
The Communication Model¹

This is a simple way of communicating that will help us to grow in taking ownership of our thoughts, feelings, and wants. We will learn to stay “clear” in our hearts with God and with others. We will learn how to avoid holding things in and remaining silent.

Principles of this Communication Model:

- This model is primarily for YOU. It is about helping you to stay clear in your heart toward others.
- You do not have control over other people’s thoughts, feelings and wants, or in their desire to give you what you want.
- It requires practice.
- The goal is to communicate with truth and grace.

The purpose of this communication model is to foster a clean and clear way of expressing thoughts, feelings, and desires. The results of using this model *may or may not change the listener’s response and future actions*. However, it does accomplish one very important thing. That is, the speaker has taken the time to think clearly and communicate in such a way that he/she is maximizing the opportunity for connection with the listener. This is a respectful, mature way of communicating. It covers the facts, opinions, feelings, ownership of one’s own issues, and desires. In doing so, it has the potential of freeing the speaker from becoming “toxic.” We become toxic when we do not keep our hearts clean of the weight and debris of hurts, judgments, feelings. When we let these things add up without effectively facing them and communicating about them, they poison our hearts and minds and our ability to connect with others in a mature and loving way. That is why Paul talks about “not letting the sun go down on your anger.” In other words, deal with it now or as soon as it is appropriate.

So, at a very basic level, communicating in the way we are suggesting here will actually enable you to maintain a clean and pure heart and mind.

¹Adapted from “R-Group Facilitator's Manual” © Cross Ministry Group

Ultimately, that is all that we can control. We cannot control another person's thoughts, feelings, or desires. But, we can control how *we* react and live in life. In doing so, we set ourselves on a path of discovery – of grace, love, truth, and hope. Sometimes, you may be the only one willing to walk this path. It is more likely that if you choose to consistently communicate clearly and stay clear in your heart that it will create an open door for others to do the same.

There are five steps to this communication model. We recommend that before you begin communicating this model that you say something like the following: “There is something I would like to talk about with you and it would help me if you listened until I am finished. Then, I would really like to hear your thoughts. Please understand *this is my work* so receive what is helpful, and ignore what is not. Are you okay with that?”

1. FACTS: Facts are the data relevant to the conversation. Facts are not the story, and it is not the interpretations or conclusions one might draw from the facts. An example of facts would be “We decided last month that we would we would spend only \$xxxx for our monthly budget. You overspent by \$300. Now we do not have enough for next month's budget.”

These are all facts. They are not weighed down with judgments or accusations. They are stating what is objectively true. Oftentimes, we confuse facts with our opinions/judgments. In doing so, we make judgment statements as if they were facts. For example, “You are irresponsible. You don't care about my needs. You want to bankrupt us. You are insensitive.” All of these remarks are judgments not facts. There may be some factual basis behind each one, but they must be owned for what they are, one person's opinion. For more on this see below.

2. WHAT I IMAGINE: These are my thoughts, opinions and beliefs. They are my interpretation of the facts, the meaning I attribute to it. These interpretations may or may not be true. They will be accurate to the extent that the filters I use in arriving at my interpretations are correct. I say “I imagine....” because it helps me to own that these are my thoughts, in other words, *my creation*. I own the fact that they are MY thoughts and

not necessarily the truth, although they might be the truth or partially true. Owning them as my interpretation or my imagination helps the listener to hear without being judged.

One example of a fact would be “You said, ‘I hate you!’ in a loud voice.” One interpretation about this fact could be: “I imagine that you won’t give me another chance.” Notice how the interpretation is a conclusion I make about a fact, separate from the fact itself. When I separate facts from interpretation, I often see that these are MY Interpretations – MY OWN IMAGINATION, and I can begin to take responsibility for my interpretations of events – for creating my perception of reality. I can begin to separate the event from my reaction to it. We can use this realization to help each other get clear on the Facts, and to separate it from the Interpretation(s) made.

Example: “I imagine that you don’t respect me as your husband.”

