

Chapter 4

The First Barrier to World Evangelization: Communication

LESSON OBJECTIVE

It is important to understand that:

- Communication is an important challenge in life, doubly so in world missions
- There are many different forms of communication
- The communication process contains many different components, layers and levels
- Communication influences knowledge, emotions and decision-making
- The more senses we involve in our audiences, the better they retain our messages
- Evangelism demands insight in the receptor's level of gospel understanding
- Converts cannot just be let to their own devices

LESSON OUTLINE

In this lesson we learn about:

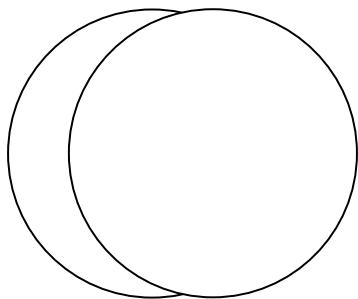
- A Definition of Communication
- The Interpersonal Communication Process
- Six Basic Ingredients & Four Additional Factors
- Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Sources
- Percentage of Things We Remember
- Gospel Receptivity, The Engel-Scale & Initial Discipleship Explained

LESSON CONTENTS

A Definition of Communication

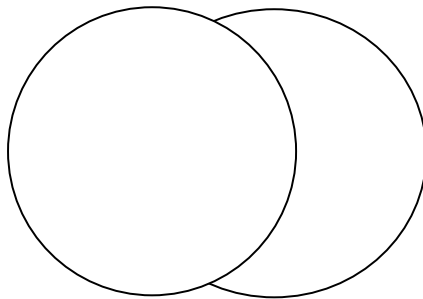
The word 'communication' (Latin: communes) means in common. To communicate meaningfully with someone we must have certain things in common. Commonness is shared in agreed codes, such as language and symbols. Symbols can be expressed in allegorical language and non-verbally through gestures or body language.

Communication, or rather its lack, causes many problems, whether between spouses, employers and employees, pupils and teachers, or missionaries and their audiences. Communicating well, thus avoiding misunderstandings as much as possible, is a gift and an art. Communication is easier to the degree that language, culture, level of training and religion are shared. The overlap of understanding is then relatively big. It becomes harder to the measure that these basics differ, or, that the overlap of understanding is relatively small. The following picture makes this clear:



Messenger Receptor

The *first* set of circles shows a big segment of overlap. Communicational distance is *small*. They have *much* in common.



Messenger Receptor

The *second* set of circles shows a small segment of overlap. Communicational distance is *big*. They have *little* in common.

The missionary's task is to communicate the gospel so that it reflects its truth and becomes relevant to the person he witnesses to. Relevant means: appropriate within the cultural context, not seemingly

foreign, and applicable to that person's life and circumstances. Hesselgrave calls communication *The Missionary Problem Par Excellence*.¹¹⁶

Communication became a world-wide problem since God confused the languages,¹¹⁷ to limit the spread of evil. True communication can only take place and last when the divine-human relationship is restored first: the cultural isolation of Genesis 11 can only be restored by Acts 2, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. There and then language barriers were lifted; the divine-human dialogue was restored.

The Interpersonal Communication Process

What happens when people communicate? Communication theory is a complicated science. Therefore we limit ourselves to communication as it occurs between two persons, ignoring dynamics of mass-communication.

Several events take place in interpersonal communication. Before the messenger's thought reaches the receptor, different phases are being passed. We assume that messenger Mr. A and receptor Mr. B can both speak and hear. Mr. A uses *speech* to address Mr. B. We see three components: speaker, message and receptor. The following paragraph describes the communication process, but says nothing about its *quality*.

Six Basic Ingredients & Four Additional Factors

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| <i>The mind</i> | is where A selects his thoughts, translates them into words and adds illustrations. He intends his message to reach a certain effect. This we call: |
| <i>Encoding</i> | He uses a set of previously agreed upon symbols (e.g. language, smoke signals, drum beating). This audible or visible expression we call: |
| <i>The channel</i> | is the medium used, e.g. voice, language, gestures. |

116 Hesselgrave, 1991:23, 2nd edition
117 Gen. 11

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| <i>Empathy</i> | is A's estimation of B's understanding of the symbols he uses: he tries to stand in B's shoes. |
| <i>The message</i> | reaches the receptor audibly or visibly, who interprets the message. This we call: |
| <i>Decoding</i> | B interprets A's message. It is the reverse process: what A encodes, B decodes. |

Communication involves a code, e.g. language and symbols, as well as encoding- and decoding processes. This is why miscommunication happens so easily. When A *encodes* without *empathy*, he is the *first* source of misunderstanding, since he does not consider what B can or cannot understand. B still decodes, but may understand something A did not intend to say.

