

## Lesson 9

### Discussion Skill

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

#### I. 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. 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*
- e. 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*
- f. 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. *I Cor 14:40* "Be sure that everything is done properly in a good and orderly way." *LB*
- g. 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*

#### II. 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.

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- 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.

### III. 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. *(Couples in the class should use the discussion skills to talk about it. If you do not have a partner, you should present your idea to a close friend even though they will not have the benefit of the skill training that you have had).*
- b. Ideas might be: Weekly date; Time to talk; Meals together; Prayer time; Greeting rituals; Exercise together; Projects together; Surprise dates.

## Discussion Skill

**LLOYD:** (holding the Expression Stick I'LL give this to you Sunday): "I've been thinking about how much you mean to me and how much I enjoy it when we go for a walk in the evening. Lately we haven't done that and I miss it. I really like it when we go up and down the street or over to the park by the river, sometimes stopping to talk or wave to somebody, sometimes watching something in trees sometimes just holding hands. I feel so good when we do that! I'm wondering if there is a way we could take walks two or three times a week."

**MURIEL:** (using the Showing Understanding Skill): "You enjoy walking with me after dinner. It's a time when you feel a lot of love for me. We don't do it very often, and you would like to make a regular habit of it."

**LLOYD:** (still holding the stick): "Yes, I would like to actually schedule it. Say we're going to do it 2 or 3 times a week. Make time for it. Not a long time-15 minutes to a half hour. And not a 'power walk' for exercise. A slow walk for us together. To be together."

**MURIEL:** "This is something you've been thinking about and that's important to you.. You don't want to make it an exercise time or let it get lost in too much to do. You want us to spend some dedicated time 2 or 3 times a week enjoying each other, being together, remembering our love for each other"

**LLOYD:** (Still holding the stick): "Yes, actually, now that you mention it, it isn't the walk so much as getting away from serious distractions and concentrating on each other. However I do like to walk, and I think you do, too. I'm wondering what you think of that idea."

**MURIEL:** "We wouldn't have to walk, just do something together, but since we both enjoy walking, you wonder what I think of your idea." (He nods his head 'yes'. and hands her the stick.)

**MURIEL:** (holding the stick): "First, let me say how special I feel because you suggested that! I do love to walk. I do love to walk with you. I would love to do that if we could manage it"

**LLOYD:** "You are very happy I suggested that; and you would love to do it. When you said 'if we could manage it, it sounds as if you're not sure we could.'"

**MURIEL:** (still holding the stick): "After supper during the school year is a very busy time for me. I'm worried that if we take off to do this all the other things I need to get done will be put off. But I want to say again, I love the idea. I would like to do it."

**LLOYD:** "You want to walk together, but you're thinking that we have tended to do that in the summertime when there are no outside activities that demand our time. You're not sure it's practical right now."

**MURIEL:** (still holding the stick): "Yes. But I want to spend more quality time with you too. I wonder if you have other ideas. "

**LLOYD:** "You wonder if I have any other ideas."

**MURIEL:** (nods her head 'yes' and passes the stick)

**LLOYD:** (holding the stick): I like that one! But I want it to be real time together without having our minds occupied by thinking about all the things that need to get done. Maybe we could disappear on Saturday afternoons and take a long walk.

**MURIEL:** "You really want to walk. Maybe a longer walk on Saturday. (Reaches for the stick)

**MURIEL:** (holding the stick): "I like that idea! Yes, let's do that. Let's start this Saturday."