Ministry Trials and Criticisms

Dr. Jim Newcomer
Executive Pastor, Colonial Baptist Church of Virginia Beach
Pastoral Theology and Counseling Professor, Virginia Beach Theological Seminary

I. The Reality/Certainty of Ministerial Trials
   
   A. Promises from the Text

   1. **Matthew 10:22-25**—You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes. A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!

   2. **John 15:19-21**—If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, “A slave is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.

   3. **2 Timothy 2:3**—Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

   4. **2 Timothy 3:10-14**—Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them…

   5. **1 Corinthians 11:18-19**—For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.

   6. **2 Corinthians**
B. Reports from the Field

1. **Puritan William Jenkyn**—“As the wicked are hurt by the best things, so the godly are bettered by the worst.”

2. **Dewey Bertolini**—“Mark this well: Criticism, like the waves of the sea, will come crashing in upon you, one wave following another. Criticism goes with the territory. We will never succeed in pleasing all of the people all of the time.” *(Back to the Heart of Youth Work, 158)*

3. **J. Oswald Sanders**—“No leader lives a day without criticism, and humility will never be more on trial than when criticism comes.” *(Spiritual Leadership, 119)*

4. **Harry Ironside**—“Wherever there’s light, there’s bugs.”

5. **Marshall Shelley**—“[The Pastor] has learned that in ministry, criticism ‘comes with the territory’—some of it is deserved, some of it unfair, all of it devastating for an individual who loves people and wants to minister to them.” *(Well-Intentioned Dragons, 13)*

6. **Stuart Briscoe**—“Qualifications of a pastor: the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child, and the hide of a rhinoceros.” *(Quoted in Shelley, 35)*

7. **J. H. Jowett**—“The Apostle Paul foresaw the peril, and studiously and prayerfully provided against it. And you and I have been chosen to walk along this road, and we shall encounter all dangers that infest it. None of us will be immune from their besetment. Perils are ever the attendants of privilege, and they are thickest round about the most exalted stations….Privilege never confers security: it rather provides the conditions of the fiercest strife.” (“The Perils of the Preacher”)

8. **Charles Spurgeon**—“Good men are promised tribulation in this world, and ministers may expect a larger share than others, that they may learn sympathy with the Lord’s suffering people, and so may be fitting shepherds of an ailing flock.” (“The Minster’s Fainting Fits”)

II. Criticism: The Greatest Avenue of Ministerial Trials

A. The Identification of the Critic

1. Often times it will be a former or retired minister.
2. Often times it will be an unemployed minister.

3. Often times it will be the one who was the most energetic to get you to that ministry.

4. Often times it will be someone to whom you’ve opened your heart in friendship.

   **Shelley**—“Dragons often work overhard initially at befriending you. If you list the people who make an appointment to see you in the first month of a new pastorate and another list of those unhappy with your ministry a year later, you’ll be amazed at the overlap.” (43)

5. Often times the lines will fall predictably/cleanly/discernibly along issues:

6. In cases of rapid growth, critics will react against perceived power-shift.

7. Comfortable critics will react to expository preaching and discipleship demands.

8. Critics most often are spectators first. Watch for this shift!

9. Critics are moving targets with regards to their assaults/accusations. They will adjust their tactics based on local culture and the responses of followers.
10. Leaders in factions are self-proclaimed “messiahs” for the old church.

**Guy Greenfield**—“Clergy killers are experts of disguise when they see it would be to their advantage. They are able to present themselves as pious, devout, and spiritual church members who are doing their destructive work ‘for the good of the church, to advance God’s kingdom.’ They can convince the naïve church members that they are raising legitimate issues. These religious monsters often hide among their ‘allies of opportunity,’ those members whom they have charmed into friendship—who are also congregational power brokers—and others who are disgruntled with the church for one reason or another.” (*Wounded Minister*, 29)

B. The Convictions of the Critic

C. The Accusations of the Critic

D. The Stewardship of the Critic

1. Weathering criticism is a major way that Christ will equip you to minister to others inside the local church (2Cor 1:3-7).
2. Criticism also equips you to minister to leaders in other local churches (2Tim 3:10-14, 4:1-7).

3. Criticism provides you with the ultimate opportunity to demonstrate love and forgiveness. (Matt 5:43-48, 18:21-35; Rom 12:14-21; 1Cor 13; 1Pet 2:23).

