



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Speaking the Language of Love – Part 2

Guest(s): Dr. Les and Dr. Leslie Parrott

Air Date: May 22, 2025

Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone you're listening to Family Talk, the radio broadcasting ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute. I'm Dr. James Dobson and thank you for joining us for this program.

Roger Marsh: Well welcome to Family Talk with psychologist and best-selling author, Dr. James Dobson. I'm Roger Marsh. Have you ever felt misunderstood by your spouse despite your best efforts to communicate with him or her? Well many couples find themselves speaking different emotional languages and they don't even realize they're doing so. Today here on Family Talk, we are continuing our conversation with relationship experts Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott about their breakthrough book called, *Love Talk: Speak Each Other's Language Like You Never Have Before*. The Parrotts have discovered that we all have unique communication styles driven by different underlying needs for emotional safety.

Les and Leslie Parrott are co-founders of the Center for Relationship Development at Seattle Pacific University where Les also serves as professor of psychology. Leslie works as a marriage and family therapist in the Seattle area and together, they've pioneered research that helps couples identify their unique "talk styles" so that they can better understand each other.

On our last broadcast, the Parrotts introduced us to their innovative approach to overcoming communication roadblocks. On today's Family Talk program, they'll dive deeper into what they call our fear factors, the underlying needs that actually drive our communication patterns. They'll also share how understanding these factors can transform your conversations and create a deeper connection with your spouse. So now let's join Dr. James Dobson and his guests, Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott for this eye-opening conversation here on Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: We always have to kind of recap a little bit because you can't assume that the people listening today were able to hear yesterday and vice versa. So people are able to kind of hit and miss with listening to the broadcast. So I think we ought to take just a few moments, Les and Leslie, to talk about what we're talking about, which is communication. It's not a new subject, certainly, communication. Everybody knows that's important. But how do you pull that off? And what are some of the principles that make it easier for a husband and wife to understand one another? And there's a lot more here than meets the eye.

Dr. Les Parrott: Yeah, and like we said last time, we've been on a quest to really apply this to our own lives and feel like we've discovered something unique that creates a safe place in our relationship. Like we said last time, to create almost a tangible room in your home where you could be guaranteed to have a wonderful conversation. That's what love talk is about.

Dr. James Dobson: And you can say a lot of words to each other and not be understood.

Dr. Les Parrott: That's for sure.

Dr. James Dobson: Not really be communicating, right, Leslie?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah, and in that way, we kind of feel like we've cracked a code that helps us make that connection and speak each other's language like we never had before because we've had that experience in our own marriage where you just don't understand me. You know, why is it that we can't get to that place where we feel fully at home, fully understood, and safe with each other, and this has made a difference.

Dr. Les Parrott: And that's what it's about, feeling safe. But once you have that, boy, does life begin to look a lot different.

Dr. James Dobson: And let me say it again, the subtitle is *Speak Each Other's Language Like You Never Have Before*. And the back of the book is a little test, an inventory.

Dr. Les Parrott: Yeah, there's something kind of unusual about this book, and we worked with our publisher, Zondervan, on this, because we actually, you're reading along and it'll tell you to do something unusual, and that is to slip the dust jacket off of this hardcover book, and you'll find an ink-jetted code back there that's specific to your book. And why? Well, you take that little code and you can go to our website at realrelationships.com, punch that code in and take what we call the Love Talk Indicator. The really cool thing is it'll give you about, what, 12 to 15 pages on your talk style, how you're hard-wired for communication and that'll be helpful to understand that. But then you get your spouse to go on do the same thing and then we will combine those codes and give you a...

Dr. Leslie Parrott: A couple's report. It can be as long as 30 pages depending on the couple. You know every report's unique to this couple

Dr. Les Parrott: But it combines your two talk styles and shows you, in fact, very specifically it might say "here's six things you should never say to me because of the way I'm hardwired."

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah, I personally, and I love this because some of these pages are perforated. You can tear them out and hand them to your spouse. These are six things never to say to me because when you do, communication breaks down for me.

Dr. Les Parrott: Here's things that I need to hear more often from you. So it gets very specific, but let's back up from it and take a look, though, at these fear factors, these safety needs. There's four of them.