This is different than saying: “You don’t respect me as your husband.” The latter is stated as if it were a fact. The problem with these interpretations (imaginings) being stated as facts is that they can create a barrier that hinders effective communication and true connection. *No one likes to hear judgments about them spoken as though they were facts.* No one likes being told: “You are a controller. You are a mean and insensitive person.” Even if there is truth to the opinion it is not the whole truth about that person. It is not their identity. If we want to connect with others through our communication we must attempt to do more than heap our interpretations/opinions on others, especially as if they were facts.

3. FEELINGS: Feelings are emotions. While there are many different feelings, from blatant to subtle, all feeling states can usually be traced to five primary emotions: Mad, Sad, Glad, Fear and Shame. “I feel angry and sad.”
4. WHAT I OWN: A vital piece of being heard by another person is your capacity to take ownership of your part in the issue at hand. Are you able to own that you have done the same thing, if not something similar, in

your dealings with this person before you? Are you really any different than the person in front of you? So, if your spouse is using controlling behavior can you own the fact that you have used controlling behavior at some point in time? “I own the fact that I have been controlling with you in different circumstances and I know that that has hurt you.”

Why is this so important? Because no one comes to a conversation as an innocent. At some point we have failed people. The point is, can I really stand in judgment and weigh someone else down with guilt and shame if I have been guilty of the same thing. At the foot of the cross, no one is standing up. We are all kneeling side by side. The fact that I have been forgiven for my “controlling” behavior five weeks ago or five years ago, doesn’t give me the freedom to stand up at the foot of the cross and judge someone who is now controlling me. We are all equal in our desperate need for grace, all the time. Owning this reality will place you in a position of offering grace, which is our primary hope for reconciliation with God and others.

5. WHAT I DESIRE: Sometimes it is helpful to simply express what you desire for a particular situation, even if the other person is not ready to respond. Regardless, you have communicated clearly what your desires are. “What I want is for you to respect me. And that looks like _____. I want us to enjoy each other’s presence. I would like for us to better understand one another.....”
 - a. Seek to identify deeper desires first. Communicating the holy desire first will help the other person connect with empathy because, if it truly is a good and holy desire that you were created to receive pre-fall (intimacy, respect, love, ect), it will allow the other person to relate with the request. That desire will be one they desire as one made in God’s image, although practically it would look different.
 - b. Follow it with a practical way it can be met. The practical way you request the person to provide for that holy desire is a way of communicating how you uniquely receive love. In a fallen world this ought to always be an open-handed request and never a demand. This step takes thought before it’s spoken.

Things to avoid when using this model:

- Saying to someone, “I need to clear with you.” This can create anxiety and distance in others.
- Using this model mechanically. Don’t be too rigid with the presentation. Use the five points of the model in a conversational way and not like a 5 point presentation.
- Giving TOO MUCH information at one time. This is true especially if you have held onto something for a while and there seem to be a lot of facts and a lot of imaginations/judgments. Keep it simple, clear and concise.
- Choose the right moment to have conversations. Ask the person if they have the time to sit down and talk for a moment.
- Don’t bring up really difficult conversations right before going to bed or right before you need to leave to go somewhere.
- Avoid using it as a veiled attempt to just demand things from someone

Here’s an example using all five steps of this communication model:

“John, there is something I would like to talk about with you and it would help me if you listened until I am finished. Then, I would really like to hear your thoughts. Are you okay with that?”

(Facts) John, last night we had an argument about finances. You walked out of the room. Since then you have not spoken to me.

(Imaginings: Interpretations/Thoughts) I am imagining that you don’t want to hear what I have to say and that you are not willing to take the time to work with me on a solution. It is like there is a wall between us. When you are silent my opinion is that you don’t think I’m worth engaging. I imagine that we are not on the same page with regard to finances nor are we on the same page about how we are to work through problems.

(Feelings) I feel sad and angry about this.

(What I Own) John, I own the fact that I have walked away from you at times and chosen to be silent and not engage you. I’ve done the same thing.

(What I Desire) I would like us to be able to be unified and work through our

problems without putting up walls. When you are ready I would like to look again at some solutions around finances. John, my desire is that we draw together and not apart.

Note: This may seem simple but it does take practice to separate out all of these issues and communicate them clearly. Practice, practice, practice!

Scriptures for Reflection:

- Matthew 7:35 “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”
- Ephesians 4:25-27 “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”
- James 1:19-20 “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”