

Episode 209|Open Topics|Why Language Matters in Ministry and Discipleship

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SPEAKERS

Josh Mangelson, Karin Peter, Mark Murphy

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:33

Welcome to Project Zion Podcast. I'm your host, Karin Peter. And today I'm talking with Mark Murphy. Now Mark teaches communications in Everett, Washington at Everett Community College. He is an Evangelist in Community of Christ. And he has some things to say about how we communicate with one another in the concepts of faith. So, our topic today is language. Specifically, why language matters in ministry and discipleship. So, let's say hi to Mark, "Hi Mark."

Mark Murphy 01:11

Hi, Karin, thanks for having me. Good to be with you.

Karin Peter 01:14

Well, we're really happy that you agreed to come on Project Zion, I know you're an avid listener. (Mark: I am.) It's got to be a little different to be on this end of the conversation, but we are grateful. This conversation came about because you wrote into Project Zion after you had been listening to some of the episodes, and you realized that the language we use to express our thoughts and concepts of faith have an impact on our own discipleship formation, and that of others. So, tell us a little bit about what prompted you to first write in about that?

Mark Murphy 01:54

Well, as you indicated, I'm a communication instructor. And my bread-and-butter courses tend to be interpersonal communication, as well as the dreaded public speaking. And in both of those, I definitely take a look at language use/misuse. The heart of establishing relationship is really the way that we use language. There is certainly the nonverbal component, but when it comes to sharing, and trying to create a sense of communion, a sense of sameness, it's really done through the language side of it. More and more I've been sensing, dare I say promptings at times, that it really becomes important to look at the way that we share with each other, the way we respond to each other, the various Christian

words we use, supposedly, in order to make sure they have some substance and depth, as opposed to just being kind of folded in with secular language and losing any kind of real precision and meaning. I think it really hit me most recently when I read a book by Douglas John Hall, who is a Canadian theologian. The book was called, *Waiting for Gospel*. When I saw the title, oh, we left out a word, waiting for “the” gospel. His book was really talking about how the word “the” changes into a set of doctrines when people are not looking for a set of doctrines or looking for good news that is so deeply claiming them that they have no option but to respond to it. I really liked that idea and realized how just a single article, “the,” can change the meaning and expression of what we're talking about. So, when I looked at all of those and recognize that our ministry, our witness, our prayer, even our understanding and respecting cultural and linguistic differences that are really coming about in rhetoric, in a fairly rapid fashion, really need to be examined.

Karin Peter 04:03

So, something you said really struck me and that was that you talked about our language as the foundation for how we establish relationship. And I would think that for many of us, we use our language or we choose the words in which we use, not so much to establish a relationship but more to make a point, which leaves out the willingness to choose words that help us be in relationship and find that communion you mentioned, when we're actually thinking about the words we're going to choose while you're talking, so that I can make my point when you're done.

Mark Murphy 04:44

Oh, most definitely. Um, I think you're spot on there, Karin. There's an individual, a child psychologist by the name of John Piaget, who studied children's language back in the 1920s. What he did was record children at a park. He thought they were having pretty good interaction and then he went back to his lab and looked at it. What he realized is that you would have a child say something, another child would respond to that using some of the same language, but they weren't really responding to what the previous person said. He realized that there was a lot of collective monologues occurring, interrupted by input by the other. I think what you're talking about is a whole series of collective monologues that we engage in. Actually, there's a part of me that wants to say to you, please make sure I respond to your questions, rather than simply replying to your questions. Now, some would say those are the same words, but for me, replying is simply saying something, it's not really addressing the core of what you're asking. Responding is really saying something relevant to what you were asking. I think there's a lot of replying that happens. We have a lot of messages exchanged, but not a lot of communication achieved.

