

MODULE 2: COMMUNICATION

SESSION 8: WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Key Ideas for This Session:

- Just as we communicate through speaking, we also communicate through writing.
- Writing can be understood or misunderstood by the choice of medium and the style of writing (which includes the type of words and language chosen).
- Understanding context and approach, being able to question, and having patience and goodwill for the writer, will help us positively move forward (and grow).
- Key verse: Psalm 119:105:
Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

Written Word as Conversation:

Building relationships with written communication can take on many forms. Formal letter writing would be on one end of the scale, and then it moves from email communication to the more casual: texting, posting, tweeting, commenting—and other social media activity.

What is your favourite way to have a casual written conversation and why?

Casual digital conversation (as listed above) is convenient and sometimes necessary. However, take caution not to use it as a replacement for face-to-face conversation. Digital conversation is “asynchronous” meaning there is a time lag between making and receiving a statement. Face-to-face communication is direct and simultaneous—we are in a moment together, in real time and emotion comes out of this shared experience. For a beautiful Biblical example, Jesus’s compassion for a suffering widow in Luke 7:13, is

immediate and visceral: “*When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, ‘Don’t cry.’*”

Asynchronous (delayed) and digital conversation can contribute to escalating tensions and misunderstandings. As we wait for the next text reply, for example, distorted thinking and/or assumptions can take place. We also cannot rely on body language cues to clarify what might be unclear. We lack hearing a compassionate tone that can change the understanding. In the book *Boundaries*, the authors observe that “The latest research about the neurological basis for how human beings learn empathy indicates that we learn it by experiencing the emotional expressions of others.”⁸

So, while asynchronous communication seeks to mimic real, live conversations, it should be avoided for more meaningful and/or emotionally laden topics.⁹

Do you agree that digital chatter is less effective than actual conversations? As part of your answer, list the pros and cons of each.

For the rest of this session, we will look at the more formal types of writing.

Other Styles of Writing and Critical Thinking:

Genre: A category, type, or style of writing, music, or art (E.g., rock, rap, classical, jazz, hip hop, and country are “genres” of music).

List at least four genres of movies or film:

⁸The above information is taken from *Boundaries* by Cloud and Townsend’s chapter on “Boundaries and the Digital Age,” p.233.

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There are different types or genres of written communication. For example, a legal contract or legal opinion is a specific form of written communication that uses specialized terminology (technical words) and requires trained understanding of the language being used. Lawyers want the contracts and statements they write to be legally sound, so that if there is a dispute, the terms of the agreement will stand up in court. As a result, lawyers use special words and terms and definitions that are “legal language,” that may not be familiar to people without a legal background. In order to understand the real meaning of a legal document it is important to know what the legal terms mean and what the legal language intends to communicate.

When it comes to the news, we expect newspapers and news articles to report the true facts about news and events. But, just as in listening to verbal messages, a skilled reader or listener will ask questions as they are reading a news story, such as:

- Is what I am reading in the article true? Does it communicate only the facts or also commentary or interpretation of the facts?
- Does the article contain all of the relevant facts or is there something in the story that is missing? What questions do I have that are not being answered about the event or situation?
- Does the person who wrote the article have a hidden agenda or a bias that is based on a particular point of view?
- Is the media trying to influence me by reporting the story in a particular way?

Is Everything We Read True?

...Of course not. If you picked up a science fiction book, you would not expect the “science” part of it to be completely true because you know that fiction is a pretend story based on imagination and not on fact. Fiction is one kind of genre and in order to understand a fictional story you need to know that it is fiction, not historical or factual.

As you become more familiar with a genre of writing, it becomes easier to understand. For example, if you have read many science fiction books, you might understand the imagery and the ways in which a science fiction story develops.

Some other examples of written genres are novels, history, biographies, and poetry. A reader who is familiar with and understands a genre like poetry, is able to tell us about their favourite poet or discuss technical aspects such as the meter or timing of the lines and verses of a poem. Their knowledge of poetry enables them to understand and appreciate this style of writing more than a person who is unfamiliar with poetry. The knowledge builds on itself.

