

Issue 53 - Do Not Just End the Argument Repair What Broke

Messy Story of the Week

The agreement was simple.

Their twenty-year-old son could borrow the family car as long as he returned it with at least a quarter tank of gas.

On Saturday evening, he brought the car home and left the keys on the counter.

The next morning, his mother drove it to an appointment. Several miles from home, the car began sputtering.

She barely reached a gas station before it stopped.

When she called home, frustrated and now late, her son responded:

“You should have checked the gas before you left.”

Technically, she could have checked.

But that was not the agreement.

When she returned home, the conversation quickly became an argument about whether responsible drivers should always check the gas gauge.

Her son kept defending his point. She kept trying to make him admit that he had caused the problem.

Eventually, he said, “Fine. I’m sorry.”

But nothing felt repaired.

The argument had ended, but several things remained unresolved:

He had disregarded an agreement.

His choice had created extra work and disrupted her plans.

He had shifted responsibility instead of acknowledging the impact.

No one had established what would happen differently the next time he used the car.

"I'm sorry" had closed the conversation without clearing the breakdown.

Faithful God Then and Now

Luke 19:1–10

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. His position gave him the opportunity to collect more than people owed and keep the difference.

When Jesus came to Jericho, Zacchaeus climbed a tree so he could see Him. Jesus stopped, called him by name, and went to his home.

That encounter changed something in Zacchaeus.

He stood and said:

"If I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold."

Luke 19:8

Zacchaeus did not offer a vague apology.

He did not say that everyone made mistakes or explain that dishonesty was simply part of the tax system.

He recognized that his choices had cost other people something.

His repentance included restitution.

That does not mean every wrong can be undone or that every relationship will immediately return to what it was. Some consequences remain. Some wounds require considerable time and consistent change.

But biblical repentance moves toward the damage.

It asks:

What did I do?

Why was it wrong?

What did it cost someone else?

What can I do to make it right?

What must change now?

Jesus brought grace into Zacchaeus's home. That grace did not help Zacchaeus avoid responsibility. It transformed the way he responded to it.

What We Can Learn

- Begin by making the conversation safe enough for honesty. If someone is yelling, threatening, mocking, or too overwhelmed to listen, pause and establish a specific time to return.
- Name what happened and clarify what broke down. Separate observable facts from motives, accusations, and assumptions. Identify the agreement, boundary, trust, or communication that failed.
- Own what belongs to you and acknowledge the impact. Responsibility includes more than admitting the action. It means recognizing what the choice cost another person in time, trust, safety, work, money, or connection.
- Make the appropriate repair and create a new agreement. Repair may include an apology, restitution, a corrected misunderstanding, a changed plan, an appropriate consequence, or a clearer boundary.
- Follow through and revisit the agreement. One conversation may begin the repair, but changed behavior is what makes the new agreement trustworthy.

Behind the Curtain

In coaching, I often see families who know how to stop an argument but do not know how to complete a repair.

Someone apologizes because the conversation has become uncomfortable.

Someone else says, "I forgive you," because they believe continuing to talk about the impact would be unkind or unchristian.

Everyone moves on, but the original problem remains.

The agreement is still unclear.

The consequence lands with the wrong person.

The behavior is repeated.

The hurt person brings it up again because nothing has changed, and the person who apologized responds:

"I already said I was sorry. What else do you want?"

Usually, what the other person wants is not a longer apology.

They want evidence that the impact has been understood and that the pattern will change.

A Faithful Apology includes five elements:

1. What I did wrong
2. Why it was wrong
3. What it cost you
4. A request for forgiveness
5. How I will make it right or act differently

In the car situation, that might sound like:

“I returned the car without the amount of gas we agreed on. That was wrong because I accepted the terms when I borrowed it. You were delayed and had to deal with a problem I created. Then I blamed you instead of taking responsibility. Will you forgive me? I will fill the tank today, and the next time I borrow the car, I will send you a picture of the gas gauge when I return it.”

