

Like Apples of Gold

bringing boldness to life

Communicating Truth to a Conscience, Part 1

HeartReachers Ministries

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A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. Proverbs 25:11 (ESV)

I walked into a room recently, surveyed those who were there (over 70 total) and simply stated, "I'm feeling depressed." I watched for a few moments, waited for a response and then asked "How many different definitions of depressed are there in this room?" The total had to be over 70. Everyone has a personal definition for how they are feeling when they feel depressed, or for any other feeling. Proverbs 14:10 states truly that "The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy." In fact, my sorrow could be your joy.

Couple that with the level of deceit that is resident in the human heart in general and you have a mess trying to communicate. On top of all that mess, I may not fully understand what I am trying to say to begin with, and if you jump in before I am ready to hear - well, that is how a heated argument can come out of a reasoned conversation.

Reasoned communication is good, it helps to clarify matters. Additionally, reasoned argumentation comes from intellectual differences and serves to sharpen the thinking process for anyone involved. Heated argumentation begins when the emotions overtake the intellect. This is especially true when the intellect has not been involved, as is often the case when I try to make a point regarding some social issue that has been defined by the mainstream media.

Take the language of abortion. We are all familiar with the everyday spin-doctoring that takes place. If I want to protect an unborn child, I am "anti-abortion" long before I can ever be pro-life. I am automatically "against women's rights" because I am trying to limit "choice." Somehow choice has become a synonym for horrendous acts of injustice, cruelty and - dare I

say it - human depravity that would make the Incan culture of human sacrifice shudder.

The word choice has also become the cloistered domain of those who are also victims of abortion. Seduced by the easy answer for an unplanned pregnancy and pressured by a culture that abhors children, the aftershock of terminating the life of one's own offspring brings its own silent screams of the heart. It is a terrible thing to suffer alone.

Decisions and Ambivalence

Not all women who seek an abortion are adamant about ending their pregnancy. Many, when they first appear for help and counsel are ambivalent about what to do. In this case, ambivalence is a good thing. Ambivalence means to have the coexistence of opposing attitudes or feelings toward a person, object, or idea. It means to have uncertainty or indecisiveness as to a course of action. When someone is contemplating an act that will bring them grave consequences, I rejoice whenever I find ambivalence. As one well known counselor has stated, "Ambivalence is conscience." When you find ambivalence, you find the conscience at work, restraining a course of action and bringing an internal argument within the person. It is in the weighing of two options, it is in the ambivalence of the moment, that decisions are made.

You can hear ambivalence if you listen for it in hesitation before an answer as well as in slogans. Slogans can cover a lot of doubt, and you can usually find someone's ambivalence if you simply ask "What does that mean to you?" when you hear a slogan. "Abortion is a woman's right!" Simply ask, "What does that mean to you?" and you will get a whole range of answers like asking "How does depression feel to you?" Now, in the answer comes the opportunity to explore the difference between someone's answer and the reality of abortion. The

difference between a popular phrase and their own conscience. Here's one example.

Life Training Institute's Scott Klusendorf tells of an encounter he had one day at a park on a weekday. A mother was there with her child and wondered why Scott could have time to be at a park with his child on a work day. He replied that he lectures in bio-ethics, to which the woman responded that he must be someone who speaks on abortion. She made a good connection, but it is her following statement that stands out. She said "Personally I am opposed to abortion because I believe it takes the life of an innocent child, but I'm glad it's legal." That is a statement literally dripping with ambivalence. Listen for the two incompatible thoughts: that something can be wrong and legal at the same time. This should cause someone a level of personal confusion. But when we are living in slogans we have not tested; we can miss the real meaning and miss our own conscience.

Scott was wise when he asked "Do you mind if I reflect back to you what I thought I heard you say." The woman answered no, and Scott replied, "I think I heard you say that you are personally opposed to abortion because it takes innocent life, but you are glad it is legal." He describes the woman as swinging her child in a swing and looking off for some time before she says, "When you put it that way it doesn't sound too good."

