

Selected Scriptures—Nonverbal Communication—9/6/26

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As I said last week, before we get back into our study of Acts this fall, I wanted to share some reminders in the arena of communication.

This is different from my normal expositional message as we'll only turn to a few passages & I'll quote or refer to a lot more.

Today I want to help us better understand what we may be portraying.

We all have blindspots, areas where we don't see ourselves accurately or don't realize how we come across with others.

But one of the blessings of maturing relationships is that we can learn what we may be communicating to others.

We all need help in this, especially with much communication happening through devices & screens rather than face-to-face.

Many know that texting in all caps is like yelling, but fewer people realize what body postures or verbal jabs may also seem aggressive.

Such things are issues of communication—what you are saying & how & how it is being received by others.

Though the root cause of relational trouble is sin—as we discussed last week—the functional cause is often poor communication.

We are made to communicate with one another—and when that goes well, relationships are built & strengthened.

In contrast, relational struggles often lack effective communication.

So I want to help with marriages & relationships in families & the church & workplaces & everywhere.

I want to help us all share openly & honestly & be understood & develop trust in relationships where we help each other.

I do not want you to feel like others don't know where you are coming from or what you deal with or what you feel inside.

When you try to share, I don't want it to come out in ways that provoke bad reactions or get twisted with suspicions.

And I don't want you to assume that some people are just good at this & never have to think or work on their relationships.

Do not gaze at others' lives with the mythic dream that they have it so wonderful & that communication is so easy for them.

No—we all battle selfishness & temptation & we all misunderstand others & are misunderstood by others.

We all need constant work, but it is always worth the effort.

We mentioned several Proverbs last week that highlight the power of communication & we saw that in James 3-4.

As Jesus taught & all of Scripture affirms, it starts in our hearts.

But even when we have right motives internally, we may damage or miss so much without good communication.

We may stay at a shallow level of superficiality with no close friends.

That hinders decision-making because Proverbs 11:14, 12:15, & 15:22 teach the wisdom of seeking & listening to counsel.

It may feel safer to keep a distance & not to be vulnerable, but that forfeits the experience of love & encouragement.

Such isolation can badly color simple issues in life when wrong ideas are left uncorrected & issues remain unclarified.

I picture it like our vision getting tainted by an issue & then everything becomes viewed through that issue—it all looks a little red after that.

That red tint colors the next issue that may or may not be red at all, but the tainted vision leads into downward spiral of distrust.

And that can continue into a darkness that clouds everything without clarifying communication.

So you can see why communication is important to study.

As well, we want our communication to build up, to show grace, to meet the need of the moment, as Ephesians 4:29 says.

There's so much potential blessing in effective communication.

As I mentioned, I've gleaned a lot from studies by Wayne Mack in his books *Preparing for Marriage God's Way* & *Your Family, God's Way*.

Much of this comes from Dr. Mack's materials being used over decades at Grace Community Church where I served decades ago.

With that credit given, let's clarify that communication is a process, not an event—it's an ongoing, relational process, not a one-time event.

Communication is a process of sharing information with another person in such a way that the sender's message is understood in the way he intended it to be understood.

In other words—communication is conveying meaning to reach a common understanding between speaker & hearer.

That involves sending AND receiving the point accurately.

So again—communication is a process of sharing information so that the sender's message is understood in the way he intended it.

That process is affected by 3 areas—by nonverbal communication, by listening, & by verbal communication.

Today we will consider nonverbal communication.

If you know how actions can speak louder than words & body language matters, you are aware of nonverbal communication.

So let's consider 4 facts about nonverbal communication that I pray will help to awaken & remind us of what we are saying.

Let's say **1st that nonverbal communication can be perpetual.**

And by perpetual, I mean continuous & ongoing, never ceasing.

Like God's glory is continually communicating nonverbally through creation, so we as His image-bearers are continually communicating nonverbally by what we do or don't do.

The terms & pictures of **Psalm 19:1-4** speak of the heavens declaring the glory of God on an ongoing, unceasing basis.

And similarly, we are communicating with our eyes & facial expressions & how we dress & our body posture & movement.

For example, it's noticeable if you make eye contact or not & if you look the other way or try to avoid or escape seeing people.

Don't get paranoid—admit that you may be tempted to take offense if someone fails to say hello or recognize you, right?

And before you start to judge others or worry about being judged, let me give you a rule on nonverbal communication.

I think this is a biblical rule—though it's not stated explicitly in Scripture, I think many biblical principles & examples prove it.

