

Week 32 Practice

In recent weeks, we have been focusing on cultivating belonging by ritualizing our togetherness, tapping into our naturally-existing empathy, accepting affirmations, asking for help, engaging in small acts of love, and making a habit of the ways we love best. This week, we are going to emphasize the value of *curiosity*, as we seek to become students of the people we love.

Generally, communication isn't terribly complicated. There are a few basic rules: one speaker and one listener at all times; the speaker's job is to avoid blame and to focus on expressing his or her own experience; the listener's job is to listen closely and to paraphrase what was said in order to confirm it was heard accurately; and partners should share the floor equally over the course of a conversation. In other words, communication is relatively simple.

However, the *words* we communicate are not.

Words matter. But they mean something different to each of us, so we have to slow down our communication, get still and attentive, and become actively curious about what certain words mean to the people we love. For instance, if you tell me you're "sad," I can be a good listener by reflecting back to you that you are feeling sad, but that accomplishes very little. Because I know what "sad" means to me, but I don't know what "sad" means to *you*. To me, "sad" means lonely and disconnected from the people around me. It means I work harder and bottle up my feelings. To you, "sad" might mean you are in despair about your future, can't get out of bed, and you're eating chocolate like it could save your life.

If we aren't curious about what certain key words mean to certain key people in our life, we can easily end up having two entirely different conversations, while assuming we're talking about the same thing. Without curiosity, words can become a wedge slowly, imperceptibly, driven between us.

This week, take at least one opportunity to ask someone you care about what they mean by a specific word they are using. Explain to them, "So, when I hear you say X, this is what it means to me. But I wonder what it means to you." You will be amazed at what you learn about people when you decide to slow down and to become a student of them once again by becoming a student of the words they are using.