Solomon said, “For as he thinks within himself, so he is.” (Proverbs 23:7) When we allow our minds to think certain thoughts, we will act upon those thoughts. When a husband thinks thoughts of kindness and love about his wife, he will be kind and loving to her. If he thinks thoughts of resentment and anger about her, he will mistreat and abuse her.

Jackson says that there are five basic rules of communication. The first one is that everything we do or *do not do* sends a message. It is impossible not to communicate. It is not only what we say, but how we say it; our body language accompanies it.

Jackson's second rule of communication is that each message is wrapped in emotions. People act and react with emotions in everything they do. It can be anything from a blank expression, meaning, “I do not want you to know what I am really thinking,” to a smile, meaning, “I like you.”

The third rule of communication is that each message creates a response. Communication is not one way; it goes in both directions. There is a response to all messages we receive. It can be anything from a spoken reply to raised eyebrows.

The fourth rule of communication is that words and other behaviors deliver messages. They can be only in body language. In fact, most of our communication is nonverbal. This can be a sigh or laugh, the volume and pitch of the voice, eye contact, gestures, and body movements.

Jackson's final rule of communication is that each message promotes or denies equality of position, depending on the relationship between those involved in it.

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The two basic relationships are equality (symmetrical) and difference (complementary). In the equality relationship each member mirrors the other's behavior. It is the idea of communication between two equals. The complementary relationship is that between a superior and an inferior. We do not stay in one position all the time. We move back and forth between being an equal, superior, and inferior in our different relationships.

B. Jay Haley

All relationships are based on communication. It is communication that begins, maintains, and ends relationships. Without communication (verbal or non-verbal), it would be impossible to have a relationship.

Another aspect of communications is that it helps to define who is in control of a relationship. When a young man puts his arm around a young lady, he is attempting to define their relationship on a romantic level. If she allows his arm to stay there, she is accepting his control in defining their relationship. On the other hand, if she removes it, she is defining and controlling their relationship as nonromantic.

This struggle to define and control relationships cannot be avoided. People are always attempting to define their relationships. In a healthy relationship a balance exists between the partners.

There are two levels of communication: words and music. The word level is the words that are actually spoken. The music level it is the tone, intensity, and voice that we use. Tone has to do with the pitch of a word or sentence. It can be either high or low. Strain and tension will cause the tone to rise, while thoughtfulness and relaxation will cause it to become deeper. Intensity has to do with force—loudness or softness, fast or slow. Inflection has to do with how we accent the words.

When we say, “I'm feeling good,” what does the music level say? If we say it fast with a high pitch and flat inflection, we are really saying that something is wrong. In any spoken communication, the music level is more important than the word level. Often the words say what we think we are supposed to say, but it is the music level that says what we are really feeling and thinking.

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C. Virginia Satire

Satire says that relationships are based on feelings about oneself, others, and areas of interest to self and others. This is not a simple concept. It is extremely complex, especially when applied to family relationships. Satire says that there are four *wrong* ways to communicate.

1. *The Blamer* - This type of person wants to be regarded as strong and in control of all he surveys. He is the boss, a fault finder, a tyrant. The content of his message is “it's your fault.” He is characterized by bulging eyes and neck muscles and flaring nostrils. His face reddens as he points an accusing finger.
2. *The Placater* - This type of person does not want to make anyone mad. He is the typical “yes man,” a bootlicker. He always apologizes and never disagrees with anybody or anything. He cannot do anything for himself and never thinks for himself. He is characterized by being physically on one knee with one hand held up as a beggar would. His voice is whiny and squeaky.
3. *The Reasonable One* - This type is also called the “computer.” As the name implies, this person is very correct, reasonable, and abstract in his thinking and speaking. He shows no feelings or emotions. He is a perfectionist. Errors are not tolerated. He is characterized by a ramrod back and ten-inch-wide iron collar around his neck. His voice is flat and dead.
4. *The Irrelevant One* - This type is also known as the “distracter.” This type of person acts as though nothing is important and seems out of touch with what is happening around him. He ignores any type of threat and his words make no sense. He usually responds to a question or statement with one of his own that is of a different subject. He is characterized by knees locked together in an exaggerated manner and his body going off in different directions. His voice is singsong and does not match his words.

Satire calls the person who communicates in a mature manner the *Leveler*. The leveler is in touch with his whole body. He knows what he is thinking, doing, and feeling. His communication is clear and precise. It is easy to understand. The leveler is secure that he is able to accept people who are different from himself. He is not afraid of people from different cultures, races, ideas, or religions. Although he accepts them, he does not necessarily agree with them. He does not see differences as a threat. He sees them as a chance to learn more

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about the world and its peoples and ideas. Satire says, “Being a leveler enables you to have integrity, commitment, honesty, intimacy, competence, and creativity.”

III. Conclusion

Communication ties a relationship together. If the communications are angry and resentful, the relationship will be weak and untrustworthy. When it is genuine and honest, the relationship will be strong and positive. God wants us to build our family communication on love, honesty, and genuineness.

Now, please return to the enclosed Response Sheet and write your answers to the study questions about this lesson.