

**Living Out The Grace of God Together**  
**Lesson 3: Showing Understanding (Empathy)**  
**Continued Again**

**I. Introduction**

- a. The heart of empathy is putting yourself in the other person's place and experiencing the world **from their** point of view. That is having true understanding.
- b. Failure to achieve this degree of understanding will significantly **limit** the degree of trust and subsequent disclosure in the relationship. Once you have understanding you can show that you have it by both words and deeds.
- c. When you show understanding, you give the wonderful **gift** of empathy. You can do that in formal dialogues which you will learn later in this series and in what you say and in your everyday lives. This is the heart of relationship enrichment.

**II. What the Skill Looks Like**

- a. There are two parts to Showing Understanding (Empathy). You **MUST** have both parts for this to work.
  1. Part One is for you...what you must do in your own head. You must listen while you put yourself in the other person's place so you understand them. In a sense you become them and this is not easy for most.
  2. Part Two is for your partner. As you are listening, you **name** what you find when you are experiencing what your partner is experiencing. You say it in a way that your partner feels understood and accepted.
- b. **Listen** in a way that shows strong interest which requires that you:
  1. Put your own thoughts on **hold**.
  2. Pay close attention to what your partner is saying through words and **body language**.
  3. Show with your body that you **want** to hear what your partner says.
  4. Listen with an open mind and an open heart without forming a **judgment** on what is being said.
  5. Listen without forming your **response** to what is being said.
- c. **Become** your partner which requires that you:
  1. Put yourself in your **partner's place**.
  2. Be **curious** what it must feel like to be your partner as s/he expresses these thoughts and emotions. Ask yourself: What's going on here; What's important? How do you feel?
  3. **Identify** the thoughts, desires, concerns, feelings.
  4. Pay attention to **conflicting** thoughts, feelings, concerns, and desires.
  5. This is the internal part of empathy. For empathy to work, that internal part has to be there. Otherwise you are just **repeating words**.
- d. **Name** thoughts, feelings, concerns and desires. This requires that you:
  1. Describe what you have come to understand about what your partner thinks and feels. Begin your statement with: "As (NAME), I feel..." Or, As (NAME) "you feel". Remember, you are **being your partner in your response**.
  2. Use the "**I form**" of empathy, simply speaking as if the thoughts and feelings being expressed are your own. Avoid saying "I hear you saying that" because that implies you are outside, not inside your partner's experience.
  3. Focus on the feelings and what **has not** quite been said. There is no need to get the story exact; just capture the feelings and concerns.
  4. Show **respect** and compassion by your voice, body, and words. Communicate acceptance.
  5. This is not **agreement**. It is acknowledging that whatever your partner says is important to him. You accept this deep sharing as a gift to you.
  6. Use words your partner will readily **accept**. When genuine understanding is happening it is common for the person talking to tell you even deeper feelings, concerns, and desires.
  7. It is also common for feelings in that moment to grow stronger, yet softer, and the expression to be even more vulnerable. Then the feeling of being understood emerges in each of you as negative feelings are named yet **accepted**.
- e. The fifth aspect of this skill is to accept and make corrections **graciously**. This requires:
  1. First, that you understand that each person is the world's greatest authority on himself. Therefore, when offering observations of your partner's emotions or experience, they may **disagree** with your observation. That's OK.
  2. This accepting and gracious attitude will keep the observer from telling someone else **what they feel**.
  3. **When** the other person "feels understood" there is a natural quiet and a readiness to hear from the other person.

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**III. Ten Ways to Show Understanding**

- a. Stop what you are doing and **pay close** attention when your partner talks to you.
- b. When you listen, look at your partner in a **caring way**.
- c. When you listen, imagine **you are** your partner.
- d. Let your partner know that you **are trying** to see things his or her way.
- e. When your partner is upset, listen and show understanding **BEFORE** (or in stead of) disagreeing.
- f. When your partner is happy or loving, spend some time **together** enjoying the good feelings; reinforce the experience.
- g. When your partner wants or needs help, do **something** to help and this will encourage the expression of good feelings.
- h. When your partner is tired, rest **together**.
- i. When your partner is worried or sad, stay **close by**.
- j. When your partner needs space, **back off** a little.

**IV. Practice Application**

- a. Think of a childhood experience (either pleasant or unpleasant) but it needs to be something that has both meaning and emotion. As you tell your story don't say too much before giving your listener a chance to empathize.
- b. The other person will listen attentively with empathy, trying to understand from the inside what it must have been like to have that experience. Then switch roles where person #2 tells a childhood memory and person # 1 listens with empathy.