

“Be Careful for Nothing–Taking Risks”

By Chris Ulrich

Sunday, July 21st, 2013

This month, the theme of the month is, “The Grace of God.” The main Scripture verse is:

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men...

It is God that gives us that grace. It is God that we’re thankful to.

I want to share a short story. A lot of us have heard this. Pastor Thomas, on many visits up here, has shared this on a number of occasions. There’s a man interviewing 3 people for a truck driving position, and it’s a particularly treacherous route. He asks the first applicant, “There’s a sharp cliff, and if you go off it, it’s certain death. So, what I want to ask you is, how close can you get to the edge of this cliff on the highway without going over?” The first guy says, “I think I get within about 2 inches.” So the interviewer tells him, “I’m sorry, that’s not good enough.” He asks the second guy the same question (at this point, you’re thinking, “Oh, I’ve got to get really close.”) and the second guy replies, “I think I can get within 1 inch.” The interviewer tells him, “That’s not good enough, hit the road.” There’s one guy left and he’s thinking, “So I have to get within a half an inch? what’s the right answer?” So, he starts to get up and walk out of the room. So the interviewer sees this and asks him, “Where do you think you’re going?” The second guy looks back and says, “I’m going to try and stay as far away from the edge of that cliff as possible.” The interviewer then says, “You’re hired.”

As Christians, we’re not trying to live on the edge. We’re not trying to cut it as close as possible. We’re not trying to jeopardize our salvation or play around with God. The Bible says that God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29), and that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God (Hebrew 10:31).

James 4:6-10 ...God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble...

God does give us that grace, and He gives grace to the humble. If we lift ourselves up, we’re not going to get it; we’re not going to be a recipient of that. One thing for sure is we’re all sinners saved by grace. We’ve all heard that message, and I don’t want to say it like beating a dead horse. It is something that, in the Christian world, we know. We all make mistakes and we all have faults and we’ve all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But I’d like to stop there and say that by the grace of God we also do a lot of things right. I’m not talking about bragging on ourselves, or patting ourselves on the back and saying, “Yeah, I got myself through another day.” It’s God that gives us each breath; He’s the One who gets us through each day. He gives us that ability to make right decisions to keep ourselves out of harm’s way, to be successful in this life. God’s not trying to have us live a torturous existence, or be cursed. We’ve talked about that in some of the Bible studies at the Orelup’s house: What’s the difference between being blessed and being cursed? It’s a real thing; we’re not talking about, “It’s Old Testament; it doesn’t apply...” It still applies. Now I’m aware that the Bible says that our righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6) and there aren’t many things God hates more than self-righteousness. But if we trust in God and don’t lean to our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5) then we are going to make a lot of correct decisions because God’s grace is upon us and our lives are going to be blessed beyond measure.

This is part of the title, in this very first verse, and, what's interesting is that when we had the gathering at the Grandwood Park District a week and a half ago, this is one verse that was read. It's not like, "Oh, it's a sign." God's going to give us signs—there's a verse that says an evil and adulterous nation seeketh after a sign (Matthew 12:39); there shall no sign be given it, except for the sign of Jonas. How many more signs do we need? If God given us the plan of salvation, how many more signs do we need? Okay, *now* I think I've got enough signs accumulated for a lifetime to know that God is real; to know that Judgment is real; to know that I can be blessed; to also know that, if I don't do right, sin lieth at the door (Genesis 4:7).

Philippians 4:6-7 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing...let your requests be made known unto God...

Be careful for nothing. That's a part of the title of the message today. The other part is "Taking Risks". I know who I'm talking to; we just talked about the analogy of the truck driver, I'm not trying to cut it as close as I can. So, what is risk-taking, as far as Christianity goes? I'm glad you asked. So what is being careful for nothing supposed to mean? It's the opposite of being careful for everything right? It means don't hold back. It means let your requests be known to God with boldness and assurance.

Now about that part about taking risks, any true believer will say, I don't want to take any chances with my salvation, and I agree. I don't want to take any chances; I want to stay as close to God as possible. The last thing in the world I want to do is talk somebody out of the plan of salvation, or talk myself out of salvation, or spiritually gamble with my own life. How could God's grace be active in our life if we live recklessly? it's not going to be. I'm not talking about risk taking and taking chances that are sinful and jeopardizing our walk with God.

Now, I want to ask some questions, and I have a few people that I have talked to that I would like to share with us about what risk-taking means in their personal lives and how it can be beneficial—well, no risks, no reward.

