

Lesson 10

Problem Solving Skill

Mystery #4: How can we both get what we want?

I. Introduction

- a. The basic foundational skills that we have learned thus far help us to express what is on our minds, listen with empathy and carry on a discussion that will often lead to a satisfactory resolution of **most** everyday issues.
- b. Some problems are solved just by talking about your thoughts, feelings, and concerns and desires. As you come to understand each other in a respectful way, the differences between you fade away or **do not matter so much**.
- c. The reason for this is because as you understand and accept each other, in effect, the problem solves itself. Just discussing in a **respectful** way solves many everyday issues.
- d. However, in **every** relationship there arise issues, concerns, problems and feelings that we believe are much weightier than the kinds of issues that mere discussion will resolve.
- e. When the issues and concerns are significant to us, they must be addressed in a skillful way or they will surely erupt in a way that will make things much worse for all parties concerned. This is where the **Problem Solving** skill comes into play.
- f. While the Problem Solving skill uses Expression, Listening with Understanding and Discussion skills, it goes one step further and facilitates a decision where one or both of you need to change a **behavior**.
- g. The process begins by each person expressing his love and concern, even pain and displeasure with the situation. When **all** your thoughts, feelings, desires and concerns are expressed, you both understand the other.
- h. By this point feelings are no longer getting in the way of a proper discussion and you are thus, **enabled** to arrive at a solution but you still may not know what to do now that you understand.

II. Why Learn This Skill?

- a. Problems that remain unresolved create emotional distance and drain energy from us and from our marriage. Over time unresolved issues take an enormous **toll** on the quality and durability of a relationship.
- b. Resolved problems, on the other hand, build confidence that our marriage can thrive; that there is nothing that can not be resolved and that the relationship is valued sufficiently by both to **ensure** mutual commitment.
- c. There are **four** basic responses individuals make to dealing with problems in a relationship:
 1. When neither the relationship nor the issues are important many find that the easiest response is to **withdraw** or yield to the other person.
 2. When the issue is important but we devalue the relationship, many resort to **forcing** their will on the other person.
 3. When the relationship is important but the issue is not that important many believe that **compromise** offers the best hope of each party getting something of what they want.
 4. When both the issue and the relationship are important then using the **Problem Solving** skill offers the very best solution.
- d. It must be noted that every one of those four responses to dealing with problems have their risks and rewards. However, **only** the Problem Solving skill will build a healthy and Christ-like long term relationship.
- e. The key ingredient in the effective use of the Problem Solving skill lies in the ability of both parties to identify and articulate their **core concern** with the issue.
- f. The core concern is **the thing** that makes an issue important to the individual. It may relate to one's values or philosophy, or it may be some practical thing.
- g. Whatever one's core concern is, it has **power to stir** emotion and to compel action. Therefore, leaving one's core concerns unaddressed in the final solution of a problem is a certain recipe for future disaster.
- h. The result of applying the Problem Solving skill to an issue is **invariably** that one or both parties will have to change their behavior.
- i. It's limiting, narrow and arrogant for me to think that there is only one solution to a problem (**mine**). It's gracious to hear my partner's proposed solutions and creativity to look for a solution that will meet *both* of our concerns.
- j. Over our lifetime together, time spent **practicing** these skills will enormously reduce the amount of time we spend in frustration and/or irritation and greatly increase our mutual happiness.
- k. It is only when our day to day conduct with each other reflects Christ in us that we bring honor and glory to God. Learning how to communicate in ways that reflect Christ ought to be viewed as nothing less than our Christian **duty**. *Matt 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven. KJV*

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III. Supporting Scripture

- a. Since none of us possesses all knowledge about all things, the Problem Solving skill is a tool that can help us as a couple find the **best** solution to problems we are faced with. □ *“He shows how to find the right decision every time.” Proverbs 2:7-9 LB*
- b. In humbling yourself before God and your partner you are **positioning** yourself mentally and emotionally to arrive at a solution that will work for both of you. *“If you want favor with both God and (your spouse)...trust the Lord completely. He will direct you and crown your efforts with success.” Prov 3:5,6 LB*
- c. Being humbled in your mental attitude towards your partner makes your intentions good, not self-serving and creates the necessary **willingness** to work collaboratively with the other person. *The good-willed husband is “concerned about...how he may please his wife” and the good-willed wife is “concerned about... how she may please her husband.” I Cor 7:33-34*
- d. Essentially, this preparation of your own spirit before engaging in the problem solving discussion is an expression of the **love** of Christ in us. *“Put up with each other, and forgive each other if anyone has a complaint. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Above all, be loving. This ties everything together perfectly.” Col 3:13,14 GWT*
- e. This skill places self-interest in its **proper place**. We do not drop self-interest; we keep self-interest in check while we attempt to satisfy the desires of our partner. We acknowledge that both have valid concerns and desires. *“Don’t be concerned only about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others.” Phil 2:4 GWT*
- f. The paradox of this skill is that we are more interested in satisfying the **core concerns** of our partner than we are in forcing our own way. This is in effect giving something away in order to receive. *“It is possible to give away and become richer! It is also possible to hold on too tightly and lose everything. Yes, the liberal man shall be rich! By watering others he waters himself.” Proverbs 11:24,25 LB*

IV. Scenario

- a. Event: Tracie is our daughter. She is a working single mother of three (17, 15, 10). At least once per month her job requires her to travel out of town over night, sometimes, as many as three consecutive nights. When ever she travels out of town Jenny and I spend the night at her house, supervise our grandchildren, prepare their meals and in general step into the parenting role until she returns home.
 1. How important is this issue?
 2. Why do you think it is important to talk about this issue between Jenny, Joe and Tracie?
- b. Jenny’s thoughts, concerns and feelings: I enjoy my grandchildren and would do almost anything to support my daughter Tracie which means that I am willing to be inconvenienced when she asks me to be available for the kids at her house for a couple of days. Most often when Tracie leaves town I am also working at my part time job so I need Joe to be available to do the things that need to be done (chauffeur kids, cooking meals, supervising homework, etc.)
 1. What areas of concern do you see in her narrative?
 2. If you had to prioritize, what are Jenny’s core concerns?
- c. Joe’s thoughts, concerns and feelings: I enjoy my grandkids and realize my daughter needs someone to come along side and be available when she can not be home. She has no one else who she can rely upon so we are it. I’m willing. However, I really don’t like sleeping at her house because I do not sleep well there. We’ve tried a few times having the kids pack up and come to our house but that is more hassle for everyone. A few times, I left Jenny there at bed time and just went home to sleep in my own bed but that does not feel right to me.
 1. What areas of concern do you see in Joe’s narrative?
 2. If you had to prioritize, what are Joe’s core concerns?
- d. Thus far, we have not gone beyond expressing, showing empathy and discussion. We have not actually taken any steps to solve any problems.
 1. From Jenny’s perspective, what problems need to be addressed, or, whose behavior needs to be changed?
 2. From Joe’s perspective, what problems need to be addressed, or, whose behavior needs to be changed?