

I'm Not Overreacting!

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00:08 Speaker 1: We're so glad that you're joining us again. Today we're going to talk about the slow fade of defensive responses.

00:15 Speaker 2: I have a habit of driving across town with Jill in the car, and I tend to not drive strategically, and sometimes will not think about where I'm going. And sometimes, Jill will say, "Mark, where are you going? You should've turned there." And then I would become defensive and frustrated. And then, there would be times where Jill wouldn't say anything, and I would end up in the wrong part of town, and I would say, "Why didn't you tell me? You knew that I was going the wrong direction." So, really, it was a situation where Jill couldn't win, no matter what she did.

00:56 S1: Yep, absolutely, felt that way. [chuckle] But one of the things you've been doing lately that has so made a difference with defensive responses, is you have been, you've been, number one, you're aware of it, and so I think that makes a difference. But you've been pushing information my way instead of requiring me to pull it from you, and that has made such a difference. So what Mark's actually been doing is he has been getting in the car, and we'll pull out of the driveway, and he'll say, "You know what? Traffic's kind of heavy right now, so I'm going to take GE Road, up to Main Street, and that way I hope that I will, maybe, miss some of the traffic on Veteran's Parkway." And at that point in time, I'm like, "Okay, sounds good." Because that makes me trust him more, he's just pushed information, I know he's thinking about it, we're not gonna end up somewhere else. I mean there's been many times we were headed to the grocery store and he ends up at church. And so, talk about a distracted driver.

01:56 S2: Force of habit. Yeah.

[laughter]

02:00 S1: But, by pushing that information, you have increased my trust and it's given some accountability too because then, I understand if you go somewhere and you make a wrong turn, then I can go, "Oh, wait a minute, did you really mean to do that?" Because it's amazing how easily we can get distracted. And so, it's really reduced frustration, and I've loved that. And so, we eventually, the more that you and I have talked about this, the concept of pushing information instead of requiring your spouse to pull it from you, has really begun to really dial down that defensiveness.

02:36 S2: And you've been doing the same thing, as we both have worked to push information to one another, it is just so helpful. You have... Because you are an internal processor, and you make all of these thoughts and decisions inside your head, it's been super rewarding to me when you

would let me know, "Hey, these are things that I'm thinking about, and I thought you ought to know about them." Rather than making the decision and then letting me know what we decided.

[chuckle]

03:08 S1: Exactly.

03:09 S2: It's been huge for me to know what you're thinking about.

03:13 S1: Right. And so I think that has made a big difference. It's helped me to get stuff out of my head, and it's really honoring to you, but it's work.

03:23 S2: Yes.

03:23 S1: It is work. I think we're both having to think about that more intentionally. And I think the other thing that has made such a difference, and I think this is so important is that we have to recognize that the words that we say to each other, and not only the words that we say to each other, but the tone of the words that we say to each other make such a difference. There's huge power, both positively and negatively. So, actually let's look at what God's word says. So, in Proverbs, this is verse 18:21, this is what it says, "The tongue has the power of life and death." Wow, that's huge. The tongue has the power of life and death. And so our words can bring life to our spouse, our words can bring life to our marriage, or our words can bring death to our spouse, death to our relationship. And so we really have to weigh those out.

04:14 S2: How about Colossians 4:6, "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person."

04:24 S1: Mm-hmm, just a reminder. And then, there's another one in Proverbs 29, this is 29:20, "Do you see a man who is hasty in his words, there is more hope for a fool than him." Wow, that really talks about measuring our words. And one of the things that I have found helpful in beginning to turn this around is I found helpful to pause, just to really slow down, and I would say, during our separation, when I was treating you in a way that was surprising to you, part of the way I could do that is I would pause, and I would slow down and I wasn't responding as quickly as I normally would, and what a difference that made in that season to give you words of life, instead of, honestly, what I was feeling, which oftentimes would not have brought life to our relationship.

05:22 S2: Absolutely. I think of many times that we've sat across the table from other couples that we're mentoring, and there's almost like there's this acceptance that I can treat you badly, I can say to you whatever I want, and you should be okay with it. But God didn't create us that way. He created us to live differently and to speak to one another with love and with respect.

05:49 S1: And it's not that we aren't honest. We need to be honest, but we need to be respectfully honest, and that makes all the difference in the world.

