



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Speaking the Language of Love – Part 1

Guest(s): Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott

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Dr. James Dobson: Welcome everyone to Family Talk. It's a ministry of the James Dobson Family Institute supported by listeners just like you. I'm Dr. James Dobson and I'm thrilled that you've joined us.

Roger Marsh: Marriage is a beautiful gift from God and yet, one of the most common challenges couples face is ineffective communication. While it's often easy to speak to friends or other family members, why does talking with our spouse sometimes feel so difficult? Well on today's edition of Family Talk, psychologist and best-selling author, Dr. James Dobson is going to tackle this very important issue with relationship experts Dr. Les and Leslie Parrott. They're joining us here in-studio today. This husband and wife team brings unique credentials to our conversation. Both hold doctoral degrees and together they co-founded the Center for Relationship Development at Seattle Pacific University.

The Parrotts have authored numerous best-selling books, including *Love Talk: Speak Each Other's Language Like You Never Have Before*, which is the focus of the discussion on today's program. They'll also share practical insights they've gained through their professional work with thousands of couples as well as their own multi-year marriage journey as well, more than 20 plus years and still going and growing strong. If you've ever found yourself frustrated by communication breakdowns with your spouse, well today's program offers hope and practical guidance as well. You'll discover why many couples struggle to connect deeply and what you can do to help create meaningful conversations that truly bring you together as a couple. Well here now is Dr. James Dobson to welcome our guests for today's edition of Family Talk.

Dr. James Dobson: Les and Leslie, you are very, very busy people. Just going over this bio, we spent half the program already.

Dr. Les Parrott: I'm kind of tired just listening to you.

Dr. James Dobson: We had to tag-team it in order to get it covered and you're raising two boys. How do you have time to love talk? I'd like to know.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Well, you know, you raise a good issue because, and we don't think we're the only couple that struggles with how do you capture time? And when you have time together, how do you really connect? And I think we wrote this book for

ourselves. More than anyone, we work with thousands of couples a year and yet, we're the ones who felt the need for this.

Dr. Les Parrot: Yeah, in fact, I would say this, that we knew that there was no need for another book on communication. There's lots of great stuff out there on communication. And yet, why was it that in our own relationship, two people that specialize in this, that teach about it, that are doing all kinds of work involving this, are still struggling with our own level of communication?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah, we could be brilliant at communicating with other people, but when it comes to our own spouse, things break down.

Dr. James Dobson: So you're admitting you still have to work on it?

Dr. Les Parrott: Well, what we're saying is we think we found the key, at least for us. And we set off on a quest, at least, I suppose, nearly 10 years ago, to find something that would transform our relationship deep down, soul to soul, that would bring us closer together. That would allow us a sense of intimacy that we had not yet experienced.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah, not a technique or sort of a skill, but something that would really make a difference in helping us understand each other.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, let's start with the barriers to that communication. What makes it so hard? What's so tough?

Dr. Les Parrot: It may be just us.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, it's simply a matter of talking together. Why is that so hard?

Dr. Les Parrott: You know the funny this is we didn't even have pre-marriage counseling. In fact, the very first sentence of one of our books says, "We never had pre-marriage counseling, but we spent the first year of our marriage in therapy."

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Which is true.

Dr. Les Parrott: That's the truth. So we have a passion for what we do because we've lived this out. But I think it's been a challenge for us because we would do the things that others were teaching us to do. And yeah, it would work, but not consistently and not in a way that really connected us so that we felt like we were joined.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah, and I think part of it are just, men and women are different. They approach conversations differently and we experienced that more together than we did...

Dr. Les Parrott: Yeah, and we were looking not just for a few golden nuggets, not a new tip or a technique. We were looking for the motherload. I mean, we wanted something foundational that would help us communicate differently.

Dr. James Dobson: Alright. What's the common mistake that particularly young couples make in learning to talk to each other, to communicate with each other, heart to heart?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Well, I think one of the most common mistakes is assuming that your spouse comes at the conversation with the same goal that you have out of that conversation. That a great conversation looks the same for you as it does for them.

Dr. Les Parrott: Yeah, and we know this from research that most men approach a conversation to gather information. You know, we want to be in the know, we don't need all the fluff. You hear a guy say, you know, give me the bottom line, you know, what do I need to know?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Just get to the point.

Dr. Les Parrott: Not that I've ever said that, right?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Never heard that.

Dr. Les Parrott: Just not since this morning.

