

Got GUTS?

Predictability. Control. Safety. Comfort. Jesus said that God's men can throw all these words out the window. In the end, all the energy we spend trying to eliminate risk from our lives actually works against us when it comes to our faith.

"If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life."

Mark 8:35 (NLT)

He knew their tendencies. He studied their film. He recognized their ability to compartmentalize commitment—to live an 80/20 life. Faced with the gauntlet of His own commitment to His mission, Jesus asked for His disciples' dying breath.

Predictability. Control. Safety. Comfort.

His men needed to throw those protective measures out the window. They were lies. All the energy they would spend trying to eliminate risk from their lives would actually work against them when it came to living out His purpose for their lives. A "safe" commitment to Him would be a wasted commitment to Him. Shortly, the chips would be down and the only true option for the follower was to bet it all on Him.

Two thousand years later, Christ is still calling men to stop playing it safe. The proposition is simple: Risk for Me and you will be rewarded. Hedge your bet and you will lose it all.

The boy is not supposed to die. Tension. Unpredictability. Letting go. Adrenaline. Jumping off things is in our DNA.

It took me just a few seconds to make a short list from my boyhood: Jumping

off the roof. Jumping into a cold pool. Jumping off the roof into cold pools. Jumping on a trampoline. Jumping off the swings. Jumping on a pogo stick to Billy Joel music 857 times in my garage. Jumping over Calabasas Creek with my yellow Schwinn. Jumping into mischief for the thrill of it. How about you?

Our fathers looked at us and said, "What were you thinking?" We said, "I don't know." That's because there was no explanation! We were being boys. That is, we were stretching the limits of our courage. We were testing the limits of our abilities, and we were risking injury for the rush on the other side of the experience. We lived for that feeling.

Interesting how Jesus turned to a little boy to answer the spiritual significance question: "Who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" In other words, what can I do here that will make me significant up there? Picture this:

"He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven'" (Matt. 18:2-3, NASB, emphasis added).

What would this mean in the masculine context? What qualities do you need to recapture from your boyhood that will shape your manhood in Christ?

Eager to trust. Eager to risk. Eager to "jump off."

Risk is in the DNA of every man and it's put there by God and for God. You may have misplaced it, neglected it or misused it, but it is time to get it back and do something great for God. If risking big for God is your desire, then put these R-I-S-K principles to work today.

Right View of God

Is He or isn't He? God, that is. Sounds silly, but I am dead serious. Both the root of our fears and our courage to risk hinge on our view of God. A.W. Tozer was on the mark about us men when he commented: "Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, 'What comes into your mind when you think about God?' we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man." It makes perfect sense. The most important thing about us is our conception of God.

Is He omnipotent or impotent? Sovereign or aloof? Omnipresent or selectively present? High and lifted up or familiar? Punitive or kind? Faithful or flaky? Loving or vengeful? Just or unjust? Able or unable to make a difference? Creator or killjoy?

When our concept of Him is diminished, so is our courage for Him. But if our concept is correct, we become dangerous for the kingdom and unstoppable. So, how big is your God? The answer to that lies not in your words but in the substance of your actions. If He is to you who He says He is, you will risk big.

Little god? Little risk. And so on.

No man. No obstacle. No dream. No problem. No fear. No issue in your life is bigger than your God. If He wants something to happen, remember, nothing can stop it. If it doesn't happen, His purpose will be worked out another way. That's freedom! You cannot lose because His faithfulness and purpose will always prevail. When we see God clearly, we gamble hard on God's way.

Identity Is Settled

When you know who you are, taking big risks make more sense.

Paul wrote this to his protégé, Timothy: "But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of

the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:11-12, NIV, emphasis added).

Paul knew the quickest and most effective way to pull greatness out of a man is to remind him of who he really is versus who he might be tempted to be or who he is pretending to be. Timothy was God’s man—that was his identity. His mentor knew that identity shapes loyalty, and loyalty will drive a man’s choices under pressure. In Timothy’s life it meant fleeing identities inconsistent with his own, fighting hard for what he believed and being loyal to his calling as God’s man.

In the same way, Jesus pulled His guys in tight to emphasize that their identity meant lining up on His side of the ball. “‘If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you'” (John 15:19, NASB, emphasis added). The crystal-clear message: Blending with the world is not the mark of His men.

