

Welcome back to the Marriage Melody where we are composing a lifetime of love and happiness with our husband. I am your host Rivkah Harper.

Last week's homework was to work on not interrupting your husband when he is talking to you or other people. So how did that go? For those of you with children and especially younger ones, were you strong enough to resist the temptation to shift your focus to them? I understand they have needs and require your attention. You know, one child dropped their food on the floor and another two are kibitzing with each other. They needed you.

And yes, that's true. They do need you. But they also need something else: to be shown how to give respect. You will be surprised at how quickly they grasp it. When my youngest was about five, he would always sit next to me at the table. He always had needs. And then one day my husband enlightened me and told me he could not do it. He could not talk to me and have me interrupt him with me going to deal with their child for just two seconds and then turn back towards him and expect him to remember what he was saying. He was frustrated because he could not express his thoughts fully. No, there was nothing wrong with him. It was me.

Once I realized that instead of questioning why he was not able to hold his thoughts for two seconds, after all it's an easy thing to do, right? And I just accepted that this is how God created him. I started working on giving him 99.5% of my attention. Yeah, I just could not give it all and I still can't. My eyes look out for everyone else around me still. When I focus on not interrupting, two amazing things happened.

Firstly, my son actually stopped interrupting me when I was listening to someone else without me having to say much at all. All I did was either not respond to him at that moment or I would turn and say quietly, "Shh, daddy is talking right now." That was it. Children really do pick things up very quickly. Not only that, after a short while other issues in our marriage that had been bothering me just disappeared. And when I thought about it, I realized that those other things were the unconscious message my husband was sending me. That he had an unfulfilled need. He needed to feel like he mattered. That there was one person who thought he was important.

He is very humble and he does not like public acknowledgement, but he needed my acknowledgement. And one way I can show him that he matters is by not interrupting him. When his need was met, he no longer felt the need to do those other things that bothered me. It is surprising how such a small thing can make such a huge difference. Although, I will admit, it is not always easy to do, even now. I'm very well aware of how challenging it can be. I have bitten my tongue more than once, a little too hard, and yes, I still stumble and fall.

But what about those times when your children really do need your attention? Yes, sometimes they do need us immediately. And that is why I cannot give my husband my 100% attention. My maternal instinct is to be alert. At those times, I will politely inform my husband that I need to attend to the matter at hand and assure him that I will be right back. I ask him to please hold his thoughts. When I return, I profusely apologize for interrupting him. I always use the sweetest words and the sweetest tone I can, and I try to keep those moments as few as possible.

Now, to continue the discussion from last week, we are aware that each of us is different from one another. We are all unique. We possess unique talents and face various challenges. We come from

different family backgrounds and experiences. However, we have learned that despite these unique differences, women in general share certain traits with each other, and men in general share certain traits with each other.

One significant area that we differ is in our communication styles. Okay, so imagine this scenario. A husband enters a room, and with the look that the wife gives him, she looks like she's going to bite his head off. He sees something is wrong and approaches her, asking, "What is wrong, dearie?" She glances at him and mutters, "Nothing." In response, the husband then says, "Okay, then come and help me pay the bills," before walking away. Now, what is the wife thinking? You know, why does he ignore the fact that I'm upset? He just walks away. Does this sound familiar?

Or how about this scenario? Your friend walks in and notices that you are visibly upset. She asks you what is wrong, and you again reply, "Nothing." How does your friend react? Well, she probably says, "Yeah right, sit down and tell me what's going on," and your friend sits with you for as long as you need. Are you beginning to notice something here? Okay, aside from the fact that your friends seem to understand you better than your husband.

Let us revisit the first case. Okay, so the husband observes that his wife is unhappy and genuinely wants to know why. So far, so good. However, how does the wife respond? Simply with, "Nothing." So, the husband hears from her that nothing is wrong. He does not understand why she appears angry, but since she said nothing is wrong, he moves on. Meanwhile, we all know what the wife is really thinking.

