

How You Can Break Your Crazy Marital Communication Cycle

Do your attempts to communicate with your spouse end up leaving you more frustrated and upset? The Crazy Communication Cycle has become the norm for too many couples, and results in so much conflict, misunderstanding, and heartache.

Does this sound anything like what goes on in your house? Wife feels frustrated or upset about something her husband did or didn't do. She tells him how wrong he's been, pointing out all the ways he should/could do better. Husband tries to explain, which only escalates his wife's frustration. He sees that his explanations aren't helping, so he walks away. She follows him, raising her voice louder and louder. He clams up tighter and tighter. Whether or not a big fight ensues, the problem is larger now than when they began. Nothing gets solved, and both husband and wife feel farther apart than ever.

It's no wonder many spouses respond;

- Nothing I do is ever good enough for her.
- He never appreciates my feelings.
- I try to talk about it, but it never works.

This is a snapshot of the crazy communication style described by Emerson Eggerichs. In a large measure it arises from the differences in needs between the typical man and the typical woman.

But the good news is that understanding this cycle can empower you to get off the treadmill of crazy and begin patterns of communication that empower, strengthen and deepen your relationship.

Love vs. Respect

Both men and women need love and respect equally. But under

conflict, especially, the relative value men and women place on those two needs varies significantly.

A man is drawn to respect and will gravitate toward wherever he feels most respected. When his wife criticizes him, especially with strong emotions, he feels seriously disrespected. He may try to defend himself to regain some measure of respect. When that fails, he is likely to withdraw, feeling that is more honorable than allowing his own emotional anger to escalate beyond what he may feel able to control. Pulling back, to him, feels like the safest thing for the relationship.

A woman craves love, or more specifically a feeling of being valued and cherished. She sees something wrong and tries to set her husband straight, hoping to correct him into giving her that feeling of being loved. His explanations sound superficial to her, as not addressing her true needs. She tries harder to get him to love her back, and when he withdraws, it feels like the ultimate unloving thing he could do. She grabs at him harder and louder before finally giving up, often in tears.

Can you see how their differing needs fuel their responses that end up wounding each other even more? Her attempts to set things right in the relationship feel very disrespectful to him. His withdrawal in an attempt to protect the relationship from further harm feels so unloving to her. And the crazy cycle continues.

Breaking the Cycle

God fully understands these needs of both men and women. That's why Paul wrote, "However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Eph. 5:33). This is nothing more than God's wisdom in directing a husband a wife to respond in a way that may not feel natural, but that will address what their spouse needs

most.

So what does that look like, especially in conflict?

“Husbands, love your wives.” When feeling pressured, upset, attacked, disrespected, intentionally work to show love to your wife. That means listening when you would rather walk away, validating her feelings, trying to look at the situation through her eyes, reassuring her that you value her. Seek to understand things from her perspective. Simply responding something like “I can see how much that hurts you” lets her know you are on her side.

“Wives, respect your husbands.” When feeling upset, frustrated, overwhelmed, unloved, intentionally work to show respect to your husband. That means verbally, in the tone of your voice, and by actions demonstrating you value who your husband is and that you respect him as a man. It usually means couching criticism between affirmation of what you appreciate about him, and consciously seeking to understand things from his perspective. Doing what you can to plan the time, place, and context for such conversations also demonstrates your respect for his feelings.

The Results of Love and Respect

Following Paul’s directions about love and respect breaks the crazy cycle and fuels connection and solutions between you. When a husband feels respect, he responds more easily in ways that feel loving to his wife. When a wife feels loved, she responds more easily in ways that feel respectful to her husband.

“But my husband hasn’t done anything to deserve respect.” Just as you don’t want to have to earn your husband’s love, offer your husband respect as a gift. That doesn’t mean accepting bad behavior. But intentionally look for ways that you can show your husband that he is valuable to you, that you honor him, and that you believe he has good intentions. (If there is

abuse going on, get some help right away)

“My wife doesn’t respond when I try to show her love.” Keep seeking the key to her heart. Learn what means love to her. For most women, staying engaged, listening and verbally acknowledging her feelings will feel loving to her. Push past your own discomfort and show your wife that she can be safe and real with you.

For two people of goodwill, intentionally offering your husband respect and your wife love will break the crazy communication cycle and move you forward to a stronger relationship.

Your Turn: Are you contributing to the crazy communication cycle in any way? How can you edit your communication so that your spouse has an easier time responding in a healthy way too? Leave a comment below. {eo}

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