Week 3 – Learning to Validate

Marriage Rebuilders

Learning to Validate

Levels of Communication

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3

Level 4

Level 5

How Communication Breaks Down

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How can the speaker’s message be different than the one heard?
Filters can distort the message into something different based on the listener’s...

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There can be a problem with different perspectives.
**How does the listener respond?**

The listener’s response may act like a shield, deflecting the message they think they are hearing.

Responses that shut down the speaker don’t allow the message to be heard:

- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________

Responses that escalate an argument and cause communication to spiral downward echo John Gottman’s 4 horsemen of marriage apocalypse:

- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________
- ____________________________

Suppose...Your husband is a little overweight and he jokes about it with you from time to time, so you think it’s no big deal. You’re at a friend’s house when he says something self-deprecating about his weight to your neighbor, and you chime in on the joke. When you get home, he tells you that he’s angry about you making fun of him.

*Which response is validating?*

1. “You joke about your weight all the time. How am I to know I’m not supposed to?”

2. “Nobody even cared. It was no big deal. You’re overreacting.”

3. “What about the times you joke about me in front of our friends?”

4. “You know I don’t think your weight is all that bad; you still look good to me.”

Responses that validate the speaker and demonstrate understanding:

- ____________________________ Live with the tension of unhappiness.
- ____________________________ It’s OUR problem.
- ____________________________ Validate what you think you heard.
What is Empathic Communication?
Empathic communication is a technique used by the Speaker and Listener to improve understanding and reach deeper levels of communication.

Empathic communication is a gateway that:
- Provides ____________ to facilitate communicating difficult information.
- Allows the speaker to experience ____________ and respect from the listener.
- Facilitates ____________ closeness and increased vulnerability resulting in new experiences of intimacy.
- Moves us away from ____________ and ____________ tendencies.

The Speaker’s Role:
The speaker states clearly what is important in a way the other person can “get it”. The speaker must consider:
- ______________
- ______________

The Listener’s Role:
The listener is seeking to validate and understand what they think they heard, by listening for the speaker’s:
- ______________
- ______________
Empathic Speaker Skills
The speaker prepares what to say and how to say it.

**What To Say**
Use the Communication Wheel as a guide to formulate “What you want to say”.

- What do I want to discuss? *Focus on one issue*
- What are the facts as I perceive them? *“When...”*
- What do I feel? *Use the feeling list*
- What do I think? *Be tentative, watch out for filters*
- What’s my part in this issue? *Take ownership of your part*
- What do I need or want? *Be specific and clear*
- What am I willing to do? *Action steps*

**How to Say It**
Use these guidelines to prepare “How to say it”.

Set the ________________________
- Ask for an appointment
- Briefly describe the issue to be discussed
- Set time limit, especially at first
- Remove distractions

Start ________________________
Take ________________________
- Speak for yourself, not for your spouse
- Use “I” statements to reduce defensiveness
- Avoid generalizations like “never” and “always”

Keep statements ________________________

Do not move on to action plan until the issue is heard and understood.
Empathic Listener Skills
The listener prepares to pause, listen, validate, and seek understanding.

How to Listen
Consider your non-verbal communication!

- Sit squarely
- Open posture
- Lean forward
- Eye contact

How to Respond

Listener

Listen for the fact and the feeling.
It’s OK to interrupt in order to “get it”.
Reflect back to speaker what was said. Paraphrase in your own words.

- “It sounds like you’re feeling...”
- “I hear you saying that...”
- “Your point of view is...”
- “If I understand you correctly you want...”
- “If I understand you correctly you feel...”

When there is a pause, ask:

- “Did I get it right?”
- “Is there more you’d like to say about that?”

Paraphrase until you get it right!

Listener

Validate by expressing that you understand the other person’s point of view and affirm the other person’s reality. (This does not mean you have to agree with the other person) However, the other person’s experience needs to be acknowledged and validated.

- “That makes sense to me from your perspective.”
- “I can understand why you would think that.”

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Listener ________________

Empathize with the other person by expressing what you think he/she might be feeling.

- “So you are feeling...”
- “You must have felt...”