The Bible is an amazing collection of writings that are believed to be God’s message to mankind, and are therefore considered to be true. The Bible is both relationship-building as well as instructional for readers to garner knowledge and wisdom. The writings in the Bible are not all written in the same style or genre.

Biblical writings represent different genres including poetry (like Psalms), historical stories (such as Exodus, Deuteronomy), mystical dreams and visions (like Revelation and parts of Daniel), teaching and education (like Proverbs and parts of the Gospels), theology (like Romans), and letters (like Colossians, Philippians, Ephesians).

Some books in the Bible are written in several genres and to understand what is written we need to know what genre it is written in. Some common principles for understanding the messages in the different genres of Scripture are:

- **The context.** The best understanding of Scripture is through Scripture. The text must be understood in terms of its genre.
- **Unity in diversity.** The various genres represent different ways or approaches to expressing the same truth.

What do you think “the best understanding of Scripture is through Scripture” means?

Explain what you think “unity in diversity” means.

The books of the Bible have similarities and differences one from another. Similarities would include the belief that: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). In other words, the entire Bible is useful for the growth of the Christian believer.

Most Christians would also say the Bible has benefits for non-Christians. Just like a lawyer needs to understand the formats and terms used in legal documents, someone who wants to understand the Bible needs to understand the different genres of writing in the Bible. Each genre needs to be understood on the basis of its style and its intended purpose and context.

Understanding Biblical Genres

Some books of the Bible have several separate genres contained in a single book. The Gospels, for instance (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), contain narrative, parables, sermons, and prophecy.

Genres	Bible Books
Letters and theology	Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians
Historical Narrative	Genesis, Exodus, Joshua, Judges
Prophetic literature	Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel
Apocalyptic	Daniel, Revelation
Poetry	Psalms, Song of Solomon
Wisdom literature	Ecclesiastes, Job, Proverbs
Non-fiction stories	Matthew, Mark, Luke, John (The Gospels)
Sermons	The Gospels and Acts
Law	Leviticus, Deuteronomy

Using the above list of Bible genres and your Bible, try your best to answer the following questions:

What genre do you think the book of 1 Timothy best fits into? Why?

The book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament is considered wisdom literature. Christians have historically credited King Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes. King Solomon was known for his wisdom. Look at the first three chapters of Ecclesiastes.

Do you think non-Christians could read these chapters and learn something they could apply to their life? Yes/No (Explain.)

List some things from the first three chapters of Ecclesiastes that you might find helpful.

Each genre or category of writing has a general style, tone, form, structure, literary technique, content, design, and related linguistic factors. By asking questions as you read, you are trying to be a good listener. If you were having a conversation with someone and wanted to make sure that you were understanding what they are trying to communicate, you would probably ask something like, “What do you mean when you say this or that?”; or you might say, “What you just said raises a question I have.”

Reading is like having a conversation. The writer is trying to communicate to the reader. When a person reads the message, the reader needs to understand the genre of the writing and also needs to understand the intended message—that’s why questions are important.

A good way to study a written message or a book is to...

How is it helpful to understand the genre of a particular written communication?

How important is it to question the meaning of a text?

Read parts of the creation story (Genesis 1-3). With a partner, a group or on your own, write a top-five list of questions the creation story doesn't seem to answer.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Here is a parable told by Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus often used parables to richly illustrate a large point.

Matthew 13:1-9

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.

Then He told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear."

A parable is a short allegorical story designed to illustrate or teach some truth, religious principle, or moral lesson; it conveys meaning indirectly by the use of comparison or analogy. The context is relatable for easier understanding by the audience and to convey many layers of insights.

What do you think the main point of the story is?

Who was the story told to and why?

Is the context or situation in which Jesus tells the story relevant to the meaning of the story? (You may need to consult your Bible to answer this question. The meaning is explained in Matthew 13:18-23.)

Break into small groups and discuss the following if there is time, or consider these topics this week:

- *Skim through the Books of the Bible to better understand the different Biblical genres and how they fit together.*
- *Read through the many different parables told by Jesus in Matthew 13. Why do you think He spoke this way on these topics?*
- *Think about your release date and when you might have a digital device again. Consider the different ways to communicate (the pros and cons) and what your approach is or will be.*