The reverse is true too. A can be very emphatic and channel his message carefully into B's perceived frame of reference. But if B doesn't *emphatically* listen to what A says, *he* may be the main reason that miscommunication occurs. Commonness between encoder and decoder is never complete.

Kraft states: 'Communication must not be measured by the messages we send, but by the messages people receive. Our communication must be *receptor-oriented*. The messenger, not the receptor, must take responsibility to make the message understood'.¹¹⁸ There are also differences in personality, societal status, present attitudes, background, interest, culture and other things. Look at the circle diagram again.

A delivers his message, B perceives a content, which has an effect. Usually there is a discrepancy between A's *intended* content, and B's *perceived* content. The *intended* effect differs from the *perceived* effect. When the difference is small, there was good communication. When the difference is big, communication was poor. Misunderstandings may occur.

A common mistake is that if you bring a message the way *you mean* it, you think it will also come *out* the way you mean it. Every preacher

knows that some people 'hear' things you never intended, maybe not even said. Others may miss the main point you made. Engel showed that people tend to see and hear what they want to see and hear. Their deeper beliefs, feelings and values act as filters that open when they *want* to hear the message, and close when they do not: the audience is sovereign.¹¹⁹

Good communicators learn to 'listen to their audiences' and quickly respond to what they notice, e.g. non-verbal behavior, e.g. lack of attention. We have to learn to anticipate questions the audience may have.

Miscommunication, especially in interpersonal relationships, is more likely to happen under time pressure. This factor within communication is often overlooked and yet frequently experienced.

Four more factors help to understand the communication process:

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| <i>Noise</i> | not necessarily literally, means any audible, visible or emotional distraction that hinders communication. |
| <i>Feedback</i> | is the receptor's reaction. The sender may hear (dis)approving sounds or comments or see smiles or frowns. True communication is two-way. If feedback reveals wrong interpretation, the sender can decide for: |
| <i>Modification</i> | of the message, in order to correct the perceived communicational errors. He can do so by asking questions, giving examples, telling parables, etc. |
| <i>Context</i> | means: the message must be seen in the light of the surrounding words and sentences, also considering occasion, time and place in which it was given. This dynamic is usually the most silent of the four. |

Another silent dynamic is *non-verbal behavior*, body language, e.g. smiling, yawning, posture, gesticulation and *paralanguage*, like rhythm, tone, pitch of speech, etc. Their effects should not be

119 Engel, 1984

underestimated.¹²⁰ Effective communicators have ‘read’ these messages, often given unconsciously by the recipients. A wise messenger ensures that his message comes across the way he intends.

Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Sources & Other Eye-openers

If I communicate e.g. my testimony, I am the person’s *primary* source. He hears it ‘first hand’. But if I communicate *God’s* message to him, I become his *secondary* source. He hears God’s word not from Him directly, but via me, with my interpretation. It is a ‘second-hand’ message. When Paul wrote: ‘The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also’,¹²¹ he introduced a third layer of communication. We call that *tertiary*. Paul received it from the Lord by revelation¹²² and passed it on to Timothy, who had to select and teach faithful men who would communicate it to others. In this process *God* is the primary, *Paul* the secondary and *Timothy* the tertiary source.

In Christian communication we should keep a clear distinction between divine revelation and human experience, intuition, insight, interpretation and opinion – whether ours or someone else’s. People need to be brought into a personal relationship with Jesus: He must become their ‘primary source’ of teaching and guidance. They need to rely on Him, not on Him-through-us. If we do not teach them *that*, they will probably build their faith on *us*, but we are not the Rock they need!

