Issue 62 - What Kind of Help Do We Need?

Messy Story of the Week

When Mara first talked to a trusted woman from church, she called it a communication problem.

“Ethan gets angry when I bring up money,” she explained. “I need to find a better way to talk to him.”

Her friend asked what usually happened during those conversations.

Mara described how Ethan interrupted her, raised his voice, and accused her of trying to control him. Sometimes he left the room and refused to speak to her for days.

Her friend listened without attempting to diagnose their marriage.

Then she asked, “What happened the last time you tried?”

Mara hesitated.

Ethan had spent money they needed for the electric bill. When Mara asked about it, he grabbed her phone and refused to return it. When she moved toward the door, he stood in front of it.

“He didn’t hit me,” Mara added quickly.

“Were you afraid?”

Mara looked down at her hands. “I knew I couldn’t leave until he decided the conversation was over.”

That answer changed the conversation.

Mara had come hoping for better words—something calm enough, gentle enough, or respectful enough to keep Ethan from becoming angry.

But the immediate problem was not that she had chosen the wrong opening sentence.

The problem was that Ethan had used his body and her phone to prevent her from leaving.

Her friend did not tell her to confront him more firmly. She did not arrange a meeting where Mara would have to describe his behavior in front of him. She helped Mara contact someone trained to assess relationship violence and create a safety plan.

That did not answer every question about Mara’s marriage. It did help her take the next right step.

Other couples need different kinds of help.

Some are loving and committed but repeatedly misunderstand one another. They may benefit from a class, a mentor couple, or marriage coaching.

Some are carrying trauma, severe depression, complicated grief, or longstanding emotional wounds that require the care of a licensed therapist.

Some are living with an active addiction, an ongoing affair, threats, intimidation, or violence. Communication tips alone cannot address those situations.

The question is not whether one couple's problem is "bad enough" compared with another's.

The question is:

> **What kind of support does this situation require?**

Faithful God, Then and Now

First Samuel 25 describes a situation that had already become dangerous.

Nabal had insulted David and refused his request for provisions. David responded by gathering hundreds of armed men and setting out to kill every male in Nabal's household.

One of Nabal's servants recognized the danger and went to Abigail.

He did not tell her that there had been a minor misunderstanding or that everyone needed to calm down and communicate more clearly. He gave her an honest account of the danger and urged her to consider what she would do.

Abigail responded quickly.

She gathered provisions, went out to meet David, and appealed to him before he could carry out his plan. She acknowledged the seriousness of what had happened while reminding David of the man God had called him to become.

David listened.

> "David said to Abigail, 'Blessed is Yahweh, the God of Israel, who sent you today to meet me! Blessed is your discretion, and blessed are you, who have kept me today from blood guiltiness, and from avenging myself with my own hand.'"
> —1 Samuel 25:32–33, WEB

David did not praise Abigail for helping everyone express themselves more effectively. He recognized that God had used her intervention to stop him from committing terrible harm.

> “So David received from her hand that which she had brought him. Then he said to her, ‘Go up in peace to your house. Behold, I have listened to your voice and have granted your request.’”
> —1 Samuel 25:35, WEB

Abigail’s story should not be used to place responsibility on spouses—especially women—to manage dangerous people perfectly. Abigail was not simply choosing better communication with a difficult husband. She was responding to an immediate threat created by the actions of powerful and volatile men.

She also did not speak to Nabal while he was drunk. She waited until morning, when he was sober, before telling him what had happened.

This was not an ordinary disagreement requiring an ordinary relationship skill.

It required truth, discernment, timing, courage, and immediate intervention.

God cares about reconciliation and repair. He also cares about protecting people from preventable harm. Wisdom means recognizing the difference between a problem that needs better communication and a situation that requires specialized or urgent support.

What We Can Learn

- **Not every marriage problem is a communication problem.** Better words cannot resolve active addiction, stop an ongoing affair, or make coercive and violent behavior safe.
- **The right help depends on what is happening.** Coaching, therapy, pastoral care, addiction treatment, medical care, and domestic-violence services have different purposes.
- **Safety comes before joint communication practice.** When one spouse fears retaliation, cannot disagree freely, or is being threatened or controlled, asking that person to become more vulnerable in a joint conversation may increase the danger.
- **Urgent help is not an overreaction to urgent conditions.** Abigail recognized that lives were at risk and acted accordingly.
- **Receiving specialized help is an act of truthfulness.** Accurately naming the problem gives everyone a better opportunity to respond responsibly.

Behind the Curtain

People often begin by describing the problem they believe they are permitted to have.

They say:

> "We need help communicating."

But further conversation may reveal:

- One spouse is afraid of the other's reactions.
- An affair is still ongoing.
- Alcohol, pornography, gambling, or drug use continues to be hidden or denied.
- One person controls access to money, transportation, communication, or medical care.
- Severe depression, trauma symptoms, or suicidal thoughts are present.
- Arguments include threats, physical intimidation, destruction of property, or violence.
- One spouse wants help only so a professional will convince the other person to comply.

These situations do involve communication—but communication is not the whole problem.

Marriage coaching is most useful when both spouses can participate freely, recognize that something is not working, and are willing to examine their own behavior. They may be stuck in recurring conflicts, but neither person has to fear what will happen for speaking honestly.