Karin Peter 06:13

Ah, okay, well, we'll see how this goes then in our, in our conversation today, if we reply to one another, or if we're able to actually respond. So, you and I had a little bit of written communication prior to our conversation. I was struck by some of the examples that you shared with me that had got you thinking about how your understanding of communication, from your perspective as an educator, was informing your understanding of communication in theological and discipleship terms, that even as you said, the article “the” can shift the meaning of a sentence. In the work that the seventy do, which is what I am most familiar with, we spend a lot of time sharing with people that when we use words like “my church” (Mark: Yes) that changes how I understand my relationship with the institutional church, but also how

others understand their potential relationship. I might even go so far as to say it's a mild way in which we "other" people. We put a dividing line between us. Those kinds of comments that are part of who we are, and we don't say them intentionally, but they come out in our language without our noticing. And so, we'd focus some time on that. You're getting even further into how words are used to "other" people and to alter our perception of discipleship and even our sacramental experiences. Can you say a little bit about them?

Mark Murphy 08:13

Yeah. I think one of the most vivid examples for me recently was manifested in having met a person who identifies themselves as gender fluid. Because of my experience in the classroom, I knew that I should probably ask the individual what their preferred pronoun or pronouns were. This individual looked at me with a kind of shocked look and pleasant surprise and said, "Oh, you know about that." Because my experience in the classroom, I said, "Yeah", and this individual ended up asking me to do their evangelist blessing. Quite honestly, I think there might have been a little bit of a connection there, just in the very fact that I was mindful of asking them what their preferred pronoun was. I know there are people who have said they're not going to get into all of that. People are male, female, masculine, feminine and they're not going to get caught up in all that language. I think not respecting what a person wants to be called, is a way of "othering" them, a way of diminishing and disrespecting who they are. Regardless of whether I may like the terms they prefer to be called, the simple fact is, as a child of God, I need to respect where they're coming from and recognize it. It's an important part of their identity in the same way that the church has struggled with their own identity.

Karin Peter 09:57

Oh, you're gonna throw it back in that corner? And we have! I think there's probably a lot of people who could speak to how they are received as members of Community of Christ. It's very different than how they are received as members of what was the RLDS.

Mark Murphy 10:18

And there are even subtle things in terms. We might get into this a little bit more later on. I was recently worshipping at a baptismal service. I'll be honest, and say I wasn't really paying much attention. I couldn't see everything that was going on, but there was a point at which the language of dark skin and whiteness came into play, even a children's moment where they had a brown egg representing something that wasn't pure versus a white egg. I couldn't see all of that. I couldn't hear everything, but I realized afterwards that there were several people that were upset, and understandably so. We simply cannot continue to use old language that has a very different, if not denotation, certainly a different connotation today than what it did 20, 40, a 1,000 years ago. Those are ways that people can end up, without any bad intent on the part of the users, alienating and excluding people from the experience.

Karin Peter 11:40

So, part of what's important to understand isn't simply knowing what a word is when you use it, or knowing how an additional word can change the meaning of a sentence, but it's simply understanding that language usage shifts over time.

Mark Murphy 12:00

Yes. And let me kind of frame this for a moment. Yeah, even for the rest of our discussion. Talking about language and communication is really hard at this point. I use the analogy of building a house. If we were building a house from the foundation up, that's a lot easier to do in many ways than to do a major remodel. Major remodels are so incredibly messy. You have to knock things out of the way, shift walls around that you don't do when you're building from scratch. If we were to if we were talking about math, that'd be really easy. There's no disagreement; it builds on itself. But we all have our understandings, our ideas, our beliefs, conventional wisdom about communication. A lot of it's conventional, it's just not very wise. It can really shake people up. Walter Brueggemann, which I'm sure you know, Hebrew scholar, has a really nice framework when he talks about the Hebrew Testament. I think it's a great framework for all aspects of our life, spiritual, theological, emotional, intellectual, etc. And he talks about the orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. We've all had our orientation around communication, and what constitutes good communication and so forth. It's just that some of that orientation is wrong. What happens when we talk about communication is that there can be a disorientation that kicks in. You have to work through that to get to a reorientation. Here's something that might disorient some of the listeners. Words have absolutely no meaning. They have no intrinsic meaning. There's nothing in Nature that says the letters C, R, O, S, S has to apply to two pieces of wood that are connected. Meaning resides only in the minds of the user. All a dictionary tells us is how words are most commonly used, not what they mean in nature. The first definition is how it's most commonly used. The second definition is how its next most commonly used. If you're a geek like me, and get some degree of interest looking over dictionaries across the decades, and see how words that were at one time, the first step initially have now become archaic. You can see how language changes. There's nothing static about it. When we try to treat the word as if it's the thing, as if the meaning is in the word itself, and not the user, all sorts of problems occur in all aspects of our life.