Messages can be communicated *cognitively* (information, meaning); *affectively* (feelings) and *evaluatively* (judgments, e.g. acceptance and censure).¹²³ In good communication all three occur, even though only one is in focus. But we convey secondary messages too, and these ‘para messages’ provide the context in which we communicate. Para messages determine how the primary message is understood. They

120 Engel, 1979:39-41

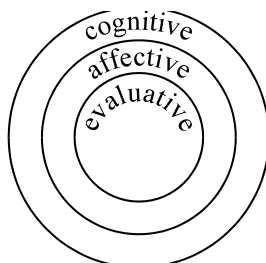
121 2 Tim. 2:2

122 Gal. 1:6-12

123 Hiebert, 1985:159-163, 167

help us understand, e.g. whether we should interpret words we hear as straight, irony, humor or sarcasm. Para messages are important in missions: we may *say* we love people, but our para messages may proclaim loudly that we cannot stand them. We may *feel* righteous in visiting their homes, but refuse to invite them into ours. Our most fundamental messages are our para messages. When these are not identical with our explicit message, people will distrust us.

People are also influenced by how much they trust the communicator. If the messenger lacks credibility in their eyes, the message itself is usually rejected. But if they sense that a missionary loves them, they open up to the gospel. The deepest decisions people make are those that change their lives. These *evaluative* determinations are the core of conversion. Changes in knowledge and feelings are not enough. Only if these lead to shifts in allegiance and behavior can we speak of the lordship of Christ and of Christian discipleship.



But, how can we help people to remember our messages?

Percentage of Things We Remember

| | After 3 hours: | After 3 days: |
|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| What we <i>hear</i> | 70% | 10% |
| What we <i>see</i> | 72% | 20% |
| What we <i>see and hear</i> | 86% | 65% |

Then, in our gospel presentations, do we deal with *literate* or *oral* societies? In the *first* we depend much on writing. We use notes, books, libraries and store information. Without writing we would be lost. But people in *oral* societies store information in songs, proverbs and poems. They use repetition and act stories out in drama, dance and ritual. Cultural objects like temples, images and paintings are used to recall religious beliefs. If literate workers want to reach out to oral societies or vice versa, media should be chosen that appeal to the *receiving* culture.

We shouldn't forget however that we cannot convince people; only the Holy Spirit can.¹²⁴ If we do our best to adequately communicate, He will do the rest. Doing our best relates to learning the cultures of the people we want to reach. Good communication, surpassing cultural barriers, is what successful world missions is all about.







Gospel Receptivity, The Engel-Scale & Initial Discipleship Explained

Before we start witnessing, we need to assess our contact's receptivity level. Engel supplies us with helpful information. The model below, known as the 'Engel-Scale', shows who does what and at which progress level the receptor has come. The scale can be read like a thermometer.¹²⁵

Engel calls it *The Complete Spiritual Decision Process Model Showing the Stages of Spiritual Growth*:

124 John 16:8

125 Engel, 1979:83

| <u>GOD'S ROLE</u> | | <u>COMMUNICATOR'S ROLE</u> | | <u>MAN'S RESPONSE</u> |
|---|---|---|----|--|
| General revelation | | | -8 | Awareness of a supreme Being |
| Conviction | Proclamation | | -7 | Some knowledge of the gospel |
|  |  | | -6 | Knowledge of the gospel's fundamentals |
| | | | -5 | Grasp of personal implications of the gospel |
| | | | -4 | Positive attitude toward the act of becoming a Christian |
| | | Call for decision | -3 | Problem recognition and intention to act |
| |  | | -2 | Decision to act |
| | | | -1 | Repentance and faith in Christ |
| <u>REGENERATION</u> | | | | <u>NEW CREATURE</u> |
| Sanctification | Follow up | | +1 | Post-decision evaluation |
|  |  | | +2 | Incorporation into the church |
| | | Cultivation | +3 | Conceptual and behavioral growth |
| | |  | | |

God's role, the communicator's role and man's response are drawn in terms of changed beliefs and attitudes. The numbers used on these stages are arbitrary. They progress in descending order to indicate that each change brings a person closer to the point where they can make a valid spiritual decision. People can fall into any of these stages.

When they know no more about God than what they can see in nature and hear from their conscience, they fit the -8 category. Terms like 'sin' and 'shed blood' mean nothing to them.

Depending on their knowledge, people who have some understanding of the basics of Christ's message regarding God, man, Christ and the Bible, fit in at -7 or -6. This knowledge does not mean much to them yet, nor does it affect their life-style or motivations.