Examples of Listener Phrases...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tentative Opening</th>
<th>Feeling</th>
<th>About, Because or When</th>
<th>Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It sounds like...</td>
<td>You feel mad...</td>
<td>About...</td>
<td>How I disciplined the kids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hear you saying that...</td>
<td>You feel sad...</td>
<td>Because of...</td>
<td>What she said to you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I hear you correctly...</td>
<td>You feel glad...</td>
<td>When...</td>
<td>Your sister succeeds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You seem to be saying...</td>
<td>You feel afraid...</td>
<td>About...</td>
<td>You father’s ill health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think I hear you saying...</td>
<td>You feel confused...</td>
<td>Because of...</td>
<td>All the different options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m not sure I’m following...</td>
<td>You feel ashamed...</td>
<td>About...</td>
<td>Wanting to leave your job?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Am I hearing you say...</td>
<td>You feel lonely...</td>
<td>When...</td>
<td>I don’t make time for you?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Helpful hints:

- Set a time limit – 15 min., 30 min., 60 min.
- Remember this takes practice and will feel awkward at first.
- The goal is to understand, not to agree.
- Designate who is Speaker and who is Listener. Use an object or the Communication Wheel to show which person is the Speaker.
- Stop and pray for God’s presence and help in your communication.
- Speakers, pause after a sentence or two to allow Listeners to reflect back. Keep your sentences short if possible.
- Listeners, if necessary, gently indicate when you have heard enough and need a chance to reflect back.
- After the Listener has paraphrased, validated, and empathized with the Speaker, the take their turn as Speaker to share their thoughts, feelings, needs and wants around the issue.
Rules for Empathic Communication

Speaker:
- Start softly
- Speak for yourself, not for your spouse
- Use “I” statements
- Don’t generalize, avoid “always”, “never”
- Keep your statements brief
- Stop to let the Listener paraphrase

Listener:
- Focus on the Speaker’s message
- Hold back your own reaction
- Paraphrase what you hear
  - “It sounds like you feel...”
  - “I heard you say... Is that right?”
  - “Are you saying...”
- Validating their perspective, “I can see why that upset you”, doesn’t mean you agree with their perspective.
- Ask, “Did I get that right?”
- Ask, “Is there more you’d like to say about that?”

When the speaker feels their message is understood, switch roles.

References:

**The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work** A Practical Guide from the Country’s Foremost Relationship Expert, by John M. Gottman and Nan Silver

**Connecting with Self and Others** by Daniel Wackman, Elam Nunnaly, Phyllis Miller, and Sherod Miller

**Listening for Heaven’s Sake Building Healthy Relationships with God, Self and Others** by Dr. Gary Sweeten, Dave Ping, and Anne Clippard

Marriage Rebuilders 2013
Week 3 – Learning to Validate

Discussion Questions

1. How are you feeling? Sad, Angry, Scared, Happy, Excited, Tender

2. Over the past week, you determined your love languages and communicated these to your partner. Were you able to show love to your spouse? Please share any insights you gained from this.

3. What level of communication do you and your spouse most commonly communicate at?

4. Explain what benefit you realize when someone listens to you and understand your feelings.

5. What are common barriers to communication between you and your spouse?

6. What do you need from your spouse in order to “feel” listened to or understood?
   • Practice using empathic communication skills to tell your spouse what you need.

7. Considering the listening skills, what prevents you from being a good listener? What are you willing to do to improve?

8. Considering the speaker skills, what prevents you from being a good speaker? What are you willing to do to improve?

9. As a speaker, are there phrases that you repeat often, but don’t feel are heard? How could you rephrase it so its stated in a way the listener can “get it”?

10. Remember you do not have to agree with your spouse to validate his/her experience. What are the obstacles to acknowledging and respecting your spouse’s view?

11. What new insights and/or skills have you gained from our discussion of communication?
Homework

1. Listed below are some of the ways we protect or cut ourselves off from intimate communications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bad habits</th>
<th>Filters</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advice giving</td>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>Reading at mealtime</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interrupting</td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Turning on TV rather than continuing a conversation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reassuring</td>
<td>Feelings</td>
<td>Taking a shower or bath so your spouse will be asleep when you go to bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangents</td>
<td>Past experiences</td>
<td>Filling your time with tasks that give you privacy</td>
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</table>

“Heart” issues

- Jealousy
- Criticism
- Contempt/hatred
- Unforgiveness
- Mistrust
- Pride
- Fear of intimacy or isolation or ?

