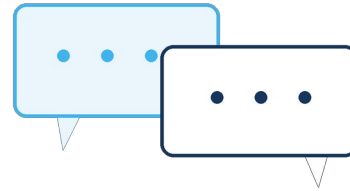


5 RULES OF BIBLICAL COMMUNICATION



Do you want to know the 5 keys to better communication? Who doesn't?

Good relationships don't happen automatically. Neither are they immune from problems. We are all sinners (Romans 3:10-12, 23), meaning we are selfish and finite - and that's all it takes to set the stage for conflict.

But God's Word guides us in how to communicate in order to keep unity in our relationships. There is no clearer description than in the book of Ephesians.

Chapters one through three of Ephesians lays the foundation as it assures us of our vertical relationship with God and who we are in Christ. Ephesians 4:1 is a key transition:

"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called."

Ephesians 4:1 (ESV)

Because of who we are in Christ and because of our union with Him, Paul tells us to walk worthy of that calling. Our attitude toward our horizontal "family" relationships is expressed in Ephesians 4:2: "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love." Then, in Ephesians 4:3, you read the admonition to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

In Ephesians 4:22-24 Paul stresses the importance of laying aside the "old self" and its way of doing things and putting on the "new self," which is God's way of handling matters. The following verses (25-32) detail the communication rules we are to use in all our relationships. When we apply these keys, we develop unity. When we break one or more of them, tension and disunity follow.

The Five Rules of Biblical Communication

1 Be Honest · Ephesians 4:25

"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another."

A. Speak.

The Greek is an imperative - a command: "You speak!" People cannot read our minds. "For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him?" (1 Corinthians 2:11). Clamming up, or the "silent treatment" is out for the Christian. Denial is also dishonesty - saying "Nothing! Leave me alone!" when there is a problem.

B. Speak truth.

Speaking the truth in 4:15 is a verb form that involves continuous action. We are to always speak truth. Examples of dishonesty include:

- Outright deceit

- Incongruency: when non-verbal communication and content conflict
- Disguised communication: when the real message is masked; innuendo

Honesty is more than not lying - it is being open and truthful. "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices" (Colossians 3:9).

C. Speak the truth lovingly.

This command is tempered by Ephesians 4:15, speaking the truth in love. Christians are to speak the truth with the other person's best interests in mind. Care must be given to not only what you say but also how you say it - tone of voice, volume, facial expressions. Venting to make myself feel better in the name of harsh truth is extremely selfish. Godly speech requires kindness, gentleness, and humility.

"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned as it were with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person" (Colossians 4:6). My responsibility is to be honest and motivated by love. God is responsible to produce the results.

2 Keep Current · Ephesians 4:26-27

"Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil."

When I am angry, I must not sin by having a sinful response to that anger. Specifically, I should not hold anger in and stuff it.

Failure to solve each day's problems that day means you are:

- Guilty of sin - you're commanded to do it!
- Opening the way to resentment and hatred. Check James 4:1-12 for a sinful response to anger. It destroys people when anger gives way to bitterness (Hebrews 12:15) and bitterness gives way to hatred and vengeance (Romans 12:19-21).
- Distorting subsequent problems
- Giving the devil a foothold, an inroad into your life

Today's problems are enough to deal with today. "Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34). I shouldn't carry today's problems over into tomorrow lest I wake up angry tomorrow still dealing with today's stuff.

3 Attack Problems, Not People · Ephesians 4:29-30

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God..."

A. Unwholesome words

"Corrupt communication" - KJV - bypass the real issue, zero in on the person's character (cf. Matthew 5:21-22), and tear down or rip apart (cf. James 3:5-12). Labeling others with words like "stupid" or "slob" or saying "I wish I didn't have to be around you" or even "you always" or "you never" are attacks on the person. To say even one corrupt word grieves the Holy Spirit! He allows for none. Silence is also an attack, often interpreted as saying, "You aren't worth the energy it takes to communicate to resolution."

Any two believers, regardless of the human relationship - spouse, parent/child, sibling, employer/employee, neighbor, friend, brother in Christ - are on the same team - God's! We are teammates, not enemies.

B. Edifying communication

Edifying communication encourages or builds up, zeros in on the real issue, centers on personal responsibility (cf. Matthew 7:1ff), and gives “grace” (i.e. the desire and ability to do God's will) to those who hear.

I don't know what to do to fix the problem if I'm called a “slob,” but I do know what to do to fix “you did not clean your room today.” I can clean my room and restore the unity. I can't fix “stupid” but I can attack the problem of “leaving the lights on all night.”

“Unity happens when we as teammates attack problems. Disunity happens when we attack each other.”

4 Act, Don't React · Ephesians 4:31-32

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

When we react, we “bounce off” the words or actions of another. We let ourselves be controlled by what they say or do. By whom does God's Word instruct me to be controlled? The Holy Spirit! (Galatians 5:16-26). Reactions make problems worse, not better.

A. Reaction (v.31) - attitudes and actions you must “put off” completely:

- Bitterness - the inability to treat someone as if they never hurt you
- Wrath - flaring outbursts of rage
- Anger - settled indignation or hostility that frequently seeks revenge; the “slow burn”
- Clamor - harsh contention and strife; public quarreling; brawling
- Slander - speech that injures; abusive speech
- Malice - the desire to harm others or to see others suffer

B. Actions (v.32) - attitudes and actions you must “put on” to replace the reactions:

- Kind - benevolent; helpful; courteous
- Tenderhearted - lit. “of good heartedness”; compassionate; sympathetic
- Forgiving - to pass over an offense and to free the offender from the consequences of it, just as God in Christ forgave you - firstly: before you confessed, freely: without merit on your part, and fully: for every offense.

I can act like Jesus regardless of what you say or do! We can choose to act like Jesus, being kind, compassionate, forgiving. Arguments are possible only if there are two people who react.

5 Listen Attentively · James 1:19-20

“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

Throughout Proverbs, the idea of listening is also seen through statements like “pay attention,” or “give me your ear,” or “incline your ear to my voice.” These are clear admonitions to listen attentively.

Some people don't listen. They are busy stating their opinions or preparing their response, but not listening carefully. Failing to listen fosters mistakes and incites anger. Listening is paramount to knowing how to respond properly and to contribute words of value.

Conclusion

Changing habits is not easy, but can be done (1 Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13). It is much easier than the “way of the transgressor” (Proverbs 13:15b KJV). No matter how ungodly others are in their attitudes and actions, you must communicate biblically!

What if all of God's children used these five communication keys? What a difference we could make in our world!

“All will know you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34-35

We would be like the early church that turned the world upside down. Our churches would function in a unified manner, and our homes would be safe havens for all who come in. We would indeed walk in unity in all our relationships.