

Di121 Effective Communication

Lesson Di121-9 Method: Using Indirect Speech

When problems arise between believers, how should the situation be handled? If a Christian disobeys God, should anyone confront him or her? In some cultures a leader would handle the problem directly, confronting the person and correcting them. Other cultures would use an indirect approach. This means helping the person discover their need with a story or an indirect question. When the person responds, revealing his heart, the true purpose of the communication can be revealed. Using a story to reveal truth to someone often works best.

The events of the story in this lesson happened after two failures in the life of King David. First he committed adultery with one of his warrior's wives. Then after she was pregnant, he had her husband, Uriah, killed by enemy forces during an intense battle far away. David thought it was all a secret. God saw it all, of course, and sent his prophet Nathan to the king. God's communicator used an indirect approach. He wanted to enable the king to understand God's message and to respond correctly. Discovering truth through a story proved to be very powerful.

When Nathan came to the king, he told him a parable. "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him" (2Sam 12:1-3). Nathan continued by saying that a traveler came to the rich man's house. Instead of taking one of his own animals to prepare a meal for the guest, he took the poor man's pet lamb. He killed it to feed the traveler.

What was King David's response? He burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die ... because he did such a thing and had no pity!"

The first part of Nathan's story indirectly referred to the relationship of Uriah to his one wife, Bathsheba. David, by contrast, had many wives. When David lusted after his neighbor's wife, instead of going to one of his own wives, it was like taking the poor man's only lamb. David burned with anger. He was angry because the rich man in the story had shown no pity or mercy for the lamb or its owner. David believed this had actually happened. He did not realize yet that Nathan was using a story to convey a deeper truth. We call this kind of story a 'parable.'

Nathan the prophet was God's spokesman. He led David to see himself the way God saw him. He used indirect speech instead of coming right out and confronting David's sin. When David heard this story, the key concept for him was the lack of mercy. David himself had shown no mercy to Bathsheba in his bedroom. He also had cared nothing for her husband Uriah, his loyal commander on the battlefield. In his anger David rightfully condemned the man in the story to death. He did not realize that he was also condemning his own deeds.

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house’” (2Sam 12:7-10).

After identifying David as the guilty one, Nathan continued speaking as the mouthpiece of God. David had despised God’s word by his evil actions. The king was reminded of the mercy and great blessings God had given him. Now he would suffer judgment. The sword would bring trouble to his house. In response to the prophet’s words, David confessed his sins. He recorded his prayer of repentance in Psalm 51. God forgave him and released him from the death penalty, but the consequences of his sin remained.

Why was Nathan’s story—his indirect speech—so effective? Using indirect speech caused things to happen. **First**, it avoided open confrontation and anger. It was a safe approach for correcting a king. **Second**, the person with a spiritual need can often realize their need themselves, instead of being rebuked by another person. Indirect speech helped David through a process of discovery. God’s spokesperson was not viewed as a master or parent correcting a child. **Third**, a good story can continue to reveal truth even after a human need has been met. The communicator’s purpose should be restoration of the person, not condemnation. Nathan’s story helped to bring about a positive response of repentance from David.

This story is **important** because it shows how an appropriate story can be used to help a sinful person discover their own spiritual needs. It also teaches that you can be God’s spokesperson as you are led by the Holy Spirit.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that using indirect speech—stories—can help believers communicate God’s truth in difficult situations.

Let’s **review** this lesson—

1. What approach did Nathan use with David to help him see God’s view of his sin? [Pause]
A. If you answered that Nathan used indirect speech by telling a story, you are right.
2. What story did Nathan tell David to help him understand his lack of mercy concerning Bathsheba and Uriah? [Pause]
A. If you said, “He told a story about an evil rich man who showed no mercy to a poor man,” you answered correctly.
3. When indirect speech is used in a difficult situation, what can often be avoided? [Pause]
A. If you said that confrontation and anger between the persons involved can be avoided by using indirect speech, you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it several times until you have memorized the story. Tell it to someone who has not heard it before. Then ask them this question, “Why did

Nathan the prophet use indirect speech in speaking to King David about his sin?" Answers might include that it was a safer approach for correcting a king; it allowed David to discover for himself God's view about his sin; and it helped bring about a positive response of repentance from David.