Dr. James Dobson: I wonder if you all have ever had the experience we've had where we have been in a restaurant someplace, enjoying one another because after all these years, I still just enjoy taking her out to eat and sitting and talking. But looking over at another table and you have a couple sitting there that don't have one thing to say to each other.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: They're both bored, they're both looking out the window and it's obvious that they're not in one another's worlds at all. Now there's time when every couple goes through that when you feel like you've said it all. But if that's a consistent pattern, you've got problems and my heart goes out to these people when I see this. I want to go over and say, "Is there really nothing in the depths of your relationship that you feel you haven't yet said and that hasn't been understood?" but apparently not.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Well you know what, the loneliest people in the world are people who are married and have a spouse and don't know how to share their lives. And you really do ache for that. You know, there's a comfortable silence where you don't have to be anxious and always fill it up with words but what you're talking about happens to so many couples. They don't know how to stay connected. They just have lost that sense.

Dr. James Dobson: What happens when you lose it, Les? Where does it go?

Dr. Les That sense of connection?

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, because in the dating relationship, you can't shut up. You know, you talk on the phone for four hours at a time and then you get married and you got nothing to say.

Dr. Les Parrott: Yeah, and we will meet with several hundred engaged couples in Seattle for our annual "Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts" event and these couples will get to the session on communication, and we'll see some of them almost roll their eyes. "Why would we need to learn about communication? All we ever do is talk. That's why we're getting married." And yet it is the case that somewhere down the line, they begin to struggle with that issue and they struggle with it because like Leslie said, you're expecting something from it that you're not getting and I think that that is what we found. We knew the fundamentals, you know. It's so important to review the fundamentals in communication.

In fact, I spoke at Green Bay, Wisconsin a little while ago and when I left, the folks that I spoke to gave me two items to remember them by. They gave me one of those big cheese heads. So I put that in my suitcase, and I thought my son would enjoy that. And then they gave me a football. And the football, I'm walking on the plane and I have a suit on, my briefcase and I'm carrying this football. The guy sitting next to me says, "What's up with the football?" And we started talking a little bit about that and then he noticed Vince Lombardi's signature and imprint of his signature. And he reminded me of something that Vince used to do at half-time, I'm sure you know this, when he would come into that locker room and he wants to get back to the fundamentals, and he'd say to those guys, he'd hold up a football. Remember what he would say? "This is a football." Well no duh, right? I mean these guys giving their lives to this game, but it was his way of saying let's get back to the fundamentals and play this game. In the same sense, we're saying in the very first chapter of this book, we're holding up a, as it were a football, and saying "hey folks, this is it. Let's get back to the basics and play this game we know to play in communication."

So many couples lose sight of that. By the way as a quick aside, I had lunch with Vince Lombardi Jr., the son of this famous coach, he's an attorney in Seattle. I said, "Is that true? Does your dad really hold up that football and say that to those guys?" He said, "Oh, yeah." He said, "I remember being a kid in the locker room, he'd do that." He said, "I remember dad holding that football up and saying, 'Men, this is a football.' And he said, 'One of the linebackers in the back row said, 'Slow down, coach, slow down.''" So sometimes it's hard to get to those fundamentals.

Dr. James Dobson: I think his most often quoted comment was that fatigue makes cowards of us all. And fatigue also interferes with communication, doesn't it?

Dr. Les Parrott: Wow. Absolutely.

Dr. James Dobson: When you too worn out to talk to each other, you're too tired, and that is so common in this culture, in this society.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: You know, I can think of a recent incident we had. So I'm up all night with the little guy with a fever, and Les has a plane to catch the next day. So we're headed to the airport, and it's one of the

Dr. Les Parrott: I think I know where this story is going. This is not a good story, but yeah.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: But I'm just being honest, you know, this is what happens for every couple, you know? And so we had one of our only snow days for the year in Seattle, and so it slows everything down. We're running late for the school bus for our older kid. So I promised to take Les to the airport. He's got to catch a flight. I'm exhausted and we hop in the car and realize there's no gas in the tank and Les says "Instead of taking time to do this, let's just get me to my flight on time, and then you can fill that tank up. You've got the day." So we head to the airport and I get him in there and you know how we have those indicators on our cars that say you know miles to empty. Right as I pull out of the terminal it drops suddenly from 10 miles to zero to empty. You know how they do that.

