

The Secret to Running a Strong Christian Race

For most of us, envisioning how God wants to use us is easy. The real work comes in faithfully taking steps each day in the direction of His will.

At times, the way seems clearly laid out for us. But at others we feel confused, unprepared and inadequate.

You've undoubtedly had the experience of ministering to someone and coming away thinking you had utterly failed. But a few days later you encountered that person again, and she told you your ministry was an answer to prayer!

Admittedly, my greatest foe in pursuing God's purposes has been my own fear of my heart's intentions. The Scriptures say we can't fully know why we do what we do (see Jer. 17:9). There have been times when I decided that it was easier to "err on the side of caution" rather than risk offending God because I acted out of impure motives.

But God brought powerful conviction to me through the story of the "wicked, lazy servant" who failed to invest what his master entrusted to him because he was afraid (Matt. 25:26; see also vv. 24-25, 27-30, NIV).

In *The Message* his behavior is characterized as "criminal" (v. 26). Look at the reason this servant offered for being unproductive: "'Master, I know you have high standards and hate careless ways, that you demand the best and make no allowances for error. I was afraid I might disappoint you, so I found a good hiding place and secured your money. Here it is, safe and sound down to the last cent'" (vv. 24-25).

According to this passage, the servant feared and blamed his master. He saw him as cruel, demanding, unmerciful and

evidently powerless to undo any mistakes the servant might make.

My personal anxieties are similarly rooted in a narrow, distorted view of God's love and grace. Once I embrace certain misconceptions about Him, it becomes necessary for me to play it safe in order to protect myself.

But God does not commend me for avoiding risks. The unfruitful servant's careful behavior greatly angered his master, whose verdict on his behavior was swift.

“Take the thousand and give it to the one who risked the most. And get rid of this “play-it-safe” who won't go out on a limb. Throw him out into utter darkness” (vv. 28-30).

At the close of her online Bible study *Believing God*, Beth Moore declares that God credited righteousness to Abraham because of His *faith*—not his *perfection*. She concludes that it is better for us to believe God and act on what we believe than remain within our comfort zones “faithlessly.”

The secret to running a strong Christian race is consistently walking with God in faithful obedience, trusting Him with the outcome of every step. Often the safest thing to do will appear to be the most risky. But don't ever be afraid to “go out on a limb” for God.

PRAYER POWER FOR THE WEEK OF 7/8/2013

Ask God for the kind of faith that pleases Him and moves you to action. Pray for the courage needed to step out and do His will whatever the cost. Pray that believers would truly reflect the love of God while at the same time stand for righteousness and abide by His Word. Pray that God's love and truth would permeate the darkness, lift the veil of deception in the church and across the nation, and bring lasting change by His Spirit and through revival. Continue to pray for the persecuted church, Israel and those in authority over us. 1

Tim 2:1-4; 1 Pet. 5:6-11; James 2:17-26