



“HOW SHOULD I RESPOND TO CRITICISM?”

*“The biggest danger of receiving criticism is not to
your reputation, but to your heart.”*

Tim Keller, *How Do You Take Criticism of Your Views?* on
timothykeller.com

As a ministry wife you can be acutely aware of criticism of your husband and his ministry that may escalate into conflict in the church. You may experience criticism too – or your children may be criticised. This can affect you in a different way to your husband, although criticism and conflict will affect him too. You may feel confused, fearful, disillusioned, hurt, and upset. It can affect your own walk with the Lord. You may ask “Why, when we are sacrificially serving, are we recipients of such harsh words, unkind looks and lack of appreciation?” To experience criticism and any conflict from within the family of faith is distressing.

Before labelling all criticism as unjust, take time to listen, reflect and pray about what is being communicated even if it is not shared helpfully or kindly. There may be legitimate concerns that are being flagged up and we need the grace that Christ gives, not be defensive and to take time to bring what is being said before the Lord and to ask for his help and wisdom. Criticism which is constructive and given in the right spirit is an opportunity to grow and develop.

To respond to criticism of your husband (legitimate or not) is not (usually) the remit of the ministry wife. We can make things worse! When criticism is undermining or unjust this can lead to ministry wives feeling wounded with no voice, especially if conflict escalates. Wounds from criticism wrongly given or badly received can be deep and personal; you can feel very bruised by words or actions.

We want to be able to accept constructive criticism. Sometimes we even need to be our husband’s critic. Not all criticism is bad. We all need to change and learn. Church leaders can disagree in love. If conflict results, we can, with God’s help, work to maintain relationships and build unity and peace. The challenge is not to respond to criticism sinfully.

It is a battle to respond in a godly way. God’s Word, the help of the Holy Spirit and the comfort Christ provides are what we need. When we go to the Lord and pour out our hearts to him, he does meet with us and provide comfort, strength and help.

Do speak to trusted friends and seek support.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Do you have an awareness of where harsh words come from? (see James 4:1-3)

How have you and your husband responded to criticism? What do you wish you had done differently? What helped the situation?

Do you think ministry wives should speak up in church life when there is criticism of their husbands? Why might it not be the best action to take?

Have you developed a prayer life where you pour out your heart before the Lord? If not, how can you begin to do this?

1. HOW DO WE RESPOND TO UNJUST CRITICISM AS A MINISTRY WIFE IN A GODLY WAY?

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1 Peter 2:21-25

Remember:

- **WE ARE NOT CHRIST, BUT WE ARE "IN HIM"** - only Christ is perfect in every way. Be willing to examine your own heart and repent of what is wrong. Rejoice that you are given Christ's perfect righteousness.
- **WE FOLLOW IN CHRIST'S FOOTSTEPS** - Jesus suffered unjustly, he was falsely accused, mocked, insulted and condemned to death, yet he didn't retaliate. As servants of Christ, we are not above our master and so unjust criticism will come to those in ministry.

- **WE NEED TO BE CONSCIOUS OF THE LORD** – God is in control and one day he will right all wrongs - He loves us and cares for us and sees all our tears and will one day He wipe them all away. We can trust him to be at work even through difficulty.
- **WE KNOW JESUS IS THE SHEPHERD OF OUR SOUL** – Jesus suffered and died for us, he knows his us by name and watches over us. What a comfort this is in times of unjust criticism.

2. RESPOND WITH YOUR HEAD, HEART, AND HANDS

HEAD

- a) **Mind** – Give the harsh words to the Lord. You may need to do this repeatedly and not dwell on them. This takes discipline and creativity.

Remember it is the Lord Christ you are serving and not those who seem to oppose your husband or yourself (Colossians 3:23-24). Give your mind to other things (Philippians 4:8-9). Know that God is in control.

- b) **Lips** – Hold your tongue when speaking to others; try to listen well and not feel you need to give a response; ask for the Lord's help to be polite, calm, and gracious. Do not feel the need to either justify or defend your husband to others.

Also ensure that you and your husband keep each other accountable. Do not let the matter of nasty criticism in the church dominate your marriage, your private time with your husband, your rest, and times of relaxation. Consider how, when, and how much you speak about these things (Ephesians 4:29).

- *When unjust criticism comes what helps you to keep perspective?*

HEART

When you are hurting, keep hold of God's promises, write them down, meditate on them, learn them by heart. Examine your own heart, seek to keep your heart pure, confess your sinful responses, resist the temptation to respond in sinful ways (Galatians 5:16-26). Pour out your heart to the Lord. He promises to bind up the broken hearted and to heal their wounds (Psalm 147:3). As you hold onto God's promises to build his church, have faith that God is at work despite difficulty and hardship (Hebrews 11).

- *Are there any promises that you have held onto during difficult times in church life? Revisit these promises during times of difficulty.*

HANDS

Do not neglect prayer but be faithful in prayer – for your husband, for yourself, and for those who have unjustly given criticism and for unity in the church (Luke 18:1 and Philippians 4:6). You may need someone to pray with: pray with your husband, or another ministry wife, or another couple in ministry. Ask that God's will may be done, and he will be glorified even if you need to be silent and count the cost. Pray for wisdom

and for reconciliation where criticism has escalated into conflict. Work to bless those who work against you, be kind, be practical (even bake them a cake), be a peacemaker and do not add fuel to the fire. Give others a taste of grace, be motivated and empowered by the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24).

- *Write a prayer for God to be glorified and for good to be done to those who cause conflict and for God to pour his comfort into your heart.*
- *What can you do practically to help where harsh criticism has been expressed or conflict has arisen as a result?*

Seek to leave the outcome of the conflict with the Lord. Entrust yourself to the one who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23). Help your husband as he seeks to respond in a godly way, encourage him to look to the Lord, to have the support of others in ministry and godly counsel. Do not add fuel to the fire. Together trust God to lead you through this hard season.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. Who are we serving as ministry wives?
2. What should we do with criticism?
3. How can you help your husband in times of criticism in ministry?
4. What can we do with a heart wounded by criticism?
5. Have you the kind, prayerful support of others? What can you do to foster this?
6. Write a prayer in line with 1 Peter 2:21 as you consider your head, heart, and hands in your response to criticism.