How many thinks that flying in a plane is a risk? Okay, some do; some don't. There was a guy that used to announce the NFL, named John Madden—a lot of us are football fans, and we know who he is—and he was so terrified of flying that everywhere he went he took the train or drove. This is a guy who is a little bit older in life—I think he was in his seventies by the time he retired—but it was like, why? did he have that bad of an experience? I don't know why, but I respect it. If that's the way you feel, you're not going to take that risk of flying; you're obviously never going to die in a plane crash. True? Now, what's the reward of flying, say, from here to California, versus driving? time, right, probably also more cost-effective, especially with the price of gas. So, what about driving a car? Does everybody think that driving a car is a risk? I was on a trip this past week down to Springfield, and there's a place where there is a digital sign that says how many traffic fatalities there have been in Illinois this year; a couple of weeks ago it was 490, and now it's like 530... I don't know who these people are, but obviously something has happened; there's a risk. How about starting a new job? Moving to a new city? Buying a car? Buying a house? How about playing an instrument? Starting a business?

Andy, I've talked to you, and you play an instrument. I've known you for twenty years. You haven't always played an instrument; it's about ten years that you have. I'm sure that there were a lot of struggles at first, still, nobody gets to a point of perfection, but, I'd like to hear, what are some of the risks, and what are some of the rewards, as far as playing an instrument?

ANDY: “There’s a lot of both. When I started playing guitar, I had the luxury of sitting back in the band where no one could hear me. It wasn’t much of a risk, but when we restructured, and I became a praise-and-worship leader, now it’s a whole different ball of wax. I’m standing out in front, and every strum of my guitar, everyone hears. The risks are, well, one of the first things we think, as humans, what if I mess up? The expression that we use is, ‘train-wreck.’ What if I mess up the whole group? The rewards are being part of a group, and ministering to people, seeing people uplifted in many ways. If I never take the chance to do that, if I never take the chance to play or to sing a new song, then those are rewards that will never be reaped.”

Thanks a lot, Andy. You know what? We’ve got to keep him in prayer, and be supportive.

Now, Ken, I talked to you, and Ken is a guy who’s been in his own business for a long time. I’ve always respected that. I’ll tell you this: I’ve never had my own business. People say,, “Have you ever thought about owning your own business?” not really, no. I’m just telling you the truth, as far as my standpoint, but I respect those that do, because I know that there are risks and rewards. Ken?

KEN: “In my line of work, every winter is a recession for me. It’s a phrase that I say quite often. I don’t know if you’ve heard this one yet, Jess, but, I have no work for next week. If I could sum it up right now, I have no work orders for next week, but there’s always work for tomorrow. That’s because I know that God is there, and I have to trust God. Sometimes it’s lonely, and it’s tough, especially starting out, there were some lean times. As time goes on, it’s not all fun and games; it’s very difficult a times. I say this to everyone all the time, though, and I believe it, it’s all in the hand of God. God feeds the sparrows (Luke 12:6-7), like it talks about in the Bible, and I know that God takes care of me. I have to give God all the praise and trust and I can’t take any credit upon myself. I just have to say that it’s only because of God’s goodness that I’m able to survive and sometimes prosper.”

Thanks, Ken.

This was probably three or four months ago, we were at the Orelup’s for Bible study, and Greg and Alma were there with their daughter, Jailed—she’s nine, right?—she’s playing the violin, which, probably not a lot of people know, but it’s a difficult instrument. I was watching her, and she was learning to play a piece, and Kirk was helping her... I didn’t know that—I think it was Easter Sunday morning—she and Tennessee, who is Brian and Luzy’s daughter, played “America the Beautiful” on the violin in front of the whole congregation. There only nine and twelve, I believe. It was great! They did very well! I’m not saying there wasn’t one slight mis-chord, but, overall, it was tremendous! Was there a risk? there’s a risk. I’ve got story to tell in a minute about my brother, but it had nothing to do with playing the violin...

So what kind of chances or risks am I talking about when it comes to our walk with God? The kind in which we’re willing to live a life in faith and not trust in all the things the world tells us we need. I’m talking about what it takes to do the things in order to lay up treasures in heaven. I’m not talking about jumping off a cliff or walking a tightrope across the Grand Canyon. A guy did that about a month ago—when Jim and I made that trip, we went to the Grand canyon, and, I’m telling you, that is a long way down. In the book of Matthew, chapter 4, where Satan was tempting Jesus: He had fasted forty days and forty nights, and he said, command that these stones be made bread. Now, you know, Christ, being God manifested in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16), He could have snapped His fingers—Boom!—there’s bread, you know, like “I Dream of Jeannie” or something like that. Or when Satan said, cast Thyself down, for He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, and Christ said, no, thou shalt not tempt the Lord

