**Mike Hipes – Facebook Lesson, August 21, 2020**

Good afternoon!

While I was in Russia on a three-week mission trip a number of years ago, I struggled with the language. Learning Russian was hard for me! In this small city in Siberia nobody, for the most part, spoke or understood any English. We were there to help boost the small church of Christ that had recently been planted by holding daily bible studies and nightly lectures. Of course, it was all having to be done through Russian interpreters. During the days I was there I worked hard to learn some of the basic language to be able to communicate directly with the Russian people. After about two weeks I felt I had a good enough handle on some of the words to venture out into the town alone and without an interpreter to accompany me. I decided to go to the bank to exchange some dollars for rubles. How hard could it be to walk up to the teller’s window at the counter and simply say “rubles for dollars please.” After waiting in line, the woman at the next open window motioned for me to walk up. I handed her $40 American dollars and said “rubles for dollars please.” What I didn’t expect was for the woman to start asking me questions! Now nervous, I spoke to her in the few Russian words that I knew, saying, excuse me I’m sorry but rubles for dollars please! She continued to ask me more questions! Finally, I put out my hand and said, please give me back my money! She did and I left in a huff! I could hear all of the Russian people waiting in line behind me laughing as I exited the building. Later I spoke to my young friend Sam who usually comes with me to interpret. I explained the story to him and when I finished, he started to laugh as the others did! I said what’s so funny! He said, that place you went to wasn’t a bank, it was a post office! They don’t exchange money there, they only mail packages and sell stamps!

Knowing the right language can make all the difference in the world! Knowing your audience and what they are hearing can also make all the difference! Using the right words does make all the difference! The thing is, I actually had a pocket translation book that I usually kept with me in cases like this! However, I decided to leave it in my room and try to venture out on my own! The result was disastrous! It was not only embarrassing but I was unable to clearly communicate an accurate message! This ended up in confusion and misunderstandings for all of us! The thing to remember is that if we expect to clearly communicate the message of Christ to people, our source of accuracy needs to be from the book, God’s book, not the man without the book! The power is in the message, not the massager! Listen to how the apostle Paul puts it:

· “And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” I Corinthians 3:1-5

· “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” I Corinthians 1:18,21

When it was my turn to bring the lesson one evening at our nightly church services, the interpreter Irene asked to look over my notes beforehand. Now, that in and of itself was a task as my notes are always handwritten along with a lot of scribbled last-minute thoughts in the margins and all over the page. She said that there were some words that I had written that had different meanings to Russians and suggested that I don’t use them. The word “pretend” was one of them. For me, it meant one thing but for the Russians, it indicated being deceiving or lying. I made the adjustments! It was fun but different preaching through an interpreter. Everything I said was received with a delayed response due to the interpreting process. Even when I would tell a joke you had to wait a few seconds to see and hear the reaction. Wild! However, I surprised the audience at the end of the lesson by previously learning how to say a closing phrase in their exact language. As the interpreter stood silent, I spoke directly to the audience at the end of the lesson. I guess it came out OK as no one laughed but this time cheered! Just one more reminder that knowing the right language can make all the difference, and that the power is in the message and not the messenger! As II Timothy 4:2 says, Preach the word!

Blessings,

Mike