Dr. James Dobson: I want to get to those, but first, give people, Leslie, a feel for that test. What kind of questions are asked?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Well, I'll tell you what it does. It asks questions that helps you understand your talk style. And it's all based on this idea that we've been talking about, these fear factors. And let me just tell you what's behind it, because we started, when we were on this quest to really uncover, what would it take to have great communication? What we started noticing about ourselves is we do a great job of communicating until we have a breakdown. Something happens and one of us doesn't feel safe. And when you get afraid in a situation, when you have fear, you get kind of crazy in your behavior. We had a free moment between us.

Dr. James Dobson: Alright, what are the four fear factors?

Dr. Les Parrott: They're easy to remember because there's an acronym and it spells talk, but we spell it a little bit differently. T -A -L -Q, talk, okay? Each one of those represents a fear factor. T is for time. Some of us are hardwired to feel safe when we're controlling our time. And we feel threatened when we're losing control of that time that we value. Because we're pretty urgent. We go through life and I say we because this is my number one fear factor. I'm hardwired to use my time well. This is a commodity I want to protect. And so I'm efficient with my time. I want to be productive with my time. And there's people out there listening to us, even with this little short introduction going, boy, that's me, I am the same way. I'm hardwired for time, and I'm urgent about it.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: And yes, and urgency is the key there. Because if this is your fear factor, if being in control of your time is what makes you feel safe and not being in control makes you feel unsafe, it makes you extremely urgent. And if you have a problem, anything that crops up in your day, you are gonna respond to that with a very aggressive approach. You're gonna wanna take care of that now, get it off your checklist, and get on with your life.

Dr. Les Parrott: Yeah, or you find yourself in the midst of a conversation that seems to just keep going on and on. Didn't we already cover this ground, you know?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: I never do that.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Or probably the most common scenario is we have a problem to solve and I want to solve it right now.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: No matter what that problem is.

Dr. Les Parrott: Big or little and she has, since time is not a fear factor for her, she's like "Oh let's just give it time we can just you know just give it more time" and I'm like "give it

time come on let's get going on this thing." So that's where some couples have that breakdown in communication because one of them is hardwired for time as their fear fact.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: It could be anything. I remember this summer, Les was trying to prepare our oldest son for kindergarten. He just felt he needed to know a few things before he got into school. So you were working with him for like, I don't know, I mean 30 minutes, 45 minutes.

Dr. Les Parrott: Yeah, and I was teaching him the difference between coins and nickel and a penny. And I'm sure every school teacher out there is saying that's way too advanced. He doesn't need to know that at this stage and you know how many pennies are in a nickel. And now I know that. But at the time I thought, "Why isn't little John getting this?" And so after working with him a little while, I finally said "Stay here John. Let me go talk to mommy for a minute," and I went into the kitchen. I said to Leslie, I said "We've got a problem." She said "What?" and I said "John doesn't understand money." And she said "Well he's not even in kindergarten what do you mean he doesn't understand money he shouldn't understand it yet." and I said "Well I think we need to get a tutor." She said "What do you mean? We don't need a tutor. He hasn't even started his first day of kindergarten yet. You're way too urgent about this." and I said "Well let's get a tutor and call the students and-"

Dr. Leslie Parrott: ...call the university today and get a college student to tutor John. mean, that's how every problem is for him. Let's solve it now. He's a very aggressive problem solver and that's what anyone whose primary fear factor is getting in control of their time.

Dr. Les Parrott: Well, and even as I was talking about that, I see Leslie begin to well up with tears a little bit and I thought, what did I say? Where did this come from?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Well, I'll tell you where it came from because he tapped into my primary fear factor and that's that "A" in that talk, which is approval. Anytime I start to fear that I have lost the approval of someone who I love and respect, and I'm in a conversation, that's when I get afraid and I start shutting down. And all I could hear in his comments were, "you have been a terrible mom, you haven't prepared your son for the outside world. We're gonna need to get an extra help in order to get him ready to function in society," and I swelled up with tears.

Dr. Les Parrott: And that thought never crossed my mind. All I was trying to do was solve the problem, and here she was, I threatened her fear factor, her safety need.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me press you guys a little bit, okay? That's what makes for a good conversation. The title "fear factor" seems not to address all the things that I would be feeling in a negative context. I might be feeling irritation or frustration or competing objectives or a strong desire of one sort or another and not fear. I can't think of many situations in my relationship with Shirley where I would feel

something that I would call fear. I'm not sure how you're using that. You understand what I'm talking about?

