

Project Violet Podcast

Script – Season 1 – Project Violet Podcasts

Episode 3 – From Criticism to Feedback

Season Intro

	Music
Jane	Hello, I'm Jane Day, Centenary Development Enabler for Baptists Together
Helen	And I'm Helen Cameron, Research Fellow at the Centre for Baptist Studies at Regent's Park College Oxford. Together we are the co-leaders of Project Violet.
Jane	Welcome to Season 1 of the Project Violet podcast. Project Violet is a research project investigating women's experiences in ministry whilst developing women ministers. We are trying to understand better the theological, missional and structural obstacles women ministers face and identify ways forward.
Helen	In this first season, we plan to introduce you to the history of women's ministry in the Baptist movement and look at some of the language used to discuss women's experiences.
Jane	We've been working together on Project Violet since May 2021 and have become even more aware of the different layers that make up Baptist life.
Helen	I've learned so much in all the listening we have done to women ministers. I think there are three layers that the project has ended up focusing on: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The everyday language and behaviour we use in church life. 2. The accepted ways of doing things. 3. What we believe about the church and the role of ministers.
Jane	We hope that listening to these five episodes will prepare you for when the findings of the project are released in May 2024.

Segment 1 – JD/HC learning the language

	Music
Jane	This is the second of four episodes where we are going to learn about the everyday language and behaviour used in church life. Last time we looked at how a shift of behaviour from offering compliments about appearance to affirming what you appreciate about someone's work can help avoid sexist language.
Helen	And last time we looked at the metaphors from James chapter 3 of a small rudder changing the direction of a large ship, and a small spark setting off a forest fire to think about the impact our words can have on others. Is there a bible passage we can use to root today's conversation?
Jane	I've been thinking about the parable of the persistent widow in Luke 18: 1-8 "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people. There was also a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but later

	<p>on he said to himself, ‘Though I neither fear God nor have regard for people, yet because this widow keeps on bothering me, I will give her justice, or in the end she will wear me out by her unending pleas.’” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unrighteous judge says! Won’t God give justice to his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he delay long to help them? I tell you, he will give them justice speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”</p>
Helen	<p>What I find so sexist in the behaviour of the unrighteous judge is that even when he grants the widow the justice she requests, he won’t admit that he has been wrong to ignore her but says he is just doing it to avoid her nagging. There have been Baptist women ministers for more than one hundred years now and so some of the reaction we have had to Project Violet has been – ‘do we still need to deal with this?’ I hope that change comes because it acknowledges injustice and not as a way of shutting women up.</p>
Jane	<p>So are you saying that motive is important as well as language and behaviour?</p>
Helen	<p>Yes, I think I am. We can ask things of God knowing that he judges what we need and when we need it and not because of the number of times we ask. The parable ends by saying that when Jesus comes, it is faith he is looking for.</p>
Jane	<p>This is reminding me of the definitions of sexism offered by Rachel Gardner from Youthscape when she spoke at one of our Project Violet seminars on sexism in schools. She spoke about: Benevolent sexism – language and behaviour that praises women or men for behaving in stereotypical ways. In the case of women this can mean praising them for domestic tasks in the home but ignoring what they do at work. I guess another word for this is patronizing.</p>
Helen	<p>It feels a bit odd using the word benevolent with the word sexism – it could sound as if there is a good form of sexism.</p>
Jane	<p>Yes, I thought that too, but I think the point is that this is the kind of language that is difficult to challenge because people say ‘Oh well, I’m sure they were just being kind’.</p>
Helen	<p>The next term is more straightforward. Rachel spoke of hostile sexism which is language or behaviour that criticises women for taking on tasks which the speaker sees as reserved for men.</p>
Jane	<p>Are you saying that you shouldn’t criticise at all?</p>
Helen	<p>Obviously in any role we need feedback so we can learn from experience but criticism feels as if the person hasn’t processed what they want to say and so it comes out as aggressive or hostile.</p>

