

# LISTENING

## Listening to their past

Look at the handout entitled, *How we are formed*.

Your spouse was built, bent and beautified into the person she is today.

She has a certain personality (temperament); certain predilections that are largely biologically based.

Some of these are related to her gender.

She has been influenced, for good & ill by developmental events.

She has had spiritual influences malevolent and holy that have also helped form her into who she is today.

We emerge from our childhood with deeply held beliefs about who we are, what the world is like and even what God is like (core beliefs). Tied to the beliefs are certain longings that are often the opposite of the desires (e.g. those feeling unacceptable long for acceptance; those feeling the world is chaotic long for control; etc. – core desires). Finally, we have all developed ways to prevent negative feelings and get what we want (i.e. core strategies).

Her personality, predilections, core beliefs, desires and strategies are what she encounters her world with every day. You cannot interpret her by imagining how you would feel, think and act in the same situations. It's important that you understand her, in order to understand how she is experiencing things.

She has been formed from a variety of influences, just like you. Their personality, perspectives, desires, habitual ways of acting and reacting developed from conception until now. Many of these features are not conscious, in the sense that they are automatic rather than considered; emotionally or spiritually driven rather than rationally.

Over time and during times of relational alienation spouses tend to measure their partner by their own strengths rather than taking them for who they are. I'd like to encourage you to get to know her as she is and appreciate/accept who she is. If change is needed (i.e. her core beliefs/desires are wrong and unhelpful) your helpfulness will be tied to whether she believes that you are generally accepting rather than generally rejecting.

## Listening to their present



Focus on the diagram above the dark horizontal line. As we talk with people they reveal things that have happened and then often tell us something about their reaction to it. They may report behavior or thoughts that were triggered by the event or maybe the feeling they had after this event occurred. Wherever they start, our work is to ask about the other areas.

If they say, "Darrel (boss) told me to help Sara (co-worker) get her reporting finished. I told him, "If I'm supposed to do my work and her work, then fire her and pay me extra," they have told us about a trigger and a behavior. We can ask, "What happened when you said this to him?" "What were you thinking about Darrell/Sara when he told you to do this?" "You seemed pretty angry about this, were you?" "What did Darrel's directive block that you got so angry?" In these ways you help them fully process things.

The reactions to the right make it difficult to know them but reacting to the reactions is often unhelpful. On the other hand, their reactions do provide an access point to their inner life.

E.G. "They hate me."... "What happened that led you to think this?"

E.G. "You make me mad."... "Why are you angry?"

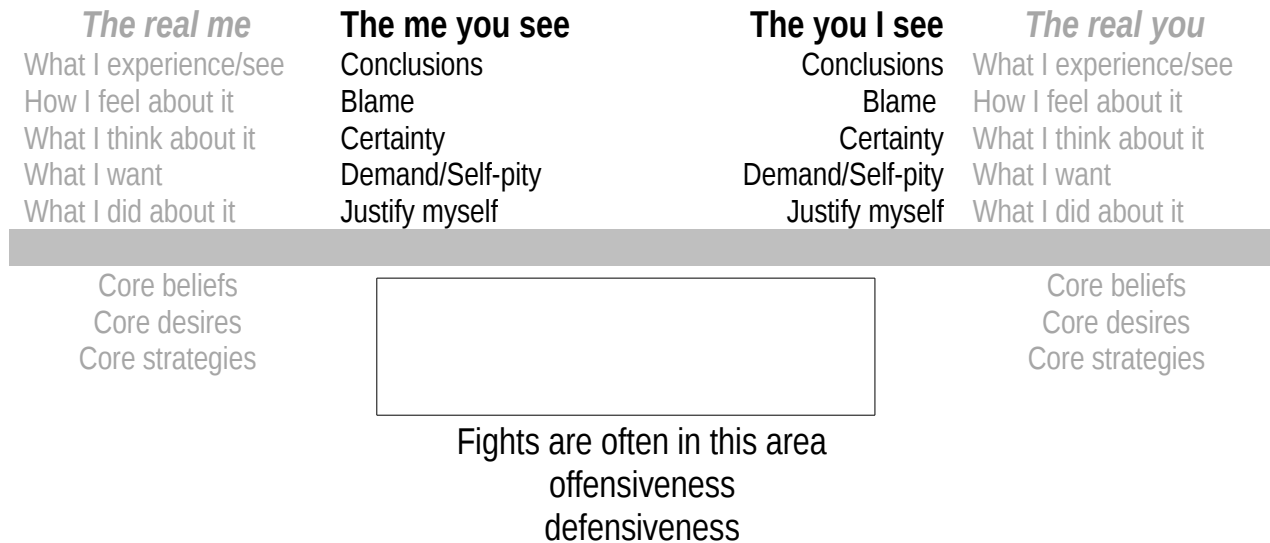
E.G. "Well, you obviously have no regard for my opinion."... "What happened that led you to believe this?"

From time to time we may take the conversation deeper (i.e. below the line) by giving them feedback (blind spot) and perhaps asking, "What must you believe about yourself (God, others, the world) that you tend to feel, think and act this way?" They may respond by locating their insight onto something other than their belief. They may say, "What I believe is that I need people to leave me alone," but this is not a belief they hold *about themselves, God or the world* and so we persist. They may reveal a core desire, "I want to be respected." This is great because core desires are typically linked to and often the opposite of what they believe. Someone who feels worthless (core belief) may crave respect or at least the absence of criticism (core desire) and have developed ways of getting what they want and avoiding what they fear.

While we need to think, feel, and act differently, merely focusing on the stuff above leads to moralistic advice (aka legalistic) because real change happens as our core beliefs, desires & strategies change.

Most Christians know what God says we should believe and want and may know what their flesh nature believes and wants but the real battle lies in the practice of preferring God's perspective over their own.

## Listening together (Intimacy)



Intimacy means I reveal  
reveal

Intimacy means I explore (finding your way through the offense/defense)  
explore

Intimacy means they

Intimacy means they

Ideally we would related to someone in a way that makes it easy for them to understand what we experience, feel, think, want and do AND that makes it easy for them to reveal the same about themselves. This is intimacy. Intimacy requires honesty about your inner life and curiosity about theirs. However, we tend to do things with our inner life that makes intimacy difficult. We draw conclusions about what we experience or observe and act as if our conclusions are true. We blame people for our feelings. We insist that our thoughts about situations or people are true. We demand others satisfy our wants or feel sorry for ourselves that they have not satisfied our wants. We justify our behaviors.

Honesty means:

- We need to say what we see without concluding. Instead asking them to interpret what we notice.
- We need to say how we feel without blaming our feelings come from ourselves not them.
- We need to say what we are thinking but express it tentatively with openness to their input.
- We need to say what we want without demanding or feeling sorry for ourselves if we don't get it.
- We need to say what we did without justifying. Allowing them to react & respond to our actions.

What if they conclude, blame, insist, demand, justify & feel sorry for themselves? Curiosity means we help them shift from these back to and explore the underlying observations, feelings, thoughts, wants and behaviors. So, curiosity means:

- If they conclude we ask what they saw that led them to that conclusion rather than critiquing the conclusion.
- If they blame for how they feel we focus on the feelings and how they tie to experiences, thoughts, wants and behaviors, not on whether the blame is justified.
- If they are adamant about the accuracy of their thoughts we walk them back to all that led them to such thoughts. The backfire effect – strengthening their conclusions by opposing them. The most effective way to get someone to listen is to listen.
- If they demand, we explore their wants and validate them even if we will not conform to them.

- If they justify we ask about their behaviors and explore how the other things led to them seeing this as the right action.