Dr. Les Parrott: Yeah, I think I do. I think what we're trying to get at here is that you may feel, whether you even know it or not, emotionally threatened. In other words, when a couple has a communication meltdown, they're typically having that meltdown because one of them doesn't feel safe. Somehow, you've tapped into their threat level for them, whether it is time or the loss of approval. Time would be the fear of losing control of your time.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: But it might not be an emotional experience, and that's what you're saying, because really only some of us live in our feelings, and I'll tell you who lives in their feelings, the people whose fear factor is approval. If that's not high for you, you don't evaluate anything, you know, on the basis of your emotions. But still, like you said, your objectives, your main goals might be being threatened. Or you might, you know, you just, this is not what you wanted to focus on. –

Dr. James Dobson: I would not feel threatened. You know, I'm very comfortable with the relationship with Shirley and have been for all these years. So I would not feel unsafe. I might feel uncomfortable about something. I don't like what's going on between us, because we're coming from a different perspective. I may not feel understood and that may frustrate me, but I don't feel unsafe or afraid.

Dr. Les Parrott: You don't feel psychologically underneath it. You don't feel underneath this issue, whatever it might be, that she's tapped into something that threatens your, we've only talked about two of them so far. We have two to go, but your fear of losing control of what you wanted to get done today because time is important.

Dr. James Dobson: That's not fear, that's frustration. You know, I got a to-do list and the day's getting away and it's already 11:30 and I haven't gotten started on it. And Shirley wants me... we had a big fight one time over the umbrella in the backyard and Shirley wanted me to go out there and clean that thing. I'd been gone for six weeks, I came home, I was tired and wanted to watch an SC Alabama football game. I didn't want to go out there and clean that umbrella. Well, she had 75 people coming to our house that night. We were allowing a Sunday school class to use our house. And she was concerned about the fact that it was dirty. And so it was very logical that she wanted me to do that. But I was frustrated because I was tired and I wanted to do my own thing. I wasn't I went unsafe. I was just uncomfortable.

Dr. Les Parrott: How about Shirley, though? How did she feel in that situation when you said, "No, I don't want to do that. I want to do my own thing."

Dr. James Dobson: She felt not understood because it was perfectly reasonable for her to say, "I don't want these people coming in here and that umbrella being dirty." You know? It may be semantics. I don't know.

Dr. James Dobson: It could be. But do you think that underneath that message, she might have felt a little bit, maybe the message to her was, "Well, if he loved me, he would really do that." And therefore, I'm losing his approval, perhaps, or would he turn...

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Well, I don't know what, I can't even begin to know what Shirley's fear factor might be, but I do think women might relate more to the term "safety" and "fear-"

Dr. James Dobson: That's very, very possible and probable.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: ...than men. Men might feel frustrated or anxious or disappointed or angry even. But what's threatening it is the same dynamic. And when you understand it, that's what helps you crack that code, 'cause you know what pushes your hot buttons in a conversation.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, yeah. What are the other two factors?

Dr. Les Parrott: Yes, you have TALQ, time, approval. The third is loyalty. Some of us are hardwired for fear of losing a sense of profound loyalty. Now, of course, we all want loyalty in our relationships and our marriage.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah, this isn't about commitment or covenant in a marriage. This is more about what you love, what makes you feel safe in your lifestyle and it has to do with resisting change. You love things to be the way they are.

Dr. Les Parrott: Predictability and you love that groove and that you drive home from work the same way. Some people like spontaneity and why should any day be the same as any other? Let's make everything do. And so this particular need of loyalty for some can really get under another person's skin if that person doesn't respect it in value.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: I'm fairly high on my need for loyalty. Les is very low. I mean, he'll hang up from a phone call and he'll come in and say, "Hey, I just talked to Joe and we're gonna go to Phoenix tomorrow." And he's thrilled. He loves a sudden change. I'm not like that at all. What about my small group? What about Tammy? I was going to have lunch with her and we just can't suddenly change something. I don't even want to change the grocery store where I shop. I love to go to the same place. I know what to expect and it's just a high need. That makes me feel emotionally safe not having a lot of change in my life.

Dr. Les Parrott: And so in our conversations, we're negotiating change a lot. A lot of conversations in marriage are dealt with that.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Whether it's just changing the schedule or what I thought we were gonna do for our date night. Maybe Les said last week "Let's try this restaurant. That sounds like a great date." Then we get to that night and he says "You know what I'm not in the mood for that. Here's what I'd like to do." I'm like "What I've been looking forward to that all week."

