

(#21 of WCL1) Email Correspondence

1/17/24 10:56pm MST

Dear Sisters,

Thank you so much for your service on the council. I know it is a sacrifice and I am so grateful for your willing hearts. I feel that by agreeing to serve, you show that you care about truth and you care about this movement and our hopes for Zion. Thank you so much.

My mind has been preoccupied with our discussion last Sunday. I believe that some of the concerns and questions brought up that needed to be adequately addressed. It is important to ponder and answer all the questions that have a bearing on our vote. These are the concerns I remember and have thoughts about.

- **This is a marriage issue.**
- **She “provoked” his reactions**
- **One have to understand, “he is a volcano.”**
- **If we call out verbal abuse like this, it will condemn all the men in this movement. Is verbal abuse calling my spouse “Stupid”? If it is, I am guilty. Is verbal Abuse normal in some relationships?**

I will address these concerns with my thoughts one by one.

“It is a marriage issue” I confess I am confused about what this means in the context of abuse accusations. I am going to assume that this embodies a feeling that every marriage is different and some marriages look bad on the outside but this works for the two consenting adults involved. This sentiment may also have an “I should not get involved” component If this is the feeling expressed, I disagree. I believe that we can have discernment about abuse. This begs the question, When is the right time to intervene? It is a good hypothetical question to ponder. I have spent a lot of time sitting with this question. What are my personal beliefs about marriage and abuse and a community’s duty to care? At what point would righteous people call an

intervention for a woman in trouble? A woman who is asking for help? I do not know. What would I have to see to feel the need to say something, or do something to support the victim? Here are some possible answers:

1. A serious physical assault? The 4th or 5th serious physical assault?
2. A serious physical assault that leaves marks?
3. An assault that causes her to have PTSD and visible trauma reactions
4. An assault that leaves her in need of medical attention.
5. An assault that causes permanent disability?
6. Death?

*wait until the perpetrator, or a policeman, or an "expert" defines the incidents as *real abuse*.

We should ponder this question with care. Knowing when a marriage issue becomes a public issue is important. I know this question has been mine since Israel. I can't get it out of my head. The time that haunts me is the memory of walking toward [the wife] and [MIQ] room and the worry about what we would find there. We walked hand in hand and Brian had an awful premonition that "It would be very bad". It was. I tried to convey to you in my testimony [MIQ's] agitated state when we entered that room. His attitude of justification and self-preservation. I decided at the time to lend whatever support I could to [the wife] but I didn't call a women's council. Now we are at number 5 on the list. How long will I/we stand against abuse? Our silence implicitly supports the abuser.

The "two consenting adults" mindset is not what abuse is. This is not some BDSM fetish. A woman who is told it is her fault she was abused or that she is consenting/responsible for her abuse is being told a lie. [MIQ's] _____ did not consent to her abuse. [The wife] did not consent to her abuse. In domestic violence situations, "It's a marriage issue" defense falls apart due to the severity of the situation. It has taken [the wife] a long time to see through the "You are responsible my my actions" lie that [MIQ], and all abusers use. To me "It's a marriage issue" sounds like a thought-terminating cliché used to close our hearts and deny that there is anything we can do to help. It serves to enable the abuser to continue the abuse.¹

The next important question that I don't feel was answered very thoughtfully in our council, is the question of **what [the wife] did to provoke him?** And, does a provocation lessen his accountability down to "it's unfortunate but understandable" levels
I wrote my testimony with this question in mind. I know [MIQ] tells himself, and others that [wife] is provoking. (Some of the women in this council have been told this loud and long) I was careful to include the provocation that triggered each abuse in my testimony. Some examples

are: “Pass the crackers”, “Turn left”, the act of taking pictures, giving a little girl a high five, and adjusting a thermostat, or trying and talk to him about how his actions hurt her. I tried to show that [MIQ] seems to have a **perception problem**. He perceived slights as aggression. He seems to feel that common misunderstandings are deliberate. [MIQ] acted as if many independent actions on her part were out of line. In a word, [MIQ] was controlling. [MIQ] interpreted an interruption when he was speaking as a hostile act. He acted as if he believed that a logical and understandable reaction to being interrupted when he was speaking was, anger and put-downs. He gave himself license to demean and belittle her for interrupting him. I feel like [MIQ] has [wife] trained to navigate him like a minefield in order, to avoid his wrath.. Did [wife] sometimes act in independent and aggressive or perhaps passive-aggressive ways? Of course, she did. She would not be human if she didn't. She made mistakes and has the same instincts to defend her agency from control that we all do. [Wife] is not a fairy tale perfect innocent victim. She is complicated, and wrong sometimes. I am sure she can be annoying and hard to deal with. I am sure it must have been hard to be married to her sometimes. But think about what it must be like to be married to [MIQ]. Walking on eggshells all the time. Afraid that the next misunderstanding will provoke a cruel outburst. Two things can be true at the same time. [Wife] can make mistakes and be passive-aggressive, and she can be hurt by her husband to an abusive level. I do not want to withhold my compassion waiting for an innocent enough victim. There are no perfect victims. I can comfortably say it is wrong to be angry and controlling in a marriage even if there are provocations.

