

Lesson 8

Discussion Skill

Mystery #3: How can we stop having the same arguments that go nowhere?

I. Introduction

- a. In our series thus far we have focused on two important skills that are the basis of **all** communication: The ability to understand with empathy; and the ability to express our hurts, desires and concerns in a way that will invite cooperation.
- b. When we combine the Understanding skill together with the Expression skill we reap the benefits that are available in a two person dialogue. This is called the **Discussion skill**.
- c. In the Discussion skill we learn how to **take turns** so that we can keep talking long enough to find solutions to issues of concern that work for both partners.
- d. Discussion is not monologue; it is not ranting or dumping on the other person. It is **meaningful** sharing of points of view, identification of feelings, concerns and desires.
- e. To do this one person expresses while the other person shows understanding. You take turns, one person speaking and one person listening with empathy **at a time**.
- f. As each person expresses and shows understanding, you **both** get clearer about what you think, how you feel and what you specifically want to have happen as a result of the discussion.
- g. By adhering to the guidelines of the Discussion skill, the natural conclusion of the Discussion skill is that you are ready for the next skill in the series; **Problem Solving**.

II. Why learn this skill?

- a. Discussing an issue without adhering to **guidelines** will be as successful as playing football without some idea in mind about plays that might work or sewing a dress without a pattern.
- b. A *skilled* discussion moves focus from the surface facts and opinions to the **deeper meanings** underneath. With deeper understanding of each other, lasting solutions are much easier to find. (Experience Diagram)
Prov 18:15 Wise men and women are always learning, always listening for fresh insights. The Msg
- c. It's foolhardy to **assume** that I know what my partner is feeling or thinking. It's equally risky to assume that my partner knows what I am thinking or feeling. There is only one who knows the thoughts and intents of the heart. *Ps 139:2 I'm an open book to you; even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking. The Msg*
- d. Ultimately, a skilled discussion reflects true **godliness** and therefore increases the feeling of intimacy. As we reflect godliness in our communication we will experience the feeling of being deeply and safely connected to each other. *Prov 9:10-12 skilled living gets its start in the Fear-of-GOD, insight into life from knowing a Holy God. It's through me, Lady Wisdom, that your life deepens, and the years of your life ripen. Live wisely and wisdom will permeate your life; The Msg*

III. Scriptures that support this skill

- a. The Discussion skill is a **practical** manifestation of the kind of wisdom that comes from God. *James 3:17-18 Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor. The Msg*
- b. In **contrast** to the godly wisdom which is manifest in the discussion skill, Scripture characterizes one who does not listen to others as being a fool. *Proverbs 12:15 "A fool thinks he needs no advice, but a wise man listens to others." LB*
- c. The Discussion skill **promotes** unity between believers because when it is properly exercised it builds mutual understanding and agreement about the importance of the relationship. *Psalms 33:1 "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" NAS*
- d. In effect, putting into practice the Discussion skill in your daily communication demonstrates that you are ultimately relying upon the **wisdom** of God to nurture and grow your relationships with others. *Prov 3:1-6 My son, never forget the things I've taught you. If you want a long and satisfying life, closely follow my instructions. Never tire of loyalty and kindness. Hold these virtues tightly. Write them deep within your heart. If you want favor with both God and man, and a reputation for good judgment and common sense, then trust the Lord completely; don't ever trust yourself. In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success. TLB*
- e. Taking turns in expressing and understanding puts the discussion into a **structure** that conforms to what the Apostle Paul says ought to also characterize our worship of God. *1 Cor 14:40 "Be sure that everything is done properly in a good and orderly way." LB*
- f. This skill keeps the discussion from disintegrating into a fight or turning one another off or having the same old discussion that seems to go nowhere; nowhere, that is, except into **self-interested** sin. *Gal 5:16-18 My counsel is this: Live freely, animated and motivated by God's Spirit. Then you won't feed the compulsions of selfishness. For there is a root of sinful self-interest in us that is at odds with a free spirit, just as the free spirit is incompatible with selfishness. These two ways of life are antithetical, so that you cannot live at times one way and at times another way according to how you feel on any given day. Why don't you choose to be led by the Spirit and so escape the erratic compulsions of a law-dominated existence? The Msg*

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IV. The Ingredients That Make This Skill Work

- a. Agree with your partner on a **time** and place to have a skilled discussion.
 1. Good dialogues happen when people can **concentrate** on them. Make sure that distractions will not interfere.
- b. One partner begins to **express** thoughts, feelings, concerns and desires.
 1. Usually the one who brings it up has **stronger feelings** about a topic so they are the first one to express.
 2. It is important for the person expressing to **pause** long enough to allow their partner to show Understanding and to name the concerns and feelings that have been expressed.
- c. The other partner shows **understanding**.
 1. If the person showing understanding begins to feel overloaded with information it is **appropriate** to give a signal to the one expressing to pause.
 2. When the Expresser **pauses**, at that time the one showing Understanding can then show understanding for what was just said.
- d. From time to time trade places **to move** the discussion along.
 1. Normally, the one expressing will offer the "**discussion stick**" to the one showing understanding rather than having the person showing understanding request it.
 2. However, the person showing Understanding can and should ask for the stick if his/her own thoughts, feelings, desires and concerns are preventing him/her from being **empathic**.
 3. Discussion skills are great for those couples who have different levels of **talkativeness**. . . where one says little and the other says lots.
 4. It also helps the one who says less to say more and the one who says more to say less while still feeling heard and understood. A **balance** develops in the relationship.
- e. If you are **Expressing**, trade places when:
 1. You **feel** understood
 2. You want to **hear** your partner's thoughts, feelings, concerns, and desires.
 3. You want to know if your partner has **questions**.
 4. Your partner **looks** confused or upset.
- f. If you are showing **Understanding**, trade places when:
 1. You have **shown** understanding to your partner.
 2. You are **confused** and want to ask a question.
 3. Your own **feelings** are getting too strong for you to do a good job of listening, and showing understanding.
 4. You have an **idea** you would like your partner to hear.
 5. It seems that your partner is **repeating** him/her self or has gone on to a different part of the problem and left you behind.
 6. Once the change of role has been requested, out of respect, the person expressing may **not add** more information they must yield the expression stick.

IV. Application Exercise:

- a. Identify a positive that already exists in a personal relationship, something that provides value and worth to you when you think about it and make a plan for growing it.
- b. Ideas might be: Weekly date; Time to talk; Meals together; Prayer time; Greeting rituals; Exercise together; Projects together; Surprise dates.