Dr. James Dobson: You know that is a fundamental difference between men and women. Men like change. I like spontaneity. I like newness. I like challenge. I like aggressive, new possibilities and Shirley likes predictability and stability and certainty and long-term security and so on. That's why a move is usually so much more difficult for a woman than a man and if you're going to move as a family, the husband had better understand that this is going to be very challenging for his wife.

Dr. Les Parrott: I agree with you, but there are men that are also hardwired for this sense of stability.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Well, we know him. I mean, we have a friend, George, who's been driving the same car. I mean, he could afford anything he wants, but he's been driving the same truck for 30 years, because, you know, a good friend gave it to him, and it means something to him, and he's, well, he doesn't want to change anything in his life.

Dr. Les Parrott: He doesn't like the furniture to be changed in the living room, or, you know.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Even this week, he was getting the engine fixed, which needed an overhaul. And I said, well, tell me about that, and it was, he was trading out from a childhood friend who remembered him, defending him on the playground in grade school. I mean, this man's life is about relationships he started when he was a child, and those are the friends he loves today. So it can be in a man.

Dr. Les Parrott: When we talk about this to a large auditorium, one of the things I'll do just to illustrate the point is to say, "Okay, now, you know, for the last half of this day, let's just trade seats. Everybody get up and sit on the other side of the room or down front." And they start to look around like, "What? This is crazy. Why would we do that?" And I said, "There you go. That illustrates the point. We like that loyalty."

Dr. Leslie Parrott: There are some people that go, "Hey, that's great," you know, because they're the spontaneous ones. They love nothing to be the same.

Dr. James Dobson: All right. What's Q?

Dr. Les Parrott: T -A -L, time, approval, loyalty, and Q is for quality. Some of us are hardwired for fear of losing a quality standard in our life. Now, hopefully, we all prize integrity. This has something to do with a little bit deeper than that, isn't it?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: This is more about decisions. How do you make decisions in your life? Someone who is high in their need for quality puts everything through due process. They don't just want to do the right thing; they want to do it in the right way. They don't want to make any mistakes with their process. They read the instructions; they carefully consider everything about their life.

Dr. Les Parrott: If they're going to buy a lawn mower, they check Consumer Reports. They're going to do their research. Now, I'm low on this. I'm high on time and low on quality. So, in fact, just recently when I got little Johnny a tricycle, you know, it comes in a million pieces and you're reading the instructions and I'm thinking, "Oh, I can just do intuitively. You know, I'll know how to put this together." Halfway through that, I realized the rear axle was out of an extra, like, six inches in the back of this thing.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Actually, John noticed that.

Dr. Les Parrott: John said, "Daddy, I don't think it's supposed to look that way." "Oh yeah, John, this is how they're doing them now, you know? Let's just get it going, you know?" And a person that is high in quality would never approach it that way.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: It's an event to, you know, ever go to a restaurant with someone who is high in quality. I mean, they don't just sit down and say, "I feel like eating this." You know, they study the menu. They consider; they want to hear all the specials. They want to know every option, and they carefully make their decision. And that's what it's like, you know, for someone who has this high need for quality.

Dr. James Dobson: Shirley will study the menu endlessly and then want what I ordered.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Well, there's that too. I just want him to order something I didn't order that I also wish I could have so I could taste it.

Dr. James Dobson: Now tell me, does the test tell people where they are on those four fear factors? Does it come back with a score?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah. So if they go online and they punch this code in and take this test, 10 minutes, the Love Talk indicator, it'll give them a printout of several pages on where they are, very specifically on each of those four. There's over 19,000 different combinations when you look at the high, medium, low combinations.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah. It's not just some cookie cutter formula. My highest need is for approval. That's when I feel the safest. But I have a high need for loyalty too. And so when Les comes out of his study and says, "Hey, we're going to Phoenix tomorrow," I react against that. But because my need for his approval is higher than my need for loyalty, it trumps it. And I often go along with experiences and changes. I would never choose because I need that more.

Dr. James Dobson: If you spent two hours getting dinner ready and got a new recipe and really went after it and you know set the table very nicely and all that you do and Les came home and ate it and then said "Thanks babe. This was a good meal." and then went off to do some work would you be hurt?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: I often say when he's through with his dinner, "So did you like it? Did you really like it?"

Dr. Les Parrott: What you're really saying is "Do you approve of what I did?"

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah, exactly. He's sometimes afraid to compliment something I'm wearing, 'cause he's afraid I might keep it on for the next five days, you know, if he really likes that.