Relational patterns

- Withdrawing/distancing
- Defensiveness
- Denial
- Control/domination
- Passivity
- Passive-aggressive cycles
- Pursuing
- Harmful expression of anger
- Conflict avoidance

2. Using the items listed above create a personalized list of the barriers you use.

3. Decide which barriers you want to “tear down.”

4. What specifically are you going to do to change these barriers?

5. Use the Communication Wheel and practice “Rules for Effective Communication” to share your thoughts with your spouse. Remember to give your spouse a chance to be the speaker. Switch back and forth until you reach understanding.
Expectations about love and marriage

Fantasies about what marriage should or shouldn’t be are dangerous. Problems arise when our hopes and beliefs don’t meet with our reality. You may barely realize that you’re holding your partner up to an impossible standard. Unrealistic expectations can keep you from fully appreciating your spouse.

The following statements reflect unrealistic expectations that commonly lead to disappointment and dissatisfaction in our relationship.

Which of these statements are you tempted to believe?

If you agree with a statement, how might it set you up for disappointments?

• “My partner and I should feel a deep, unspoken bond at all times.”
• “A good marriage is free of conflict.”
• “If I’m not happy in my relationship, it’s my partner’s fault.”
• “My partner should be able to anticipate my needs.”
• “I shouldn’t have to work for love.”
• “I shouldn’t have to work to be trusted.”
• “Time will resolve our problems.”
• “My partner should love me unconditionally.”
• “My partner should be emotionally available to me whenever I need him or her.”
• “Love is a feeling that can’t be forced or manufactured. It either exists or it doesn’t.”
• “We shouldn’t have to work at feeling sexual desire for each other; it should come naturally or not at all.”
• “When passion dies, so does the relationship.”

Which of the above unrealistic expectations are shaping your thinking about your marriage?

List any other unrealistic expectations contributing to your own discontent.

How might changing your expectations change your attitude towards your relationship and partner?

How could these changes make a difference in your marriage? If so, what could this change look like?
### Devotions

This week’s devotions focus on characteristics of good communicators. What is God communicating to you? Let your Rebuilder facilitators know if you need a Bible.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Hebrews 4:14-16</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”</td>
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<td>Do you find Jesus approachable? How does Jesus’ humanity affect His ability to empathize with your struggles? Take a few moments to “approach the throne,” and tell Jesus whatever is on your heart. Imagine yourself standing in Jesus’ accepting, loving presence receiving His grace and mercy. He longs to spend time with you!</td>
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<tr>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Ephesians 4:29</th>
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<td>“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>What “unwholesome talk” has come from your mouth? How does this unwholesome talk contrast with words that build-up? Are you aware of your own needs? How can you better communicate these needs to your spouse? If we are to build-up our spouse “according to his or her needs,” how important is it to first realize these needs?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Proverbs 16:32; Proverbs 15:1</th>
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<tr>
<td>“Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.” “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”</td>
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<td>How have you experienced “harsh words that stir up anger” in your marriage? How would your interactions with your spouse be different if you responded with patience and “gentle answers”? Can you recognize the significance of starting softly with your spouse to communicate empathetically? Ask the Lord to soften your heart towards your spouse.</td>
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<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Colossians 3:12-14</th>
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<td>“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”</td>
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<td>How might an attitude of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience affect your communication? Love is elevated as the greatest virtue. What is so significant about love? How would you define love? What is the source of love? Ask the Holy Spirit to clothe you with an attitude of love.</td>
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<td>Friday</td>
<td>Proverbs 15:21-25</td>
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<td>&quot;Folly delights a man who lacks judgment, but a man of understanding keeps a straight course. Plans fail for a lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed. A man finds joy in giving apt reply - and how good is a timely word! The path of life leads upward for the wise to keep him from going down to the grave. The Lord tears down the proud man's house, but he keeps the widow's boundaries intact.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the path of your life leading upward or downward? Have you sought counsel in your current struggles? What have you found helpful? And, what has not been helpful? Can you see the significance of timing? When have you been most ready to receive advice? Has pride played into your resistance? What have you learned from your own experience that could affect how you communicate with others? Talk to God about whatever is on your mind and heart.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Proverbs 16:18, 22-24</th>
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<td>&quot;Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before the fall. . . Understanding is a fountain of life to those who have it, but folly brings punishment to fools. A wise man's heart guides his mouth and his lips promote instruction. Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>These verses contrast one who is proud to one who seeks understanding. How do your words affect your body and soul? What is the result of “understanding”? Ponder the contrast between the results of “understanding” and “folly.” What does the verse say about the benefits of “pleasant words”? What benefits and/or consequences are you reaping from your current communication patterns? Are you ready for a change? How do these verses related to using empathic listening skills?</td>
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