thy God. Christ is not asking us to take any foolish risks, which those would be. If that guy who walks a tightrope across the Grand Canyon thinks it's a smart risk, okay; I don't. How many remember Evel Knievel? I remember, as a kid, this guy was saying that he was going to fly a rocket over the Snake River Canyon, and I'm like, "For what?" Obviously for attention, for money, for fame and fortune, but I heard—they used to say this quite a bit—that guy broke every bone in his body—which is 212, I think—during the course of his daredevil days. That brings up a quick story about my brother: I was nine, and he was ten. I'm from western Mass. originally, and there's this really tall tower close by this mountainside near where we lived. We climbed to the top—it's just a regular old tower that's got steps and everything. It was just me and him—there wasn't an audience yelling, "Yeah, yeah! Dare you! Do this!" He climbed *over* the railing—now he's ten—and hangs, seventy feet up! I don't want to tell mom that Dave fell off this tower! That's the kind of risks that I'm NOT talking about taking. I'm talking about expressions of kindness and friendliness where there aren't any strings attached. I'm talking about giving in ways that we wouldn't normally do by ourselves. And I'm talking about taking chances on friendship—making friends—relationships, generosity and yes, even romance. It's a risk; it is a risk. It's something that, in Christ—I know we're talking about all things being done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40)—marriage is honorable (Hebrews 13:4). All of those things are risks and oftentimes we feel vulnerable and out of our comfort zone. But God gives us more grace.

I appreciate Andy and Ken coming up, but I want to share a couple of things that people have done (I'm talking about people in our congregation):

Pastor Hubert Ulysse, a lot of us do know him, and he's been up here, but he's originally from Haiti. He joined the military, probably twenty-five years ago, got baptized, became part of the church... He gained full US citizenship, and, a few years after he got out of the military, he wanted to go back to Haiti to help evangelize that country. Now, to me, and I think everybody here would agree, that's a huge risk. I've never been to Haiti—who here has been to Haiti? Parrish, Kirk—just look at recent history; they had an earthquake that devastated that country that was already a very poor, impoverished country. They say it's the second-poorest country in the whole world (I think Bangladesh is the worst). To take a risk like that... When we look at all the fruit that's come as a result of him taking that risk, thank God!

Jack and Bonnie Rohrer—that's a couple in our church—they moved to Haiti a couple of years ago. That's a big risk! It's not like there is somebody forcing them at gunpoint to go there; they felt that God led them to do that. God bless them. Amen. God gives more grace.

I know Pat Taylor and Cedric Christian moved to Jacksonville, Florida to start a fellowship down there. Cedric worked in the school system in Waukegan here for 25 years. That's a long time, and that's a lot of tenure, and he wasn't quite retirement age yet. He's working another job. That is a risk. That is something where, you know what? you put your life on the line...

We're going to talk about Moses, and we're going to look at the risk that he took

Hebrews 11:24-27 ...he had respect unto the recompence of the reward...

that, to me, is one of the greatest examples, but, we also look to King David who fell on several occasions—I'm just going to be honest with you, when I look at the mistakes, the failures, the sins that King David committed, he's not my favorite Bible character—but, you know what? the Bible says he was a man after God's own heart. I've had to adjust my own thinking as time has gone by to respect that man's legacy.

Look at the example of the disciples: “Drop your nets and follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Look at the example of Christ himself who saw the end from the beginning and endured about as gruesome a crucifixion as we can possibly imagine. He did it for us; He did it for our redemption. Of course they did these things in faith but there was still a risk. What if Moses had said, “Nah, I’m not going to do it; I’ll just hang here.” Or, what if, when Israel was in Egypt, they had said, “Nah, let’s just stay here.” There were times when the hardship came in the wilderness and they said, “Let’s go back!” Moses said, “No, there’s a victory in front of us.” That’s what we have to look at; we have to see the end from the beginning. We ourselves have, in many cases, chosen to hazard our lives for the Gospel’s sake. There’s nobody here coming into this room, holding us at gunpoint, but who’s to say that it will never happen? Are we going to be ready? We have to look at it like, “Am I ready to stand the test of any kind of threat?” You look at the persecution all throughout the Old Testament, of the disciples... We have to take our calling in God seriously? It’s worth it, but it’s still a risk. But, again, God gives more grace (James 4:6).

There’s a website called IMDB, Internet Movie Database, anybody ever heard of it? It’s probably one of the best websites out there for movies, TV shows, actors, actresses... It’s clean. There’s also like users’ reviews... What’s interesting is that, along with plot summaries, or when the movie was made, who’s in it, there’s a section called, “Goofs.” It’s basically the section where someone has evaluated the movie to a great extent and then listed those mistakes one by one. For example, if a movie is depicting a time period from the 1950’s and a car that was built in the 1960’s goes zooming by in the background that would be considered a goof. Somebody, I guess in their free time, goes on the sight, and says that this is an error. Or if the movie’s setting is supposed to be somewhere in California and a saguaro cactus is seen, that grows in of Arizona or Northern parts of Mexico, then that’s also considered a goof. A lot of times these goofs are hard to detect because the movie is trying to be as accurate as possible. What’s interesting is that some of the movies and shows that are considered to be the absolute best of the best, the all-time classics have the most goofs. The movies and shows that are considered to be some of the worst movies ever made have very few mistakes. That’s because the ones that really took a chance, and really made an attempt to do something worthwhile, made a lot of mistakes. They failed a lot of times, but they kept going, they got right back up.

