



Communication Theory

Christian Communication

Intersected with the Christian Life

Session 1: Whole Messages

Introduction

Complete this sentence in your small groups: “Communication is absolutely terrible these days because ...”

My Personal Communication

To begin, reflect on your own communication:

1. How would you describe your communication style?
2. What struggles do you have when communicating?
3. What would you like this Bible study to address?

Whole Messages

Proverbs 15:1–4

Devotional Thought

In biblical theology, words do not simply convey information; they do something. God spoke the Word, and the world was created. Jesus commanded the sick to be healed, and they were. Pastors proclaim sins are forgiven, and they are. **Provide some examples** from these verses: “For better or for worse, words can be the most powerful things you can do.”

Theoretical Explanation

In communication theory, whole messages are not necessarily for everyday conversations, but they are particularly appropriate for harder, deeper conversations like the ones mentioned in Proverbs 15, where “a gentle answer turns away wrath.” A whole message is a careful way of communicating that leaves nothing important unsaid. Instead of saying “you” a lot (which can create defensiveness), whole messages use copious amounts of “I statements.” A whole message has four components:

1. **Observation:** “Here is what happened ...” (neutral statements of fact)
2. **Thought:** “That makes me think/suspect/believe ...” (your own understanding or inference)
3. **Feeling:** “That makes me feel ...” (describing the context and intensity of your emotion)
4. **Need:** “Therefore, I need ...” (identifies a specific changed behavior that is desired)

Discussion

Many everyday conversations leave one (or more) of the four parts out. What happens if you leave each of the parts out?

1. Observation:
2. Thought:
3. Feeling:
4. Need:

Analyze the flaws in these conversations:

(1) “You haven’t been in church in a long time.”
“No, actually I have been at church recently.”
“Well, when was that?”
“About two months ago. That’s not that long ago.”
“I don’t remember that.”
“Maybe you were out of town.”
“Well, we still need you to be in church more often than that.”
“Maybe it’d be nice to see you in church more often too!”

(2) “You look really mad. What did I do wrong?”
“Well, I came in the door with my arms full of groceries and kids running around, but you sat on the couch watching TV!”
“But I didn’t know you wanted me to help you.”
“How could you not know? Just look at me!”
“Next time, I just need you to tell me that you need help, and I’ll come help.”

(3) “Pastor, what you did after church last week really bothered me.” [brief silence]

“I’m sorry about that. What are you referring to?”

“Well, I had been really sick but you never visited me. When I managed to come back to church, you talked to so many other people. No one ever talked to me. I felt like no one even cares about me in this church. I’m living on an island, lonely and overwhelmed.”

“I apologize. There were a lot of people who wanted to talk to me after church, and I just didn’t know you had been sick.”

“Well, it feels like other members are more important than I am. I don’t even know why I’m a part of this church if that’s how people treat me.”

Conclusion: Put it into Practice!

You have not seen an individual at church or in your growth group for a number of weeks. You could simply ignore it, or you could address it to find out what is really going on. **Simulate this situation** by beginning with some small talk and then using a whole message. Here is how it will work:

1. One person will act as the concerned church member.
2. A second person will act as the absent individual.
3. The other people in your group will act as communication coaches who will analyze the conversation and provide feedback.
4. Switch roles as much as possible so that people will get a chance to play all the roles.