

CO-MISSION: **PLANTING**

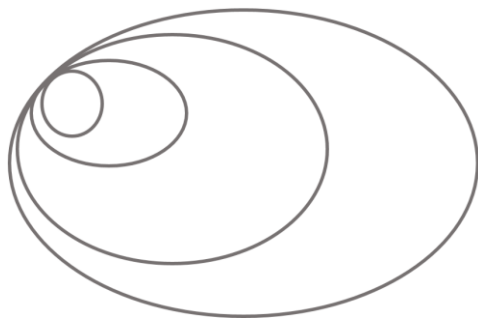
Sharpening our communication within the church plant and beyond: Circles, Boosters, Barriers, Broadcasting

Communication is a huge topic. Relationships are communication. Life is relationships. Ministry is relationships.

We could look at a biblical theology of communication (communication breakdown to communication restoration). We could look at the Bible as the ultimate communication – a wonderfully rich variety of all sorts of different modes of communication. We could zoom into the book of Proverbs – full of so many punchy verses on the use of the tongue. One I read this morning was Proverbs 17:28 – which made me wonder whether I better not say anything right now.

But here are a few things that might stimulate our thinking, particularly on church plant communication...

CIRCLES



As you move out the circles, the amount/detail/level of information communication decreases in steps:

- Elders / senior leadership – where you have a very close relationship, open communication, high level of sharing including sensitive details of pastoral issues, very regular meetings
- Deacons / ministry leaders – not sharing pastoral details but still quite a high level of discussion and sharing about plans and direction, less regular but occasional meetings that not all members are invited to
- Members – need to feel that they are the church (which they are) and that they ‘know what is going’, may have members meetings and email communications, will be serving in different ways, they don’t know every detail of plan development but they do know more than non-members
- Non-members attending – need to know what the church is all about and about events, but will not know everything that members know or be invited to all meetings or be on every email list
- Community – need to know what the church is all about, where and when it meets, evangelistic/engagement events

This is complicated when you try to place your wife, friends and ministry partners/supporters on the diagram – you need to work out the level of information sharing with them as well.

The basic point is: *level of sharing indicates and creates level of relationship.*

You need to think through what is appropriate at each level. There needs to be a distinction between each circle – not too great a distinction and not too little. E.g. if the drop down from the team leaders (deacons) to the rest of the membership is too great then there is a danger of a disengaged membership who think “I don’t know what’s going on” and who think the leadership are there to do all the ministry. On the other hand, if the distinction between members and non-members is not great enough then you may get non-members (or even

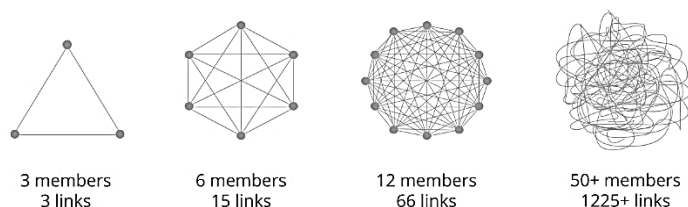
community) thinking that they are members and “This is our church” because they are ‘in the know’ on everything.

When we’re thinking through for our context what are the appropriate distinctions and levels we need to be guided by Ephesians 4:

- speak truthfully
- what is helpful for building others up *according to their needs*
- get rid of all slander

Team Communication is Exponential¹

As you go out the circles the number of people involved increases – perhaps from 2 to 8 to 40 to 80 to 4000 – but the number of lines of communication between the people increases exponentially.



The more lines of communication, the more likely it is for the message to get misunderstood, mangled or simply missed. Where this is really important is in the membership circle – perhaps 25 to 50 people or whatever. These are the guys who really need to know what is going on – they are the church. But it is also the scale at which messages are going to get missed. So what Craig Hamilton recommends is **multiple overlapping redundant communication**. That means that if you’re trying to get a message out about a church event you send the same message out over multiple channels over a period of a few days or weeks:

- Upfront verbal notice in church
- Email
- Communicated through the small group leader
- Facebook
- Paper flyer

In a sense the repetition may be redundant for the keenly attentive member who has a relatively simple life, but the average busy, distracted church member will miss at least three of these channels.

- Where have you seen there be too little/much distinction between the circles?
- Which circle could you do with paying more attention in terms of communication?

BOOSTERS

This is a collection of things – some vital and hugely significant, some less important – that can enhance our communication and ‘boost the signal.’

1. The power of loving

This is foundational. ‘Do everything in love’ (1 Cor. 16:14). This needs to be the source. All the other things listed below flow from love – we pray because we love, we prepare because we love, we work hard at being clear because we love...

¹ Craig Hamilton, *Wisdom in Leadership*

Love shapes the way we communicate:

- We'll think about how to communicate in a way that they can receive. If we love people we are not just talking to get things out of our head but to get them into our hearers for their good. In football and rugby there is a difference between firing the ball at someone and giving them a 'sympathetic' pass – one that is easy to receive. If I love people I want to give them a sympathetic pass so they can easily catch what I am saying.
- Tone - We'll speak patiently and gently with great compassion and sympathy (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Thess. 2:7). Not demanding and harsh and impatient but as a loving mother spoon-feeding her small baby.
- Fight for their attention - Richard Coekin - <https://www.facebook.com/thepastorsheart/videos/487955105107749/>.