Here’s a spiritual fact: You risk more for God when your identity is firmly in God. Today, God’s Spirit is confronting all of His men everywhere with the same question: “Are you on My team?” Jesus is still confronting “posers” by asking: “‘Why do you call Me, “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say?’” (Luke 6:46, NASB)

In other words, identify with Me fully—don’t just pay lip service. No faking and shaking. Every time we choose Christ, our identity becomes more deeply imbedded in Him.

Sacrifice

“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, in order to gain what he cannot lose,” are the now famous words of martyred missionary Jim Elliot. In my estimation, he is the patron saint of spiritual GUTS. In a single reflection, he

captures the essence of all great men of God who leave their mark on the Earth before leaving it for heaven. At some point those men stopped caring about Earth in order to populate or invest in heaven. In Elliot's case, he traded his bride, his career and, ultimately, his very breath for Jesus' sake and for the sake of the gospel. He lost his life to gain his life. His talk of sacrifice was matched by a life of sacrifice.

And while few of us will be called to give our lives, millions of us will be called to sacrifice our wills for His will, material wealth for spiritual wealth, earthly recognition for heavenly recognition, carnal appetites for godly appetites, career dreams for God's dream, corporate ladders for family health and convenient compromise for spiritual integrity. Sacrifice and suffering loss for the sake of our faith is what connects the God-Man (Jesus) and God's man.

"In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Heb. 2:10-11, NIV).

Jesus was made fit to lead us through suffering. Naturally, if He lives in you, God will continue to make His sons fit to lead by calling us to a sacrificial life. More importantly, sacrifice for Christ is what unites most deeply with Christ. How else could the apostle Paul write, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings" (Phil. 3:10, NIV, emphasis added). For the fun of it? I don't think so.

Risking for God is synonymous with sacrificing for God, and it is not a burden, it is a privilege as God's man. It is a special bond we share with Christ and part of our worship. We lay our lives on the altar so He can use us mightily for His work. What are you waiting for?

1. Risk telling someone else about your relationship with Christ and be willing to suffer the rejection.
2. Risk getting involved in someone's life you know needs your help.
3. Risk giving generously to break the grip of materialism in your life.
4. Risk being gracious to someone you're angry with today.
5. Risk starting a ministry in your church where there is a need.
6. Risk getting connected with other men for the purpose of mutual encouragement and accountability.
7. Risk getting that Bible for a co-worker who is going through a rough time after his divorce.
8. Risk going to the world with help and the gospel.

Decide now to sacrifice your agenda and risk being used by God. Don't play it safe!

Kingdom Build

Once your view of God is right—your identity as God's man is settled (as in no more competition)—and you are willing to sacrifice your agenda for His service, it's time to build something that will outlast you. It's time to invest in something you can't take with you but something you can send ahead to eternity. It's time to get busy building the kingdom of God right where you live, in your local church with other men and in your world. It's time to dream "Big God" dreams.

The kingdom requires big, hairy, audacious dreamers—not more religious guys. Think I'm yanking your chain? Listen to Jesus describe John the Baptist and the kind of man God uses for breakthrough works of His Spirit in the world. He could be talking about you right now.

"'From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it'" (Matt. 11:12, NIV, emphasis added).

As soon as John started talking about the Messiah, the battle lines were drawn, and men through the centuries have been challenged to cross the line from comfort over to courage for their King. Forceful men are moved from within by a forceful vision God has let them see to expand His kingdom. We are not those who hunger for blood but those who hunger and thirst for the kingdom of God to explode in people's hearts.

The kingdom mentality is not for the spiritually timid, it is about winning—winning hearts, winning communities, winning unreached peoples, winning countries and winning a harvest of men worldwide that will change the course of history.

From the leaders of entire nations to the everyday man trying to provide for his family, men will be used to plant churches, equip leaders, assist the poor, care for the sick and educate the next generation. A vast army is being raised and troops are being delivered to global hot spots in record numbers. Our team has the widest and best distribution network in the world—it's called the church. And the world is waiting for its redeemers (little "r") because the Redeemer lives in us.

Risk more. Dream more. Soar higher. Fight harder. Conquer your fear. Now.

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