

## Pastor's Note

Hello

One of the most ridiculous trends in America is the trend that is now putting warning labels on everything. Have you noticed this? Even a box of corn flakes says, "Consult your doctor first." Anything and everything, they're all afraid of being taken into court, so they're disavowing and warning you about everything that comes out. It comes from this desire to have a risk-free society. America has been the land of opportunity. It's now becoming the land of safety first. Where we want to remove all risks from society. People want cradle-to-grave security. That's a warning sign; as Arnold Poynty, the eminent historian said, *"The heartbeat of a civilization is its spirit of adventure."* And when all of a sudden, safety first becomes the number one goal in life, civilizations historically begin to decline rather than continue to develop.

Now, on a personal level, the fact is you can't remove all the risks from a society. Life is composed of a series of risks. Choosing a college to go to is a risk. Choosing a career is a risk. Getting married is a risk. Because, you don't know what you're getting into. You think you're saying, "I do," but in your mind you're saying, "I wonder." Eating fast food is a risk. Driving is a definite risk. You can't live without risk. Why has God put us in this kind of world? Because He wants us to learn to live by faith. He wants us to learn to trust Him. All through the bible, God asked people to trust Him. And He asked them to take risks. Exodus 14, is the story of perhaps the most famous biblical risk; the Israelites passing through the Red Sea. And notice that when their faith is tested, they respond in fear.

### **I. Four Things Fear Does To Us:**

**1. Fear makes us skeptical.** In Exodus 14:11 (TEV) the Israelites said, *"Did you bring us out here in the desert to die?"* In other words, when we are afraid, we begin to doubt. We doubt ourselves, we doubt God, we doubt other people, we become skeptical. Studies have shown that at the root, cynics basically have a problem with being afraid. We often ridicule what we're afraid of.

**2. Fear makes us selfish.** When we're afraid, the only thing we can think of is ourselves. We really aren't thinking about anybody else, we're just focusing in on our fear. In Exodus 14:11b (TEV) the Israelites said, *"Look what you've done to us!"* When we're afraid, we accuse others and excuse ourselves, we deflect it to someone else, we blame shift it

away from us, and avoid taking any responsibility. You wonder why people never want to make commitments? They're afraid.

**3. Fear makes us stubborn.** We resist change when we're afraid. In Exodus 14:12 (TEV) they said, *"Didn't we tell you before we left that this would happen? We told you to leave us alone..."* So, they're saying to Moses, "Don't rock the boat. Don't upset the status quo. We've always done it this way." And fear keeps people from growing, it keeps businesses from growing, it keeps churches from growing, because it causes us to be stubborn. We won't admit it when we're wrong. As Ahmed Kathrada said, *"The hardest thing to open is a closed mind."*

**4. Fear makes us short-sighted.** When the Israelites were confronted with the Red Sea, they said, *"It would be better to be slaves there [Egypt] than to die here in the desert"* Exodus 14:12b (TEV). They wanted to go back to the "good old days" in Egypt. They wanted to retreat and return; they wanted to go back.

## **II. Five Ways to Take Risks By Faith:**

**1. Get the Facts.** If you're going to take risks, God wants you to get the facts. Anything that requires faith is going to have some element of risk in it, but God says, there's a right way and there's a wrong way. God doesn't want you making foolish risks, that's not faith. So He says, first off, get the facts. Find out all you can. Notice in Proverbs 13:16 (NIV) *"Every prudent man acts out of knowledge"* Know what you're doing. Proverbs 23:23 (TLB) says, *"Get the facts at any price!"* When you're going to make a major decision, when you're going to make a decision that involves a risk in your life, talk to people who've already done it. Get the facts at any price. Read a book. Attend a seminar. Listen to a tape. Find out who's already been there and get the facts at any price. Studies have shown that most new businesses and a lot of marriages fail because of uneducated enthusiasm. They say, "Oh, I've got a great product!" "Oh, we love each other, it'll all work out." And they go for it and it just bombs. Uneducated enthusiasm. Committing to something takes work. So, get the facts.

