

Issue 52 - Responsibility Is Not the Same as Blame

A quick note before we begin: This is the 52nd issue of Messy Families, Faithful God. That means we have now spent a full year meeting here each week. Thank you for reading, reflecting, and allowing these conversations to become part of your family's story.

Messy Story of the Week

His work shirt was still in the laundry basket.

The seventeen-year-old had known all weekend that he needed it for Monday morning. His mother had reminded him once, and he had said he would take care of it.

At 10:30 Sunday night, he walked into her room holding the shirt.

"I need this clean for work tomorrow."

She looked at the laundry basket and then at the book she had just opened.

"The washer is available."

"But I have to get up early."

"So do I."

His frustration rose.

"You know how to get stains out better than I do. If I ruin it, I'll have nothing to wear."

She felt the familiar pull to rescue him.

It would take less time to wash the shirt herself than to continue the conversation. She also knew that if he arrived at work in a dirty shirt, other people might judge her parenting along with his appearance.

But this was not the first time he had waited until the last minute and expected someone else to absorb the inconvenience.

She could shame him for being irresponsible.

She could wash the shirt and carry the consequence for him.

Or she could remain connected while allowing the responsibility to stay where it belonged.

“I’ll show you where the stain remover is,” she said. “But washing the shirt is your responsibility.”

He was not pleased.

But displeasure is not always evidence that a boundary is unloving.

Faithful God Then and Now

Luke 15:11–24

The younger son asked his father for his inheritance and left home.

The father allowed him to go.

He did not follow his son into the distant country. He did not continually send money to protect him from the consequences of his choices. He did not persuade someone else to make the son come home.

Eventually, the money was gone. A famine came, and the son became desperate enough to long for the food given to pigs.

That suffering helped him see what he had refused to see before.

He returned to his father and said:

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.”

Luke 15:21

He did not blame the famine.

He did not blame the people who stopped helping when his money disappeared.

He did not blame his father for giving him the inheritance.

He named his own sin.

The father received him with love and restored him as a son. But the welcome did not erase the truth of what had happened. Grace met him as he returned in repentance.

The father maintained his love without preventing the consequences that helped his son recognize his need to return.

What We Can Learn

- Responsibility answers, “What belongs to me?” Blame asks, “Who can I make carry this instead?”
- Allowing a natural consequence is not the same as rejecting or shaming someone.
- Rescuing may reduce immediate discomfort while preventing responsibility from developing.
- We can offer support without taking ownership of another person’s task, decision, or repair.
- Grace does not require us to pretend that harmful choices have no consequences. Grace makes repentance and restoration possible.

Behind the Curtain

In coaching, I often see highly responsible family members carrying more than their share because allowing someone else to struggle feels unloving.

They remind repeatedly.

They finish forgotten tasks.

They explain away someone else’s behavior.

They absorb financial, emotional, or logistical consequences to keep the family functioning.

They may tell themselves, “It is easier if I just do it.”

In the short term, it often is.

But when one person repeatedly prevents consequences from reaching the person whose choices created them, the family loses an important opportunity for growth.

The over-carrying person becomes exhausted and resentful. The other person learns that responsibility can be delayed, argued away, or transferred.

Connection does not require this arrangement.

We can care about someone’s difficulty without taking ownership of it. We can help them think, provide appropriate instruction, or remain present while they solve the problem.

The question is not simply, “Can I fix this?”

The better question may be:

“Whose responsibility is this, and what kind of support would help without taking it over?”

Faithful Family Tools

When Conflict Patterns Keep Repeating

Sometimes it is difficult to tell whether your family is experiencing a normal struggle or a pattern that needs outside support.

The Do We Need Coaching? assessment will help you think through what is happening and identify a possible next step.

[Take the Do We Need Coaching? assessment](#)

Practice Responding Without Yelling

Allowing responsibility to land can create tension, especially when someone is accustomed to being reminded, rescued, or protected from consequences.

The No-Yelling Challenge will help you stay clear and steady without using volume to force cooperation.

[Join the No-Yelling Challenge](#)

Faith Step for the Week

Read Luke 15:11–24.

Notice what the father carried and what he did not carry.

He carried love for his son.

He carried grief over the separation.

He remained willing to welcome him home.

But he did not go into the distant country and live the son's life for him. He did not prevent every consequence. He allowed the son to recognize his choices and return.

Now consider a situation in your own family.

Ask:

“What belongs to me to steward?”

Then ask:

“What am I carrying that belongs to someone else?”

This is not a question about withdrawing love or refusing all help. It is a question about whether your help supports responsibility or replaces it.

Two-Minute Practice

Create two short lists.

Mine to steward

This might include:

- Speaking clearly
- Following through on an appropriate boundary
- Offering information or instruction
- Regulating my own response
- Remaining available for honest conversation

Not mine to carry

This might include:

- Making another person admit wrongdoing
- Preventing every natural consequence
- Completing a capable person's responsibility
- Managing someone else's reaction to my boundary
- Repairing damage I did not cause

Choose one responsibility that needs to return to the person who owns it.

Complete this sentence:

“I am willing to help by _____, but I will not take responsibility for _____.”

Prayer

Lord,

You love us faithfully, but You do not confuse love with removing every consequence of our choices.

Give us wisdom to know what belongs to us and courage to release what does not.

Keep us from using blame to avoid responsibility. Keep us also from over-carrying because we fear another person's struggle, disappointment, or disapproval.

Teach us to offer help that strengthens rather than replaces responsibility.

When we have done wrong, lead us toward honest repentance. When someone we love must face the results of their choices, help us remain connected without standing between them and the growth You may bring through truth.

Amen.

Coming Next

Recognizing responsibility is necessary, but it does not complete the repair.

Next week, we will bring the pieces of this series together and look at how to clear a breakdown: naming what happened, acknowledging its impact, making appropriate repair, and creating a trustworthy way forward.

Did you miss an issue? [Check out the newsletter archive.](#)