Here it is—**nonverbal communication can raise questions, but it does not necessarily give answers.**

In considering this 1st point that nonverbal communication is perpetual or continuous, we need to realize that **it can raise questions but it does not necessarily give answers.**

Just think—I may seem to avoid you or not look at you because I am engaged in another conversation & don't want to be distracted.

Or I may be headed to do something else in a hurry or focused on a meeting or meeting a need or whatever else.

So lack of eye-contact, for example, **may raise a question** about whether something is wrong & we need to go ask that question.

But it does not necessarily give an absolute, dogmatic answer that is certain without asking any questions.

You may be smiling during a sermon because you thought something a kid did was funny or you thought of a memory that made you smile.

Or you could be smiling because you are encouraged & rejoicing inside at some truth I mentioned.

And we could describe crying or sadness or worry or other emotions on our faces that are nonverbal cues that may need follow-up.

We don't know unless we ask.

But the flip side of that is that we also need to be aware of what we may be communicating.

What are you saying that maybe you didn't realize?

For example, when **Proverbs 7:10** & other verses describe a woman as being dressed as a harlot, what's that mean?

It means that she looks like she's for sale—she looks like she wants to be looked at & to lure others by her appearance.

That is nonverbal communication that we want to be aware of.

Or consider the person in the corner away from others with his head down & arms folded—what's he communicating?

Whether he knows it or admits it, he is communicating nonverbally that he doesn't want to be with people.

Of course, that doesn't excuse us from reaching out to such a person because it may indicate some larger problem.

But to grow in relationships, we must consider such things.

We can pray for awareness of our friendliness to visitors in church or to those of a different age or with different interests.

We don't want to show partiality or favoritism like James 2 warns of.

We can evaluate what we do with our time & money & what that may communicate nonverbally, both to God & to others.

Just think back to the beginning with Adam & Eve in the Garden before sin when Genesis 2:25 says they were naked & not ashamed.

That communicated their innocence & freedom that was then stolen & broken after they sinned & so they hid themselves.

Turn to Genesis 3:7-8 to read the resulting nonverbal communication.

God knew everything & He could see everything & He was everywhere present & yet read Genesis 3:7-8. [READ]

Adam & Eve tried to hide from God & cover up with sewn fig leaves.

Why did they do that?—because of the shame they felt.

That internal guilt was shown by external, nonverbal cues.

So God went to question them & draw that out.

God gave a wonderful example of how to draw out what's inside.

Genesis 4:5-7 has more nonverbal communication. [READ]

Cain's countenance was saying something & God asked about it.

We see here from the beginning of time in Scripture that nonverbal communication is perpetual.

Our facial expressions & actions are speaking.

What you laugh at says something about you.

What we watch or listen to & don't watch or don't listen to all speak volumes nonverbally about what we believe & value.

Whether we help or don't help & how we help say something.

We nonverbally communicate by how we listen & by our silence or sharing & our tears or laughter.

Our presence or absence at various events says something.

I told those who were here on our last Sunday evening devoted to prayer how they demonstrated that they believe in God.

If you have time or money for one thing & not another, others may assess that & battle related discouragement or distrust.

Again, we must all be careful not to react wrongly—& we must ask the questions that nonverbal cues can raise & not jump to conclusions.

But I think you get the point & could add your own examples to show that nonverbal communication can be perpetual.

Since this can be ongoing & continuous—think—what are you saying?

Brothers & sisters—pray & ask each other about this area.

I pray today's study will motivate you to want to know because 2ndly today, nonverbal communication can be powerful.

Nonverbal communication can be powerful.

We can see this in Scripture in how God communicates His love.

God did not merely tell us He loves us.

Romans 5:8 says “*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”

John 3:16 says God so loved the world that He gave—He communicated love nonverbally by giving His only Son.

So Romans 8:32 concludes that we can certainly trust God to keep us, because “*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*”

Jesus repeatedly stressed nonverbal communication by saying things like John 14:21, “*He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me.*”

In John 14:23, He said, “*If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word.*”

In contrast, in Matthew 7:21 Jesus said, “*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.*”

Jesus emphasized, as James did after him, that works prove faith, that actions display & authenticate professions of faith.

So Jesus asked in Luke 6:46, “*Why do you call you me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?*”

And Titus 1:16 described people who profess to know God, but by their deeds deny Him.

Their disobedience is the strongest statement of their unbelief.

In contrast, the NT speaks of deeds in keeping with repentance.

Ephesians 4:28 gives an example of how a thief is changed if he works to provide for himself & others & also to give.