05:58 S2: Jill and I both learned the powerful decision of pushing information out of our crisis. And what happens is, though our flesh wants to resist, our selfishness wants to resist, and really many times we're just lazy. And so by making the conscious decisions to push information, we are totally transforming the depth of our marriage. One of the communications we've pushed forward has been

regarding money. That in the past, I would just go out and purchase and then Jill would be left to figure out where that came from or to question what it was and then I would feel parented by her. So in changing to push information, I would communicate what account I took that money out of and what it was for. And so it eliminated the mistrust.

07:00 S1: And I've had to do exactly the same thing. If I spend on something that maybe we hadn't talked about, maybe he's not aware of, I have to be intentional about being upfront. I don't want him to see it when he looks at the bank statement. I want to be the one that pushes it there. And this is increasing trust in our relationship. It is hard work. When our kids were at home and Mark was at work, a lot of times I was at home in the afternoon. I would often call him and say, "Hey, I need you to know this is what's going on with this kid." And that was pushing information to him, so he didn't walk in the door and then end up being like, "What is going on?" and have to pull the information out. I was pushing it to him so he was better equipped to be able to walk in the door. And all of this is dialing down defensiveness in our relationship and in our communication.

07:51 S2: Yeah. Absolutely. I think one of the ways that I've worked to push information to Jill is also my emotions. Sometimes I'm down emotionally and I don't even know why. But I'll push that information to Jill so that she doesn't misread it that I'm frustrated with her or I'm discouraged by us. By pushing that information, I'm letting her know how to pray for me and how to partner with me.

08:20 S1: It's made a huge difference.

08:22 S2: Yeah.

08:22 S1: So one of the other places that defensiveness tends to creep in is when we give each other feedback. And naturally, husbands and wives give each other feedback. Sometimes it's not said in a nice way, it's said in a frustrating way. Sometimes we try to say it in a nice way but it's received very defensively. But there have been two pieces that have been really helpful for us in learning to give each other feedback, and really learning to hear feedback well, and to handle it better. The first one, when I'm giving feedback is, "Can I share something with you?" or "Can I share something with you about what happened the other night when we were out for a date?" Okay, so maybe I'm letting him know... He may not realize that he said something or he did something that was hurtful or something that I just would like him to be aware of. And so that's feedback. So I'm asking permission for that. And that has been helpful because it helps you get your heart in the right place. And then on the receiving side, we've been doing two things. The first is, we've been reflecting back what the other person said. So if I communicate something to you, instead of you disagreeing with it, instead of you saying, "Well, you this and you that." You're actually saying, "Well, what I hear you saying is this."

09:45 S1: And then you're reflecting that back to me, and man it makes me feel heard. That makes all the difference in the world. It makes me feel heard. And so I think that that has been huge. And the second phrase we've been using is, "I can receive that." So when we're on the receiving side... Okay, so maybe Mark tells me something and it's hard for me to hear. Honestly, none of us wants to hear something that's bad about us, or something that is a place that we maybe unintentionally hurt another person. But we also have to trust that they see things that we can't see. We have blind spots, and sometimes we need to hear about them. And so in that moment, maybe he will say to me, "You were a little amped up when you were talking with the kids and I think that was maybe ineffective

and I just wanna encourage you to pause and take a deep breath before you enter into something like that again, okay?" It's hard and I want to be defensive but I know that he's right. And so, when I can actually say, "I receive that." Sometimes I'll even say, "Let me think about it just a little bit." But then that let's me digest it and begin to process that and receive that feedback. And we're becoming safer with each other.

11:00 S2: Yeah. I think that's been key is becoming safer with each other in learning these phrases in which to begin that discussion of feedback. It allows us to get in a frame of mind where we can hear and then we both are working so hard to hear what the other person is saying, and then to honor them. To honor that we just heard this and that we value this. But it also gives us an opportunity to discuss that we may not agree but we still want to honor one another in here.

11:43 S1: And it's not that we aren't honest. We need to be honest.

11:46 S2: Yes.

11:47 S1: But we need to be respectfully honest. And that makes all the difference in the world.

11:52 S2: Yup. In Ephesians 4:29, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths but only such as is good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear."

12:07 S1: So the question that we ask you to consider today is, are you bringing life or death to your marriage with your words?

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