Karin Peter 14:57

So, let's talk a little bit about what that means when we are talking in the realm of faith. You mentioned that you were listening to a Project Zion episode and the word hope was mentioned. Tell us a little bit about that.

Mark Murphy 15:16

As you know, hope is one of those core Christian concepts. We promote communities of joy, hope, love, and peace. Up until recently, I always envisioned hope as simply a feeling that we needed to keep alive, so to speak, and that when you lose hope, you lose a sense of vision and the ability to go on. But I was listening to Dr. Brené Brown, who is a Professor of Social Work, and a renowned scholar on issues of vulnerability and human connection and stuff. She points out that hope isn't actually a feeling. It's a kind of cognitive process that's based on being able to set goals, have the perseverance or the tenacity to be able to pursue those goals, and to actually believe in our own capacity to help us act towards those goals. I would dare say, and I don't know this for sure, but I would dare say that's not how a lot of people talk or envision hope, when they use hope. And even if you look at the dictionary and look at synonyms, hope is the same as wish. And Christian wishing isn't the same thing as Christian hope, at least not according to the way that I'm understanding scripture more and more when I see that word used.

Karin Peter 16:51

So, hope has much deeper meaning. It has implications of action involved in it, of setting goals, and then having the implied tenacity or the self-understanding of one's capability of then meeting those goals. (Mark: Exactly.) Very deep, very comprehensive system that applies to the word hope.

Mark Murphy 17:10

Yes, yeah. With wishing you can sit around and simply wallow endlessly in wishing without having any outcome associated.

Karin Peter 17:20

Well, there are times it sounds like exactly what I would prefer to do.

Mark Murphy 17:25

But don't we all? Yeah, I think there's a role for that at times.

Karin Peter 17:28

That might be the Hebrew lamenting. I'm not really that sure. (Mark: Yeah.) Maybe that's where that comes. (Mark: Yeah.) But I can see where this applies to other words, for example, the word salvation. How it's understood in Community of Christ is that salvation is not simply an individual act. It's not something where I connect with Jesus, I love Jesus, so I'm saved. Or I follow Jesus, so I'm saved, and I will go to heaven. That's not salvation. Salvation is bigger and more comprehensive than that. It applies to all of God's created order being reconciled to God. So, it's an individual and a corporate kind of act where God and creation work together. So, with that, salvation in Community of Christ is God's redemptive process, and we all participate in that. That's very different than how salvation is tossed around in Christian language and Christian commentary in the Western world.

Mark Murphy 18:37

Correct. Yeah, I totally agree with you. I think, when you look at the simple truth that salvation, wholeness, and healing, all come from the same root word, that clearly seems to have implications for salvation being more than just a hereafter kind of timeframe and that it has to do with more than just the individual component. I do think the North American church, because of its high emphasis in individualism, specifically in the United States of America, I think we tend to read the Bible through a hermeneutic that is deeply flawed. The Bible was written from a communal, collectivist perspective and we read it from the individual perspective. So, salvation has a different meaning, I think, in the Bible than what it has in the way that we currently hear it being espoused by fundamentalist conservatives, evangelicals, even some people in our own faith communities, whether that be Community of Christ or a Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, or other listeners, where it really is about accept the Lord Jesus Christ, and you get to be saved. One of the things I deeply love about Community of Christ is that we look at the here and now, we let the hereafter take care of itself, so to speak, to put it in, you know, kind of simplistic terms. I think people who focus on salvation as an individual reward can be, as the saying goes, so heavenly minded they cease to be of real earthly value in terms of bringing about what we call Zion or peace and justice communities.

Karin Peter 20:34

So what are some other language uses you've noticed in the church where people are assuming that they are using a word, because that word has a certain meaning, when in reality, that word might actually invoke something very different than what they intend? I'm thinking about in prayer life, in Sunday School, in conversations with others about faith.