When those conditions are not present, another kind of support may need to come first.

That does not always mean the marriage is over. It means we are refusing to treat a serious wound as though it only needs a bandage.

It is also possible for a couple to need more than one kind of support. Someone receiving treatment for addiction may also need individual therapy. The other spouse may need help establishing boundaries and recovering from betrayal. Marriage work may become appropriate later, once honesty, safety, and stability have been established.

Choosing the right support is not giving up on the marriage.

Sometimes it is the most truthful way to begin caring for everyone involved.

Faithful Family Tools

Here is a simple starting point for thinking about different kinds of help.

Marriage education or mentoring

This may be helpful when a couple is generally stable and wants to strengthen the relationship, prepare for a transition, or learn from a wise and trustworthy couple.

Examples include:

- a marriage class
- a retreat
- a mentor couple
- a book or structured course
- a small group focused on relationship growth

Marriage coaching

Coaching may be appropriate when both spouses recognize that something is not working and are willing to practice new skills.

Common coaching concerns include:

- repeated misunderstandings
- recurring but manageable conflicts
- difficulty listening without defending
- ineffective problem-solving
- disconnection during stressful seasons
- trouble repairing after hurt
- unclear relationship goals
- patterns both people are willing to examine

Marriage coaching is not a substitute for medical care, mental-health treatment, addiction treatment, or protection from violence.

Licensed therapy

A licensed therapist may be needed when one or both spouses are experiencing:

- significant trauma symptoms
- severe anxiety or depression
- complicated grief
- a mental-health condition affecting daily functioning
- longstanding individual wounds that repeatedly overwhelm relationship work
- distress that requires assessment, diagnosis, or clinical treatment

Some couples may also benefit from a licensed marriage and family therapist for deeply entrenched marital distress.

Specialized treatment

Active addiction, compulsive sexual behavior, eating disorders, or other serious conditions often require professionals specifically trained in those areas.

An ongoing affair also requires more than general communication coaching. The outside relationship must end, truth must be established, and the injured spouse must be able to make informed decisions before meaningful rebuilding can begin.

Safety and crisis support

Threats, stalking, physical violence, forced sexual contact, blocking exits, taking someone's phone, destroying property, controlling necessary resources, or creating fear through intimidation require a safety-centered response.

If you are in immediate danger, contact emergency services.

In the United States, the National Domestic Violence Hotline is available by calling **800-799-SAFE (7233)**, texting **START** to **88788**, or using its online chat. Be mindful that internet activity may be monitored; use a safer device when possible.

You do not have to determine the future of your marriage before asking for help. You can begin by telling the truth about what is happening and finding someone qualified to help you identify the next safe and responsible step.

Work With Tanja

If your marriage is safe, both spouses are willing to participate, and you need practical help understanding recurring patterns, communicating clearly, and repairing conflict, marriage coaching may be a good fit.

The screening process helps determine whether coaching is appropriate before you register.

Work With Tanja: https://faithfulfamilycoaching.com/apply

Newsletter

If this issue could help someone distinguish between ordinary relationship struggles and concerns that require specialized support, forward it privately and without pressure.

Community

Join the Faithful Families community for thoughtful conversations about marriage, parenting, emotional maturity, boundaries, and practical relationship skills.

Join the community:
https://www.facebook.com/groups/tanjascoachingcommunity

Blog

Find more encouragement and practical tools at:

Blog

Faith Step for the Week

Bible Passage

Read 1 Samuel 25:14–35.

As you read, notice:

- The servant accurately described the danger to Abigail.
- Abigail did not minimize the seriousness of the situation.
- She acted with urgency before harm occurred.
- She chose her timing carefully.
- David listened when confronted and changed his course.
- The immediate goal was preventing harm—not facilitating an ordinary conversation between Abigail and Nabal.

Consider:

- Do I tend to minimize a serious problem because naming it accurately would require action?
- Am I trying to solve a specialized problem with ordinary relationship advice?
- Is there a wise, qualified person who needs to know what is happening?
- What is the next truthful, safe, and responsible step?

Two-Minute Practice

Complete this sentence:

> **The problem we keep trying to solve is _____.**

Then ask:

> **What have we already tried, and what does the result tell us about the kind of help we need?**

If you are both safe and able to speak freely, discuss whether your next step is:

- learning a specific skill
- talking with a trusted mentor or pastor
- seeking marriage coaching
- finding a licensed therapist
- consulting a specialist
- seeking individual or safety-focused support

You do not need to solve the entire future today.

Identify the next appropriate source of help.

Prayer

> Faithful God,
> Give us wisdom to recognize what is happening in our relationships and courage to name it truthfully. Keep us from minimizing serious harm, and keep us from treating every difficulty as though disaster is inevitable. Lead us toward wise counsel, qualified support, and the next faithful step. Protect those who are living with fear or danger. Give humility to those whose choices are causing harm, strength to those who need boundaries, and discernment to everyone offering help. Teach us to pursue truth, safety, responsibility, repentance, and genuine repair.
>
> Amen.

Coming Next

Family life gives us endless opportunities to misunderstand one another, learn something new, practice repair, and discover God's faithfulness in ordinary places.

Next week, we will begin a new conversation about one of those everyday places where family relationships are formed—often through smaller moments than we realize.