faithful
family coaching

Issue 58 — Questions That Change the Direction of Conflict

Messy Story of the Week

When Caleb told his wife that he had invited his parents for Sunday dinner, he expected her to be pleased.

Instead, Anna stared at him.

“You invited them without asking me?”

“It’s just dinner,” Caleb said. “Why are you making this into such a big deal?”

Anna felt her shoulders tighten. *He has no idea how much work this creates for me. Now I’m going to spend the entire weekend cleaning, planning, shopping, and cooking while he enjoys visiting with his parents.*

“You can call them back and cancel,” she said.

Caleb heard something different: *She doesn't want my family here. Spending time with them doesn't matter to her.*

"I'm not uninviting my parents because you decided to be difficult."

Within minutes, they were arguing about far more than Sunday dinner.

Later, when they were both calmer, Caleb tried again.

"What about Sunday feels unmanageable to you?" he asked.

Anna explained that the house was already behind, one of the children had a Saturday tournament, and she had assumed she would be responsible for getting everything ready.

Caleb had thought they could order food and straighten the main rooms together Sunday afternoon. He had never expected an elaborate meal or a perfectly clean house—but he had not communicated that.

Then Anna asked him, "What feels most important to you about having them over this weekend?"

Caleb explained that his father had an upcoming medical appointment. He was more worried than he had admitted and wanted time with both of his parents before the appointment.

The questions did not erase the fact that Caleb should have consulted Anna before extending the invitation. They did not mean Anna had to absorb the work his decision created.

They did reveal the concerns hiding beneath their positions.

Once they understood the actual problem, they could make a plan: Caleb would clean and order dinner, the children would help with the main rooms, and Anna would not be responsible for creating a polished family gathering.

They stopped arguing over who was being unreasonable and began addressing the problem together.

Faithful God Then and Now

“The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.” — Proverbs 20:5

After Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Baal, Queen Jezebel threatened his life. Elijah fled into the wilderness, exhausted and afraid.

God knew exactly why Elijah was hiding. Yet He still asked, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

The question gave Elijah room to name what he was carrying. He believed he had been faithful, that his work had accomplished nothing, and that he was now completely alone.

God listened—and then responded to both Elijah’s exhaustion and his incomplete understanding. He provided food and rest, gave Elijah direction, and revealed that Elijah was not as alone as he believed.

God’s question was not an interrogation. It drew out what was hidden so that it could be addressed with truth and care.

The purposes of the human heart are still deep waters. What appears on the surface as stubbornness, anger, withdrawal, or control may be connected to fear, disappointment, grief, expectations, or a desire that has never been clearly expressed.

Wise questions help bring those deeper concerns into the light.

What We Can Learn

- **Positions tell us what someone wants; questions help us understand why it matters.** Anna wanted Caleb to cancel. Caleb wanted the dinner to happen. Their concerns were shared responsibility and worry about a parent’s health.
- **“Why?” can sometimes sound like an accusation.** “Why are you acting this way?” often invites defensiveness. “What feels most important here?” creates more room for reflection.
- **A useful question slows certainty.** Asking “What might I be missing?” reminds us that our interpretation may not contain the

whole story.

- **Understanding does not erase accountability.** Caleb's concern for his father did not make it appropriate to commit Anna's time without consulting her. Insight helped them address both his concern and his responsibility.
- **The goal is a shared understanding, not a strategic advantage.** Questions should not be used to corner someone, force a confession, or guide them toward the answer we have already chosen.

Behind the Curtain

In coaching, I often see families argue over proposed solutions before they have agreed on the actual problem.

One person thinks the problem is money. The other thinks it is trust.

One thinks the problem is an unfinished chore. The other thinks it is carrying the mental load alone.

One thinks the problem is a child's attitude. The child is wrestling with embarrassment, fear, or an expectation they do not know how to express.

When the concern beneath the position remains hidden, families keep offering solutions that do not fit.

Better questions can change the direction of the conversation:

To uncover the concern:

- "What are you most concerned might happen?"
- "What about this feels difficult or unfair?"
- "What feels most important to you here?"

To check your understanding:

- "It sounds like you are worried that _____. Did I understand that correctly?"

- “What am I missing?”
- “Is there another part of this that I have not considered?”

To move toward shared responsibility:

- “What would a workable solution look like?”
- “What part of this belongs to you, and what part belongs to me?”
- “How can we approach this as a team?”
- “What is one small next step we can agree on?”

These questions work best when they are asked calmly and sincerely.

“How is that supposed to work?” can be a genuine request for clarification—or a disguised way of saying, “That will never work.” The words matter, but our tone, timing, and purpose matter too.

Faithful curiosity does not use questions to control the outcome. It makes room for truth, responsibility, and wiser decisions.

Faithful Family Tools

Are repeated disagreements pointing to a deeper pattern in your relationships?

The “Do We Need Coaching?” assessment can help you evaluate what is happening and consider whether additional support would be useful:

Take the assessment

Do conflicts escalate before your family can understand the real problem?

The No Yelling Challenge offers practical tools for interrupting reactive habits and building calmer, more constructive responses:

Join the No Yelling Challenge

Faith Step for the Week

Bible Passage

Read 1 Kings 19:1–18.

Notice how God responds to Elijah's physical exhaustion, listens to what Elijah believes is happening, and then gives him truth, direction, and a next step.

Two-Minute Practice

Think of one unresolved disagreement in your family.

Write down the position each person has taken:

I want: _____

They want: _____

Now choose one question that could help you understand the concern beneath their position:

- "What are you most concerned might happen?"
- "What feels most important to you about this?"
- "What might I be missing?"
- "What would a workable solution look like?"

Ask the question without arguing with the answer. Listen for the concern, expectation, or interpretation beneath the person's words.

You do not have to solve everything in that moment. The faithful next step may simply be understanding the problem more accurately.

Prayer

Faithful God, You know the purposes of every heart. Give me wisdom to ask questions that draw out truth rather than provoke defensiveness. Help me release the need to win, prove my point, or control the outcome. Teach me to listen for the concerns beneath the words while still speaking clearly about responsibility. Lead our family away from

opposing sides and help us face problems together with humility, courage, and love. Amen.

Coming Next

This month, we practiced four small acts of relational faithfulness: asking before assuming, listening without immediately fixing, affirming without automatically agreeing, and using thoughtful questions to uncover what matters. Next month, we will continue looking at the ordinary choices through which God strengthens families—one honest conversation and one faithful next step at a time.

Did you miss an issue?

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Faithful Family Coaching
1801 North Osage BLVD
Nevada, MO 64772

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