Mark Murphy 21:02

Well, I think actually, the very word faith itself, and the word belief, are oftentimes used interchangeably by some people. Belief, as we typically use it, is seen as agreeing and a set of statements being true, or the idea that it's true that Jesus existed. However, according to Marcus Borg, in his book *Speaking Christian*, belief in the Bible really was meant as beloved, as loving God, believing Christ. So, it wasn't, it wasn't an assent to a certain set of doctrines, or a certain set of statements as being true or false. It really was a quality of relationship. And faith is really a matter of trust. For Paul, a lot of times action was an intrinsic part of that trust. It wasn't just a part, it wasn't just trust, but the action that flowed from that. So, I think a lot of times when we talk about belief and faith, we're not really clear in our own minds what we are meaning by that.

Karin Peter 22:22

And that would then kind of find its way into what we do together when we are corporately in worship, or in study, or in spiritual formation, because we're using words that we have not really defined for ourselves what we're talking about.

Mark Murphy 22:44

Exactly.

Karin Peter 22:46

So, one of the things you mentioned earlier in some of our conversations, where when we, when we pray, and we ask God, to do something for us, or help us do something, what are we really saying?

Mark Murphy 23:02

Yeah, so you mentioned that we had some written communication, and I made the observation that I kind of cringe, sorry if I offend anyone in this, but I kind of cringe when I hear people say something to the effect, "Dear God, let us feel your Spirit." The word "let" is oftentimes heard as asking God to do something that God might not be inclined to do otherwise, until we make the request. And I'm not suggesting everyone has that perception, but every time I hear "let" there's just a part of me that says, "No, God wants to," we don't have to ask God to "let" us do this. Whereas, if I hear "God help us feel your Spirit," then that speaks to me of a God that I can be in relationship with and speak to a God with a nature of generosity and grace that is always wanting to share. The very label invocation kind of drives me nuts because we will say, you know, God's already here to meet us when we get here. Well, then why are we invoking the Spirit? Wouldn't it be a prayer of awareness? And again, some people say that might be nitpicky, but I know that, I'm at the risk of sounding a little too academic, there are studies where if you show a group of subjects a video of a car wreck or something, and you say, "Did you see a tree?" as one of the questions you're going to ask, "Did you see a tree the car missed," or "Did you see the tree?" when people hear it, they're less likely to say they saw a tree because it raises two questions. The "a," Did you see "a" tree? Well, number one, was a tree there? And number two, if there

was, did I see it? (Karin: Okay) Did you see “the: tree automatically says there was a tree there. So, the question becomes, did I see it? So, when people hear “the”, they actually say they saw the tree more often than what they saw the tree in the “a”, even when there was no tree present.

Karin Peter 25:30

Oh my gosh, okay. Yeah.

Mark Murphy 25:32

Yeah, so I'm aware that what might be deemed nitpicky, but they really do make a difference. When we use the term mankind, research shows people tend to perceive males, not all of humankind. And so little things like that are going to affect how people perceive things. Carla, one of the other hosts might appreciate this language has a distributive property to it, you know, the A, if A equals B, and B equals C, then A equals C. Well, the nature of language really is language or symbols. When we talk about language, we're talking about symbols. They can represent whatever we want. Symbols, shape our perceptions. Our perceptions shape, or some would go so far as to say, create our reality. So, if I get you to accept my language, I can actually begin to create your reality for you.

Karin Peter 26:47

Okay, now you're going off into a whole other area. So, give us an idea of what that looks like. Give us an example,

Mark Murphy 26:55

Okay, I'm gonna pick it. This will be an obviously controversial one, but it's one of the core things being fought over in today's climate, the whole issue of pro-life versus pro-choice. Pro-choice is not the natural antithesis, or the natural opposite of pro-life. Anti-life or pro-death is, but no one wants to be a part of the anti-life, pro-death camp. Conversely, pro-life is not the natural opposite of pro-choice, anti-choice is, but in a land of freedom and democracy, who wants to be part of the anti-choice group? So, people spend their time fighting over the labels because they know how people perceive the labels influences what their reaction and reality is going to be. Pro-life Sister Joan (Karin: Chittister), yes, thank you. She actually has written articles saying we need to understand that many people in the pro-life are actually more pro-birth than they are pro-life because they are not all that concerned about providing the programs that would reduce the infant mortality rate, which is one of the highest in all industrialized nations. But saying pro-life makes me sound much more honorable than simply saying pro-birth. So little fights like that, the way that we argue using the language without thinking about the implications, causes a lot of disagreement, a lot of animosity, a lot of alienation.

