

Ten Major Causes of Failure – Part V – Risk Avoidance

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In 1982, "ABC Evening News" reported on an unusual work of modern art--a chair attached to a shotgun. This piece of modern art was to be viewed by sitting in the chair and looking directly into the gun barrel.

The gun was loaded and set on a timer to fire at an undetermined moment within the next hundred years. The amazing thing was that people waited in lines to sit and stare into the path of an impending shellfire! They all knew the gun could go off at point-blank range at any moment, but they were willing to take the risk that the fatal blast wouldn't happen during THEIR minute in the chair.

Today we are going to talk about risk-taking. There are times in the Christian's life where God would have us to take risks. This is what faith is all about. God wants us to move forward and trust Him in many of the things He calls us to do. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:7 that we "*walk by faith, not by sight.*"

Each one of us who has followed the Lord Jesus and received His salvation did so by faith. None of us has seen Jesus Christ in the flesh yet we believe Scripture when it says that Jesus is coming back to get His church. We give our time and our money to the Lord's work all because of what the Bible says the Lord has done and will do for us. We in essence are taking a big risk that God is real and His Word is true.

Hudson Taylor, the great man of faith who founded the China Inland Mission, integrated faith and risk. He said, "Unless there is an element of risk in our exploits for God, there is no need for faith."

But faith demands that we are willing to take risks—sometimes risking our all.

In 1 Peter 1:7-9 the Apostle Peter writes of this kind of faith to the recipients of his letter: He writes, "*that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith; the salvation of your souls.*"

Hebrews 11:1 says, "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*"

When you move ahead by faith—without seeing the results—you become a risk taker.

Number five in our list of the Ten Major Reasons for Failure is "a failure to take risks." Risk Avoidance.

There are people who are extremely careful and take no risks and it is these people who can't expect to make a difference. When you are over cautious you limit yourself to mediocrity and lead yourself to failure.

There is the true story of a mural artist named J.H. Zorthian who read about a tiny boy who had been killed in traffic. His stomach churned as he thought of that ever happening to one of his three children. His worry became an inescapable anxiety. The more he imagined such a tragedy, the more fearful he became. His effectiveness as an artist was put on hold once he started running scared.

He surrendered to his obsession and canceling his negotiations to purchase a large house in busy Pasadena, California, he began to seek a place where his children would be safe. His pursuit became so intense that he set aside all his work while scheming and planning every possible means to protect

his children from harm. He tried to imagine the presence of danger in everything. The location of the residence was critical. It must be sizable and remote, so he bought twelve acres of land that was far from the city. You had to drive a long road to get to the property and every so often along the road he posted signs, "Children at Play."

Before starting construction on the house itself, Zorthian personally built and fenced a play yard for his three children. He built it in such a way that it was impossible for a car to get within fifty feet of it.

With meticulous care he blended beauty and safety into his new home. He put into it various shades of the designs he had concentrated in the murals he had hanging in forty-two public buildings in eastern cities. Only this time his objective was more than colorful art...most of all, it had to be safe and secure.

Finally, the garage was to be built. Only one automobile ever drove into that garage—his own. Zorthian stood back and surveyed every possibility of danger to his children. He could think of only one remaining hazard. He had to back out of the garage. He feared that he might, in some hurried moment, back over one of the children. He immediately made plans for a garage that would allow him to get in and out without backing up.

The contractor returned and set the forms for his design, but before the cement could be poured, a downpour stopped the project. It was the first rainfall in many weeks of a long West Coast drought. If it had not rained that week, the system would have been completed and been in use by Sunday. That was February 9, 1947... the day his eighteen-month old son, squirmed away from his sister's grasp and ran behind the car as Zorthian drove it from the garage. The child was killed instantly.

Zorthian's effectiveness as an artist was put on hold once he started running scared and all his precautions did not prevent the kind of accident he feared most.

Like Zorthian, there are people who are afraid to die so they never live.

There are the kinds of people who only eat bland food so as to avoid an ulcer;

...they drink no tea or coffee or other stimulants, in the name of health;

...they go to bed early and stay away from night life;

...they avoid all controversial subjects so as never to offend anyone;

...they mind keep to themselves and avoid involvement in other people's problems;

...they spend money only on the necessities and save all they can.

And it is these kinds of people who attempt to do all these things and still turnaround and slip break their neck in the bathtub.