And if you love people that is a very compelling thing. "Once become satisfied that a man loves you, and you will listen gladly to anything he has to say."²

And love covers over a multitude of mistakes. We can get it wrong culturally, we can be inept technologically, we can be bumbling speakers, but it we love people that flows through.

Interesting that in 1 Thess. 2 love for people is tied very closely to accountability to God. Loving people is not pleasing people, it may often be the opposite. If I need you to like me then I am not loving you, I am using you for my own ends. Paul feels the weight of his commission from God, he is seeking only to please One, and that frees him to love people which will involve saying the hard things.

2. The power of praying

Talking to God about people vs talking to people about God – what is the ratio?

Soak all our communication in prayer – not only the sermon but also every email and conversation and meeting. Fire off little Nehemiah 1:11-type prayers all through the day.

3. The power of preparing

We know we should be giving good hours to preparing our sermon but what about those communications we think we can do off the cuff? The answer to a tricky pastoral question. The announcement for a church event. I find that when it's unprepared that is when I'm most likely to be rambling, wrong or offensive.

4. The power of clarity

John Stott was a master of this.

Be ruthless with jargon and common Christian-ese - What do I mean by 'trust God' or 'trust God more'? What does that really mean? Not just my favourite illustration. How could I explain it to a five year old? How could I break it down and spell out what it looks like in daily life for someone in my congregation?

There is an easy, superficial simplicity on the near side of the forest of complexity or we can go through the forest of complexity to a simplicity on the far side which is much more profound, rich, satisfying, helpful.³

5. The power of the unexpected

The Bible is full to bursting with stunning surprises. That's why 'What are the surprises?' is always a good Bible study question. We need to help people see them and get an instinct for spotting them. But it's also not a bad thing to say surprising things yourself. I was once at a dinner table with David Cook and what was striking was that he agreed with everything you'd expect him to disagree with and disagreed with everything you'd expect

² J C Ryle, *Christian Leaders of the 18th Century* (on Whitefield). (excellent blog on preaching and communication generally)

³ <https://biblicalpreaching.net/2015/07/31/the-fig-arm-journey-to-simplicity/> (excellent blog on preaching and communication generally).

him to agree with. It made it a very engaging and usefully unsettling conversation – he wasn't just endorsing everything we already thought.

Mark Forsyth – some of the most effective rhetoric is intentional disruption of normal word order or breaking the traditional rules of rhetoric.⁴ Breaking the rules of rhetoric is good because: 1. It arrests the attention (differentiating you from all the background noise), 2. It's biblical not to care too much about rhetoric and polish (1 Cor. 2:1).⁵ 3. I don't need to give you a third point.

6. The power of encouraging

1 Thessalonians 2:12 and the whole letter – full of encouragement.

Thabiti Anyabwile – Encourage your people.⁶

Craig Hamilton points out that end of Paul's letters are full of praise of people. See also Phil. 2:29: 'honour such men'. It is right to honour. It clarifies and celebrates what is good (e.g. Phil. 2 humble service).

- Be on a treasure hunt for signs of grace (Tim Lane) – shift from our natural disposition to notice what's wrong to a mindset which is looking to jump on any signs of progress
- Encouragement needs to be specific. "I really appreciated the way you..."
- Encouragement needs to be genuine.
- Especially important to encourage and honour undervalued ministry (e.g. unseen service, mums, manual workers)
- "I praise God so much for his work in you..." – gives the glory to God while encouraging the person
- You may well need to teach people how to respond to encouragement: don't brush it off, say, "Thank you for the encouragement."

7. The power of listening

James and Proverbs are big on this. We should be slow to speak and quick to listen. Listening is hard because a) we are self-centred and b) people are complex.

Levels of listening:

- 1) listen to speak (I'm already thinking how I'm going to respond; you are just setting me up for what I want to say; I've tuned out or I'm interrupting you)
- 2) listen to hear (I'm now trying to shut out distracting thoughts and shut down my tendency to jump in; I'm trying to listen to exactly what you are saying so that I could repeat it back to you and you would say, 'Yes, that's what I'm saying.')
- 3) listen to understand (Now I'm going beyond being a Dictaphone and I'm trying to listen between the lines, listening to tone, looking at body language, trying to hear your heart and where this is coming from and where it fits into your story, how important it is to you and why)

Listen for the good, the hard, the bad.

Have a go now:

- One person share a prayer request.
- Other person try to listen well and notice how difficult it is to shut out the distracting thoughts and really focus.

⁴ *Elements of Eloquence*.

⁵ John chapter 1:1-18 is an interesting example where a beautifully flowing symphonic opening is 'disrupted' in v6-7 and v15 with references to John the Baptist's testimony.

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HuYOnACn9WY>.

8. The power of honesty

Straightforwardness is very powerful.