The next point was, “**You have to understand [MIQ] is a volcano.**” I believe that _____ already addressed this question very well when she told the story about teaching her child self-control. I can not answer this question better than she did, but I do want to ask, , Shouldn't a priesthood holder be able to control himself? This thought exercise can bring clarity. Would [MIQ] lose control and not become a **volcano** to a hypothetical boss? A stranger at the bank? At a job interview? These are stressful situations but [MIQ] has self-control in them. I believe [MIQ] can handle stress better than he has been doing. There is an entire book in the Bible dealing with the question of how far can a man be pushed before he reacts in anger against God and man. The Book of Job. In the scripture, Job keeps his temper when much worse stresses come to him than “please pass the crackers.” Job suffers terrible heartache and never physically attacks his interlocutors, [MIQ] needs a higher internal standard, He CAN do better. We all have to overcome the natural man. He can do this. Giving him a special lower standard because of the “way he is” is demeaning to him.

The last important discussion addresses the question: **What is Verbal Abuse?** This issue was brought up by asking rhetorically a hypothetical question, “If we condemn verbal abuse like the

things [MIQ] does and says, it condemns all the men in this movement. Is verbal abuse calling my spouse “Stupid”? I do this all the time. This is normal in some relationships”. To answer this concern I looked up some definitions of verbal abuse:

Verbal abuse involves using words to name call, bully, demean, frighten, intimidate, or control another person. This can include overt verbal abuse such as yelling, screaming, or swearing. Such behaviors are attempts to gain power, and the goal is to control and intimidate you into submission. As a result, it is abusive and should not be tolerated or excused.

After reading this definition (and many more that were more comprehensive but not succinct enough for this reply) I feel that suggesting that Verbal Abuse is a characteristic of most or all of the men in this movement, is personally offensive to me. My husband does not treat me like that. I know many men who are wonderful and are what Denver described as harmless. The men in this movement have many faults but as a whole, I see a lot of respectful marriages and kind communication.

To answer this question more fully, I want to tell you about another moment on our trip to Israel. The day we left was exciting and we were happy. It is stressful being in airports and dealing with layovers and catching flights. Brian and I met up with [wife] and we traveled together. As we navigated the airport in Frankfurt Germany. Brian made a mistake and led us down the wrong concourse. I teased him and we engaged in some good-natured banter. Later [wife] told me that watching us tease and joke with each other was a new and surprising experience for her. She and [MIQ] never tease. He is too thin-skinned, sensitive, and defensive. To [MIQ] “teasing” is a way he claims deniability when he says something cruel. Being witness to real laughter and joking was poignant for her. She did not know what to do with those feelings.

I give this example to point out the difference between a couple in a good relationship using the word stupid as a term of endearment, and using the same word used to hurt and punish. Verbal abuse takes some discernment on our part but I feel that most of us know it when we hear it. There is a lot of literature about bullying in parenting books. The advice given to children to tell the difference between teasing and bullying is: **if you can't tell someone to stop when it crosses a line and hurts you, then it is bullying.** A tool to recognize good natured teasing and discerning if it is abusive, **it needs to be fun for all the participants.** I feel like this is a good guideline, not just for children but for all those who are confused about whether an exchange is verbal abuse.

I hope these thoughts address the questions and concerns that were brought up on Sunday. I am open to continuing this discussion. I care, I have been pondering these things all week, I know you have as well.

I will see you all on Sunday. God Bless.

Jennifer Bowler

Footnote:

1 Historical note: Domestic violence as a "private marriage issue", is a philosophy that was enthusiastically embraced by and supported by American Evangelicals in the 1970s to stop the building and funding of domestic violence shelters for women. They were successful for years until the numbers and publicity around murdered women upset enough people that communities were able to outvote this evangelical agenda and began providing shelters to women fleeing domestic violence.

1/18/24 10:46pm MST (#21 of WCL1) to council

I feel I need to respond to Jennifer's comments on the 4 items listed, since 3 of them are directed to my words and comments. I appreciate your thoughtfulness and careful consideration Jennifer, and I do agree with several of your points. However, I feel like my thoughts were not heard and understood. I felt like every time I spoke, I had 2-3 people jumping in talking over me. The more I hear my words and comments being repeated and misconstrued, I think this is evidence that what I said was not heard nor understood. So, I shall attempt to explain.

"This is a marriage issue": Any problem between a husband and wife is a marriage issue. Period. This comment does not imply we do not get involved, which I think is what was assumed. My point is we need to be very careful in coming between a husband and wife. I think this takes careful consideration and discussion. It felt to me that some came into the call with thoughts of this being a slam dunk or black and white and therefore no discussion was needed. In a case of abuse, I do believe a caring community needs to step in. However, this

also calls for more careful consideration and discussion on when and how a community is to take such steps. These discussions have not been addressed in this council. Nor did I feel like, at the time, these things were going to be addressed. At the beginning of the call, a "preliminary" vote was taken before any discussion. So, I voted no. Some may believe there is enough abuse going on to demand the certificate be revoked. I think we need to have the discussions.

