

How Do You Communicate? What Do You Communicate? Why Do You Communicate Like You Do?

Bob Young

I was teaching a Bible class at a women's prison. A heated disagreement arose between two inmates. The other prisoners stepped in to calm the situation. An open door of opportunity! Time to talk about communication. Why do we communicate like we do? The two inmates concluded that they frequently argued with others because that was the kind of communication they grew up observing and using.

From the first Sunday the new family arrived at the church, the wife was displeased. She did not care for the youth minister, she did not like that the high school classes were (temporarily) segregated by gender. She did not hesitate to express her displeasure! One Sunday, she caught all three elders in the hall, ready to make sure they knew she was unhappy. Her loud diatribe was cut short by the quiet comment of an elder, "Sister, that is not how we do things here. We will be happy to talk with you, but not here, not in this way."

We learn communication from our culture. I have more than once talked with my Nicaraguan brothers and sisters about how different their culture is from mine. For them, the heated conversations, animated gestures, and "in your face" declarations are not personal! But I did not grow up in a "culture of conflict." I learned a different set of expectations about communication.

How do we Christians communicate? What do we communicate? Why? The inmates appreciated the opportunity to learn new ways of communicating. The new family was assimilated into the church and learned a new way of being family, sharing faith, and helping one another. My Nicaraguan church family accepts that I am not Nicaraguan, and I appreciate that their militancy has been a major factor in explaining how effectively and broadly they have shared the gospel—in their own country and in other Central American nations.

What do others see in you? How, what, why do you communicate? People decide to listen because of demeanor more often than because of correct doctrine. Influence is relational. We communicate by how we communicate!

Our kindness, humility, and forgiveness are often the best lessons we can teach.

I learned a lot by watching and listening to the women in that prison Bible study.

I learned a lot by overhearing the "soft answer" of a wise elder.

I learn from my spiritual family around the world as I observe disciples making disciples, home Bible studies, small home study groups, new churches planted.

Dear God, may we be examples as we speak. May we model tenderheartedness, kindness, and pardon. May our communication build up and minister grace to those who hear. Make us more like Jesus, in whose name we pray, Amen.