

Communication: A Lesson from Ants



■ by Linda Ostlund, MA, LCPC

Can we learn lessons from pesky ants? Ants are a nuisance. They are in our homes; at times, we have to call an exterminator to get rid of them. Yet these insignificant creatures are honored by God. We read in Proverbs 30:24-25 that God honors ants and calls them “wise.” Ants are among a few animals that are “small but unusually wise.” Why? Because ants offer good life lessons:

- They work hard.
- They know winter is coming.
- They prepare for the lean times ahead.
- They work together.
- They thrive.
- They survive.

So, what’s the lesson we learn from ants? Simply put, ants work hard! How does that lesson relate to communication? When considering communication, we read and summarize Ephesians 4:28: “Be willing to work hard.” We have heard it said, “Well, if two people love each other, love and a successful marriage will just happen—it will be natural.” That is a myth! There is nothing natural about good communication. On the contrary, good communication requires hard work.

What is Communication?

Communication is a means of knowing—knowing two people. Communication is a tool God has given us to knit our hearts and our minds together. But why is communication such hard work? The words we speak only make up about seven percent of the communication process.

Real communication is seven percent words, 38 percent tone of voice, and 55 percent non-verbal (i.e., facial expression, gesture, posture). There are at least five major levels of communication.

Level 1: Cliché conversation: “How is it going?” “Fine. Where are we going to eat?”

Level 2: Reporting facts: “Are you going to pick up the kids?” “I’ll be home at 5 pm.”

Level 3: Ideas and judgments: “What do you think about that? What’s your opinion?” “The Sox will win!”

Level 4: Feelings and emotions.

Level 5: Beyond sharing emotions to wide open communication, mutual understanding, and total honesty.

It’s obvious to see that levels 4 and 5 are where we go deeper, when we open our hearts so to be known. Deep connection does not occur between a spouse or close friends unless levels 4 and 5 communication happens. And yet, these levels appear scary—why? Because they open us up to pain, risk, fear, and vulnerability. What’s encouraging, however, is that they can be rewarding and deeply fulfilling forms of communication. If we do not take risks and effectively communicate, the marriage—and even close friendship—suffers. The effects are detrimental and devastating.

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Lack of Effective Communication

If left unchecked, lack of effective communication in marriage or close friendship have the potential to get more out of control. It can lead to physical altercations, separation, divorce, and withdrawal. Communication problems often escalate and can become arguments chipping away at affections, gradually depleting the “love bank” (i.e., an internal account based on how safe you feel with another person). What are problems that lead to poor relationship communication, and how can they be corrected?

There are 10 top relationship communication problems:

1. Too much screen time. Put the electronics away; be focused in communication.
2. Jealousy. It damages trust and commitment in the relationship. Schedule date night one-on-one interaction.
3. Harsh words are demeaning and insulting. Show respect; be focused in communication with kindness.
4. Unrealistic expectations. It's not fair to have someone try to read your mind. Show grace in the relationship.
5. Hiding feelings. It's challenging to get resolutions or move forward with an issue if you are not being honest. Deal with feelings together, don't ignore them.
6. Own your feelings. It's not your partner's or friend's responsibility to keep or make you happy. Take steps to meet your own emotional needs through self-care so you can communicate in the relationship from a place of strength.
7. Not knowing their love language. Take time to learn your partner's love language. Be focused in communication.
8. Keep score. Whether it is on the money spent, chores that are done, or a list of past wrongs, keeping score is toxic to any relationship. Your partner is not your competitor, and you are not in it to win. Work in harmony.
9. Poor listening skills. If you do not feel heard, validated, or understood, frustration and misunderstanding are sure to follow. Be present, ask for clarification, have eye contact.
10. Lack of empathy. It's so easy to not be emotionally present in conversation. Make eye contact, remove any distracting thoughts, be focused.

Good communication is a lifelong skill that takes time and practice; it requires hard work. Is there an example of anyone who has demonstrated good communication? Yes: God Himself in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Logos: The Word Became Flesh

We read in Hebrews 1:1-3, “Long ago God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets—and, now in these final days, he has spoken to us through his Son. The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God.” The Bible tells us that once Adam sinned (Genesis 3), God took great effort to restore human beings to fellowship and communication with Himself. The most effective way, however, could only be through His Son. “So, the Word (i.e., the Son of God) became human and made his home among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness” (John 1:14).

What does this mean? To have communication with God, sin had to be dealt with. So the Lord Jesus Christ became the God-Man. He voluntarily went to Calvary to die for our sins (John 3:16), so to restore human beings back to fellowship and communication with their Creator God.

Good communication in relationship is not natural; it requires hard work. We learn the lesson of hard work through the ant, an insignificant creature that God honors and calls wise. If we ignore hard work in relationship communication, the result is detrimental and devastating. Finally, God Himself wanted to be known, so He worked hard at restoring communication between Himself and human beings through the person of the Lord Jesus Christ at Calvary. Are you in communication with God? He made it possible. ■



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