There are those who have allowed fears to paralyze them so that they put on hold their effectiveness as a Christian. They never step out on faith and do great things for God. They are afraid to take risks and walk by faith and not by sight.

In the Christian life, there are those who are afraid to take risks because of what the world says. The world says, "*it can't be done;*" "*it shouldn't be done;*" "*if you do it you are weird;*" "*if you do it you are odd.*"

Risk Aversion is a stock market term. A risk-averse investor dislikes risk, and therefore will stay away from adding high-risk stocks or investments to their portfolio and in turn will often lose out on higher rates of return. Risk taking for the Christian sometimes means defying the ways of the world for a higher rate of praise and glory to God. The world always has prophecies of glee and happiness for the person who lives according to its ways but promises doom and gloom for the one who attempts to live according to the Lord's Word and ways.

Today we are going to briefly look at some risks that Christians are called to take, that will certainly be at odds with what we are hearing in the world.

Our lesson is taken from the letter of 1st Peter.

Background

(1 Pet 1:1 NKJV) Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

In this letter, the Apostle Peter is addressing Jewish Christians who had been persecuted and fled their homes and lands. These people were called the Christians of the Dispersion and lived in the Asian provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. 1 Peter was a *circular* letter that was meant to be read and passed on to these Christians who were scattered. Peter wrote this letter to encourage these Christians in the midst of their suffering.

I also believe that the Holy Spirit was preparing the believers of Asia for the fury of the neurotic Roman Emperor Nero that was about to be unleashed. In 64 A.D., a great fire broke out in Rome which destroyed much of the city and economically devastated the Roman population. Most suspected that the Roman Emperor Nero intentionally set the fire himself.

But Nero blamed the fire on Christians. People were already suspicious of the followers of Christ and Nero capitalized on this suspicion and executed many Christians.

The 1st century historian Tacitus records the following in his *Annals*: "*...a vast multitude, were convicted, not for the crime of starting fires but for being haters of the human race. And in their deaths they were made the subjects of sport; for they were wrapped in the hides of wild beasts and torn to pieces by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set on fire, and when day declined, were burned to serve as lights for the streets at night.*"¹

In this letter to believers living during this time, Peter attempts to provide an explanation for their "fiery trial" (1 Pet. 4:12).

The easy thing for the believer to do was to run. If the Christian was "Public Enemy No. 1" in the Roman Empire—that's a no brainer—let's pack our bags and leave! This leads us to the first area where there is risk.

God called these believers to be lights in a dark place. He called these believers along with all followers of Jesus to be His witnesses. If they ran who would be light? Who would be witnesses of the love and grace of God?

So the first risk that God is teaching us in this passage is as follows:

1.) Take the risk to trust God in your circumstances

The believers in Asia Minor were facing dire circumstances. Many of them were being killed just because they were following Jesus. Peter wanted his readers to know that they should view their suffering through the agonies of Jesus.

He wanted his readers to know that there was a divine purpose in their suffering—there was a proper response the Christian should have to suffering. Peter wanted his readers to know that Christians suffer so that they might become more like their Savior, Jesus Christ.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persecution_of_Christians#Persecution_under_Nero.2C_64-68_A.D.

In chapter one, Peter begins to give his readers several reasons to “hang in there” in the midst of their circumstances.

In 1:2, he referred to them as the *“elect according to the foreknowledge of God.”* Peter was letting them know that God had “handpicked” them out from among the people of the world. They were saved, sanctified and sealed and nothing that anyone could do to them would change that!

In verse 3-4, he tells them that God has mercifully born them anew to a *“living hope.”* Not only that but they have been given an *“undefiled and incorruptible inheritance that has been reserved and is being protected for them in heaven.”*

In verse 5, Peter conveys to his readers truths about their eternal security. He writes that they are *“kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”*

In verse 6 Peter lets them know that they can rejoice in their circumstances even though they have been grieved by various trials because their joyful response proves that their faith is genuine and it brings glory to Jesus Christ when He comes back to get them.

In verse 13 to 21, Peter encourages his readers to rejoice in spite of the trials they are undergoing. He encourages them to be obedient, alert and holy because they were redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus.

It takes faith to trust God in the midst of trying circumstances. While our lives aren’t yet being threatened with death for being a Christian in this nation, we still are still challenged to take some risks in our circumstances.

For example, the economy has forced some to cut their spending habits. High fuel prices have translated into higher prices for goods and services.