Jane	Okay – I’m starting to feel the need for another scenario. But I think there are another two definitions to go before we do that. Ambivalent sexism which is the mixing of benevolent and hostile sexist language in a way that creates uncertainty about the speaker’s motives. There is a popular term for this – gaslighting.
Helen	So let me sum up: Benevolent sexism which is experienced as patronizing. Hostile sexism which is experienced as aggressive criticism. And ambivalent sexism which is experienced as confusing because it switches between being patronizing and aggressive and is often called gaslighting.
Jane	I think there is one last idea – the space in which sexist language and behaviour take place.
Helen	What do you mean by space?
Jane	Well I think one of the things that people enjoy about church life is the blend of formal and informal activity. Last time we looked at conversations that happened in the informality of coffee after the church service was over.
Helen	Okay, so it was clear who was in charge during the service, but it is less clear what the expectations are in coffee time.
Jane	I’m not sure I like the phrase ‘in charge’, there is a good Baptist word, moderator which means the person overseeing what is happening.
Helen	I like that - moderated and unmoderated spaces. Well that certainly rings true of the reflections written by women ministers. So often the sexist language and behaviour occur in informal settings such as coffee times, kitchens, car parks that sort of thing. So in unmoderated spaces.
Jane	Let’s move into our scenario. It is the same group of people as last time but this time it is a Wednesday evening, and we find them together clearing up after a church meeting.

Scenario A: After the church meeting

	Music
Helen	We’ve called this scenario, After the church meeting. The meeting is over and Ruth the minister, Thomas the church secretary, Richard, the treasurer and Harry another deacon are tidying up.
Ruth	Well, it was so encouraging to see a wider range of members at our church meeting tonight.
Richard	Well, I suppose so. But people didn't stick to the agenda. And we didn't finish the business... I'm not sure why the chairs were in the wrong place either.
Thomas	Everyone seemed to enjoy having coffee and cakes afterwards. You make such great cakes Ruth – I don’t know how you manage to look after things at home and be our minister.

Ruth	Well baking is a hobby and I do find it relaxing.
Harry	It looks as if we're nearly done here, I'll lock up.
Richard	Let me carry those cake tins to your car for you.
Ruth	I'll be fine.
Richard	I insist.
Ruth	Oh, okay.
Helen	<i>Ruth and Richard are now standing by her car in the car park.</i>
Richard	I just wasn't happy with that meeting. I feel, you know, we need a stronger chair, perhaps somebody with more experience. Perhaps you'd like to think about whether I should take over and chair the meetings? You know, so you can concentrate on being the minister?
Ruth	I'll give it some thought. Good night.

Interview: Ruth's reactions

	Music
Helen	<i>Ruth decides to reflect on her experience with Jane.</i>
Jane	Hi Ruth, it sounds as if that was a difficult church meeting.
Ruth	The meeting itself was fine. I was really pleased that some people came for the first time including some newer members of our congregation.
Jane	So what did you find difficult?
Ruth	It was the conversation afterwards when we were clearing up. I know Thomas is trying to be kind, but he just comes across as so...so...
Jane	Patronizing?
Ruth	Yes it feels as if he wants to say nice things about my baking but not about how I led the meeting.
Jane	Okay but you sound angry as well as upset, did something else happen.
Ruth	Richard said he would help me carry the cake tins out to the car – and I thought that was a kind gesture. But then when we were alone in the car park he criticised my chairing as weak and offered to take over himself as a stronger person! I feel so confused, one minute he's supportive and the next I feel undermined.
Jane	What do you think he was criticizing?

Ruth	He said he didn't like the new layout of the chairs and because I allowed plenty of time for the new people to speak we didn't cover everything on the agenda.
Jane	I'm wondering if at the next Deacon's meeting you could explain why you think that inclusion of more people in the church meeting is important to you.
Ruth	I can try, but at the moment I'm feeling attacked and undermined.