**2. Count the Cost.** Once you've got the facts, you've got to count the cost; evaluate the facts. Find out why you're doing what you're doing and what risk is involved. Find out what the costs are. What it's going to cost in reputation, time, money, and emotional energy. Luke 14:28, 31 (TLB) says, *"Don't begin until you count the cost. Who would begin construction of a building without first getting estimates...? Or what king would dream of going to war without first sitting down with his counselors...?"* Jesus says, if you're going to build a building, you better go out and plan a budget first.

And evaluate the cost. If you're going to go to war, you'd better figure out what the strength of your army is compared to the strength of the enemy's army. Analyze the risk.

Proverbs 20:25 (MSG) says, *"An impulsive vow is a trap; later you'll wish you could get out of it."* It's always easier to get in than it is to get out. It's easier to get into debt than to get out of debt. It's easier to fill up your schedule than to fulfill your schedule. It's easier to get into a relationship than to get out of a relationship. It's just a law of life; it's always easier to get in than it is to get out. So you need to choose your commitments carefully. You get the facts and you count the cost. What he's saying here is that every decision has a price tag and you'd better know what the price is before you take the risk. You see, God does not want you to take stupid risks. Ask yourself these questions when you evaluate the facts; "Is this necessary?" and "Is it worth it?" The loss compared to the gain. By the way, never make a major decision when you're depressed. Okay? Just don't. Because inevitably, it'll be the wrong one. Because depression colors everything else. If you are going through a major life issue, don't make a quick decision when you're down. Wait until you get the facts and count the cost.

**3. Plan and Prepare.** Once you've counted the cost, plan your steps. That's preparation. Proverbs 14:15 (NCV) *"Fools will believe anything, but the wise think about what they do."* They think about where they're going. They have some preparation. Faith is expecting the best. And you ought to expect the best. But there's a corollary truth that the Bible teaches. Not only should you expect the best, but you should also plan for the worst. And both of those are important. Expect the best. That's faith. Planning for the worst is also faith. God says, fools will believe anything. They don't look ahead. They don't think it through. They don't consider their ways, and they blindly stumble into one problem after another. That says the wise person thinks through and anticipates what possible problems might there be. Have the solution already planned out before you even get there.

Proverbs 16:9 (TLB) *"We should make plans, counting on God to direct us."* Notice there are two parts to this verse: our part and God's part. We should make our plans. That's our part. Counting on God to direct us. That's God's part. And they both go together. God has a part and we have a part in life. As you plan, you pray. And you ask God to direct you. That means prayer and preparation go together. When you plan and prepare without prayer, you're going to have problems. When you have prayer without preparing, you're going to have problems. One without the other is

insufficient. You need them both. The Bible says to plan out your life, to think about where you're going, to be intelligent in the direction of your life.

Some people say, "You know, I don't make any plans. I don't organize. I don't set any goals. I just live by faith." That's not faith, that's presumption. And there's a big difference. The bible says we should make our plans, counting on God to direct us. Before you speak, listen. Before you invest, investigate. Before you spend, earn. Before you criticize, wait. Before you quit, try again. Before you retire, save. Before you plan, pray. The prepared life is the effective life. It is not unspiritual to plan. Get the facts, count the cost, plan your steps. Don't just go out and take risks without thinking it through. The wise person takes calculated risks. In addition to praying, you ought to get some good advice from other people also. Proverbs 20:18 (NIV) says, "*Make plans by seeking advice.*" So, in addition to praying, go out there and get some wise counsel. Talk to some other believers, people who've already been there. Don't make major decisions in your life without getting input from other people. Don't take risks without first talking to people who've made similar risks. That's just not too smart.