As Christians we are still commanded in Scripture to give God the first fruits of our income. God has promised that He would take care of us if we *“seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.”*

It’s risky business to give God right off the top of your pay each pay period when BGE is threatening to turn off your lights. It’s risky business to give God ten percent of your gross income when the rent is due.

At the beginning of chapter two Peter lets his readers know that they are called out from among the world. He lets us know that Christians are *“living stones”* who are built up into a spiritual house where Jesus is the “Chief Cornerstone” and for those who believe, He is *“precious.”*

Jesus is precious because He *called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. We who were once not a people are now the people of God. We who had not obtained mercy have now have obtained mercy.”*

Peter goes on to teach his readers in chapter two how to live in a world that doesn’t think too highly of them. The world hates believers because they are children of the Savior who they hate. In this section Peter teaches his readers how they are to have an attitude of submission while living in the midst of a society that is anti-Christ and anti-Christian.

This brings us to another risk that believers are encouraged to take:

2.) *Take the risk to trust God and live right*

Imagine being chased from where you lived; the home you worked long and hard to buy and furnish—the place where your family has its roots. Imagine being “not wanted” in your neighborhood. It’s easy for one to become bitter and want to get back.

In chapter two, verses 11-12 Peter encourages his readers to submit to a pattern of good behavior.

He says, “*Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*”

Peter got this principal for living from none other than the Lord Jesus Himself. For in Matthew 5:39 Jesus says, “*But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*”

A successful Irish boxer one day accepted the call to become a follower of Jesus Christ. He grew in faith and became a preacher of the Gospel. One day he came into town and began setting up his evangelistic tent when a couple of tough thugs noticed what he was doing.

Knowing nothing of the evangelist's background, they made a few insulting remarks to him. The Irishman merely turned and looked at them. Pressing his luck, one of the bullies took a swing and struck a glancing blow on one side of the ex-boxer's face. He shook it off and said nothing as he stuck out his jaw to the thug again. The man took another glance and punched the preacher on the side of the cheek. At that point, the ex-boxer swiftly took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and announced: “The Lord gave me no further instructions.”

This is certainly not what Jesus meant when He taught us to “turn the other cheek.” The natural inclination for us is to get back when someone speaks against us or mistreats us, but God tells us in 1st Peter to demonstrate “honorable conduct” when we are talked about so that God will be glorified.

That’s risky behavior because you are now putting God’s honor above your own.
That’s risky behavior because your non-retaliatory response will be interpreted as weakness.

God wants us to take the risk to live right and trust Him with the results.

3.) Take the risk to trust God and submit to your government

In chapter two, 13-17, Peter exhorts his readers to submit to the government: “*Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake...*”

Peter is telling us that Christians ought to be the best examples of citizens.

Christians ought to pay their taxes.

Christians ought to obey the traffic laws.

Christians should never disrespect government authorities like mayors, governors, presidents and police officers.

However, there is only one time when Christians are allowed to disobey government authorities—this is when their laws contradict God’s laws. An example of this is found in the book of Acts where the apostles were preaching and teaching Jesus Christ every opportunity God gave them.

Acts chapter 5 tells us the Jews didn't like this so they conspired against them and told the government of Rome that these men were disrespecting Caesar by saying "Jesus was King." The apostles were thrown into prison but later on at night were miraculously set free by an angel.

The Apostles go right back to the streets and continue to preach and teach about Jesus and are picked up again by the officers who say to them, "*Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!*"

Pay close attention to how the apostles answered this question:

(Acts 5:29 NKJV) But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men."

(Acts 5:30 NKJV) "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree.

(Acts 5:31 NKJV) "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

(Acts 5:32 NKJV) "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him."

Now Peter tells us in his letter to "*submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.*"

But here in Acts 5 this same Peter is disobeying the government officers. Is Peter contradicting himself? No! When the authority told him to do something that didn't agree with the Word of God, Peter said he was going to *obey God rather than man.*

Submitting to the government is risky business but when what they are requiring you and I to do is the right thing to do, we ought to obey.

Traffic lights are there to save lives.

Laws against texting while driving are there to protect lives.

Laws against driving under the influence are there to protect lives.

Paul says it this way in Romans 13:

Rom 13:1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Rom 13:2 Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

Rom 13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.

Rom 13:4 For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.