And as I'm pulling out, I'm tired and I'm cranky and this is one of the pressures for communication and marriage because I'm so tired. So I start calling him on my cell phone and saying, you know, he can't reach me. He's checking into his flight. But I'm saying, do you realize I'm at zero miles to empty and I feel so unprotected. You've left town and I have no gas. So I've got the sick child in the back and I pull into the gas station. I make it and I think, okay, it's a good story. But I get there and then I pull out my purse and realize, "Oh, he left so fast. I didn't get the money." And see, these are the kinds of things couples are dealing with, no cash, no gas. We haven't had time to process it. And then I think that's fine, I'll use the credit card. I pop in the credit card and then I realize it's declined and I can't figure it out. And so I call him, I reach him this time, thank goodness, and I'm very cranky because I'm fatigued. And I say, you know, "What's happened?" And he says, "Oh, I bought a bunch of computer equipment and they're going to need you to get that verified before, you know, you can charge anything new." So I'm in the cold snow, I'm alone, my husband's flown out of town, I've got a sick child and no money, and he gives me the special code. You have to have your mother's maiden name and you have to have your social security number. 45 minutes later-

Dr. James Dobson: Les, Les, you cad. You cad. Who would do a thing like that?

Dr. Les Parrot: I told you this isn't a good story. It gets worse.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Because Les consents, I'm exhausted and I'm at the end of my rope and he's thinking, like any man would, my wife needs some motivation, "I'm going to help her out in this moment." And so here's what he says to me, he says, "Leslie, buck up, you can handle this."

Dr. James Dobson: That's not what you wanted to hear.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: No that wasn't exactly... I hung up, I took care of it, but all the way home from the airport.

Dr. Les Parrott: And I was thinking, that's what I would need to hear.

Dr. James Dobson: That is true. And in fact, I'd like to kind of paint a word picture for you all because speaking to the Parrotts because you work on a college campus and you've seen young couples just getting married. And it is so typical at that age to jam the bag full to where there is nothing, absolutely nothing left. You have people going to school.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Right.

Dr. James Dobson: Trying to study for tests and grades and they've got to earn a living in their spare time and a baby comes along and then they often, I don't know, I can't explain this, but they often find themselves with a house to either makeover or rebuild or doing all that stuff and they get to the point that they're ready to kill each other. And this is at a time when they most need to learn love talk, right?

Dr. Les Parrott: Right, exactly. Let me tell you the fundamentals where we say, "Let's go to communication 101. This is communication." Number one, you've got to learn to clarify content. You know, this is so fundamental you want to say, well, no duh, it's like holding up a football, but, you know, clarify content. Do you know that for the words that we use in the English language, there are on average 3.5 different meanings for each of those words that we use most frequently? So we jump to conclusions all the time and we assume we know what the other person is talking about when we really need to clarify that content. And then the second thing we say you've got to do if you master the communication fundamentals is reflect feelings. To listen not just to the verbiage, but to dip down underneath that into that river of emotions that flows between the two of us when we talk and lift out that little feeling and say, "Hey, is this how you feel?"

Dr. James Dobson: Leslie, let's go back to your illustration because it is, again, so typical. I'm glad you shared it, but what did you need from him? I'd like you to tell our listeners what he should have said.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Well, I'm so glad you asked because it really goes back to this. You know, Les is talking about clarifying content, reflecting feelings, that is so fundamental, that need for him to have reflected my feeling in the moment.

Dr. James Dobson: You didn't need a solution.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: I didn't need him to solve it, you know, what I needed, even though I was a little cranky that he'd help create the situation, what I really wanted was for him just

to say, "You must be completely overwhelmed right now. You didn't get any sleep, you've got a sick baby, and you feel like you've got all this extra work you didn't count." You know, anything he could have said, "thank you for caring for our family. You're overwhelmed." Whatever the feeling was, oh, if he could have just stayed in that moment with me and acknowledged it.

Dr. James Dobson: Let me role-play with you, okay?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Oh, I'd love it.

Dr. James Dobson: I'll be Les, alright? Okay.

Dr. Les Parrott: This should be good.

Dr. James Dobson: Oh, Leslie, you know what? I just got up a little bit late and I didn't have time to do everything I wanted to do. I am so sorry. I've left you in a mess. I mean, I ask you to forgive me.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: You know what, it's okay. Thank you for saying that and as long as I know that you're aware of what I'm doing, I'm happy to do it.

Dr. James Dobson: Is there anything I can do to help from this distance? I don't know what it is, but if there is, is there anybody I can call to help you? Is there any way I can make this easier for you?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: You know, I think we're gonna be okay but just be sure and call and check in when you land and I'll keep you posted on how Jackson's doing.

Dr. James Dobson: Do you think you're going to be able to get through this time till I get back?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: I think we're going to do it. We're going to be okay. Thanks for caring.

