

# 5.8 Words in Relationships

## Aim

- ☉ To learn to understand the significance of words
- ☉ To learn to understand the biblical perspective of the spoken word
- ☉ To get to know ways to effectively use words in communication

## Materials Required

- ☉ Pen and Paper
- ☉ A Bible

### Procedure:

Divide the participants into groups and give them a parable each to mime (act out without use of words). Discuss what significant messages were lost since words were not used.

### Input

“If you make my word your home you will indeed be my disciples, you will learn the truth and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31-32)

### Receptivity to the word

The insecure the frightened, the hostile, the self righteous all have difficulty with receptivity to words that do not match their needs. When emotions are volatile and expectations are threatened, words cannot be heard as they are intended.

Jesus appeared to understand the important influence of receptivity. He is not seen to force his words to anyone. “If your wish to be perfect...” (Mt 19:21-22), “...what about you, do you want to go away too?” (Jn 6:67)

Jesus respects people’s freedom to accept or reject his vision. He does not want his words to induce false loyalty.

### Words that get through

In the Gospel, Jesus is presented as a person who took particular care to speak in a manner that would be understood by his contemporaries if they had “ears to hear”. He does not want to pressure to his hearers but he does want to get his message through. He wants his word to reach people’s hearts and make a difference.

When his words baffle the sincere, he willingly re-explains his message, further clarifying what his disciples do not yet understand (Lk 24:44, 45).

Jesus uses words symbols, metaphors that are familiar to those he is addressing - shepherds and fishermen.

Contemporary psychological research shows that people who demonstrate verbal flexibility and are sensitive to people’s environment are highly effective communicators.

### c) Words from the heart

Jesus, whether at prayer or with people speaks words that are congruent with his heart.

Words have power, good or bad. The manner in which people use that power says something about the state of their souls before God.

Jesus has a harsh message for those who abuse the gift of verbal speech (Mt 12: 34-37)

### d) Say but the word

The word of Jesus was remembered by later Christians as having tremendous power (Mt 8: 8,13). Jesus wanted radical commitment and total change from his disciples after hearing his words. “My brothers and sisters are those who listen to the word and put it into practice” (Lk 8:20-21). The things Jesus did and said were signs that he had a certain obvious meaning as well as a deeper meaning that the disciples would understand later (Jn 2:21-22). Our understanding is progressive. It begins with simple hearing. It is transformed with life experience and culminates in discovering the deeper word of our lives.

### e) My word is not my own

“And my word is not my own: it is the word of the one who sent me” (Jn 14:24)

Jesus used words as words should be used not to describe data, but to break through the surface to the real truth of human life.



We should not use words to confuse, impress, deceive or attack but to break through; to break through secretive, hidden ways to openness, and to break through silence to conversion.

We are to use words as Jesus did; to heal and to liberate, and to give honest expression to the word of God within us.

#### **f) The communicative functions of words**

Studies show that the step from awareness of feelings to an appropriate verbal expression of them often fails because of lack of verbal clarity.

Whenever we have expressions of others that we do not say directly, we set ourselves up for disappointment.

When we use silence, or some other forms of wordless behavior to communicate for us, we find ourselves increasingly alienated from those in our environment.

Whenever our words are spoken without thought of another person's readiness to hear them, we will be experienced as cold and uncaring

#### **g) Speaking in the light**

Behavioral sciences have identified "verbal clarity" as one of major skills needed for effective communication

Verbal clarity, sometimes called concreteness involves the ability to speak in a manner that is straight forward and uncomplicated.

It implies a style of speaking that is open, honest, and congruent with inner beliefs and real feelings.

Verbal clarity enables others to understand what we are saying and to make sense of our own message, unless their own hearing is fogged with an agenda incompatible with good listening.

The skill of verbal clarity presupposes good self-knowledge. In order to be clear to others we must be clear to ourselves. Through a process of reflection, we must clarify our true feelings, our honest expectation our inner message.

#### **h) Obstacles to verbal clarity**

##### ***Vague speech:***

It occurs when we talk without ever coming to the point of our message. This usually happens because we haven't sufficiently clarified for ourselves what it is that we feel, think of want to communicate.

Sometimes we are deliberately vague in an attempt to deceive someone.

##### ***Hesitant speech:***

This often plagues those who are shy or unassertive if they are fearful of being rejected. Words that are watered down; tentative, hesitant, too slow... may cause others to avoid taking us seriously.

##### ***Double message:***

It is usually spoken when the one speaking is in conflict with something that he doesn't want to admit especially to others. Usually one of the messages express what we really want or mean and the other one is a cover spoken because we think it is what people want to hear.

A good way to distinguish a real message from the cover is to listen to ourselves when we are speaking to the people with whom we feel safe with.

What do we say behind the doors after the meeting is over? Does it differ from what we said in public? If yes then we are not operating in the light of ushering the kingdom of God.

Double messages put people in a no win situation. It can be avoided by being honest about our true wants, needs, thoughts and feelings.

#### **i) Symbols without words**

Symbols point to a deep reality that words cannot fully express.

Symbols need words to make the connection between themselves and that which they symbolize.

Communication symbols such as gifts, facial expressions, body movements and gestures need words to make their meaning clear.

We need clear and well timed words to give meaning to even our most treasured symbols.

#### **j) Verbal clarity a skill that needs compassion**

Verbal clarity takes the haziness out of our message as we struggle to make that message clear to one another.

Verbal clarity without listening can be inappropriate and can lead us to saying things that are out of place. Verbal clarity without feeling can be blunt and cruel, far removed from the verbal style of Jesus.

In order to serve the Christian function of communication, verbal clarity must be as reflective as it is expressive, as gentle as it is honest and as attentive to others as it is to its own message.

#### **k) In service of the word**

As Christians we have a commitment to the word, the word that is Jesus. We have a commandment to the way of life that his words articulate (Acts 6:3-4).

"...We will continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word"

For them service of the word meant preaching and proclaiming Jesus to all who would listen.

But before the word could be preached it had to be lived, it had to become flesh in the life of the preacher. It is only when words become flesh, real and warm embodiments of our inner being that they can communicate something. Through the strength of our words, others will come to faith. Through the integrity of our words, others will come to trust and through the compassion of our words, others will come to healing.

## Review

Jesus, whether at prayer or with people, speaks words that are congruent with his heart. Words have power, good or bad. The manner in which people use that power says something about the state of their souls before God. Our understanding is progressive. It begins with simple hearing. It is transformed with life experience and culminates in discovering the deeper word of our lives. We are to use words as Jesus did to heal and to liberate, and to give honest expression to the word of God within us. Behavioral sciences have identified “verbal clarity” as one of the major skills needed for effective communication. Verbal clarity, sometimes called concreteness involves the ability to speak in a manner that is straight forward and uncomplicated. Obstacles to verbal clarity are: Vague speech, Hesitant speech and Double message. Symbols need words to make the connection between themselves and that which they symbolize. Through the strength of our words, others will come to faith. Through the integrity of our words, others will come to trust and through the compassion of our words, others will come to healing.

## Reflection

‘When we use silence, or some other forms of wordless behavior, to communicate for us, we find ourselves increasingly alienated from those in our environment.’ Write a one page reflection on this

## Relevant Skills

Spend half a day in total silence. Write down the insights from this experience.

## References

Ferder, Fran. *Word Made Flesh: Scripture, Psychology and Human Communication*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1986.

