

MORNING DEVOTIONS

Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood

In 1967 a popular movie *Cool Hand Luke* was released. Luke Jackson, played by Paul Newman, may be working on a chain gang, sentenced to prison for two years, but he doesn't let the shackles stop him from being sarcastic and rebellious every step of the way.

He refuses to conform to any authority. After talking back to the captain, whom they call Captain – Captain has to make Luke respect his authority by screaming at him, hitting him, and pushing him to the ground. As Luke lies in the dust, Captain says, "What we've got here...is failure to communicate."

Talk about an understatement – but that phrase has been used many times in other settings: "What we've got here is a failure to communicate". He repeats the line at the end of the film as he's about to be shot, something that will definitely hurt him more than anyone else.

Perhaps one of the reasons the saying has stayed so deeply ingrained in our cultural lore is *because the failure to communicate is at the core of more unhappiness and hurt in relationships than any other factor*. It is surely one of life's great ironies that the people closest to us have the power to hurt us more than anyone else.

Think about the times in your own family when you were feeling at odds with a spouse, a parent, a child, or a sibling. These are simple everyday situations. I'm sure – if you're honest with yourself – at the heart of the problem was someone, maybe everyone, feeling misunderstood. Seeking to be understood can so quickly deteriorate into self-justification and blame.

We do have a strong conviction to be understood by others. We don't want to be the odd person out, not fitting in. But all too often we say, "Please, don't let me be misunderstood". Others' opinions do matter – more than we admit, we need to be loved and accepted. We want others to understand and accept us. A lack of communication does cause all misunderstandings.

Communication is such an important topic. We all have different personalities and it's easy for some people to get their feelings hurt or misinterpret our words. It all depends on where each of us is emotionally and what the intent is. We can't prevent people from thinking wrong about us. All we can do is speak the truth. But even that can sometimes not prevent further relational problems.

Some people adopt the attitude, "Well, I am just going to forget it and hope the whole thing will disappear". But the trouble with that is that it usually does not disappear. Misunderstanding can lie hidden in the heart; you may think you have dismissed it or forgotten it, but actually it is just festering away, smoldering like a fire that refuses to go out. Sometimes, unexpectedly, it bursts into flames; you are angry at somebody, and you hardly realise why; but it is because something has been left unsettled.

Try to understand others. Dr Stephen Covey famously said, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."

Start with empathy. Listen, don't just wait for your turn to speak. Ask questions and be curious about the answers. Determine other people's positions. Understand them before moving on.

Remember it's inevitable that you will be misunderstood – life is full of some misunderstandings. If you let the fear of being misunderstood overcome you then you will sit down in your life so that no one will see you, you won't be noticed, you won't be hurt. But if you take "stand" out of misunderstand then all you're left with is "mis".

You will miss your purpose in this life and the many opportunities to love and interact with people.

Taking the Bible's teaching, it's clear that, as Christians, we must not let things lie unsettled. If we are upset about something, or we feel someone is upset at us, then we have to do something about it. That is what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount:

"If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift," (Matthew 5:23-24 RSV).

Clear relationships are tremendously important, not only for yourself but for others as well. We want to get on well with others, and be at peace with them as far as you can.

God knows your heart and intention. He will always understand you. The Psalmist prayed:

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24 NIV)

And that can be our prayer as well. Others may misunderstand your intentions, but He never will. Proverbs 3:3-4 in *The Passion Translation* says:

"Hold on to loyal love and don't let go, and be faithful to all that you've been taught. Let your life be shaped by integrity, with truth written upon your heart. That's how you will find favor and understanding with both God and men—you will gain the reputation of living life well."