Dr. James Dobson: I mean, because if necessary, I'll get on a plane and come home.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Oh, you don't need to do that.

Dr. Les Parrott: Easy for you to say. I'm calling you the next time this happens.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: I'll tell you what's so powerful. I mean, I think, you know, the reason, first of all, the reason guys don't do that in general is because it's not necessarily what they would need if they had a problem, to be honest. You know, I think, truthfully, Les was giving me what he would have wanted for me, and I don't give him that at all, you know. But what they don't know is we're not gonna demand a lot in return. If you just validate our feeling, it almost evaporates.

Dr. Les Parrott: And that's really what *Love Talk*, what we discovered in *Love Talk* was a way to really build a space into your conversations. And like Leslie said at the top, we did this for ourselves and now we've begun to teach it to other couples. But to

build a space in your conversations where you feel completely safe, where you don't have to edit your words, you can speak your mind and know you'll be understood. Can you imagine if we had an architect that could put an addition onto your home and build a room in your house where you could have a conversation, where you were guaranteed to have a great conversation. Can you imagine that?

Dr. Leslie Parrott: You wouldn't be misunderstood.

Yeah. You'd come home at the end of the day and you'd say, "Hey, meet me in the room. Let's talk. Let's eat in here tonight. There's a few things I want to talk to you about." Well, that's what we feel like we've discovered, and that's what we've written about in this book, *Love Talk*, is how to create that space, that emotional space between us where we feel safe.

Dr. James Dobson: And love talk is dependent upon understanding how your spouse is different from you, would that be an accurate statement? You can't communicate properly if you have no clue as to what the other person is thinking and feeling.

Dr. Les Parrott: And everybody's unique, it's not just gender differences, but it's how you're hardwired for a conversation. And what makes you feel most emotionally safe in the context of a conversation? Because what makes me feel safe is not what makes Leslie feel safe and vice versa. When we got ahold of that and understood what we call your personal fear factors or your safety needs, once we understood that between each other, all of a sudden, man, we began to empathize, we began to have more grace, more patience, more understanding, and life got a whole lot easier for us.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: We had a funny moment between us that kind of illustrated this for us. One night, it was a busy week night, a lot of couples have these. I was on the church board, Les had a meeting, I had a board meeting and so we hired a babysitter to come and take care of the boys, but we didn't want to be gone. We just felt like we wanted to be home. So I was lamenting that as I left and I needed to borrow the babysitter's car that night. We had one car, Les took off in his car and I borrowed the college student's car that was at our house. Went to my board meeting. It was a long meeting; We were in a pastoral search. It was a late night. So when I was headed home, I was just missing Les. I was missing our boys. And sure enough, I look up and there is our car on the freeway in front of me. And I'm thinking, "Oh, there he is. I've just been thinking about him." And I speed up to catch up to him because I just want to feel close to him. And he speeds away. And I'm thinking, "Where'd he go?" So I speed up again, try to get right behind him. And he speeds away and then all of a sudden it hits me.

Dr. Les Parrott: Well, she honks her horn a little bit, flashes her lights. And I'm thinking, "Who's this nut behind me on the freeway because I don't recognize the car."

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah, I remember, "Oh yeah, I'm in a college student's car he has no idea." So you know I'm following him, he's getting away from me. He finally zips off the

freeway and starts going on all these back roads that are shortcut to our house. Well I fully know them so I zip off behind him. Now I'm kind of having fun with this. I've stopped trying hard for him to know who I am. I'm just kind of following him and I can tell he's kind of trying to get away from me and he's a little bit afraid. I was just playing with him a little bit. So we do this, and then we get to a point where we're almost to our house, we live on the edge of the university campus where we teach, and now I'm surprised 'cause he makes an unexpected turn away from our house and I'm thinking, "Where is he going?" I just follow him, you know, at this point, I'm committed. He pulls into the police station on our campus.

