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## Transformative Conversations: A Review of Renewing Communication

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## Transformative Conversations: A Review of Renewing Communication

### Abstract

"The Holy Spirit moves leaders from the limitations of human efforts to the divine efforts of God."

Posting about the book *Renewing Communication* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/transformative-conversations-a-review-of-renewing-communication/>

### Keywords

In All Things, book review, Renewing Communication, spirit, approaches, children, youth, families, Colleen R. Derr

### Comments

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt University](#).

# Transformative Conversations: A Review of *Renewing Communication*

Gail Ashmore

November 22, 2022

**Title:** Renewing Communication: Spirit-Shaped Approaches for Children, Youth, and Families

**Author:** Colleen R. Derr

**Publisher:** IVP Academic

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**Pages:** 288 (Paperback)

**ISBN:** 978-0830852659

Communication is like oxygen. Whether one is aware of it or not, messages are infused in casual conversations, music, words, art, writing, movement, behavior, and attitudes. Through a subtle wink, an overwhelmed sigh, the persuasive words of a sermon, or the encouraging note from a friend, communication has the power to create meaning in the world. The messages and narratives that humans receive in a given day are interwoven in the fabric of one's being, whether intentionally or unintentionally. What then, is the communication that transforms—the communication that actively changes lives?

Out of the overflow of her ministry in both education classrooms and church ministry, Colleen Derr infuses her passion for transformative communication into her book *Renewing Communication: Spirit Shaped Approaches for Children, Youth, and Families*. Derr prescribes a new lens for disciple-making, centering on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit moves leaders from the limitations of human efforts to the divine efforts of God. Derr writes with ease as she invites the reader to participate in disciple-making through the power of transformative communication.

Embedded in Derr's work is invitation: the invitation to not only go deeper with the Holy Spirit as an individual, but also be one that leads others to do the same. While her main audience is specifically to leaders of children, youth and adults, her motivational words and well-researched information has the capacity to change environments well beyond the church or classroom. The purpose of the book is to equip those who are motivated to lay foundations for effective communication through a variety of mediums. The reader finds herself not only examining her own heart in the preparation, but also examining the hearts of those who will receive it. This is done through theories of human development, audience and context, the

goals that are created, verbal and nonverbal communication, effective strategies, the use of creativity, and the importance of assessment. All of these components build the foundation for a more holistic approach to the transformation of others. While one might be intimidated by the number of mediums that are provided, Derr provides an accessible and tangible pathway forward.

Derr begins with uncovering the blueprint for transformational communication with three vital components: the role of the Holy Spirit, the transformed communicator, and the transformational relationships. First, Derr explains that human action might create the vehicle to minister to others, but it is ultimately the Holy Spirit that provides the power to transform. Second, Derr prepares the reader for transformational communication. What are real challenges within families? How does personality and intelligence play a role? What private, shared, or public environments already exist and do these spaces help or hinder communication? These questions and topics lead the reader to care for each of God's image-bearers in a meaningful way. If parents, pastors and teachers treat individuals as machines to fix, then they are forgetting the powerful reality that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, deeply cares for his people, his sheep. Asking these questions help us care for his sheep and embody the role of shepherd. Derr explains that when we begin by understanding needs,<sup>1</sup> we are able to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit to communicate in holistic ways. When we understand a person's specific needs and how to meet those needs, we are better able to celebrate his humanity, along with acknowledging his physical, cognitive, social, moral and spiritual development. This kind of preparation deepens the wells of ministry.

Similarly, and with careful consideration, Derr includes the power of location and the honest reality of the world. How does social media play into all of this? How can an environment (or atmosphere) be intentionally arranged to enhance communication? Lastly, Derr teaches the reader on the communication itself. It is intentionally created through the power of nonverbal communication, the gift of proclamation of communication, and the vitality of discernment along the way.

This book is timely. As a mom and pastoral care provider, I have witnessed the influence of communication in both positive and negative ways. Our world communicates messages. The enemy communicates messages. Students and young people are constantly sifting through the supposed truths and false invitations that they receive every day. Among those are: "If you become enough, then you will belong." "If you work harder, then you will be accepted." "If you change, then you will be loved." People are often found crippled by the false narrative of shame, rather than the transforming narrative of the gospel. It is vital that we absorb our environments and communication in the nourishing truth of Jesus. This book provides the necessary tools for creating environments that stand on God's invitation to belong with Him rather than the enemy's deceptive invitation to individualism. Transformative communication declares who God is and who we are. It is about *living into identity* rather than creating identity. I am deeply challenged and motivated by this content to create such an atmosphere in my home, in my office, and beyond.

At first glance, the title of this book would make one think that it is about the art of speaking. However, its central focus is the gift of transformation. It is not a book of human efforts, but rather how to open the doors to God's divine work. The reader is not required to have a resume of impressive endeavors, but rather a humble heart to be open to the work that God desires to do. It allows schools, churches, homes and other environments to construct the sanctuary in which God will communicate the truth of the gospel through the mediums that is provided. These words from John's gospel are at the heart of Derr's writing: "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come."

Children, youth, and adults will have access to all kinds of messages whether it be through conversation, social media, literature, movies, political rhetoric, news outlets, or advertising. However, it is the work of the Holy Spirit that they will come to know the truth of the gospel narrative in their lives and respond to this invitation with love for others and God's world. This is important work. Anyone who reads Derr's encouraging words and well-informed research will be left motivated, convicted, and equipped for the pathway of transformative communication.

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1. Derr utilizes American psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs: physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.