# Communicating with Others

It has been said that much of our communication is non-verbal. In this lesson, we will discuss verbal and non-verbal communication methods.

Empathy

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, empathy is: *“the act of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts and experience of another.”* Empathy builds deeper connections and appreciation for others in a Christian community. We are commanded to “love one another” (John 13:34), which includes valuing someone enough to listen to them and seek to understand their heart.

Example: “Ba Ba”

Empathic Listening

When it comes to communication, empathic listening is an active process in which the listener deeply engages in the conversation of another in an attempt not only to understand but also to experience some of what the speaker is saying. Empathic listening seeks to understand the speaker’s heart, often requiring “reading between the lines” of what they say.

Today, much of our communication is fragmented or distracted and, thereby, not empathic. Technology has further exasperated the problem by creating many ways to have partial conversations simultaneously. As modern-day Christians, we have an uphill battle to engage with people deeply. But we are not without hope! Jesus has given us everything we need for life and Godliness through His Word and Spirit (2 Peter 1:3). It can be done!

Empathic Listening approaches conversations with:

* No Expectations / No Judgements
* Undivided Attention
* Prayerful Reflection
* Room for Silence and Reflection
* Clarifying questions and statements

Can you think of a time when someone empathically listened to you? What was that like?

Empathic Speaking

To speak with love and empathy is to consider your audience before saying anything. Consider a missionary who goes overseas to share the Gospel. While it may be convenient for the missionary to speak their native language, speaking the people’s language is more loving and effective. Similarly, when we talk empathically to others, it is preferable to communicate so they can best understand what we’re saying. (Just like God speaks to us in ways that are familiar to us. More on that later!

When speaking, we must consider the two categories of communication: verbal and paraverbal. Verbals are simply the words that we are using. Paraverbals on the other hand, are how we say the words we say, excluding the actual words themselves.

Demonstration: “May I help you?”

Verbal components of speech, the words we use, are pretty straightforward. Remember to speak life, not death (Prov 18:21). Remember to love and not condemn (Luke 6:37). Consider the context and background of the person before speaking, and never forget who you and they are in Christ.

Paraverbals relate to your Tone, Volume, and Cadence (rate and pace of your speech). When we’re rushing to get somewhere, people can tell we’re in a hurry through the paraverbal components of our speech. Our volume and cadence tend to pick up when we’re in a hurry. Likewise, when you’re angry, it is detectable through your tone. On the other hand, our concern for someone is also detectable through the paraverbal components of our speech. So what do we do with our paraverbals? Ultimately, we don’t have the time or mental capacity to micro-manage all these factors, but what we can do is make sure our heart is in the right place. Our motives will radiate through our speech and listening skills. So make loving yourself and others a priority!

Physical Presence

Lastly, our physical presence is an often forgotten or ignored part of speech. Consider the message communicated through your position and location to someone when you’re speaking. Something gets communicated to the audience when someone stands behind a pedestal on a high stage. Likewise, when someone sits on the floor next to you and begins talking, it communicates something different. Depending on the circumstances, the meaning could change, so be aware of your environment.

Proxemics is the term relating to an individual’s personal space. It deals with how close you are to someone while communicating. Each person is known to have a personal “bubble.” While it differs for each person, a general rule of thumb is about an arms-length away (1.5 to 3 feet). Being further away tends to communicate less intimacy and engagement. Being closer than an arm’s length away may be considered invading someone’s privacy or personal space. Be considerate of your body location when speaking to others.

Kinesics is the term related to body posture and motion. Consider what it feels like if you’re sitting down somewhere and a stranger runs up to you. How does that make you feel? Their movement and destination (in this case, you) communicate something. What if everyone around you suddenly got up and ran away? What would that communicate? What if they all got up, pushed their chairs in, and walked away while looking over their shoulder at you? What would that communicate?

Kinesics include facial expressions, gestures, posture, and movement. When speaking and listening with empathy, consider these factors to avoid increasing anxiety or communicating a lack of concern.