   Bertolini—Criticism opens doors of ministry to hurting people….When a person allows himself the luxury of taking a cheap shot at us, he concedes the possibility of granting us equal time. When we respond correctly, our credibility skyrockets in the eyes of our critics; when we respond incorrectly, the criticism will only remain confirmed.” (158)

4. Benefit from any whispers of truth in shouts of criticism. (Prov 27:17

   Bertolini—“Criticism reveals our blind spots. You have yours and I have mine—areas of character deficiency that are visible to everyone except us.” (158)

   Samuel Brengle—“From my heart I thank you for your rebuke. I think I deserved it. Will you, my friend, remember me in prayer?....I thank you for your criticism of my life. It set me to self-examination and heart-searching and prayer, which always leads me into a deeper sense of my utter dependence on Jesus for holiness of heart, and into sweeter fellowship with Him.” (Sanders, 120)

III. Ministerial Cautions

   A. In the Shadow of Ministerial Trials

   B. In the Valley of Ministerial Trials
C. In the *Wake* of Ministerial Trials

**NOTE:** In the shadow, valley *and* the wake of ministerial trails, *7 Critical Questions* will keep you alive and growing:

IV. Ministerial Voices of Counsel from the Past

A. **Charles Spurgeon** ("The Minister’s Fainting Fits")—Full text available at
   [http://books.google.com/books?id=HfP1ox6GidMC&printsec=frontcover&dq=lectures+to+my+students+spurgeon&hl=en&sa=X&ei=_sopVMK7KoSryQTtip4C4DQ&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=lectures%20to%20my%20students%20spurgeon&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=HfP1ox6GidMC&printsec=frontcover&dq=lectures+to+my+students+spurgeon&hl=en&sa=X&ei=_sopVMK7KoSryQTtip4C4DQ&ved=0CC0Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=lectures%20to%20my%20students%20spurgeon&f=false)

1. Why is it that the children of light sometimes walk in the thick darkness; why the heralds of the daybreak find themselves at times in tenfold night?
   
   a. Is it not first that they are men?
   
   b. Most of us are in some way or another unsound physically.
   
   c. Our work, when earnestly undertaken, lays us open to attacks in the direction of depression.
   
   d. Our position in the church will also conduce to this.
   
   e. There can be little doubt that sedentary habits have a tendency to create despondency in some constitutions.
2. The times most favorable to fits of depression, so far as I have experienced, may be summed up in a brief catalogue.

a. First among them I must mention the hour of great success.

b. Before any great achievement, some measure of the same depression is very usual.

c. In the midst of a long stretch of unbroken labor, the same affliction may be looked for.

d. One crushing stroke has sometimes laid the minister very low.

e. When troubles multiply, the discouragements follow each other in long succession, like Job’s messengers, then, too, amid the perturbation of soul occasioned by evil tidings, despondency despoils the heart of all its peace.

f. This evil will also come upon us, we know now why, and then it is all the more difficult to drive it away.

B. J. H. Jowett (“The Perils of the Preacher”)—Full text available at http://books.google.com/books?id=T8o_AAAAYAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=the+preacher+his+life+and+work+jowett&hl=en&sa=X&ei=18opVOyjHYeQyATOqoLoDA&ved=0CCsQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=the%20preacher%20his%20life%20and%20work%20jowett&f=false

1. I purpose to examine some of these perils which fatten upon privilege, these enemies which will haunt you to the very end of your ministerial life.

a. The first peril which I will name, and I name it first because its touch is so fatal, is that of deadening familiarity with the sublime.

b. The second peril in the preacher’s life which I will name is that of deadening familiarity with the commonplace.

c. The third ministerial peril is the possible perversion of our emotional life.

d. And now let me mention a peril which will be more evident than the one I have just named, because we meet it along every road of life, and because we make its acquaintance long before we take up the actual work of the ministry. I mean the perilous gravitation of the world.
2. When a preacher, by an unhallowed absorption in the mere letter of truth, or by a successful invasion of worldliness, gets away from God, the direful consequences are immediate and destructive. Let me mention some of the results.

   a. First of all, our characters will lose their spirituality.

   b. A second thing happens, when, for any cause, we are separated from the Lord whom we have vowed to serve. Our speech lacks a mysterious impressiveness.

3. How can these perils be avoided? By studious and reverent regard to the supreme commonplaces of the spiritual life.