

Adjusting My Processing Tools

by
Amy Carroll

"When she speaks she has something worthwhile to say, and she always says it kindly." Proverbs 31:26 (The Message)

It was like we were speaking two different languages. Even though my friend and I were both speaking English, we couldn't seem to understand each other at all. I started the conversation with the assumption that we'd see things the same way, but emotions rose, battle lines were drawn and wounds were inflicted. How did we get here?

After a little cooling off period, I called Luann, my wise, truth-telling friend. I told her the basic outline of the conversation, trying to keep it neutral. Finally I asked her, "What do you think went wrong?" Luann astutely turned the question back to me, "What could you have done differently?"

At first I honestly couldn't think of one thing I could have done differently. After all, this conflict wasn't my fault! (Sorry to reveal my shocking humanness.) But after some reflection, God began to whisper to my heart. I saw the big mistakes I made. I called my friend during an extremely busy time in her life with a suggestion that would add to her schedule. Instead of being sensitive, I pushed and pushed my own agenda. As the emotions escalated, my defensiveness increased making my responses sharp and prickly.

Luann gently prodded, "How could you have listened more carefully? Would truly listening have made you more compassionate? How could you have responded with more grace?"

For the rest of the afternoon, God etched a new way of interacting in hard situations on my heart. This is the truth He carved: **Listen with compassion. Speak with grace.**

Listen with Compassion

Years ago, my pastor shared an invaluable method for re-adjusting his attitude when dealing with conflict. He shared with us this important question, "Is this behavior consistent with the person's general character?"

Wow! If I had applied that question in the conversation with my friend, I would have remembered her kindness, her servant heart and her calm nature. Then I might have wondered what was changing her normal response. I could have been compassionate toward her and the stress she was under. I would have listened with a heart to serve her instead of insisting on my own way.

At its core, listening with compassion is simply obeying the biblical commands to die to

ourselves (John 12:24-25) and to consider others more highly ourselves (Philippians 2:3).

Speak with Grace

Proverbs 15: 1 says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." There is no downside to a gentle, grace-filled answer. I'm embarrassed to admit that I've often seen responding this way as losing or giving in. That's simply not true. Needed truths can be told in very kind and gentle ways. Just think about how Luann treated me when I sought her advice!

You can be sure that when I called my friend to ask for forgiveness and clear up the misunderstanding that I prayed for a Jesus-sized dose of compassion and grace first.

I've been rehearsing "Listen with Compassion. Speak with grace." over and over again in my mind, and last week I had a chance to put it into practice when I received a difficult email. My first response was defensiveness, but I repeated my new way of processing aloud until I could hear the needs in the email and respond with grace.

I had to laugh out loud! God is so good! He gave me the chance to practice when I had time to take a breath, pause, practice my new motto and then respond. Life and relationships are filled with conflict, so I'm sure I'll have a chance to practice again. Next time, if it's in real time, I'm ready!

Reflect and Respond:

Who am I focused on during a hard conversation? Am I really trying to understand the person who is speaking or already working on my defense?

If you feel yourself becoming defensive, make yourself pause and put yourself in the other person's shoes.

Remind yourself that responding with kindness and grace is a win-win.

Power Verses:

Proverbs 17:27, "A truly wise person uses few words; a person with understanding is even-tempered." (NLT)

Proverbs 18:15, "The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out." (NIV)

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