Proverbs 24:16 *For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again...*

I’m not here to say that we’re all sinner, faults, saved, this, that and the other, but, like I said earlier, by the grace of God, we *do* a lot of things right. I’m not saying that we should get all puffed up and prideful about it, but, just to say, thank God. As you said, Ken, as God feeds the sparrows, He’s going to feed us. It’s hard to take that chance, to take that risk, and just say, “I’m going to trust in God.” It’s not an easy thing, but it’s a worthwhile thing. I’m just going to say it like this, if we never make mistakes then A) We’re kidding ourselves, or B) We’re not trying hard enough. If you attempt a lot of different things in the course of a day, you’re going to have some shortcomings, but you’re also going to have a lot of successes.

I know that I was just talking about movies, but, some of you know this, there was a very poignant scene from a movie several years ago called, “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest.” There’s this scene, Jack Nicholson plays this character who’s in an asylum, and, I’m not going to get into the entire plot, but there’s a particular scene where he’s trying to break out of there. He tells some of the other inmates, “Okay, I’m going to grab that sink; I’m going to lift it up, and

carry it over to that window, and I'm going to smash it through." Now the sink is probably three hundred pounds. They're like, "You're going to lift that thing?" and he's like, "Yup." "I bet you can't do it." So, now you've got the nay-sayers. You've got people saying, "I'll bet you a dollar." "I'll bet you twenty dollars." This was back when twenty dollars was a lot. So he starts, "Everybody stand back; don't crowd my air." He goes over there—and he's an average size guy, probably 5'10" and 180 pounds, so you think, maybe he's got the energy, maybe he can do it—and you hear him grunting, and he's turning red, and his arms are bulging, and his hair is trying to fall out, and you really think, this guy's going to do it. He tries it one more time, but, he doesn't do it. Nobody says anything, but he walks away, and he says, "At least I tried; at least I did that." I appreciate that, because if we don't try anything... If the whole goal is just to stand on the sidelines: never teach a study, never invite anybody out, never befriend anybody... What are we accomplishing/ What risks are we even taking at that point

This Christian life is a risk whether we know it or not; whether we like it or not. Going back to the other end of the scale, going back to the truck-driver story, is it a risk to *not* live for God? I'd say that it is, spiritually speaking, because, when we believe in God, we know that that's real, and we know that time, that judgment day is coming. He's going to say to those on the right, "Enter in." and He's going to say to the rest, "Ye that work iniquity..." we have to prepare ourselves for that. I'm not talking about just coming to church although that's a good thing. I'm not talking about reading the Bible although that's a good thing too. Anybody here even been to heaven? Anybody ever actually seen God? But we believe it. It's that power that we have in our own life to withstand the opposition, and there's a lot of opposition out there, and it's worsening. The Bible talks about iniquity shall abound and the love of many shall wax cold (Matthew 24:12). It talks about perilous times (2 Timothy 3:1). There's plenty of examples of what we see happening, not just in this country, but all around the world. we have to just keep trusting in God; keep believing in God. Is that a risk? yes, but it's a worthwhile risk. If we can see the end from the beginning, then we're going to know that it was well worth it. It was well worth it. So don't be afraid to make mistakes and allow God to give you more talents. If you look at the example of the parable of the talents, one guy was given one, one guy was given two, one guy was given five... You'd think it would be the opposite: the guy with one talent, "Piece of cake, I can get another one." I'm not going to say that I've got divine revelation as to why it's told the way it is, but, the ones that were given more responsibility used it and multiplied it, and the guy who was given what was seemingly the easier task, didn't do anything with it. He just sat there, and said, "Well, I know I've got to give account, but I can't do anything." He froze! You've heard the expression, "Deer in the headlights?" It's like, "Oh, I can't do anything. I just can't do anything." Well, you've got to do something. We've got to keep living for God. We've got to take a chance on making a friend—I like what you shared, Sonia, if you see somebody that's alone, we have the power of God to share with people, to be able to impart that kindness, that friendliness, that generosity... And, you know what? I've said this before, but, as Christians, we're probably going to pay out a lot more compliments, acts of kindness, acts of friendliness than we're ever going to receive, but we're going to get our props. I'm not talking about having strings attached. I'm talking about just being friendly and paying compliments. There's a fine line between flattery and paying compliments. The Bible doesn't say much good about flattery, but, as far as being friendly, as far as being complimentary... Take a chance on getting and staying serious about the Gospel. And just as important, take time to invite someone to know Jesus.