

Issue 51 - Before You React, Make Sure You Understand

Messy Story of the Week

The appointment had been on the calendar for weeks.

She had reminded her husband about it earlier in the week, and he had said he would be there. But when it was time to leave, he was still working on something in the garage.

She stood in the doorway, already holding her keys.

“Are you coming?”

He glanced at the clock.

“I didn’t realize it was this late. Give me a few minutes.”

Her thoughts moved quickly.

He knew this mattered to me.

I reminded him.

If it had mattered to him, he would have been ready.

By the time they got into the car, she was quiet and angry.

He noticed immediately.

“I said I was sorry. I lost track of time.”

“That’s always the answer.”

Now his thoughts began moving just as quickly.

Nothing I do is enough.

She was waiting for me to fail.

Why should I even try if one mistake proves I do not care?

They were both responding to something real. He had agreed to be ready, and he was not. She had reason to be frustrated.

But they were also responding to conclusions neither had confirmed.

She believed his lateness meant the appointment and her needs were unimportant to him.

He believed her frustration meant she saw him as a permanent disappointment.

The missed departure time was becoming a much larger story about the relationship.

Faithful God Then and Now

Joshua 22:10–34

After Israel entered the Promised Land, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh returned to the land they had been given on the other side of the Jordan River.

Before crossing the river, they built a large altar.

When the other tribes heard about it, they assumed the altar represented rebellion against God. God had commanded Israel to worship at the tabernacle. Another altar appeared to threaten the spiritual faithfulness of the entire nation.

The situation was serious. The other tribes gathered for war.

But before attacking, they sent Phinehas and representatives from each tribe to confront them.

The eastern tribes then explained that the altar was not intended for sacrifices. They feared that future generations living west of the Jordan might deny that their descendants belonged to Israel. The altar was meant to serve as a witness that they shared the same God and covenant.

When Phinehas and the leaders heard the explanation, “it was good in their sight” (Joshua 22:30).

The altar was real.

The concern about faithfulness was legitimate.

But the meaning Israel assigned to the altar was wrong.

An event that nearly started a war became an opportunity for greater clarity because someone stopped to ask what it meant before responding to what they assumed it meant.

What We Can Learn

- We do not respond only to what happened. We also respond to what we believe the event means.
- A sincere emotional reaction does not prove that our interpretation is accurate. The western tribes' concern was real, but their first conclusion was incomplete.
- Clarification is not the same as excusing harmful behavior. We can ask for understanding while still addressing a broken agreement or damaging choice.
- Approaching someone with a question can prevent an assumption from hardening into an accusation.
- Connection becomes safer when family members know they will have an opportunity to explain before conclusions are drawn about their motives or character.

Behind the Curtain

In coaching, I often see families arrive at the argument with two different problems.

One person is talking about the event:

“You were not ready when we agreed to leave.”

The other person is defending against the meaning that has been attached to it:

“You think I do not care about you.”

The conversation becomes confusing because they are no longer responding to the same thing.

Sometimes the meaning is spoken directly:

“If this family mattered to you, I would not have to remind you.”

Other times, it remains inside the person's thoughts but still shapes their tone, posture, and reaction.

A forgotten task can become evidence of selfishness.

A request for space can become evidence of rejection.

A teenager's quietness can become evidence of disrespect.

A spouse's question can become evidence of criticism or control.

The event may still need to be addressed. Losing track of time does not erase an agreement. But an inaccurate interpretation can turn a manageable breakdown into a conflict about the entire relationship.

Before deciding what someone's behavior reveals about their heart, we need enough curiosity to ask what happened.

Faithful Family Tools

Practice Responding Before the Volume Rises

Yelling often begins after our interpretation has moved ahead of the information we actually have. We react to what we think someone meant, and the other person reacts to the accusation they hear.

The No-Yelling Challenge will help you recognize what happens before the escalation and practice a clearer response.

[Join the No-Yelling Challenge](#)

Continue the Conversation on Facebook

Inside the Faithful Families Free Community, we talk about the ordinary conflicts that can quietly become larger relationship patterns. You will find practical tools, faith-rooted guidance, and conversations with people working through real family life.

[Join the Faithful Families Free Community](#)

Faith Step for the Week

Read Joshua 22:10–34.

As you read, notice the difference between what the western tribes knew and what they concluded.

They knew that an altar had been built.

They concluded that the other tribes had rebelled against God and endangered the whole nation.

Their conclusion made sense based on the information they had, but it was not accurate.

Think about one recent family interaction that produced a strong reaction.

Ask yourself:

“What do I know happened?”

Then ask:

“What did I decide it meant?”

You may discover that your interpretation was accurate. Clarifying the story does not require you to deny obvious patterns or disregard evidence.

It simply means separating what you observed from what you concluded long enough to seek the truth.

Two-Minute Practice

Divide a piece of paper into two sections.

Write:

What I know happened

Describe only what could have been seen, heard, or verified.

Then write:

What I interpreted it to mean

Name the belief or conclusion that shaped your reaction.

For example:

What I know happened:

He was not ready at the time we agreed to leave.

What I interpreted it to mean:

If the appointment mattered to him, he would have remembered without another reminder.

Now form one clarification question:

“Can you help me understand what happened from your perspective?”

The answer may not resolve the entire problem, but it gives you better information with which to address it.

Prayer

Lord,

You see what happened, what was intended, and what remains hidden from us.

Slow us down when our thoughts move ahead of the truth. Help us recognize the difference between what we know and what we have assumed.

Give us courage to ask clear questions and humility to listen to the answers. Keep us from assigning motives carelessly or using our interpretations as weapons.

When an agreement has been broken, help us address it honestly. When we have misunderstood, help us correct the story without protecting our pride.

Teach us to seek truth in ways that preserve both responsibility and connection.

Amen.

Coming Next

Sometimes clarification reveals a misunderstanding. Other times, it confirms that someone disregarded an agreement or made a choice that caused harm.

Next week, we will look at the difference between blame and responsibility—and why staying connected does not require us to rescue people from the consequences of their choices.

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