

# Releasing Resentment

“LINDY, MRS. THOMPSON’S SICK, and she can’t do the food for the youth social tonight. So I told her you’d be happy to do it instead.”

“But you know I need to focus on my presentation for work tomorrow! My department’s funding depends on it!”

“I know, darling, but surely this is more important. It may be the turning point in these teens’ lives. It’s God’s work. You know I can’t do this without your help! And I’ll pray that your presentation will go well tomorrow.”

However dedicated we are to our spouse’s ministry, and no

matter how supportive we wish to be, living in a ministry family involves all kinds of conflicting expectations. We’re expected to attend church events, conferences, and camp meetings, no matter how inconvenient it is for our family. We have to absorb the impact and stress of the pastor’s heavy workload, last-minute emergencies, and other people’s lack of planning. We may have to drop our own plans and needs—however important—to rescue a ministry situation. And there’s an unspoken expectation that we can always do this cheerfully . . . because it’s all for God.

## THE COMPLEXITY OF RESENTMENT

Resentment isn’t a simple response. The effect of small resentments can build up over time. The pressure to put your own needs aside for the sake of the ministry can



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lead to sadness, frustration, anger, disappointment, hopelessness, and an internal message that "I'm not important" or "I can never be as important as my spouse's ministry and the needs of other church members."

It's hard to talk about these feelings, or even admit them to ourselves, because it feels selfish to prioritize our own needs or those of our family over God's work. If we fuss about being taken for granted, we feel that we're ultimately complaining about God. We feel frustrated when we say "yes" to requests we'd rather say "no" to, and we can even feel angry about giving up our plans to help with a church emergency.

Pastors can also feel resentful if their spouse isn't willing and able to provide hospitality when expected and to be 100 percent supportive in every situation. Sometimes there is an unspoken sense that the pastor has a greater "right" to their spouse's help and understanding, whenever needed, because they are doing God's work.

#### **HARD TO ADMIT**

Resentment begins when one person feels that a relationship is

out of balance. They're giving up their time, hopes, goals, dreams, and energy to support the other person, but they aren't receiving the same amount of support in return.

It can be hard to admit resentment: we're afraid of sounding petty and selfish. But it can destroy our happiness and our marriages if we don't address feelings openly, in an atmosphere of love and understanding.

#### **REFLECTING ON RESENTMENT**

- Is there an unspoken message in our family that ministry always takes the top priority?
- Do I offer to help my spouse with their workload and responsibilities as much as I ask them to help me with mine? How can we share our workload more evenly?
- Am I asking my partner to do this primarily because I didn't plan ahead?
- Could someone else in the church do this? Why aren't I asking them instead?
- If my spouse regularly asked me to help them do their job, how would I feel? How would I respond?
- Have I just *assumed* my partner can help? Have I taken away their freedom to make the choice for themselves?
- What effect is my resentment having on:
  - My relationship with God?
  - My feelings towards ministry?
  - My own calling as a spiritually-gifted Christian?
  - Our marriage and family life?
  - My well-being?
- How do I respond when my partner is obviously stressed or unhappy about being asked to help? Do I make them feel guilty, or do I accept their "no" with compassion?

#### **PRAYING ABOUT RESENTMENT**

Read: 1 Peter 5:7

- Pray that you'll recognize the effect that resentment is having in your life and on your relationships.
- Ask God to help you heal the pain of resentment in your relationship by listening openly to each other's pain, comforting each other, and forgiving each other.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you discern when and how to draw loving boundaries in your relationship.
- Focus on the blessings of ministry life. Thank God for them.

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### HEALING RESENTMENT

Read: Romans 12:15; 14:13; 1 John 4:18

- Recognize the hurt that resentments are bringing to your relationship.
  - Be respectful and tender about each person's pain.
  - Accept each other's hurts without judging or criticizing.
  - Talk respectfully and openly about your feelings: "When this happens, in this situation, I feel resentful because. . . . It would help me if you could do this instead. . . ."
  - Talk about assumptions and expectations as soon as you are aware of them. Don't let resentments build up. Take the time to debrief after ministry emergencies have hurt your relationship. Commit to being more considerate in the future.
  - When you get stuck, work through the four places of forgiveness. (See "The Gift of Forgiveness," *The Journal*, 3<sup>rd</sup> qtr. 2012, p. 15; available in online *Journal* archive: [www.ministerialassociation.org/spouses/](http://www.ministerialassociation.org/spouses/).)
- "demand," or "expectation" so that helpful conversations are not silenced.
  - Create a shared agreement about the boundaries and expectations in your ministry marriage.
  - Agree to manage your own workload and responsibilities as well as you can.
  - Discuss your calendars in advance. Notice the times when each of you may need extra support.
  - Plan ahead and delegate responsibilities to other people rather than to each other.
  - When asked for more help than you can provide, set clear boundaries: "I can't cater for the whole meal, but I can make soup / set up the room, etc."
  - Choose to give your help as a gift, not as an obligation.
  - It's better to cancel an event than harm your relationship.
  - Offer support in return for support, so there's a sense of balance.
  - Appreciate your partner generously when they help you.

### PREVENTING RESENTMENT

Read: Galatians 6:2

- Make it "OK" to talk about your negative feelings related to a ministry "need,"

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*Karen Holford writes from Scotland, where she still (sometimes) struggles with ministry resentment and how to manage it.*