Once they grasp the implications (-5), receptivity to the gospel may develop. They now understand something the Bible says and its relevance for their lives. A more positive attitude may grow toward accepting Christ (-4).

The communicator's goal, especially at the - 7 and - 6 stages that precede decision, is to build awareness. Persons must learn to see that there is one God, that man is a sinner, that Jesus has a unique role in salvation and that the Bible is a valid source of eternal truth. Yet, it is not the time for asking to accept Christ; the work is still pre-evangelism, or proclamation. Engel points at some trouble spots:

1. There are only few good materials to use in witnessing to people at the outset of their decision processes. Most tracts assume that the person is ready to receive Christ and only needs to be shown how. Therefore, *most Christians are unprepared to cope with the majority of the people they will meet!*
2. Success has nothing to do with the number of decisions: people in phases -6 to -8 do not make decisions, and if they do, they may do so to please *you*. The key is to touch people where they are with biblical truth in a loving and empathetic manner. If that was done, there was successful evangelism.

The phase of problem recognition (-3) has been reached when people see the difference between their lives as they are, compared to life as portrayed in scripture. This serves as a powerful motivating force for change into the direction of accepting Jesus Christ. Now it is time to call for a decision (-2 and -1).

The Bible gives *two* criteria for conversion: '*Believe* with your heart ... *confess* with your mouth ... and you will be saved'.¹²⁶ The sinner's prayer is not *normative* for conversion. It is deceptive to count conversions on that basis.

During the post-decision evaluation (+1) new converts need to be helped through their doubts, uncertainties and possibly confusion. Therefore, follow-up is an important task of the evangelist during which he gives initial teaching, focusing at assurance of salvation and explaining essentials of Christian growth. If this is not done, impaired spiritual development, retarded Christian growth or even backsliding may be the result.

Incorporation into the church, which can be any type of Christian community, is the definite measure of evangelistic success.¹²⁷ Spiritual growth now continues at the positive side of the scale. During this cultivation the unique needs of each individual have to be met.¹²⁸

In three foundational areas all believers must show conceptual and behavioral growth:¹²⁹

126 Rom. 10:9,10 (italics mine)

127 McGavran, 1970 and Wagner, 1971

128 Engel, 1979:76-82

129 Engel & Norton, 1975:53

1. Communion with God through prayer and worship;
2. Stewardship – continued commitment of all aspects of one’s being to God and to His service;
3. Reproduction – ministry to others, thereby reproducing the love and power of God in them (a) internally, within the Body of Christ through spiritual gifts and (b) externally, to the world through verbal witness, social concern, etc.

Much more could be said about communication. Its psychological realities are more complicated than I described here. Yet, I am sure it will help when you keep these principles in mind. May the Lord help you to become a better communicator of His message to the lost. Missionary or not, we all have God’s commission for that!

RESEARCH

The websites below give some fun pictures and other resources:

https://www.google.nl/search?q=interpersonal+communication&espv=210&es_sm=122&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=z-T8UoqwEMjD7Aati4GYBw&ved=0CE0QsAQ&biw=1366&bih=643

https://www.google.nl/search?q=engel+scale+of+evangelism&espv=210&es_sm=122&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=D-b8UqrmC8yp7Abw4oCgCg&ved=0CDEQsAQ&biw=1366&bih=643

MISCELLANEOUS

Recommended books: See the Bibliography

Assignments

- Give an example from your life or somebody else's in which miscommunication took place. Briefly describe the issue, analyze how it happened and how it could have been done better
- You have to preach. Describe what you should do to communicate with maximum effect, so that your audience remembers your message as long as possible
- Check the websites and describe what you find most interesting, or what helps you most

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Explain in your own words the meaning of communication
2. Explain 'overlap of understanding', using the circle diagram
3. Which two scripture passages complement each other regarding language issues?
4. Describe and explain the six basic ingredients of the interpersonal communication process
5. Explain what it means, as speaker, to listen to your audience
6. About which four additional factors in communication did you learn? Explain their meaning briefly
7. What is body-language?
8. Explain why para-messages are important in missionary communication by giving some examples
9. Explain the difference between literate and oral societies, and its implications for gospel communication
10. What are the only biblical criteria for true conversion? Mention the scripture reference