

Talk # 4 - Making It Safe to Have a Conversation

My name is _____, and my talk is Making it Safe to Have a Conversation. We just learned to start with the heart – to think about what it is that we really want for ourselves, for others, and for our relationships before we have a crucial conversation. In order for that to become reality we each must feel safe to state our view and add information to the conversation. That is, we must keep the conversation mutual, really caring about what the other person wants to share. St. Paul speaks about this in Ephesians, 3:29 “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.”

“So your words may give grace to those who hear.” Wow! So, when we have respect for each other and have a mutual purpose then we feel safe having a conversation. Think about it, if my experience with you is grace and support then I am open and feel safe when we talk. But safety can quickly be destroyed. This is especially true when we feel ignored, called out or manipulated. There are times we simply misunderstand what was shared, but the misunderstanding impacts us in the same way. As we begin to feel unsafe to share our view or to listen further, the conversation can quickly change to one of silence or control. Unsafe here is when mutual respect or mutual purpose is at risk. When having a safe conversation is at risk we should not ignore it. There are actually a couple of ways to rebuild the mutual respect and purpose during the conversation to continue.

One is offering an apology. When we have made a mistake that has hurt others, we need to start with an apology. To apologize is to offer your sorrow for your role in causing pain or difficulty to another person.

Talk # 4 - Making It Safe to Have a Conversation

It also includes offering your sorrow for not preventing pain or difficulty to others. For an apology to be sincere we must experience a change of heart. In fact our motives have to change for us to offer a sincere apology. Changing our motives means we give up saving face, being right, winning, or getting what we *really* want. A sincere apology will not contain the word “if” or “but” in it. “I am sorry if I hurt you when.....” or “I am sorry for not talking to you yesterday, but you....” Usually we have not taken responsibility for our part when our apology places partial blame on another person. We are called to sacrifice some of our pride/ego for something much more valuable, such as healthy relationships and better results in our crucial conversations.

There are times when we innocently share our views, but the other person believes our intentions is to judge, hurt or disrespect them. This is when the other person has misunderstood the purpose of what we shared. An apology is not used in this situation because we have done nothing wrong. So we use a technique to clarify by contrast. Contrast is to compare in order to show differences. Using contrast helps clear up misinterpretations and clarifies our true purpose by saying a Don't/Do statement. Always start with what you *don't* mean and then explain what you *do* mean. Let me give you an example:

(The don't part) The last thing I wanted to do was communicate that I don't value your input.

(The do part) I do think your work has been nothing short of spectacular.

The most important part of contrasting is, '**the don't**' part. It deals with the misunderstanding that has put our mutual conversation at risk.

Talk # 4 - Making It Safe to Have a Conversation

Contrasting can also be used as prevention when we know we are about to say something that might make the other person defensive. We put extra safety up front. For example:

I don't want you to think that I don't appreciate the time you've taken to . . .

I do, however have some concerns about . . .

Speaker Testimony *(please keep your comments to 4 minutes or less)*

Tell of a time in your life when in a conversation, safety became an issue and you or someone used apology or contrast to restore mutual respect and resumed the conversation.

It is possible to live out what St. Paul shared with us in Ephesians 4:29 by cultivating a mutual respect and purpose in our conversations. It is through the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we can “Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.”

Group Discussion

How difficult is it for you to offer a sincere apology?

Is it more challenging for you to share mutual respect or a mutual purpose in a conversation?

Talk # 4 - Making It Safe to Have a Conversation

Role play a contrasting statement for this situation:

You asked your roommate to move her things off your desk onto her desk. You like your roommate, and to you it was no big deal – simply a request to share the space evenly. She responded “There you go again, telling me how to run my life. I can’t seem to do anything right according to you.”

Practice an up-front contrasting statement to clarify the misunderstanding and get the conversation going:

I don’t want _____

I do want _____