

My how fast things change – changing times and an unchanging message!

My thumbs are clumsy at typing on my phone's tiny keyboard, and the phone constantly substitutes the wrong word for what I mean. I quickly realized that if I wanted to “stay in touch” with our daughters, I would have to adapt my primary form of communication from face to face and in person conversations and even phone calls to texts, tweets and Facebook posts. I am a reluctant “texter”. But, I'm clearly in the minority: A recent survey indicates that eighty percent of Americans prefer texting to voice calls.

In a study conducted by psychologists from Binghamton University, participants were found to be significantly more likely to view period-punctuated texts less genuine than unpunctuated texts. So apparently, when texting, the more you punctuate, the less real you are?

In this study undergraduate students were shown a series of text messages and handwritten notes. Afterwards, they judged that sincerity increased as grammatical correctness decreased. Written communication fails to reflect body language, but these students reported that the grammatical mess-ups revealed the person's genuineness often found in physical proximity and revealed through body language.

Grammatical errors may be common, but the errors point to the strength in our desire to connect and communicate. The biblical narrative is filled with examples of prophetic communicators speaking to those who didn't have ears to hear (i.e. Jeremiah, Isaiah). Imagine having a message that resonated like fire in your bones (Jeremiah 20:9). Amos would describe hearing a message from the Lord was like hearing a lion roar—it demanded attention and response (Amos 3:8).

The Binghamton study reveals the changing dynamics within communication in the 21st century. Coupled with the lack of punctuation is the usage of “emojis” [☺ ☹ ;) :-) ], and the impact on personal face to face communication that has evolved as a direct effect from “textspeak”.

*“Emojis “ ; - )*

Last year the Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year was the emoji. Specifically, it was the digital symbol that connotes joy and is technically called 'face with tears of joy.' It won the title due to its prevalence and the fact that it "best reflected the ethos, mood, and preoccupations of 2015." A digital shorthand way to communicate thoughts, feelings, and opinions, emojis are replacing words in text conversations. Though

believed to communicate more than words, emojis have the propensity to bring about a multitude of words in the form of questions—specifically, "What did they mean?"

### *"Textspeak"*

With the usage of emojis increasing, the number of misspellings and grammatical errors has increased as well. Often called "textspeak," this way of communicating substitutes grammatical correctness for succinctness.

Psychologist Celia Klin said - "Given that people are so adept at communicating complex and nuanced information in conversations, it's not surprising that as texting evolves, people are finding ways to convey the same types of information in their texts." This is sometimes referred to as discourse particles. These words or symbols communicate feelings to the person on the receiving end of the message. Texting is replete with examples of such particles. The asterisk (\*) has become the signal to repair an error from the previous message. Instead of looking over the text before sending, the person simply sends another text that properly spells the word. Or, to assert your syntactical dominance, another person does this for you before you can, thus repairing the conversation and passively aggressively showing their superiority. But it is possible that the **beloved enemy** known as autocorrect changed the word completely, thus it was necessary to send the asterisk.

Another example is the carat (^), which indicates that you concur with the previous message. Your strong agreement needs no words, rather the carat functions as an affirmative echo.

It is interesting to read posts on blogs, see face book posts or tweets from folks on a wide range of issues. Have you ever wondered, if folks would "say" the same kinds of things if they were face to face with another person? That presents a moral conundrum of sorts - When people whose relationships are based on texting begin to interact face-to-face, what they typed is not often what they meant to communicate. When our words and our actions disagree, actions win.

In Mere Christianity, C. S. Lewis describes the "popular idea of Christianity": "That Jesus Christ was a great moral teacher and that if we only took His advice we might be able to establish a better social order and avoid another war." Lewis believes that this sentiment is "quite true." However, it doesn't go far enough. He notes that "we have never followed the advice of the great teachers. Why are we likely to begin now?"

Lewis concludes: "If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, then Christianity is of no importance. There has been no lack of good advice for the last four thousand years. A bit more makes no difference."

Christianity is not about advice, but transformation. Jesus was clear: "If anyone would come after me, let them deny self and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). Christianity is not about following teachers or teachings, religious leaders or organizations or even about a prescribed set of right ideas or patterns of behavior. Jesus wants us to follow Jesus.

The most powerful communication about God's Love is the power of God's love in your life. When skeptics confronted the man born blind but healed by Jesus, he responded simply: "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25). They could dispute his theology, but not his transformation.

We cannot expect a skeptical world to follow Christ, if Christians don't follow Christ! If Jesus is only a Sunday Savior or devotional topic, he is not the Christ of the New Testament. But when we experience personally the God who walked on water and calmed storms, cleansed lepers and exorcised demons, healed the sick and raised the dead, others will see his transforming power in us because we have experienced the radical Love of Jesus, and we are free to share that Love with everyone!

Though the prophets of old had a message, their listeners did not understand or could not understand. Where the prophets were ineffective, Jesus was masterful. For those who chose not to understand, Jesus would utilize imagery or illustrations in order to convey his points. The message never changed, but the way in which it was communicated did.

Think about the Christians who have influenced your life. Was it their beliefs or the way they lived their lives sharing God's Amazing Love in Visible, Intentional, Tangible, Authentic and Life changing ways? Was it their theological sophistication or their passion for Jesus and compassion for you?

We live and move in a world in which the language is changing and the methods of communication are ever evolving, but our desire to connect is not. Though we have heard from the lion (Amos 3:8, 2 Peter 1:19), we must listen to his sheep (James 1:19). Only when we listen can we best understand how to communicate the message that even the angels yearn to hear (1 Peter 1:12).

That's what Jesus did and invites us to do as well – Make the Love of God real in Visible, Intentional, Tangible, Authentic and Life changing ways! What Jesus did in the Bible, he invites us to do every day. Ask the Spirit to make Christ real in your words and visible in your actions. I wonder if there is an “emoji” for that?

Oh, and know this- Changed people change the world. I invite you to be a part of a community of faith that seeks to share God's Amazing Love in Visible, Intentional, Tangible, Authentic and Life changing ways! Rome First is that place! We care and it shows! Tweet, text, post on your Facebook page or simply tell someone else about the goodness of God's Love that you have experienced. I will see you in Worship and Connect groups as we seek to live “out” and “in to” the message of God's Love made real through Jesus!

Shalom,  
Robert ><>