- Dr. Les Parrott: And I'm thinking there's no way this nut is gonna follow me into the police station. I mean, having no idea that it's Leslie.
- Dr. James Dobson: Hey, you know, Leslie, that's really kind of a very commendable thing that he was doing here. A beautiful girl comes up alongside him.
- Dr. Les Parrott: I couldn't even see her, though.
- Dr. James Dobson: He ran from her. That ought to give you some comfort.
- Dr. Leslie Parrott: Nice of you to point that out. I should respect that.
- Dr. Les Parrott: I actually thought it was a student that I flunked and was going to, you know, do some damage.
- Dr. Leslie Parrott: The funny thing is, I zip right in that part. I'm not afraid, you know, I'm laughing. I'm having fun with this and I know he's afraid. He pulls so many tricks on me. It's good. I'm feeling like I'm finally getting one on him.
- Dr. Les Parrott: Well and I hop out of the car and I'm thinking "Okay who is this? You know if this guy wants a piece of me let's go." I'm getting out of the car.
- Dr. James Dobson: Oh you didn't know it was a girl.
- Dr. Leslie Parrott: No he didn't know. He couldn't see me. It was dark.
- Dr. James Dobson: Oh well that's not quite as impressive.
- Dr. Leslie Parrott: He comes at me. He's got this big steel flashlight in case of emergencies in the car and he's got it you know and I don't get out of the car because I don't know what's gonna happen and he comes right around to the driver's window, and he sees me, and he just shakes his head, he gets right in the car and drives home.
- Dr. Les Parrott: Well, she's dying laughing, she's rolling, you know, just laughing. And I get home, she's still laughing, and I haven't found the humor in it yet. Finally I did, but-

Dr. Leslie Parrott: You did, I got home, we started talking, I said, "Here's the funny thing about that moment." I said, "You know, that was funny for me," but I said, "it reminded me too often of what happens to us in a conversation, because I'm feeling playful, I'm happy, I'm missing you, I want to connect and I go to connect and whatever I say, unbeknownst to me, does something that causes you to be afraid and you start backing off, you start withdrawing or you get aggressive. I don't know what I did, all I wanted to do is connect." And he said "Yeah, you do the same thing. You might break down and cry, you know, whatever it is." You don't know why but you just know when you touch in, when you tap into a fear factor, your spouse starts behaving crazy. It's different.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah. Well, we're coming to the end of this broadcast and I want to pick up right there with the next one, identifying those fear factors as you call them. You talk about something in the beginning of this book called the secret code of communication. Maybe that's kind of a wrap up question to help us end this first program. What is the, what's so secret? What is the secret code?

Dr. Les Parrott: Well, it has to do with how you're hardwired. It has to do with this idea of your talk style. Once you understand kind of, and in our next program, we're going to talk about these four fear factors, because all of us are hardwired in combination with one of these four. Once you understand that combination for you and your partner, in the dance of marriage, you no longer step on each other's toes.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah. It really helps you crack that code to great communication.

Dr. Les Parrott: And most couples don't understand that.

Dr. James Dobson: And some of them that have been married for 20 years, like you guys, still don't know.

Dr. Les Parrott: We feel like we've finally discovered it. And like I said, we are enjoying conversations at a level like we never dream possible in the first half of our marriage. And so we're feeling, as you can tell, we're very passionate about this. We believe in it.

Dr. James Dobson: Well, Shirley and I, we are both talkers, which is an advantage, because some guys in particular just don't like to talk much. And it's very hard for them. They have to force themselves to say more than "fine" and "good," and "it was all right," and that's not going to get it done.

Dr. Les Parrott: We have a whole chapter in this book on the silent partner for that very reason, because there are some that just tend to clam up.

Dr. James Dobson: You've got a chapter in here on when not to talk. —

Dr. Les Parrott: That's right.

Dr. James Dobson: Which is interesting.

Dr. Leslie Parrott: Yeah, you don't expect to find that in a communication book.

Dr. James Dobson: Yeah, well, if we don't get off the air, we're not gonna need to know when to not talk 'cause nobody will hear us. So, hey, thank you all for being with us. Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott, very unusual for a husband and wife team to both have doctoral degrees. Yours Les is a Ph.D., yours is an EDD and your specialty, Leslie, is a marriage and family.

Dr. Les Parrott: Well not only to both be doctors but then to both be Leslie that's when life gets really confusing. That's why our son's name is John. John Leslie.

Roger Marsh: You're listening to Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk and a heartfelt conversation that reminds us that marriage isn't about perfection but connection. You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson joined by his special guests, Dr. Les and Leslie Parrott, who reveal how understanding your spouse's unique communication style can actually transform difficult moments into deeper intimacy. Now if you missed any portion of today's broadcast, or if you'd like to share these practical insights with a friend or family member, go to drjamesdobson.org/familytalk. There you'll find the audio for today's program, along with information about the Parrott's book called *Love Talk: Speak Each Other's Language Like You Never Have Before*. Again, you'll find all that information at drjamesdobson.org/familytalk.

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Well I'm Roger Marsh, be sure to join us again next time for part two of this enlightening conversation featuring Dr. Dobson and Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott as they will reveal four fear factors that might be sabotaging your communication. That's coming up next time right here on the next 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.