Segment 2

	Music
Helen	So Jane, how do you feel about that scenario and your conversation with Ruth?
Jane	Well I guess to use the definitions of sexism we looked at earlier, Thomas could be seen as using benevolent sexism. He is trying to be positive but like last time, he is using stereotypes that make Ruth feel that he is noticing her as a woman but not as a minister.
Helen	Yes, that's how I would see it too. What I have noticed in the written reflections we have had from women ministers is the different ways women respond to benevolent sexism. Some shrug it off and say things like 'water off a duck's back' – it is as if they expect it and don't think there is anything that can be done about it. But there were other women, like Ruth, who felt undermined and want it to stop.
Jane	I think what concerns me is that in noticing things that fit the stereotype but not noticing Ruth as a minister, Thomas may influence the language and behaviour of others in the church who look up to him as a deacon.
Helen	I also picked up on what you said about space. It was in the informal space after the meeting and then the car park, that this conversation took place. Another unmoderated space.
Jane	And what did you think of Richard's behaviour?
Helen	Well having experienced this type of behaviour myself, I think the definition of ambivalent sexism fits well. One moment benevolent and the next minute hostile. Rather than processing his discomfort about the meeting and asking questions about why Ruth had done things differently, he leapt straight in with criticism.
Jane	I would say that feedback can be constructive but unprocessed criticism is experienced as undermining.
Helen	I can hear your experience as a coach coming through Jane – how would you define feedback? Are there any rules for doing it well?
Jane	I think feedback means:

	<p>Stopping to process what you are thinking and feeling and what it is you are unhappy about.</p> <p>Asking questions to be clear you have understood what has happened.</p> <p>Affirming things that went well, before being specific about what you found difficult.</p>
Helen	<p>Can I add another one?</p> <p>Speaking for yourself and not claiming to speak for everyone.</p>
Jane	<p>I'll take that one as well.</p> <p>I'm noticing we haven't mentioned Harry – he didn't say much. I wonder what he's thinking.</p>

Scenario B: After the church meeting

	Music
Helen	Let's run our scenario again and see what might be different: Take 2 – After the church meeting.
Ruth	It was so encouraging to see a wider range of church members at the church meeting tonight.
Richard	Well, I suppose so. But people didn't stick to the point. And we didn't finish the agenda. And I'm not sure why the chairs were in the wrong place.
Harry	Well, for me, that is the point. More people came and more people took part. And I think the new layout of chairs and having coffee and cake really helped. If they keep coming, then they'll soon get the hang of what's expected in a church meeting.
Thomas	You make such great cakes, Ruth. I hope you don't feel that it's expected of you.
Ruth	No, no, it's a hobby of mine. And I do find it quite relaxing.
Richard	Ruth, why don't you let me carry the cake tins out to the car.
Ruth	No that's fine Richard. I can manage.
Richard	Are you sure?
Harry	I think if Ruth says she can manage, we can probably accept that she can manage. Right. I'm ready to lock up. Let's turn the lights out and then we can all go home.

Outro

Helen	Thank you for listening to this episode of the Project Violet podcast. We invite you to reflect on this episode. Did you learn anything new or surprising? How were you left feeling?
Jane	The episode notes contain questions you could use in a small groups to get a discussion going.
Helen	We invite you to subscribe to this podcast on the platform you are using, so you don't miss out on future episodes.
Jane	And don't forget to tell others about the Project Violet podcast. You can follow us on Facebook and X formerly Twitter and find out more on our website www.projectviolet.org.uk
	Music

Episode notes

Scripture passage: Luke 18: 1-8

Link to Rachel Gardner seminar

[Sexism in school and online - How can Baptists respond? \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

Discussion Questions:

Did you learn anything new or surprising? How were you left feeling?

Definitions

Benevolent sexism - patronizing

Hostile sexism – aggressive criticism

Ambivalent sexism – gaslighting

Moderated and unmoderated spaces