That is the sound of a conscience. Scott didn't put it that way, but she did. He merely reflected back to her what she said, but did it in a way that didn't threaten or confuse, in a way that brought out the conflict between what she was saying and what her conscience knew to be correct.

In Romans Chapter 2, the Apostle Paul speaks about the conscience, where he describes it in terms of ambivalence.

For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, (vs. 14-15).

Did you catch that? Their thoughts alternately

accuse and defend them. In other words, the conscience, even in an unbeliever, serves as a space between accusation and defense depending upon whether or not those thoughts line up with God's moral Law. Their consciences never excuse everything they do, which has implications for moral failure.

According to Paul, even apart from the moral Law we cannot live up to our own standards of right and wrong. We miss both God's standards for morality and our own. Ambivalence comes into play in both cases. We know the right thing to do and when we do not do it, we know that too. We just choose to ignore the prompts. Ignore them enough and they become hard to hear. Cover them enough with slogans rather than clear thinking, and the quietness becomes the excuse we wanted. Scott Klusendorf understands how to communicate in an age of media where emotions rule above logic, and feelings sway thinking more than content. You do it by listening more than arguing.

Listening for the Sound of Conscience

When I train counselors, I train them to listen well. There is much more to listening well than merely the sound of words, or the flow of speech. There are ways of listening for the ambivalence that surrounds conscience that have proven to be effective over time and in a variety of situations. I have found that they even work at Wal Mart at the checkout register. What are these skills?

Colossians 4:5-6 is a good overview of the skills needed to communicate truth in ways that open opportunities rather than end with an argument.

Use your heads as you live and work among outsiders. Don't miss a trick. Make the most of every opportunity. Be gracious in your speech. The goal is to bring out the best in others in a conversation, not put them down, not cut them out. (The Message)

Don't miss a trick is not referring to being devious in how we communicate. It refers rather to being skilled in communication, to the use of wisdom in how we communicate as much as what we communicate. Perhaps even more the how than the what, because when I say I am

opposed to abortion I have communicated only a portion of the content, and perhaps not even the content itself. If I have shut the ears of the person I am trying to communicate with, I have not acted with wisdom.

So, there are tricks of the trade, so to speak, that do keep the communication moving and keep the opportunities for conscience to make its appearance. It is better to listen to what the other person is saying and help clarify what they mean any time prior to giving your own opinion. You have to know who you are speaking to before you can speak a word to their hearing.

Reflective listening is one of the key skills, when learned, will change how you communicate absolute truth to people schooled in matters of personal choice. Scott Klusendorf gives an example of this skill in its easiest form, a simple reflection.

A **simple reflection** repeats to a large degree what the other person has said.

Speaker "I really hate it when someone tells another person what to do."

Listener "You really hate it when someone tells another person what to do."

This skill must be used at a minimum, for if you use it more than once or twice, the other person will think you are a parrot or are making fun of them. The idea though, is to listen for the content of the other person, and to reflect back ever deepening levels of your personal understanding to them.

A **rephrase** states the same thing in different words.

Speaker "I really hate it when someone tells another person what to do."

Listener "You don't like people ordering other people around."

A **paraphrase** makes a guess about what the person means and attempts to continue the conversation through a statement rather than a question. At this level, communication is beginning to open up, and the speaker is beginning to feel heard (important) and you are beginning to understand.

In effect, you are beginning to theorize what the other person means by what they say. There is risk in this, and if you miss, the speaker will let you know in a way that clarifies what they meant. That gives you an opportunity for a mid-course correction. A short exchange might go something like this:

Speaker "I really hate it when someone tells another person what to do."

Listener "People should really keep their opinions to themselves."

Speaker "Yeah - that's right. These anti-abortionists, they just keep trying to force their opinions on women who have a legal right to have an abortion."