Okay, so let's step back and look at the bigger picture. Firstly, we must give credit to the husband for recognizing that his wife is unhappy and for inquiring about it. However, the wife's response is confusing, leaving the husband unsure of how to proceed. His dilemma is to whether to rely on the words she utters or how she looks. He doesn't understand why she looks upset, but since she stated that nothing is wrong, he assumes there is no issue and returns to his tasks.

On the other hand, the friend notices something is wrong, asks for an explanation, and when confronted with conflicting words, she disregards them, thinking, "But she looks upset, so she must be upset." Now, are you beginning to see what is going on? A man's tendency, or rather the male character trait, is to understand and make decisions based on the words said and what is heard. On the other hand, a woman's tendency, or the female character trait, is to understand and make decisions based on what is observed visually, emotionally, and psychologically.

And if we reflect on this, it explains why men often excel in areas that are more straightforward, that are more black and white, such as chemistry, physics, and engineering, while women tend to thrive in roles like primary caregivers for children or elementary school teachers, professions that require understanding of a person's psyche and the ability to comprehend their behavior.

Therefore, we are not being fair at all to our husband when we give him mixed signals. Just like I would not speak Greek to someone who only knows German, I need to learn the language that my husband speaks. If I'm upset, and especially if he notices and asks about it, I need to talk to him. I need to use my words. It might be that I'm not ready to discuss things at the moment, but I shouldn't confuse him with mixed signals for that is just setting him up for failure. Instead, I can simply tell him that I'm not ready to talk at the moment, and I will let him know when I am.

In other words, the issue often lies in the breakdown of communication between us and our husband. The wires get crossed, so to speak. Have you ever noticed that sometimes you and your husband can argue about something, only to realize later that you are both talking about different things, or that one or both of you misunderstood something the other said? Well, let me share a personal example with you.

Recently, I was testing for my black belt in Taekwondo, and one of the requirements was breaking two boards. I was really struggling with one of the breaks. I had three attempts, and if I failed to break it, I wouldn't pass the test. A week before the test, during practice, I attempted three times to break the board, but failed. I was starting to get really nervous. The whole time for the last year, everyone kept giving me feedback saying, "You're pushing the board, don't push the board." I understood that I shouldn't push the board, so I attempted to kick faster and with more force. However, there's only so much force and so much speed that I could generate, and I was still not breaking the board. I could not figure it out.

It was only when I missed the board break and couldn't break it that I sat down and finally realized what everyone was trying to tell me. I was using the wrong part of my foot. I knew I was supposed to use my heel, but I was unintentionally using the ball of my foot, and yeah, that would push the board instead of breaking it. And then at that point, everything clicked, and I knew exactly what I was doing wrong and how to fix it. Four days later, back in class, for the first time, I broke the board on my first try. I was all set. I was able to go into testing confident. And yes, I broke the board during testing on my first try.

If I can have such misunderstandings with my instructors and fellow students, it is even more likely that I will experience similar misunderstandings with my husband. I don't know why they chose the phrase, "You're pushing the board," instead of "Pull your toes back, kick with your heel," but at least I now understand what it means, and really that's all that matters. We need to keep this in mind when communicating with our husband. Just because I understand what I mean and use words that make sense to me does not mean he will interpret them in the same way. This is normal. This is okay. There is nothing wrong with that. We just need to learn his language a little better. We need to learn the words to use to ensure he understands our intentions.

Now, I understand that we focused on his needs so far. Don't worry, soon we will address your needs, for they are equally important. When we provide even a small amount of help to our husbands and support them in fulfilling their needs, we will find that they will have the energy and willingness to help us fill our needs too.

Your homework for this week is to observe and pay attention. Do you notice any instances where you and your husband seem to be sending each other mixed signals or speaking different languages? And please don't forget, you can go to the website, TheMarriageMelody.com, and you can download the toolbox journal so you can write in to help you out.

Until next time, take care.