Issue 59 - When Getting Help Feels Like Giving Up

Messy Story of the Week

Daniel and his brother Mark had spent most of Saturday morning replacing a section of fence behind their mother's house. They had already made two trips to the hardware store, disagreed about the best way to set the posts, and discovered that neither of them had brought enough water.

It was familiar, ordinary work—the kind that made conversation easier because they did not have to look directly at each other.

As Mark held one of the posts steady, Daniel said, "Rachel thinks we should talk to someone."

Mark adjusted the level. "About what?"

"Our marriage."

Mark looked up, but Daniel quickly added, "It's not like we're getting divorced or anything. We're not even close to that. She just thinks we need help communicating."

The word *help* came out with more irritation than Daniel intended.

"We have the same argument over and over," he continued. "She says I don't listen. I say she never tells me what she actually wants. But getting counseling or coaching seems extreme. It makes it sound like we're one of those couples."

Mark was quiet for a moment.

Finally, he said, "We were one of those couples."

Daniel laughed. "You and Amanda? You barely even argue."

"Oh, we argued. We just did it quietly."

A few years earlier, Mark explained, nearly every conversation about money had followed the same pattern. Amanda would bring up something that concerned her. Mark would immediately start proposing solutions. When she kept trying to explain, he assumed she was rejecting every reasonable option he offered. She interpreted his solutions as evidence that he had not heard what mattered to her.

They would leave the conversation frustrated, each convinced that the other person was the reason they could not solve anything.

Amanda eventually suggested marriage coaching.

“I didn’t want to go,” Mark admitted. “I thought we should be able to figure it out ourselves. And I didn’t want some stranger deciding which one of us was the problem.”

“Did they?”

“No. That was kind of the point. We learned to recognize what was happening between us before we started blaming each other for it.”

The coaching had not eliminated every disagreement or transformed them into people who communicated perfectly. But they stopped turning each money conversation into a verdict about whether Mark cared or whether Amanda could ever be satisfied. They learned to slow down, clarify the purpose of the conversation, and make sure they understood each other before trying to solve the problem.

Mark picked up the post-hole digger again.

“We didn’t go because our marriage was ending,” he said. “We went because we were tired of making the same problem worse.”

Daniel did not go home suddenly excited about marriage coaching. He still disliked the idea of telling someone else what had been happening between him and Rachel.

But for the first time, accepting help did not sound quite so much like admitting that their marriage was failing.

Maybe it could mean they were ready to learn something they had not yet figured out on their own.

Faithful God, Then and Now

Moses had been given an enormous responsibility. The Israelites came to him with their disputes, and he sat from morning until evening trying to help them discern what God required.

From Moses’ perspective, he was doing the work God had given him.

But his father-in-law, Jethro, saw something Moses could not see clearly from inside the situation.

> “The thing that you do is not good. You will surely wear away, both you, and this people that is with you; for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to perform it yourself alone.”

—Exodus 18:17–18, WEB

Jethro was not accusing Moses of being unfaithful. He was not suggesting that Moses had failed in his calling. He recognized that Moses' current way of carrying the responsibility was unsustainable—and that it was affecting the people around him too.

Moses could have defended himself. He could have insisted that God had called him, that he understood the people better than Jethro did, or that receiving help would reveal weakness.

Instead, Moses listened.

Jethro helped him establish a wiser structure so that other capable people could share the burden. Moses remained responsible for his calling, but he no longer tried to fulfill it entirely by himself.

Marriage is different from leading a nation through the wilderness, of course. But the underlying truth still matters:

Receiving help is not necessarily evidence that we have failed. Sometimes wise help is one of the ways God equips us to become more faithful.

We sometimes assume that a strong Christian couple should be able to resolve every problem privately. But Scripture does not treat teachability as weakness. Again and again, wisdom is connected to our willingness to listen, learn, and receive counsel.

> "Where there is no counsel, plans fail; but in a multitude of counselors they are established."
>
> —Proverbs 15:22, WEB

The question is not whether a faithful couple ever needs help.

The question is whether we will remain teachable when our current way of responding is no longer serving the relationship well.

