

providing a future with hope

Challenger

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Risk is Right

By Jeff Bonzelaar, Executive Director

One of my favorite movies is *Brave Heart* starring Mel Gibson. The character he portrays is a passionate, determined warrior named William Wallace. There's a scene in which he rallies his struggling troops to fight to the bitter end, and he says something of epic proportion, "*All men die; few men ever live.*"

Pastor and author Erwin McManus writes, "The great tragedy is not the sins that we commit, but the life that we fail to live."

In 1st Samuel 14, there's a story about King Saul and his son Jonathan. The Israelites were being bullied by their arch foe the Philistines. King Saul, fearless leader that he was, sat under a pomegranate tree with his troops, twiddling his thumbs trying to figure out what next to do. In the meantime, his free-spirited son Jonathan with his armor-bearer decide to play "peek-a-boo" with the enemy. An all out war follows.

One man sits while another runs.

Many people live like King Saul. They play it safe. They take care to minimize risk and lessen loss. Like Saul and unlike Jonathan, they sit under a pomegranate tree protecting the life they have but

in the process forfeit the abundant life God desires for them.

Jesus said, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mk. 8:35). In other words, resist risk and die, or embrace risk and live.

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Two things happen when we take righteous risks:*(1.) Others are inspired; and (2.) God is honored.

1. Risk inspires others.

Jonathan's actions had a ripple effect. His initiative influenced his armor-bearer, then his father and the Israelite army, next the Hebrew traitors who had

joined with the Philistines, and finally, a whole colony of Israelites who were hiding in the hills. In other words, an entire nation was impacted by the risk-taking of one man.

Courage is contagious.

In the New Testament, we read of something similar. Paul's imprisonment due to his Christian witness had a similar effect. He writes in Philippians 1, "Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. . . . Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly" (12, 14).

Lesson: Never underestimate how far God can take the momentum of one person acting in righteous risk.

**By righteous risk, I am referring to an action taken for the cause of Christ that exposes you to the possibility of loss or injury. If you take a real risk you can lose money, position, the respect of others, your health, and even your life.*

2. Risk honors God.

Living a life of risk honors Christ because it provides the context for God to show Himself strong. When we step out on a limb God has a chance to "flex His muscle" and show what He can do.

True, not all risk honors Christ. We can risk for very self-exalting reasons. Maybe we want to impress others by our sacrifices. Or maybe we think we can earn God's approval. Both reasons are rooted in pride, and neither honors God.

But there's a way of risking which opens the door for Christ to make a name for Himself. Jonathan risked his life by literally picking a fight. His was no rash decision. He carefully strategized his moves. Still, Jonathan didn't have 100% guarantee that what he was about to do was the right thing, let alone that it would be successful. Jonathan simply said to his armor-bearer, "Come, let's go. . . . *Perhaps* the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few." Jonathan didn't have advance knowledge of the outcome. He just did what he thought best, took a chance and, by God's grace, it paid off.

The risk Jonathan took created a situation where "but for

God" he would fail. I think God loves such challenges. The story ends with these words: "So the Lord rescued Israel that day." God gets the glory—not Jonathon, not Israel's armies, . . . God (thanks to Jonathan creating the opportunity!)

I know we're not to test the Lord by jumping off church

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roofs (Jesus knew better), but at the same time, let us not rob God of situations by which He can glorify Himself.

CONCLUSION

Christian Sociologist Tony Campolo interviewed several octogarians and asked, "If you had to live your life all over again, what would you do differently?" The answer he got more often was, "Risk more."

You will never live if you play it safe, if you try to save your life, if you try to minimize risk in your life. You were meant to risk.

So what does this mean for you and me?

- It might mean picking up the next hitch-hiker you see;
- It might mean writing your estranged father;
- It might mean leaving your job and going back to school to prepare for ministry;
- It might mean adopting a child or becoming a foster parent;
- It might mean leaving the "burbs" to live in the city. (Cities like Detroit have their share of violence and crime, but the suburbs might be even more dangerous. They serve as the home of numbness, complacency, and materialism among other things.);
- It might mean selling everything you own and giving it to the poor;
- Or it might be something as simple as taking a pan of freshly baked brownies over to your next door neighbor.

Whatever it means, it means leaving the shade of your pomegranate tree. It means laying down your life. It

means dying.

Don't waste your life. Risk is right.

In the words of one man, "All around you, people will be tiptoeing through life, just to arrive at death safely. Do not tiptoe. Run, hop, skip, or dance, just don't tiptoe."



Testimony

Shandrieka Shavers

"I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1978. When I was a baby my mother abandoned me along with my older brother and sister in an empty warehouse. I never saw her again. When my siblings and I were found we were separated and put into foster care. I never saw them again either.

When I was three I was adopted by a single mother who raised me the best she could while holding down a full-time job. I had no father figure and was an only child. I grew up lonely, always looking for something to fill the emptiness.

I rebelled against any sort of discipline, and by the time I was seventeen I was drinking heavily and smoking marijuana. I lost all interest in school and dropped out in my senior year.

At nineteen I became pregnant. The father left me to raise our daughter on my own. That same year I was in a serious car accident. My face was severely injured. I went into a deep depression. I found that the pain medication I was taking helped to numb the hurt both physically and emotionally.

I was soon addicted to the medication. It got to the point where my mother would not allow me in the house. I would sleep in my car and wave to my daughter as she looked out the window. I would cry out to God and tell Him that I did not want to live like this

I tried several rehab centers. That seemed to work for a while, but before long I was back on the street getting high.

I had no strength to resist. I used whatever I could find to keep me from dealing with who I was.

I thought a family would bring me happiness. In 2002 I got married and had a son. Instead of bringing me peace and fulfillment, new problems arose I was not able to handle. Around this time I was introduced to crack cocaine. I tried it, and it immediately took control of my life.

I spent my days running the streets and staying in drug houses. All I could think about was where I could get my next high. I stopped going home. A year went by before I saw my mom and daughter again.

One day out of nowhere my mom showed up at the drug house I was in and literally pulled me out. She took me home and gave me the number of the Teen Challenge Crisis Center in Ohio. They connected me with Life Challenge in Detroit and I was put on a bus and entered the program in August of 2006.

I was broken. I knew I needed help. I wanted a better life for me and my children. In His mercy, Jesus came into my heart and transformed me. The classes and morning chapel taught me what it meant to be a godly woman. I know personally that it is possible through Jesus Christ to turn away from life-destroying addictions.

I see differently now. My future looks bright. My anger and heart of stone have been replaced with a loving heart and a desire to know more of God's will for me. Through Jesus Christ all things are possible!"

P.S. Shandrieka graduated the program in August. She returned to Ohio where she is getting her G.E.D. and helping to raise her children.



Fighting the good fight,

Jeff