Listener "It seems to you that they are just out to violate women's rights."

Speaker "What else could they be doing?"
The courts have said abortion is legal, so who are they to stand in the way of what the courts have done?"

Listener "It is important to you to uphold the right thing to do."

Speaker "It is more important to me that people do not lose their civil rights, especially ones that were hard fought to have."

Listener "So you support those who have battled for what is theirs by right, and it is important to you that no one interferes with those hard-fought rights."

Speaker "Yeah - that's it. I can see that you understand where I am coming from."

The outcome of this kind of conversation usually goes something like this, and the speaker ends up sensing that you have taken the time to understand their position rather than blast them - like all those other pro-lifers out there they have run into before. With just these simple basics of reflective listening, you can open up new opportunities to be gracious in speech and not put down or cut out the other person.

As this type of conversation goes along, the conscience of the other person will eventually make itself evident. Further skills include double-sided reflections that capture the ambivalence between two positions (Scott Klusendorf response above was a double sided simple reflection), reflection of meaning, reflection of feeling and amplified reflections. Here is an example of the last one, but these never work unless the other person has been heard, senses they are understood, and you really

do have an understanding of how they are looking at things.

Speaker "I really hate it when someone tells another person what to do."

Listener "Those anti-abortionists give you all kinds of grief!"

This kind of reflection is amplified in meaning, not in volume. It is a powerful skill that can help another person open up and be willing to hear. Once you have helped someone to that point, what you do next is equally as important.

There are a series of skills that include asking good open-ended questions (versus asking closed questions and not-so-good questions) that we will approach in another newsletter. For now, practice that art of listening well, and when you hear the ambivalence in someone's statement, try to add a reflection with a good open-ended question and watch for that conscience to start its appearance.

Speaker "I don't care how old a woman is, the Supreme Court has legalized abortion and I don't think any state attorney general ought to stand in the way. Women should be protected at any age no matter what. This issue is all about safety for females"

Listener "You agree that women are protected by the Supreme Court and that protection should stand at any age no matter what because the issue is about safety. What about women's rights for women who cannot conceive a child. How would you protect those?"

Try practicing the art of listening through reflection with friends, at home, and even shopping. It is amazing, even in line at Wal Mart what you can get going if you watch for an opportunity, make a guess about someone helping you check out ("It must be hard to scan groceries that fast all day.") and get ready for some harmless practice. You'll be better equipped when an opportunity arises to start a conversation for something really important.

The Chinese language recognizes the skills involved in listening well as a key to good communication. The Chinese character for Listening represents the difference between just hearing someone and approaching them with sound listening. By integrating our ears, eyes, heart and the act of undivided attention, the Chinese have truly captured the essence of listening.



This symbol embodies all of the elements of effective listening in a single character. It demonstrates how unifying our attention towards another is a combination of selflessness on the part of the listener, and empowering on the part of the speaker. EAR: we need to dedicate this organ to the words of the ones we are trying to understand. EYE: we need to keep our visual focus towards the speaker rather than be distracted. HEART: we must be receptive to listening for content and emotion, for facts and feelings and listen for the whole "package" the person is trying to present. UNDIVIDED ATTENTION: we must make the other person of supreme importance at that moment.

Like Apples of Gold is a Skillsletter of HeartReachers, the home of *Straight To the Heart, Tell My Story* and other biblically based communication skills training. Much of the Bible is taught as content, with little given to the study of and training in how to utilize biblical principles in governing how we communicate. Steve Gilbertson, the founder, has nearly 30 years in counseling and counselor development, and has been a Licensed Professional Counselor for over 25. He is the founder of the Hebraic Life Alliance in 2007 with the goal of unifying Messianic, Jewish and Christian leadership in saving human life, from conception to natural death. Contact HeartReachers for more information, resources and workshops that will help you become a skilled communicator of Truth at the right time, in the right way in truthless times, Bringing Timeless Truth to Truthless Times.