We could illustrate the power of nonverbal communication in a thousand ways from our own experience, couldn't we?

We see it in gifts given & time spent & promises kept & more.

So we can note 3rdly that nonverbal communication can be practical.

This point is already made by verses cited in the 1st 2 points, but it's worth stating separately to note that this is practical.

Nonverbal communication is not some fuzzy heart-flutter only discernible in by a woman's intuition or by an elite social code.

It is (1) perpetual, (2) powerful, & it is (#3) very practical, as is evident in a passage like James 1:22-25.

James 1:22-25 says, *"prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does."*

It is practical nonverbal communication of faith to look in the mirror of the Word & then do something with what we saw.

If we don't try to wipe off the mess we see, we communicate that we don't believe what we saw or we don't care or something else.

That reality is helpful in examining ourselves, that we should want to look at our lives & know ourselves rightly.

Parents, we should want help to consider what we may or may not be

communicating to our children even in areas like when we praise or encourage or show affection or when we don't or if we don't.

How we address sin or don't address it—what we prioritize & speak about or don't speak about can matter in various ways.

In all of life, we should ask others for their evaluation of what they see in us, what they perceive that we may be communicating nonverbally.

We want to be increasingly aware of how our nonverbal communication MIGHT come across to others.

If you wonder why people don't trust you or why they avoid you or why others respond in good or bad ways to you, then realize that you may be communicating something that you don't realize—what is it?

Of course, we cannot know unless we ask.

Again, nonverbal communication is informative but not authoritative.

It is enough to raise questions, but not necessarily to answer them or draw conclusions.

So just because someone feels like you are saying something by your nonverbal cues, that does not indict you undeniably as doing so.

We learn by asking questions, not by hurling accusations.

As you've heard said, questions can prick the conscience, but accusations may harden the heart.

So when we ask questions or receive questions, we should be willing to listen & learn & not react or attack.

As Philippians 2 says, we should consider others more important than ourselves & consider what might be perceived wrongly & talk about it.

Turn to 1st Thessalonians 2:17-18 to see a great example of this practical awareness of nonverbal communication.

Paul wrote this to the Thessalonian church after founding it & spending only a few months there & being driven away.

And his heart ached to know how they were doing spiritually & whether his efforts & investments were having a last effect.

He wanted the young Christians there to know of his love for them & he did not want them to misunderstand his inability to return so far.

So read what he wrote in 1st Thessalonians 2:17-20. [READ]

These believers were precious to Paul's heart & he did not want them to mistake his absence as a lack of care.

It was not his choice to be sent away & he wanted to see them.

So in a very practical way, he wrote to clarify that & then went on in chapter 3 to explain his heart & why he wrote.

Read 1st Thessalonians 3:1-6. [READ]

Paul reminded them how he had predicted suffering & how that was happening & how that had only increased his loving concern for them.

So that's an example of how nonverbal communication can be practical & it's also an example of how it can be problematic.

And that leads to our 4th & last point about nonverbal communication today, that nonverbal communication can be problematic.

Nonverbal communication can be (1) perpetual, (2) powerful, (3) practical & (4) problematic.

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians illustrated that & so do numerous stories in the OT & NT.

For example, Mark 4:35-41 tells how Jesus slept on a boat on the Sea of Galilee & His disciples misinterpreted His rest.

They wrongly thought Jesus didn't care about them during a storm.

But of course He cared & so He got up & rebuked the winds to calm the storm & then He rebuked their lack of faith.

So pay attention here—don't be surprised when your intentions are questioned by something you do or don't do—it happened to Jesus too.

Even His disciples questioned His care for them by observing His nonverbal communication that needed clarification.

Sadly, we may also question God's love at times when we don't see the whole picture of all He is doing or why.

So realize that you are not alone when you are misunderstood or questioned or wrongly accused or whatever else.

Nonverbal communication can be problematic.

As another example, the Apostles were misinterpreted in Acts 2 when they spoke in different languages.

People thought they were drunk & there were definitely not drunk.

OT prophet Samuel's mother Hannah was also misunderstood by Eli the priest as she prayed silently with her lips moving.

And Genesis 32-33 records another misunderstanding when Jacob was returning to the land after being away for 20 years.

It was scary when Jacob's brother Esau was coming with 400 men because Esau had wanted to kill him when he had left.

But Jacob's fears were wrong & Esau welcomed his brother.

Rather than react or jump to conclusions, nonverbal clues can move us to ask questions rather than hurl accusations.