Be the chief repenter – not necessarily going into the specifics of your sin but having the tone of Nehemiah, Ezra and Daniel. Speak as a sinner to fellow sinners.

9. The power of Why?

This is Simon Sinek's point, picked up by Craig Hamilton. Start with the Why. We very easily start with the What & How. People will often follow if your Why is clear (even if you're not that clear on the What and How).

- This is how the Bible teaches us. This is what we need to reflect in our preaching.
- It's certainly important when you're talking to your children (over the age of 3) or discipling anybody.
- It's important in the Sunday gathering – Why are we here? Why do we sing? Why do we read from the Bible? – there are probably several reasons so split them up and drop in one each week.
- One particular situation where it's important is in church announcements – whether upfront notices or via email or some other channel. These are great opportunity to teach the Why – and yet so easily we just say What (there's going to be a church picnic on Saturday at this park at this time) and present the need (please bring food and chairs and gazeebos) without explaining clearly why we are doing this.
- Think of an event coming up in the life of your church or a need for help and how you could present it in a way that forefronts the WHY.

10. The power of Proxemics

This is a fancy word for thinking about the space in which you are speaking and the variables which could impact the effectiveness of the communication.

- Size of room, number of people, arrangement of people in the room – this is going to effect your volume and pace, whether or not you stand or use a lectern, how much energy you need to project
- Acoustics
- Clutter, visual distractions, décor, colours
- Distance (public, social, personal, intimate space) – depending on culture, public space (normal church situation) is 12+ feet between speaker and hearer
- Position, Angle, Level
- Physical Barriers – is a heavy lectern necessary?

11. The power of emphasis

People don't remember everything. D. A. Carson: "If I have learned anything in 35 or 40 years of teaching, it is that students don't learn everything I teach them. What they learn is what I am excited about, the kinds of things I emphasize again and again and again and again. That had better be the gospel."

- Repetition, from different angles – that's how Hebrew poetry works; that's how the Bible emphasises the sufferings and glories of Christ, through a rich variety of different pictures and angles
- Volume, pitch, speed
- Making explicit – "If you've gone to sleep, wake up because this is the key thing you need to hear."
- All these things we can overdo – don't put everything in bold
- Saying less and making it count

12. The power of bluntness

Jesus was often blunt. I'm noticing more and more that a lot of godly leaders can be very direct and blunt. Of course it can just be rudeness but there is a middle class idol of 'being nice' and a cultural aversion to bluntness which is not biblical. It comes back to am I trying to please man or God. Bluntness can be right and bluntness can be very powerful.

13. The power of the Word

This is where the real power is – Psalm 29. We want churches led by the Word of God.

- We want our hearers to go away from a sermon with the Word ringing in their ears not our clever illustrations
- We want to be making decisions genuinely based on the Word of God. That is a very exciting thing for a congregation to see – that the pastors are really sitting under the Word of God personally and that as a church we are changing things and doing things (including hard things) purely because we've seen it in the Word and been corporately convicted and been compelled to do things differently. That is very unusual and exciting for a church member to see and it massively increases trust.

BROADCASTING

This is about getting the message out, mass communication, non-face-to-face. We're especially concerned here with getting the message out beyond the church – whether that is to promote the existence of your church (to Christians and seekers), to promote events (evangelistic or engagement) or to inform your prayer network and partners (newsletters etc.). Here are a few things that will be helpful to consider:

1. Who are you speaking to?

Know your audience segments.

Be able to describe them.

2. What mix of communications tools will we use?

How do they usually access the kind of information you are wanting to communicate? Google, Facebook, phone or desktop, flyers, community notice boards...

E.g. Hope Vauxhall – Facebook not Twitter

3. What do we want to say? And how can we make it sharp and alive?

We don't want to waste people's time.

Ask yourself, What would I want to read? What email subject would I bother clicking on?

Remember the power of Clarity and Why?

4. What do we want people to do?

I commissioned a video and the feedback was – ‘What do you want me to do after watching this?’ There needs to be a call to action.

5. What is competing against the message?

Differentiate from others in the channel.

Think about timing.⁷

6. What look and feel do we want?

Some of us love branding, others feel ill at the thought of it. But the truth is that we’ll have a brand whether we like it or not. And so it’s worth asking what it currently is.

- Branding is related to culture.
- Brand is *what you consistently present as*.
- Most importantly, brand is about trustworthiness
- It’s also about:
 - o Your ‘voice’ – casual /formal
 - o Consistency of style/font/images / Level of consistency
 - o Logo
- Often the process of thinking through and discussing these issues as a leadership (What is our culture? How are we seen? What do we want to be known for?) is a helpful process in itself.

7. Who will be involved in creating this?

Are you the best person to do this?

Why not talk to brand consultants, designers?

Take advantage of expertise in the church/launch team in the areas of social media, mailchimp, comms, writing, design... It is important to carefully guide and guard your communications but you also need to empower people.

Above all – accept feedback!

How would you work through these issues for:

- Introducing a church weekend away
- Promoting the church launch
- Inviting to an evangelistic event

⁷ <https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2014/09/04/best-time-to-send-email-campaign>.