What We Can Learn

- **Getting help does not mean divorce is approaching.** It may mean a couple has noticed a pattern early enough to address it while affection, goodwill, and hope are still strong.
- **Repeated conflict is often maintained by a pattern, not one defective person.** Couples can become so focused on defending their intentions or identifying the other person's mistake that they cannot see what is happening between them.

- **Love does not automatically teach us relationship skills.** Two people can care deeply for one another and still need to learn how to listen, clarify, regulate their reactions, repair hurt, and work through disagreement.
- **Teachability is a form of wisdom.** Seeking counsel is not an admission that we are incapable of faithfulness. It is an acknowledgment that faithfulness sometimes requires learning.
- **Earlier help usually provides more room to practice.** Couples do not have to wait until every conversation carries years of accumulated hurt before trying something different.

Behind the Curtain

When Kevin and I had been married for about five years, our marriage was not going well, and I wanted us to get marriage counseling.

Kevin was terrified.

He had seen couples enter counseling and later divorce, so counseling looked to him like the beginning of the end. At one point, he was literally on his knees, crying and begging me not to pursue it.

His fear was real. But looking back, I wonder whether counseling had caused those marriages to end—or whether those couples had waited until years of injury, resentment, and disconnection had left them with very little room to work.

My sister and brother had different experiences. They sought counseling earlier in their marriages, and it made a significant difference for both of them. I learned from watching them too.

Over the years, I have seen couples come for help at many different stages. Some arrive while they still have enough trust and goodwill to practice new skills together, and they begin thriving. Some are barely hanging on. Others have already begun separating, or one spouse has decided that changing is no longer something they are willing to consider.

No coach or counselor can guarantee the outcome of a marriage. Reaching out earlier does not guarantee an easy path.

But it often gives a couple more options, more hope, and more room to learn before every difficulty becomes evidence that nothing will ever change.

Faithful Family Tools

You do not have to decide whether your marriage is “bad enough” before acknowledging that something is not working.

A more useful question might be:

> **Would learning some new skills now help us care for our marriage more faithfully?**

Marriage coaching may be a good fit when both spouses recognize that something needs to change and are willing to examine their own responses. Coaching can help couples identify recurring patterns, communicate more clearly, understand what lies beneath repeated conflicts, and practice meaningful repair.

If you and your spouse are repeatedly getting stuck in the same place, you can learn more about working with me here:

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

Newsletter

Know someone who believes getting help means a marriage is already failing? Forward this issue to them with a simple note: *“This made me think about the way we sometimes misunderstand marriage support.”*

Community

Join the Faithful Families community for practical conversations about marriage, parenting, emotional maturity, and building stronger family relationships one faithful step at a time.

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

Blog

You can find more encouragement and practical relationship tools at:

FaithfulFamilyCoaching.com

Faith Step for the Week

Bible Passage

Read Exodus 18:13–24.

As you read, notice that Jethro did not question Moses' commitment. He helped Moses recognize that his current approach was wearing down both him and the people he was trying to serve.

Consider:

- What did Jethro see that Moses could not see from inside the situation?
- How did Moses respond when someone questioned his approach?
- Where might faithfulness require you to become more teachable?

Two-Minute Practice

Ask your spouse:

> "When you think about getting outside help for a marriage, what do you assume it means?"

Do not argue with the answer or try to persuade your spouse immediately.

Listen for the belief underneath it.

Does seeking help represent failure? Exposure? Judgment? Loss of privacy? Fear that an outsider will take sides? Fear that the marriage is worse than you thought?

Then reflect back what you heard:

> "It sounds like getting help would mean _____ to you. Did I understand that correctly?"

The goal is not to decide today whether you need coaching or counseling. The goal is to understand what each of you believes about receiving help.

Prayer

> Faithful God,
> thank You for caring about the way we care for one another. Give us humility when we need to learn, courage when we need to ask for help, and wisdom to recognize patterns we cannot see clearly on our own. Free us from the belief that needing guidance means we have failed. Teach us to receive wise counsel and to use what we learn in service of love, faithfulness, and repair.
>
> Amen.

Coming Next

A marriage does not have to be in crisis before a recurring pattern deserves attention.

Next week, we will look at the space between “Every couple struggles sometimes” and “Something between us is no longer working”—and why *it isn’t bad enough yet* may not be the most helpful way to decide when to seek support.