Karin Peter 28:56

So, language then, our language choices, when we are communicating with each other for the purpose that you said, which was establishing relationship, right, with one another when we choose our language based on our desire to establish relationship, then that, the choices we make impact the quality of those relationships. (Mark: Yes.) So, we routinely reply to one another or respond to difficult situations without really thinking about how the message is going to be received. We're worried about how, what we're communicating, but we're not thinking on the other end about what is being received. And one of the ways that you have pointed this out before is when we are talking to people and we're

trying to offer sympathy. So, we're trying to share with someone else, that we care about, that, that we have sympathy for what has happened in their life. So, say more about that.

Mark Murphy 30:10

Well, first of all, I think it's really critical for people to understand that all effective communication is receiver oriented. It's not speaker oriented,

Karin Peter 30:23

Oh, then that just messes up everybody, Mark,

Mark Murphy 30:25

It does. And it makes it really, really hard because it means that we have to have some awareness of who we're speaking with. We have to know, in one sense what world they're coming from. We have to have some sense of what their language means for them because we don't convey meaning. What I do is, I experience something internally that I have to put some kind of words to. I then transmit those words to you based on what those words mean, for me, my cultural historical experience, my connotations with those words, the emotions that they raised in me. I give those to you. You don't receive my meaning. What you do is you receive my words, my language symbols, and you apply your meaning to them. If the meaning that you apply sufficiently matches the meaning I intended, then we have communication. If we, if it doesn't, then we have messages exchanged, but not communication achieved. So, it really becomes important to realize that effective communication is not just about me saying what I want to say, the way I want to say it. It's about having some sense of how I can frame what I need to say to this other person in a way that increases the likelihood of them actually receiving it. So, I really need to be able to put myself in their position and in one sense, be able to say, if I were receiving from someone else what I'm about to say to this person, would I really find it of value.

I think one of the areas that most gets to me is when we try to provide support for people who are grieving. I talk a lot about this in my listening unit, in my interpersonal class. I've had people tell me that they've had people say, "I know you lost your child, but at least God gave you two others to compensate for the loss." You know the common ones we oftentimes hear, "Well, Heaven must have needed little Jimmy more than Earth needed him," or "They're in a better place," and all of that kind of, all of those kinds of things. According to studies, 97% of the time, people like to say, "Would you just please shut up, that is of no help whatsoever." Maybe 3% of the time people get any kind of momentary help out of that. But the most common responses we give, which are either advising or trying to support with these cliches, over 97% of the time, people say, "Do me a favor, shut up." It kind of gets back to the story in Job when Jesus, or rather, God, says to Job's friends, "Why don't you just be quiet, because you're not doing Job any favors in what you're saying?" People say when it comes to grieving, the most helpful response is really a person who simply says or acknowledges, "I know you're in pain, and there's not a damn thing I can do about it. But I'm willing to sit here with you." So, I think there are ways that we, we say things, and pardon me if I offend anyone here, I think at times what we say is more to make ourselves feel good than to actually help the other person, as if I've done what I needed to do to be the good disciple, to lift up the hopeful message, without saying, really, would anyone find what I'm about to say to be uplifting in the least? Yeah, they're in a they're in a better place,

but that doesn't remove the fact that they're in pain right now and we'd still like to have that person here.

Karin Peter 34:44

So, in the in the life of the church, when we are learning to live into spiritual formation as a way of being one of the practices that we encourage is for people to move into deep listening, holy listening, where we are putting our own agendas and our own self in the background and simply trying to be present with and hearing the other. So, this is kind of what you're talking about.

Mark Murphy 35:16

Yes, yes, in fact, anytime a person says, "what communication skill do you think would be most important to learn, flat out, no doubt, authentic listening, genuine listening to another person being truly present with them. And in terms of discernment, holy listening. But there's definitely a holy listening component, not just in terms of listening to God, but listening to other people, as well, and recognizing that so much of what a person is saying is in what's not said, sometimes. You might remember the great philosopher Gloria Estefan?.

