

There's a funny thing that seems to consistently happen whenever you mention a specific key word in conversation, mostly because that key word is defined so differently by each and every person. And the fact is, much of people's lives have been lived uniquely and exactly in response to how they have defined that word on a street-level basis. So, are you curious about that word? Yes...the word is "risk." And, yeah, how we look at risk determines so very much about our journey and our destiny! Let's dive into that.

Let me start out by asking this: is risk *good* or *bad*? Right off the bat, you reveal your beliefs about risk by your response to that. But let me tell you, the first reality we should deal with is that risk simply "is"...yes, that's right, because risk exists in every situation, risk is simply an ever-present fact of every person's life.

Wait, you might say, *that's not true, I avoid risk by not taking action*. But that's not true, because "not taking action" is a risk in and of itself! Let me give you an example of that. I grew up in a home where nobody knew God. We did kinda attend a dead church with a Godly lineage, but it had gone the way of so many churches and denominations—the living God did not inhabit the church at large, even if a person or two had real faith. So, I was in my 20s, uncommitted to God, sitting on the fence, wallowing in a loosely held belief in a passive God. Yes, I was noncommittal about Jesus and content in that unbelief. In baseball lingo, I had not stepped up the plate to take a swing—yes, by my choice, I was simply sitting on the bench!

But then one day, I realized something pretty basic...but profound! Sitting the fence about who Jesus was or is didn't mean that I was correct! In fact, either Jesus *was* the Lamb of God sacrificed on the Cross for the sins of all...or He *wasn't*! And my lack of commitment either way didn't change that truth one way or the other. If Jesus was indeed the Lamb, my supposed sitting the fence was definitely a rejection of Christ. *My risk*, there all along, now became clear...and by the nudging of the Holy Spirit, I believed in Jesus!

Yeah, that's right, staying out of the path of a decision doesn't mean we have avoided risk. In fact, getting into action is the only way to obtain new rewards, the rewards that only come from wisely taking risks! And that means "getting into the game" in all facets of life! But here's the rub. We are not to just go out and start taking stupid risks. So. What is the key to the risks of life? To carry the baseball analogy full circle, how do we cross home plate when it comes to handling risk in the various dimensions of our lives?

Well, we've already covered the first step—we have to step up to the plate and try to get "on base." Yeah, we have to try to leave a "home base" where risks seem minimal and life is comfortable. But whether it's our spiritual lives, our family lives, or our workplace lives, we are called to step out of seemingly riskless positions into the light of fresh opportunities. That means we step up to the plate and work to get to first base, all the while with an eye towards circling the bases and scoring the winning run.

So, just what is the "first base" of taking risks that is essential for scoring? It's accurately defining the risks of the adventure you are considering. And the most important emphasis here is the word "accurately."

So, let's look at two quotes that address this issue in completely opposite ways. First, how about the popular bumper sticker from years past? "He who dies with the most toys wins!" Contrast that to Jesus teaching in Mark 8:34-37 (ESV): "And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?'"

Notice here in this passage that Jesus deliberately *called the crowd to an opportunity to get to first base*. More broadly, Romans 1:20 tells us that *God has revealed Himself to every person in creation*—and it's up to each person *to reach an accurate conclusion* to get to first base. Yes, each person is "without excuse."

But being accurate and getting to first base doesn't get you to second base. Yeah, defining risk accurately comes first, but then doing it purposefully is next! To be blunt, from the Cross until now, there have been multitudes of folks who said they knew Jesus, but they didn't truly work to fulfill His purposes. You see, Jesus has several key, action-oriented commands to believers—like to love God and to *honestly* love your

neighbors as yourself. And we are to “go forth and make disciples” of all nations...yeah, we are called to God’s purposes...and that’s eternal “purposes” in the plural, as it’s told in Romans 8:29. And as Jesus said, “if you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (John 14:15) And we are to do that *fully!* And that’s getting to second base, handling risk purpose-fully! But here’s a huge caution to us: Saul, that great enemy of the early church (who later became the Apostle Paul), was persecuting Christians *because his Old Testament-attributed religious purposes were not God’s purposes!* Our purposes must be God-accurate!

