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Issue 55 — Before You Assume, Ask

Messy Story of the Week

Rachel noticed the unfinished science project on the dining room table. Again.

"Eli, why haven't you finished this?" she asked her thirteen-year-old son. "You've had all week."

"I know!" he snapped. "Just leave me alone!"

Rachel immediately began forming conclusions: *He doesn't care. He's being disrespectful. If I don't stay on top of him, nothing will get done.*

Her irritation rose from those interpretations. She was ready to lecture him about responsibility when she remembered something she had been practicing: Before you assume, ask.

She took a breath.

"It sounds like something about this project feels bigger than the actual work," she said. "What am I missing?"

Eli stared at the table.

After a long silence, he admitted, "We have to present it in front of the class. Last time, some kids laughed when I forgot what I was supposed to say."

The unfinished project was still his responsibility. Speaking sharply to his mother still needed to be addressed. But laziness wasn't the whole story.

Rachel could have responded to the behavior she saw while completely missing the fear underneath it.

One curious question did not finish the project or erase the disrespect. It gave them better information so they could address the real problem together.

Faithful God Then and Now

"To answer before listening—that is folly and shame." — Proverbs 18:13

God does not ask questions because He lacks information. Throughout Scripture, He uses questions to invite people to stop, examine what is happening, and bring what is hidden into the light.

Jesus did this too.

When a blind man named Bartimaeus cried out for mercy, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The answer may have appeared obvious, but Jesus did not reduce Bartimaeus to an assumption. He gave the man an opportunity to name his need for himself.

In ordinary family life, we often do the opposite. We see an expression, hear a tone, or notice an unfinished responsibility, and decide we already know what it means.

She is being dramatic.

He doesn't care.

My child is lazy.

My spouse is trying to control me.

Sometimes our interpretation may contain part of the truth. But Proverbs warns us against answering before we have listened.

Faithfulness can look surprisingly ordinary. It may mean pausing long enough to ask one more question before deciding that we understand the whole story.

What We Can Learn

- **Our first interpretation is not always the complete story.** We respond emotionally not only to what happened, but also to what we believe the other person's behavior means. Curiosity helps us examine that interpretation.
- **Understanding does not remove responsibility.** Learning that Eli was afraid did not make his sharp response acceptable or complete the project. It helped Rachel respond to both the fear and the behavior.
- **Questions can lower defensiveness.** Accusations pressure people to protect themselves. A sincere question gives them room to think, explain, and tell the truth.
- **The goal is not to interrogate or steer.** A "question" used to corner someone—"Don't you think you're being selfish?"—is still an accusation. Faithful curiosity seeks information, not leverage.
- **The best way to know is to ask.** We cannot read another person's heart. We can notice patterns and use wisdom, but we still need humility about what we do not know.

Behind the Curtain

In coaching conversations, I often see families trying to solve problems before they understand them.

A spouse explains why the other person's concern is unnecessary. A parent gives advice before a child has finished speaking. Someone hears disappointment as criticism and immediately begins defending an intention that was never actually questioned.

The conversation moves quickly, but it does not move deeply.

Healthy communication and problem-solving are related, but they are not the same step. First, we talk about the problem. Then we listen to understand. After that, we can work toward a solution together.

One helpful way to slow the conversation is to replace certainty with curiosity:

- "Help me understand."
- "Tell me more about that."
- "What feels most important to you here?"
- "What do you wish I understood?"
- "What might I be missing?"

These questions are not magic phrases. Tone and motive matter. But when they come from genuine humility, they can help shift a conversation from *me against you* to *us looking at the problem together*.

Faithful Family Tools

Want help recognizing what is happening beneath the surface of your relationships?

Start with the free course, **What's Happening in Your Relationships?** It will help you notice patterns and begin identifying your next faithful step:

[Access the free course](#)

Would you like a safe place to keep learning with other Christian families?

Join the Faithful Families community on Facebook for practical teaching, thoughtful conversations, and encouragement for the messy work of family life:

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Faith Step for the Week

Bible Passage

Read Proverbs 18:2 and Proverbs 18:13.

Notice the contrast between wanting to express our own opinions and taking the time to listen before answering.

Two-Minute Practice

Think of one recent moment when you reacted strongly to your spouse or child.

Ask yourself:

1. What happened that I could observe as a fact?
2. What did I assume that behavior meant?
3. What respectful question could I ask to learn more?

Choose one simple question to practice this week:

"Help me understand what was happening for you."

Prayer

Faithful God, You know every heart completely, yet You are patient with us. Forgive me for the times I assume, label, or answer before I have listened. Give me humility about what I do not know and wisdom

to ask questions that make room for truth. Help me listen with patience, respond with grace, and address problems with both compassion and clarity. Amen.

Coming Next

Next week, we will talk about what happens after we ask the question. How do we remain present when our spouse or child begins sharing something difficult—especially when we can already see a solution? We will explore how to listen without rushing to fix, correct, or defend.

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