**4. Declare Your Intent.** Once you have the facts, count the cost, and plan, you announce your goal. That's the principle of declaration. You need to tell the world about your intention. You need to make a public statement. Announce where you're going. Why should you make an announcement? Why can't we just go out there and take the risk and not tell anybody about it, and then if we fail it doesn't look bad? Goals are statements of faith. They're saying, "I believe God wants to do this in my life, by such and such a date." And here's how you do it. The Bible's very clear about this. James 4:15 (TEV) "*What you should say is this, 'If the Lord is willing, we will live and do this or that.'*" That's how you make the goal statement. If the Lord's willing, we'll do this or that. You don't do it presumptuously, you don't say, "It's going to happen no matter what." You say, "If it's the Lord's will, God willing, we're going to do this by such and such a time."

Now, why should you announce the risk that you're about to take? Why should you tell other people about the thing you're about to do; your dream, your goal, your ambition? First, it builds your faith when you announce it publicly. The Bible says in James that your tongue is like the rudder on a large ship: It's small but it sets the course and direction of your life. And when you said, one day, "I'm going to... whatever it is" that was a statement of faith. But the very act of saying that gives you the faith to start out. Not only does announcing it build your faith, but it holds you accountable to other people, which we can all use. Have you ever tried to

break a bad habit without telling anyone? Doesn't work too well. So you announce your goal, you announce your intention. And on top of that, it attracts support. When you say, "This is what I think God wants me to do." Other people say, "Well, I want to go along too. I'm going to get on board with that." And so publicly announcing your intent, the risk you're about to take, attracts support.

**5. Take Action.** The moment of truth, is point five. That is, take action. Let go and launch out. You've got to let go and launch out if you're going to be a person of faith. James Bryant Conant said, "*Behold the turtles. He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out.*" Well, it's true of human beings, too. Have you ever watched a circus trapeze artist? A trapeze artist is a hundred feet high in the air, they swing out on one bar, and another one's coming out the other way for them to grab. But those things are spaced apart so the artist has to let go of this one before they can grab onto the other one. And when they leap for it, there is a point in the trapeze act, that the person is suspended a hundred feet above the ground, holding on to thin air, for a split second. For the moment they let go of this one, and before they actually grab that one, they're sailing there, a hundred feet above the ground, holding onto nothing. That's pretty scary. That is what it means to live by faith. Many times, God will work in your life and you have to let go of the past before you can grab onto the future.

You've got to let go of security in order to grab opportunity. This is very important, because the most difficult part of taking the risk is the letting go of the old. What we want to do is we want to hold on to the old job, while we get the new job secure. You know, we want to make sure that everything's set up in the new location, in the new home, before we move out of the old home. It's the letting go in faith that makes it faith. Letting go of the independence of being single in order to grab on to being married. I'm talking about throwing away the crutches that you've been using. Peter, one time, was in a boat fishing. Jesus came walking across the water. Peter looks out at Jesus, and says, "Lord! Bid me to come!" And Jesus says, "Come on down!" Now Peter could have stood there and said, "Jesus Christ, I believe that I can walk on water with Your help. I believe that You'll give me the strength not to drown. I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe!" But until he got out of the boat, nothing happened. If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat. You've got to let go and launch out. And that's difficult.

The children of Israel were at the Red Sea. God had backed them into a corner. Which is typical. God loves to back people into corners to force them to trust Him. There were mountains on either side, there's an

ocean in front of them, and the Egyptians and Pharaoh were in hot pursuit, waiting to slaughter them all. They have an opportunity to believe, to have faith, but instead, they responded in fear. And they became skeptical and stubborn and short-sighted. And when all this happened, they said, "Hey! Moses! We should have just stayed in Egypt. Why don't we go back to Egypt? The good old days." Now, remember, they've just spent four hundred years in slavery, they've been beaten, they've been mistreated, they've been abused, they've been killed, they've been starved, they've had no rights, they've been overworked for four hundred years and now they're saying, "Let's go back."