"Provoking" or "Button pushing": I have seen [MIQ] and [wife] fight for 3 days over the color of a door they viewed in passing while driving in the car. It takes two to fight. I guarantee you did not have the full context of their fight when the only part you were present for was "pass the crackers" or "turn left". I struggle to pass judgement on others when I have not heard their side of it. Since it takes two to have the fight, then we should hear both sides if we are going to judge appropriately.

"Volcano": I don't know of a time when my words have ever been so twisted, so misconstrued and taken out of context. I can't even bring myself to explain this one. I will only say - I would not want to be judged on my worst behavior on my worst day. (Not saying that is what happened here with [MIQ]. We do not know if it was or wasn't.) Therefore, I hope to throw a cloak of charity over others, hoping I too will receive a cloak of charity over my sins and I am not judged on my worst behavior on my worst day.

I feel like we have the opportunity here to be beneficial to our community by coming together as a council and discussing issues within our community and appropriate solutions. By coming together and discussing upsetting and challenging topics can also bring us together as women. To hear various view points and working together to hopefully find positive solutions, if not solutions that will benefit our community. This case almost feels too much like trying to punish one man for his bad behavior. If that is the end result, that is fine. But we are bypassing the journey for that end result. I think the point is in the journey.

1/19/24 8:11am MST Organizer to council

Thank you _____ and _____ for your comments.

_____, I'm sorry you didn't feel heard, that is not a good feeling.

I know it's important that we discuss these sensitive matters and I honestly felt that we had a lot of good, productive discussion, despite not coming to a final conclusion on Sunday. Our meeting from 8:00am to 11:45 am - almost 4 hours of discussion, with no outside witnesses for either side. It was just us 13 women talking with each other for nearly 4 hours straight.

As for "judging someone on their worst day", it is my understanding that the entire purpose for the council on Sunday was to show and discuss the fact that what 6-7 witnesses were describing wasn't simply [MIQ] on his worst day. It was a pattern of violent, abuse behaviors over several days, spanning several years. And therefore we as a council was to both discuss, and then judge his behavior. That's the whole point of a council, to judge behavior. To determine if it is harmful to a community, or harmless.

I acknowledge your frustration at not hearing his side of things, I too am frustrated and disappointed with his choice to stonewall us. We pled with him on multiple occasions to please share with us his side so we can have more information with which to judge his behavior and any extenuating factors/feelings he would please be willing to share. He has refused all of our pleadings. So is it our fault we don't know his side? No, that's squarely on his shoulders. Again, I'm sorry for your frustrations at not being heard, I'll make a better effort to make sure one person talks at a time, I know that I can do better at that.

Amberli

1/21/24 11:10am MST council member to council

I am grateful for the Lord's instruction on women's councils

Amberli and Jen called the council because they have been victimized by the abuse of [MIQ]. He is was an abuser, both toward his wife, and to those who were present in the UK. Many have witnessed and have been privy to the fact that this abuse has been taking place over many years, as well. The fact that it was so blatant and public on the 2 (!) occasions in question, is frankly shocking to me.

Yes, it takes two to have a conflict. But that doesn't always mean that both parties are responsible for the conflict. Because you can't have an abuser without someone to abuse. You

can't have a rapist without someone to rape. You can't have a killer without someone to kill. Does that mean the "someone" who is abused, or raped, or killed deserved it? Or caused it? Or has any responsibility at all in forcing the violent actions of the other? How we act is solely our responsibility alone, and within our own control. No one can make an abuser abuse. That's their own choice.

This is a serious matter before us. So I am honestly stupified that rather than discuss the reason behind the council being formed in the first place, we have spent the week caught up in the minutia of "how to proceed", instead.

Why aren't we focused and united in one heart and one mind toward protecting the community? Let alone protecting [the wife]? Why are [MIQ] rights seemingly more important than the harm he has caused to so many? Why isn't this an obvious case of a flock of women needing to rise up to protect the community, as commanded by the Lord?

Instead, the focus has been solely on being fair to [MIQ], who in my opinion, forfeited any say he had in the matter when he crossed the line into public abuse. He has no defense. Bringing his own witnesses doesn't negate the actions witnessed by so many others. We have already been more than merciful by extending multiple invitations to hear from him, anyway.

As _____ said, there is much leeway in how councils proceed. Amberli and Jen called the council. They set the parameters. There were clear boundaries and rules they put in place. When one member of the council crossed those boundaries, breached our trust, dissolved anonymity, and created harm to others, they had the right to let her go. This is all within the "much leeway" of how they see fit to guide this council. If we didn't have anyone "in charge", this would drag out indefinitely with endless rabbit holes of discussion, demands, and ultimate dissolution. And it would place the focus on the council, rather than on the man in question. And this is exactly what the adversary wants. If he can stir up our hearts into conflict, hijack the conversation and derail the purpose of this council, then we take the focus off of the sin and onto ourselves. And then he has won.

I believe we women are the ones on trial here. If we can't recognize the need to rise up and protect one of our own in this very clear case, then perhaps we don't warrant the Lord's trust in us.

I pray that we can come together today in love and one purpose, with the eye on [MIQ]'s actions and not on ourselves.

