

Counseling Commentary

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:6

Have you ever tried to define the word art? Go ahead, try it..... If you're like me the mind races for a central idea because our society has such a broad perspective on what constitutes art. I did, however, find a broad definition in the Lincoln Writing Dictionary for Children. Art is defined as "*any activity that requires special skill or talent to do well*". I like this definition because it includes all areas of art from painting and sculpturing to writing and conversing. Yes, you read it correctly, writing and conversing can be considered an art under this definition because it does require a special skill to do it well.

This month I would like to share with you some ideas about the art of conversation. Since this is becoming a lost art, it is a skill we are trying to recover with students through classroom guidance activities and individual sessions. In the restoration process the first thing to do is to look at what the Bible says about how to converse. As the above verse states, our "conversations should always be full of grace and seasoned with salt". It emphasizes that a Christian's conversation should be savory and seasoned, not always about grace, but with grace. Grace is the salt which seasons our dialogue and makes it "pleasing to the palette". As salt preserves a food item, grace keeps a conversation from spoiling. Graceful conversation allows the opportunity to show God to others and build/nuture a potential relationship.

The key to sharing this grace and making the best of the opportunity is to keep the conversation going. Many students understand that the art of communication is like traffic: there are green lights that encourage you to continue and red lights that say "Stop!" The communication red lights and green lights are signals that we give to others showing them whether we are really listening. If we are listening the conversation will continue; if not, it will stop.

Such examples of red light signals fall under three categories: ***giving advice, passing judgment, avoiding the issue***. *Giving advice* would include preaching (you should), having all the answers (I know), giving orders (do this). *Passing judgment* includes criticizing (gross), blaming (it's your fault), being sarcastic (NOT!). *Avoiding the issue* includes making jokes (could have been worse), interrupting, not listening. Like red light signals, green light signals also fall under three categories: ***acknowledging, reflecting, and validating***. *Acknowledging* includes looking at the speaker and encouraging them to keep talking (go on). *Reflecting* includes clarifying content (did you say?), summarizing (so what you are saying is...), recognizing feelings (what were you feeling?). *Validating* includes showing support and appreciation.

Only through practice and observation does one become proficient in any skill, including how to communicate. May God grant us the wisdom to converse gracefully, so we can pass on the art of conversation to the children and "know how to answer everyone".