Fear always does that. It causes you to retreat, to turn around, to go back. Even when what you came from was terrible. What they're doing is they're preferring slavery to uncertainty. They say, "I know it was bad, but at least we knew what was happening there, and we don't know what's going to happen here. So let's just go back." Now let's apply that today. Why do we stay in destructive situations? Why do we put up with self-defeating habits that we know are bad for us? Why do we continue in patterns that are destructive to our relationships instead of saying, "Let's get some help in confronting the issue and trying to work on it?" Why do we hold on to our hang-ups we know are bad for us? Because of the same reason they wanted to go back to Egypt. The point is, we are afraid of freedom. The Israelites said, "I know it's painful back there in Egypt, but at least it's predictable." Is that you? It's painful, but at least it's predictable.

What is the solution? How do you get the courage to let go and launch out and face your fears? Look at Psalm 4:13 (TEV) "*When I am afraid, I will put my confidence in God. Yes, I will trust the promises of God.*" He says, "Where do I get my courage to face my fears and launch out?" I put my confidence in God. Notice it says, "When I am afraid." He's afraid. Can you have confidence and fear at the same time? Absolutely. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is moving ahead in spite of your fear. That's courage. The courageous person is scared to death and does it anyway. If you don't have any fear, you're not courageous, you may just be stupid. There are a lot of things in life to be afraid of that you really ought to be concerned about. But you do have a loving heavenly Father who wants to help me with them. And He wants to help you. And courage is moving ahead in spite of your fear. Joyce Meyer says, "*Do it afraid.*"

So what am I saying? I'm saying when you come to this step, the moment of truth, you not only have to let go, and you not only have to launch out, you have to look up. Look up to God for that confidence. Philippians 4:13 (TEV) says, "*I have the strength to face all conditions by*

*the power that Christ gives me.*" By the power that Christ gives me. Faith is doing it afraid. The key to living by faith and liberating your life, the key to overcoming the fears that keep you bound up, is to move against your fear. You've prayed about it. You've thought about it. You've talked about it. Now take action! Move against the fear. Do the thing you fear the most. That's what it means to live by faith. You feel the fear and you do it afraid. You notice when the Israelites were at the Red Sea, God didn't take them around the Red Sea, He didn't build a bridge over the Red Sea, He took them through it. And they could have stood on the sidelines for the rest of their lives, saying, "We believe God's going to save us." But it wasn't until they stepped into the water that it started happening. Moses held up his rod and he says, "Move in. Get going." You move against your fear. You do the thing you fear the most. That's courage. Exodus 14:15 (TLB) says, "*Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Quit praying and get the people moving! Forward march!'*" I like that. "...get moving."

What is it that scares you to death; that frightens you? The loss of a loved one? Poor health? The possibility of losing your job? The possibility of being single the rest of your life? The idea that maybe if you confront an issue with someone you care about closely it may blow up? And you don't know the way it's going to happen, so you let it ride and you enable them? What is it that's got you worried? That seems an impossible barrier? That looks unpredictable? That seems overwhelming? That's your Red Sea. And you've got one. And what would God say to you today? He'd say, "Quit running and face the issue. Face it in faith. Move against your fear. Do the thing you fear the most." God told Moses, "Quit praying and get the people moving!" What is it you need to start doing?

The problem with most of us is, we already know what to do, we just don't do it. Why? We don't move against the fear. Now what is it that you need to quit praying about and you just need to start doing? Something you already know is God's will. Start doing it today. One of these days, is really none of these days. You say, "One of these days, I'm really going to get serious for God. And really put Him number one in every area of my life." When are you going to do it? Move against the fear that says, "You'll be a fanatic. It won't work. You'll regret it." Move against the fear. "One of these days, I'm going to find a church family I'm going to join." When are you going to do it? What are you waiting for? Move against your fear. You say, "One of these days I'm going to get involved. I'm going to develop the talents God's given me and I'm going to go after the dream I know He's put in my heart." Why not now? Move against your fear. Quit praying. Start acting. What I'm saying, is that thing that's out there, that has

you most afraid, in Christ's name, go for it. Don't miss the best life has to offer. Find God!

Blessings,

Scott

