

Clarifying the challenge of communication

Are you part of a home Bible study or some other small group? Have you got the possibility of having a missionary come to speak to your group? If you have the opportunity, ask them to speak on some aspect of communication in their ministry. In order to introduce the subject and make the talk more meaningful, try this game before they speak.

Take two small tables - card tables would be fine - and put some kind of screen between them. Perhaps a couple of people could hold up a blanket if you have nothing else suitable. On each table you need some children's building blocks, the old wooden ones of various sizes and colours. You can often find a supply in opportunity shops, or a handy man can make up a few. You need a set of 10-12 for each table and the sets MUST be identical. You sit a person at each table, so they can't see each other. Choose one person to build something with his blocks. When finished, without leaving their seat or looking around the screen they now have to describe to the other person how to build an identical construction. They will, of course, find this very hard. When finished, they look at each other's buildings and will find, not surprisingly, that they are not identical. Now reverse their roles and do it again. Let others in your group try. To make it more interesting, put two people at each table and see if they can agree on how to give the instructions and on how to understand the instructions. Let everyone in your group have at least one try, and then they are ready to listen, with a new level of understanding, to the missionary speak about communication in their ministry. This works just as well with high school or senior primary kids and will make them much more interested in what the missionary is going to say. But remember - tell the missionary before hand what you are going to do, so that you help their talk rather than wrecking it!

If you have a larger group in a larger room, then you can use the same principle, but will need several sets of tables and screens. Use the building blocks for one set of tables. At another, give each person a drawing pad and an identical set of coloured felt pens. At another, give each person an identical set of 20-25 coloured clothes pegs to build with. At another, give each person an identical size piece of cardboard and pair of scissors to cut out a shape and describe it to the other. The challenge is always the same - how well can you communicate and understand ideas and instructions in your own language. And if it is that difficult on the language we know so well, imagine the challenge of communicating clearly in a new language.

The audience is now ready to hear the visitor speak about the communication challenges in their own ministry.