

Communication

Jeff, our youngest of three sons, met his wife-to-be, Sonia, in college. Both of them majored in communications. Jokingly, they used to say to their friends: "If we can't communicate successfully with each other, then there's no hope for the world." The truth is, even the best communicators are misunderstood. God is the foremost communicator and *he* is misunderstood. Is it surprising, then, that *my* words and intentions are sometimes misinterpreted?

What is the problem? It's a problem that is distinctly and exclusively human. We are flawed... imperfect... complex. There are many handicaps, hazards and barriers along the communication highway of life.

What *are* some of these challenges?

One. No two people are alike; no two people *think* alike; so, no two people express themselves in the same way. All of us have a language of our own, including our own word definitions. Somehow, this difference has to be bridged, deciphered in order for communication to be successful. (Remember: Effective communication is a two-way street.)

Two. We don't always know how to express ourselves clearly, rationally, logically. I shouldn't be surprised when people don't understand me at times. After all, there are times when I don't understand myself.

Three. We are not always forthright and transparent. The deceitfulness of our human nature obstructs our communication. So, people are misled or bewildered.

Four. Rather than being kindly candid and ask for explanations, we second-guess each other and we jump to wrong conclusions.

Five. We are not static beings. In many ways I am not the same person Betty married 60+ years ago. Our views, our beliefs and our positions on issues do undergo change. We shouldn't *assume* anything when we communicate with others.

Six. Our vocabulary may be deficient. Words, and what they mean, are a mixed blessing. We perceive and comprehend words and expressions differently. Are we talking about the same thing or are we self-assuredly talking past each other?

Seven. Trying to communicate through a third person - an interpreter, a representative, a go-between - is also a formidable challenge. You might be surprised how much is lost in translation. Some trusted interpreters know a foreign language only well enough to get them (and you) into trouble.

Eight. All too often, words (linguistics or semantics) are inadequate. There is the more important language of the heart, of the soul. And, initially, the *cultural* language is more important than the spoken or written language. Plus, every culture has its own entrenched logic. Consequently, we rationalize differently.

Nine. *Demeanor* has a language of its own. Thanks to our cultivated two-facedness, our "body language" can contradict what we say.

And Ten. *Behavior* is more important than words. Our actions *and* our reactions speak the loudest. The most convincing kind of communication involves conduct, not conversation alone.

You are fortunate if people consider you their friend. A friend is trusted, believed, whether she or he is understood or not. So, strive to be a true friend and you won't need to worry about being misunderstood. Give generously of yourself without high expectations or expecting anything in return. Good communication includes *acceptance*, though not necessarily agreement or approval. Do you know how to speak the language of acceptance, of grace, of compassion? We can learn from God.

Do the people you are trying to reach misunderstand you? Your loving, selfless disposition will be hard to misunderstand. Your acts of kindness and your good deeds will be hard to dismiss. But, even if people reject you, your good intentions and your good works will not be in vain before the Lord. Your godly life is a testimony the Lord will use and will reward – later, if not sooner.

Do you know why God is such a great communicator? It's because he not only talks; he acts. He not only *said*; he *gave*. He gave himself. He didn't give *of* himself; he gave *himself*. You are a great communicator not so much because of what you say but because of who you are and what you do. There is an unexpected benefit that reveals itself in "giving" oneself: *authority* that is unassuming.

You *yourself* may not be the problem. Others bring their share of cultural, psychological and emotional baggage into a relationship. They could very well bring a truckload of different values, presumptions and biases. That's why it's easier for them to understand you by how you *treat* them, rather than by what you *say* to them. *But*, even after you do everything you possibly can, some people will still misunderstand you simply because they don't make a sincere effort to understand you. If it's any consolation, even God is misunderstood – repeatedly. ◇◇