



## Have You Ever Been Criticized?

By Dr. Gregory Wiens

Have you ever been challenged as a leader? If not, you are not doing enough to push people. All leaders at some point experience significant resistance to their leading. It may be by some well-intentioned dragons that criticize the way you do something behind your back; maybe they call your ideas out of touch, or simply tell you to your face that you are wrong and leave the church. Those who are more catalytic will experience more of this.

Leadership challenges are never easy and often eat to the core of good leaders. I have seen too many good leaders give up in the face of criticism or leadership challenges. It usually isn't those cruel or mean people who bother us most, but those who are close to us who have the most potential for pain in our lives. We must be careful in how we respond to either extreme of ignoring these people or being immobilized by them.

Jesus experienced criticism from all kinds of people. His enemies were constantly challenging his authority and questioning him. These types of people seem easier for Jesus (and us) to handle. He pointed out their hateful attitude or hearts and then moved on. However, Jesus also experienced criticism from those close to him. In Matthew 11:2-6 we read these words:

*When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."*

John the Baptist was a second cousin of Jesus. He had launched Jesus' earthly ministry when John baptized him acknowledging Jesus' divine call. Now later in Jesus' ministry while John is in prison he is wondering if Jesus really is the divine Messiah. It appears that John doubted Jesus' calling. Someone very close to Jesus was questioning the very core of Jesus' ministry.

Has that ever happened to you? Has your spouse, your friend, your board chair; the person you were pouring your life into ever really doubted you, your motives, your call or your ministry? It often happens at critical junctures in ministry. When you as a leader are at a point of making an important ministry decision or the church is at a critical point in changing direction. Our enemy is oh so sly.

I find Jesus' reply to be very insightful. First, he wasn't threatened by the question from his cousin and second, he pointed to outcomes that could be measured as evidence of his calling. Sometimes we react rather than respond to criticism. Jesus didn't react; in fact he praises John the Baptist a few verses later (verses 7-19). Jesus clearly heard the question as simply a request for evidence rather than an accusation. So he says, look at the kinds of things that they had seen evidenced through his ministry.

Jesus clearly had outcomes (can we say goals?), which could be measured and assessed as to the effectiveness of his ministry. If more of us set goals and were held accountable to such, I believe we would be better equipped to respond to questions of our efficacy. Some pastors react negatively to the suggestion that their ministry be measured by outcomes. They pontificate that spiritual dimensions can't be measured. Jesus surely felt that Kingdom outcomes could be measured and pointed to them when he was criticized.

Do you have outcomes from the Lord that you take to a board for accountability? I don't think Jesus had a board; he didn't need one. But he did have clearly defined outcomes that he pointed to as evidence of his effectiveness. In verse 19b Jesus says, *"But wisdom is proved right by her actions."*

You surely can't stop criticism from coming your way, but you can live and minister in such a way that your responses carry some weight without being reactive.