That apology does not demand immediate trust. It creates a basis for rebuilding it.

When an Apology Is Not the Right Repair

Not every breakdown involves wrongdoing.

Sometimes two people understood the agreement differently. An expectation was never communicated. Plans changed, but one person did not receive the information. Someone expressed an emotion or set a reasonable boundary that another person did not like.

An apology should not be required simply because someone is disappointed or upset.

A forced apology can hide the actual breakdown by assigning guilt where clarification is needed.

When no one did wrong, the repair might sound like:

“We understood the plan differently. Let’s decide exactly what we are agreeing to now.”

Clearing a breakdown requires truth. Sometimes that truth includes confession and repentance. Sometimes it includes recognizing that the family needs a clearer system rather than someone to blame.

Do Not Use Forgiveness to Bypass Repair

Forgiveness is central to Christian life, but it should not be used to silence pain, avoid accountability, erase appropriate consequences, or demand immediate trust.

If forgiveness is to be real, repentance must be real.

Real repentance does not simply regret the conflict or the consequence. It fully owns the action and its impact, seeks to repair what was damaged, and changes direction.

A person may choose to release vengeance and entrust justice to God before the relationship is fully repaired. But that is not the same as pretending the damage does not matter or declaring trust restored.

Forgiveness, reconciliation, and trust are related, but they are not identical.

Trust grows as repentance produces consistent fruit.

Faithful Family Tools

Understand What Is Happening Beneath the Conflict

Repeated conflict is often a sign that something deeper remains unresolved. My free audio course, *What's Happening in Your Relationships?*, will help you identify the patterns beneath the visible struggle and consider what needs attention.

[Listen to the free course](#)

Is It Time for More Support?

Some breakdowns can be addressed through one clear conversation and a better agreement. Others involve patterns that have become difficult to change without help.

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](#)

Faith Step for the Week

Read Luke 19:1–10.

Notice that Zacchaeus's repentance moved beyond words.

He recognized that his actions had affected real people. He did not get to decide that the cost was insignificant simply because he was ready to move forward.

Think of one unresolved but manageable breakdown in your family.

Do not begin by deciding who must apologize.

Begin with this invitation:

“I would like us to understand what broke down and decide what repair would look like.”

Then consider:

- What happened?
- What did each person understand or expect?
- What responsibility belongs to each person?
- What was the impact?
- What kind of repair is appropriate?
- What needs to happen differently?

For a serious breach of trust or a situation involving intimidation, coercion, violence, or ongoing deception, do not attempt to force a private repair conversation. Safety and appropriate outside support come first.

Two-Minute Practice

Choose one recent conflict and answer three questions:

What happened?

Describe the event without assigning motives.

What was the impact?

Consider time, trust, work, money, safety, property, or connection.

What needs to happen next?

Name one specific repair, agreement, boundary, or follow-through action.

Keep your answers concrete.

Instead of:

“He needs to care more.”

Try:

“He agreed to complete the task by Friday. We need to decide whether he still owns it, when it will be completed, and what will happen if the agreement is not kept.”

Prayer

Lord,

You meet us with grace that tells the truth and makes restoration possible.

Give us courage to face what has broken down without hiding, blaming, or rushing past the impact.

Teach us to own what belongs to us and release what does not. When we have caused harm, lead us into repentance that produces real change. When we have been harmed, give us wisdom to recognize the difference between forgiveness, reconciliation, and rebuilt trust.

Help our families do more than end arguments.

Teach us to repair what has been damaged, establish clearer agreements, and follow through with integrity.

May our conflicts become places where truth and grace meet—and where deeper connection becomes possible.

Amen.

Coming Next

We can approach a breakdown faithfully, but we cannot complete another person's repentance for them.

Next week, we will look at what happens when someone apologizes without changing, refuses responsibility, or will not participate in repair. We will learn from David's relationship with Saul that refusing revenge does not require us to ignore repeated behavior or return to an unsafe arrangement.

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