Karin Peter 36:07

I'm old enough to remember.

Mark Murphy 36:10

Yes, some listeners may not. But you might recall, she had a song that said, "I tried to say, I love you, but the words got in the way," There are times words get in the way. And the most powerful, the most powerful message that can be conveyed is silence, but silence that is framed in sanctuary, safety, in presence. And we just don't, we don't value the power of silence in the presence of others, in the way that we should. Now, here's the catch, Karin, we can have, we can be together in a room and each of us be having our own experiences, but I really don't know if the experience that you're having is similar to the experience I had, until you and I start talking about it. That's the language side. So, I don't want to say that relationship is built only through language, but shared understanding is through language. But language never has the capacity to fully articulate our understandings. And it always has the capacity to divide, as well as to include.

Karin Peter 37:41

When we're talking about our language usage, as disciples, there is, I guess one way to say it would be a higher accountability. (Mark: Yes), an expectation that we would be willing to look at our own language usage more effectively, (Mark: Yes) to practice holy listening, deep listening, authentic, and to understand the communication as a way to build relationships, rather than to simply share information or make our own point, or our own needs. No. (Mark: Right.) And this is, this has a little bit more heavy lifting to it than simply being a people commissioned to go out and share the Gospel, so to speak, just to go out and proclaim. Now we're getting into the build communities of joy. All right. So now we get to this other aspect of communication, which is significant (Mark: Yes.) discipleship, and probably needs a lot more attention given to it than what we have done in the church in examining how we are using symbolic words together.

Mark Murphy 39:15

Correct. Yes. And I would go so far as to say a lot of what we think is communication is really more bypassing, as it's called. Bypassing is what happens when you and I might use the same word, but we have a different definition for what that word is. We simply assume we're using it in the same way without realizing our definitions are different. So, we're talking along, but we're like two ships in the night going past each other. Again, we have the collective monologues, we have the messages exchange, but in terms of really understanding where you're coming from, I'm not, because I'm making assumptions.

Karin Peter 40:01

So, we see that a lot right now, when Community of Christ people are visiting with people who come out of different faith traditions, particularly the LDS tradition, because we can use the same vocabulary that we have, marked by a 14 year shared experience. But they mean significantly different things. They have deep implied meanings that, that don't resonate with people from the other faith tradition, for example, Temple and all that goes with that, or priesthood and how it's understood, so very differently in both traditions.

Mark Murphy 40:37

And sacrament,

Karin Peter 40:39

And sacrament. Yes. And we could go down the list. Yeah. But there, we don't think of that going in. We think, oh, we have the shared tradition. So, we must, it must be easy to communicate with people. And I think we have the same experience when we speak to people who come from fundamental or really evangelical traditions. We're both using the language of hope and faith and salvation in Scripture, but we are meaning very different things. Yes. So, as we go forward, what's your advice for us?

Mark Murphy 41:17

Well, let me give you one quick example that has really resonated with me lately. I was listening to Dr. Timothy Johnson, who some of you might know from ABC. What I did not realize is that he was also a MDiv, ordained minister, before he went into medicine and so forth. And in his presentation, he was saying that he has gotten to the point where when people ask him, if he's a Christian, he no longer says yes. He says, I'm a follower of Jesus. Because they said, when I look at the Jerry Falwell, Juniors, when I look at the Robert Jeffers, and all these other people who claim to be Christian, the word Christian has lost any real precision, in terms of what it means and conveys. And I know many of us have gotten uncomfortable calling ourselves Christian, because we immediately know the defenses are going to go up. I actually really like the idea of saying, I'm a follower of Jesus, rather than getting caught up in Christian because it just, in one sense, it has lost any real clear meaning. Certainly, certainly, meaning that we and Community of Christ would like to convey in terms of what the nature of Christ is. So I would say, one of the things that we need to do is be able to define our own language, have clear definitions of what we're talking about. Every time we make a statement and every time we state a belief, those are all based on underlying assumptions. And we need to be able to say, number one, here's my definition, like I did at the beginning, when I said reply versus response. It doesn't mean that you're going to agree with those definitions. But at least you now know what I mean, when I say those

