

## Communication- Shallow or Deep? (Rev. Dr. John Bartol)

*“As persons, we have an immense need to be really listened to, to be taken seriously, to be understood.”* — Dr. Paul Tournier, psychiatrist

My dictionary defines communication as the giving and receiving of information. It should include listening and understanding as well as speaking. The golden rule of friendship is to listen to others as you would have them listen to you.

There is much more to be said on this topic, but here are six levels of communication to consider. Each one represents a broader degree of willingness to share with others:

- 1. Clichés or surface communication:** “It’s a nice day! How are you?” (We don’t expect a full answer.) There is no real sharing of ourselves. At least a cliché is better than being ignored.
- 2. Reporting facts:** usually about other people and things. For example, “Did you know ... is in the hospital?” At this level, nothing is given of ourselves.
- 3. Thoughts and judgments:** we begin to tell how we think about certain things, such as politics or taxes. Some real communication is starting to take place, but first we want some indication of being understood. Research by Dr. Guy Greenfield shows that many people seldom move beyond this level.
- 4. Feelings and emotions:** At this stage we can go much deeper and reveal more of our real selves. It’s a shift from head to heart; moving from being self-centred to a caring level. Open communication is often expressed through laughter, tears and prayers. Body language can speak volumes as well.
- 5. Intimacy:** we are able to express our thoughts and feelings, knowing that we will be heard and accepted, even though we may not always agree on everything. This level can bring a sense of worth, a feeling of being understood and cared about.
- 6. Experiencing God’s unconditional love:** I believe this is the highest form of communication. Without love, God would be a cold, remote abstraction. His unconditional love, completely unearned, tells me there is nothing I can do that will cause Him to love me any more or any less than he does right now.

However, I don’t think any of us can know one another completely and show unconditional love in every situation. I am very fortunate to have a very understanding wife and a few close friends with whom I have shared deeply. However, I still have a hunger and longing for the love of a heavenly father. Many of my heartfelt prayers go deeper than spoken words.

God is the only one who knows everything — yes, everything — about us and loves us just the same. He accepts us as we are, faults and all. However, He loves us too much to allow us to remain the way we are. When you and I reach out for deeper relationships, God will be there to meet us and have others help us as well.

*“Let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger,” (James 1:19).*