Then, *it’s on to pursuing third base...and that’s handling risk sustainably!* Yeah, it’s one thing to define risk accurately...first base...then to do it purposefully...second base...but to do that sustainably is to get to third base. One victory is sweet, but the full course in handling risk is to do that *sustainably!* The writer to the Hebrews just finished speaking to the faith of heroes of the Old Testament and then moves to Hebrews 12:1... “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Yes, the race set before us requires the full endurance during the fullness of years afforded each of us.

And it’s on third base where we strive to fully occupy...sustaining accurate and purposeful handling of risks. And we do that until we are called home to be with Christ. *And there He will be faithful to reward everything we do that is accurately and purposefully built on the foundation of Christ!* That judgment is in 1 Corinthians 3:9-16. But, beware: everything else will be burnt up! Yes, the Word promises that all that is *not* accurately and purposefully built will be burnt up! Frankly, every religion apart from Christ is a terrible risk. And just as frankly, many supposedly “Christian” endeavors are *not* accurate and rightly purposed on the foundation of Christ. God has fairly warned us—so, avoid the thick smoke of bad choices!

All that news about correctly handling risk is a good gift from God above. God has communicated clearly, providing guidance that what we build on the foundation of Christ will be rewarded! Yes, our accurate, purposeful, sustained path is rich with promise...rewards result when we come around the bases to home!

Hey, here’s the total picture. This pattern of handling risk can and does apply to virtually every endeavor—our workplaces, our families, *and* our faith. We go through this cycle in order to get to the reward at home plate. Yes, we first must step up to the batter’s box—sitting out is a losing choice from the get-go!

Then...we can only get to first base by accurately defining risk! Did Blockbuster accurately define risk when Netflix came on the movie-distributing scene? Did Hitler accurately define risk when trying to create and sustain a German empire? Did the Pharisees accurately define their risks when Jesus came on the scene? And many moderns who claim the name of Christ hold significantly wrong beliefs. But the Holy Spirit teaches us all things, bringing remembrance to Jesus’s teachings and discernment to define accurate risk.

Then...we simply can’t sit in an ivory tower commending ourselves as to our sound wisdom—in order to get to second base, we must act purposefully! Think about your workplace...has it *purposefully* captured its second base? Frankly, even many millions of Christians worldwide who’ve accurately defined risk have passively done little in building on the foundation of Christ. How about you and your local church...surely you are joyfully striving to be on second base—evangelizing and making disciples, locally and worldwide!

Then comes the endurance needed to get to third base. And that says it all! Few companies last many decades, even fewer last centuries. Frankly, the few church movements that truly evangelize and make disciples worldwide themselves struggle to sustain that. *But you still can and should work for sustainable impact of accurate, purposeful handling of risk...you will be rewarded at home plate!*

Look, this framework is simple and easy to remember. Every worthy enterprise can be rewarded at the end if its handling of risk is...first accurate...then purposeful...and then enduring! But be assured—that simple, straightforward process requires real discernment, wisdom, fortitude, and perseverance!

Do you have regrets about your past handling of risk? It’s never too late to align with God...to get accurate! Like the Apostle Paul did. Romans 12:2 says to be transformed by the renewal of your mind. *Go risk well!*

A&A: Application & Action

1. How is your workplace enterprise handling risk? Is it purposefully on second base? Sustainably on third base? Discuss.

2. How is your local church handling risk for God's purposes? Is it purposefully on second base? Sustainably on third base? Discuss.

3. How are you personally handling risk for God's purposes? Are you purposefully on second base? Sustainably on third base? Discuss. If your church is itself not sustainably on third base for God's purposes, how are you handling that? Discuss.