words. So know our definitions and be able to identify our underlying assumptions. For instance, I absolutely hate these two statements. "There, but for the grace of God go I." The underlying implication is, God apparently didn't choose to give that person grace. Second one I don't like is, "Everything happens for a reason" because when you ask people who say yes, most of the time, they're going to say it's a larger power that determines that reason. The implication of that is troubling because if everything happens for a reason, then there was a reason the higher power wanted this child to die. If everything happens for a reason, that higher power, God, was on the side of the Nazis. The implications for "everything happens for a reason" are so disconcerting and unworthy of God and yet we just throw it out there like it has some meaning. And it causes people to say, what's the reason? What did I do wrong? Why didn't I have enough faith? rather than recognizing sometimes that the reason is just that crap happens and it's not the result of some intended larger power. So [we should] be aware of our underlying assumptions and knowing our own words. And I'm going to go one step further and say, identify what our motivations are for why we say what we do. We really need some deeper self-awareness. We need to be able to step back and say, I'm about to make this statement. Really, what am I hoping to accomplish with it? Am I doing this because of impression management? Am I doing it because of genuine love? Am I doing it because I'm trying to passively/aggressively control the person? I just think these are a lot of self-reflections that we have to go through which means, as you're picking up, communication, it's not just me talking and you listening. It is so much harder and the more that I study communication, honestly, the more surprised I am that it even happens. I don't know how people get along.

Karin Peter 46:23

Sometimes better than others. (Mark: Yeah.) So, this has given us a great deal to think about Mark and I'm sure it's going to spark some other interesting conversations as we go forward. I hope you're open to visiting with us again, about communication, and about these very real applications in our life that will help us build more authentic relationships, healthy relationships, as we have had them identified in Scripture, with God, with Himself, with others, with the earth to be in those healthy whole, balanced relationships. Thank you for calling our attention to the importance of language and defining language. I mean, clear definitions, identifying our underlying assumptions, yes, I took notes and our motivations for what we are saying, so that we can strengthen how we communicate with one another and how we share the message of what it is to be a follower of Jesus in today's world. If you are interested in the some of the things that Mark talks about, we can recommend that you can find some information on unpacking the language of faith by checking out *Speaking Christian* by Marcus Borg. I think the Kindle version last time I looked was around \$10. There are several other books that Mark mentioned and authors that Mark mentioned. Walter Brueggemann was one. Brené Brown was another. And so, all of these can be really helpful as we continue our understanding of what it is to be in communication with one another. Anything else that you want to share with us before we close up this episode?

Mark Murphy 48:26

Well, just a couple of things. I really do think it's important at some point that we also recognize the problem of language from a patriarchal system, and the implications that has in terms of referring to God in male genders, and all of those kinds of things. So that's certainly something we need to be sensitive to, and maybe explore more, because it really can leave out half of our congregation. The final thing I would simply say is this, when it comes to communication, our default response should always

be listening and asking questions. Power in interpersonal relationships, or in human communication, is defined as the ability to influence goal achievement. We tend to think power resides in the speaker or in talking. Power resides more in the listener than in the speaker. If no one's listening, it doesn't matter what you're saying as a speaker, and even if you think about an individual, those times where you have tried to share a painful experience with someone, and they start asking all sorts of questions and directing the conversation you may have even had the instance or the time where you just kind of at some point go, I'm obviously not going to get to tell the story the way I need to tell it. I'm going to have to tell it the way they want to tell it. Asking questions is considered part of listening, if they're true questions. I always say our default needs to be listening and asking for understanding first, before thinking about talking.

Karin Peter 50:34

Okay. So, you are trying to just be silent and go look what a great listener I am. Fortunately, to close this episode, yes, you left us with a lot to think about Mark and I do really appreciate the time that you were willing to spend to do the interview. (Mark: Well, thank you.) I'm hoping we can do some more in the future. (Mark: We'd love to.) For Project Zion Podcast, this is Karin Peter. We've been chatting with Mark Murphy. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 51:16

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