Dr. Les Parrott: She feeds off of that approval. But I'll tell you what, once we got into this research and understood this, and I know that she's hardwired for approval, man, I wanna give that to her. 'Cause I didn't really know that before we did this research. And now that I know she's hardwired for that, I look for ways to show her how much I "approve" of whatever it is that she's trying to accomplish.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Well that's what's so powerful about this it also has made me extremely patient. For someone who has a high need to be in control of his time, I used to find him blunt and even sometimes mean because he'd want to solve a problem so fast I'd feel like "Hey you know what's going on here? Let's connect you know."

Dr. Les Parrott: And I'm trying to solve the problem to get it off of our place so that we can love each other.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Now I don't take it so personally. I go, "Okay, this is about his time. It's not about me."

Dr. Les Parrott: We have a friend who in Seattle, Chuck and Barbara, and he said that he was putting a Ritz cracker and a chunk of cheese on it in the microwave, and his wife walked by and just uttered one sentence. As she walked by, she said, "That cheese is too big." Now, what he heard was, "You big fat slob, I can't believe you're eating that much cheese." What she meant was, "That cheese is too big to melt evenly. Never entered her mind to make that kind of a judgment on him, but because his need is high for approval, that's what he read into it.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Because if you have a high need for approval, you're tuned in to signs of disapproval.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, we've got a high need for time management here. Right. The title of the book, again, is *Love Talk: Speak Each Other's Language Like You Never Have Before*. Doctors, because they're both doctors, Les and Leslie Parrot, and it's fun talking to you guys. It always is, and you're continuing to write, I know, and it's a real pleasure to have you come here all the way from Seattle to be with us. I think that a lot of people are gonna find help in this book. Les and Leslie, I've known you for a long, long time, it is really good to have you back with us.

Dr. Les Parrott: Thanks, Doc. It's so fun to be with you always, and I'm not going to call them fear factors for you. It's safer than you.

Dr. James Dobson: Irritable characteristics.

Dr. Les Parrott: That rolls off the tongue, doesn't it? It's great to be with you.

Dr. James Dobson: It's a pleasure.

Roger Marsh: You know, true intimacy in marriage actually grows when couples learn to speak each other's love languages. Helpful insights from Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott today here on Family Talk. They've been Dr. Dobson's guests here on the program. And if you missed any portion of today's broadcast or if you'd like to share it with a friend, maybe even your spouse, you can access the complete program online at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk or by downloading the JDFI mobile app. You'll find a link there to the Parrotts book, which served as the basis for today's conversation. It's titled *Love Talk: Speak Each Other's Language Like You Never Have Before*.

And by the way, when you download the free JDFI mobile app, it's the perfect companion for strengthening your marriage and parenting journey. Access the latest Family Talk broadcasts, parenting tips from Dr. Dobson and other experts, and biblically sound marriage advice all at your fingertips. The newest version even lets you personalize your content, save favorites, and stay informed on policy issues that affect your family. Simply search for Dr. James Dobson in your App Store and download this powerful resource today.

Here at the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, we are dedicated to strengthening marriages through biblical principles and practical wisdom. Since 2010, this ministry has been a beacon of hope for families navigating life changes, and this year we are celebrating our 15th anniversary of ministry. Wow, the time goes by quickly. Every day here at Family Talk and the James Dobson Family Institute, we hear from listeners whose marriages have been transformed through these broadcasts. Your partnership makes that all possible. When you support the JDFI, you play an essential role in bringing biblical truth to millions of homes during a time when godly wisdom is needed now more than ever before. Your gift today of any amount will help us continue broadcasting messages that strengthen marriages all across the country and all around the world. You can make a secure donation online at drjamesdobson.org. You can give a gift over the phone when you call 877-732-6825. That's 877-732-6825. Or if it's easier, send your donation through the U.S. Postal Service. Our ministry mailing address is Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, the zip code 80949. Again, that's P.O. Box 39000, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 80949.

Well, I'm Roger Marsh, and on behalf of Dr. Dobson and all of us here at the JDFI, we are so glad you spent some time with us today. Be sure to join us again next time right here for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk, the voice you trust, for the family you love.

Announcer: This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.

Dr. James Dobson: Hello everyone, this is James Dobson inviting you to join us for our next edition of Family Talk. Every day we come to these microphones with someone in mind, whether it's a busy mom looking for tips on discipline or a husband who wants to learn more about connecting with his wife. We want to put an arm around your family in any way that we can, so join us It's time for Family Talk, won't you?