1st Corinthians 13:4-5 says, “*Love is patient, love is kind & is not jealous ... is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong.*”

So the loving response to nonverbal issues is not to be provoked or to take in a wrong or impatiently recoil.

Instead, as 1st Corinthians 13:6-7 says love “*does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*”

So the loving response requires taking joy in what’s clearly true & thinking on that & bearing all things.

Believing all things & hoping all things is HUGE because love should move us to believe the best, to hope the best, to hope for what’s good.

Then our questioning is a friendly clarification, not an attack or hostile enemy interrogation.

That also prepares us to take a person’s word in what they explain even if our perception did not see their explanation at all.

Love believes all things & hopes all things.

Then turn to Joshua 22 for one final illustration of how problematic nonverbal communication can be & how loving clarification is needed.

Let’s start reading Joshua 22:1-9 [READ]

Remember—before Israel had crossed the Jordan River to officially conquer the Promised Land, the tribes of Reuben, Gad & half of Manasseh had received an inheritance on the east side of the Jordan.

So the men of those tribes had left their families there & come to help the rest of Israel conquer the land.

Then as those 2 ½ tribes returned to their inherited portion, they set up a large altar as a show of solidarity with the other tribes as one nation.

But the other tribes saw it as rebellious, not unifying, because God had told all Israel to worship together at one central altar.

Read verses 9-20 of Joshua 22 to see the conflict develop. [READ]

The main 9 ½ tribes west of the Jordan had misunderstood what the intention of the 2 ½ tribes building the altar was.

Those 9 ½ tribes were convinced their kinsmen had done wrong & they almost went to war over it.

But fortunately, they asked first to clarify their perception of the nonverbal communication they had heard about.

So the 2 ½ tribes clarified & senseless bloodshed was prevented by asking questions rather than hurling accusations.

Read Joshua 22:21-34 for the clarification & peace. [READ]

Because they asked before they attacked, intentions were clarified & Israel remain unified under Yahweh as their God.

The western tribes did not go to war against the eastern tribes over wrong perceptions over nonverbal communication.

Such examples of avoiding destruction by talking before rushing to judgment should alert us to our need for patience & wisdom.

We must guard against hypersensitivity & a critical spirit.

Since we are not God, we cannot know everyone’s heart or what they meant or intended by what they did or didn’t do.

That’s arrogant & foolish to read into everything like that.

Often, we just need to chill out & be gracious & show some patience.

So again, Joshua 22 illustrates how nonverbal communication can be perpetual, powerful, practical & problematic.

It again reveals how we need to be aware of how we come across, of what our actions or body language are saying or not saying.

It also teaches us to ask questions & not hurl accusations lest we react & hurt relationships over wrong perceptions.

Do not assume you know what they meant by that—ask them instead.

Again, as others have wisely said, *questions can prick the conscience but accusations may harden the heart.*

That's a helpful reminder of humility related to misinterpretations.

Ask questions rather than letting your vision get tainted to only see evil when all may be completely reasonable.

Or even if someone did wrong, questions may open the way to repentance rather than fire up a conflict.

We strive to live as Romans 12:18 says, *"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."*

And we always keep in view how God came in Christ to make peace with us when nothing in us gave reason to show mercy.

When we deserved to be punished for our sins, God put His wrath on His Son who died for us if we surrender in Him.

We can come in faith to Jesus Christ as our Lord & Savior & be reconciled to God & at peace with Him now & forever.

And we can know God's promises are trustworthy because He has proven His Word over & over throughout history.

He has not only given clear words of His love & grace & forgiveness, but He has also **shown** it repeatedly.

God nonverbally **showed** His love in sending Jesus.

And He proved His victory over sin & death when Jesus rose again.

So we remember that work of Jesus now.

As we think of nonverbal communication being perpetual, powerful, & practical, there is no greater demonstration of love than in Jesus.

And God's communication is clear & undeniable so anything problematic in understanding Him is our faulty perceptions.

We may wrestle with things God has allowed, but we can always return to the greater reality that He has proven His love in Jesus.

So now let's pause & thank Him as we come to the Lord's Table to close our service in this ceremony of remembrance.

If you don't know Him, we'd love to lead you to Him.

Please let us know how we can pray for you after the service.

But for now, pray as you watch & ponder His body & blood as the sacrifice for sin for all who trust Him.

That's what we remember in the Lord's Supper.

We unite in worship as followers of Jesus in His church.

We confess our sins & also confess our common faith in Jesus as our true King & only Savior.

Let's pray now that we will remember Him in a worthy manner.