Lastly, Paul encourages us to pray for our leaders. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 Paul writes, "*Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.*"

Related to taking the risk to trust God and submit to the government is the fourth risk in our outline that Christians are called to take:

4.) Take the risk to trust God and submit to your employer

In verse 18-20, he tells his Christian readers to submit to their masters—even the unreasonable ones.

1 Pet 2:18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

1 Pet 2:19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.

1 Pet 2:20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God.

We would say today, “Do what your employer tells you to do.” But Peter was addressing people who were being singled out by their employer and mistreated because they were followers of Jesus who they regarded as “King.”

Peter says, be submissive to your employers, not just to the good and gentle, but also to those who are harsh. It was easy for the believer to do a good job for the good boss but it was difficult to work hard for the evil boss.

When I was a supervisor, my team knew that I was a Christian minister. I was not only a minister; I was one who rose up from the rank and file. I used to be a technician, now I was a supervisor of technicians.

Some of the people who worked for me gave an honest day of work for an honest day of pay. But then there were those who came to work expecting to get paid for socializing.

When I was around they acted like they were working but as soon as I left the work area, they put their tools down and started talking with their coworkers. When the Scripture says, “There is nothing new under the sun” we know it’s true because the Apostle Paul had to deal with shamming employees over two thousand years ago:

Col 3:22 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.

How many of us work harder when the boss is looking than when he or she is not? How many of us have had our computers on some website until the boss comes over and you quickly switch it to a work-related screen? Today there are having problems with employees who spend work hours “facebooking” rather than working.

Whether our boss is good or bad, reasonable or harsh—that is not the issue. Paul goes on in Colossians 3:23-24 and says, “*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.*”

5.) Take the risk to trust God in your marital responsibilities

In chapter three, Peter encourages Christian wives suffering in their marriages to submit to their husbands. In verse one he says, “*Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives...*”

Peter goes on to encourage Christian husbands suffering in their marriages to submit to their wives by loving them and not leaving them. In verse seven he writes, “*Husbands, likewise, dwell with them*

with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."

Notice both in 3:1 and 3:7 Peter uses the word "likewise." Some translations have it, "*In the same way.*" When Peter uses the word "*likewise*" he referring to the previous *context* of this letter. The context deals with how to get along in a world that doesn't like Christians.

Peter has just dealt with how to get along with people who call you *evildoers* because you are a Christian. He has just told his readers how to get along with governments that treated them differently because of their faith. He has just encouraged his readers how to get along with a boss who mistreated them because of their association with King Jesus.

He deals with each of these hotspots of human suffering in the Christian community by focusing on the supreme example of the One who has already run the race of suffering. In other words, Peter is saying to his readers, "*Check out Jesus--He's been there, He's experienced that.*" Jesus has been down the path of suffering and now He is calling you and me to walk in His footprints.

1 Pet 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

1 Pet 2:22 "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth";

1 Pet 2:23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;

1 Pet 2:24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.

1 Pet 2:25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Immediately after this Peter says, "*Wives likewise*" and in verse seven, "*Husbands likewise.*" Peter was saying, "*In the same way*" as Jesus Christ responded to suffering, you follow in His steps.

When sinful men shoved that crown of thorns on His head, drove those rusty nails through His hands and feet and raised Him up on that rugged cross, Jesus could have summoned legends of angels but...Peter says, "*He who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed or entrusted Himself to Him who judges righteously...*"

So Peter says to both the wife and the husband, in the same way Jesus responded to suffering, you do likewise—this is indeed risky business.

To wives, the Word of God says in 1 Peter 3:1, "*Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives...*"

I have had some women say to me, "*What do you mean submit?*" "*I ain't submitting to him until he starts acting like he is worth submitting to.*"

Notice that Peter doesn't say that God wants you to start submitting to him once he starts acting right. No, the command from God's Word is to submit even when he's not acting right—that's risky business!

He may not ever start acting right! But then God just might get a hold of this husband because of the behavior of his wife. This is exactly what God's Word says in the following verses:

*1 Pet 3:1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,
1 Pet 3:2 when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.
1 Pet 3:3 Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel;
1 Pet 3:4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.*

God is calling the wife to risk her own comfort on God's glory. He is calling the wife to risk having her own expectations met and dreams fulfilled on pleasing God rather than herself—this is a great risk that can result in either great rewards or more hardship—many women are willing to take this risk.

But the risk is not the woman's alone—there are risks that the husband has to take as well. You see Peter is writing to the wife who is a Christian but is married to an unbelieving husband. He is also writing to the husband who is a Christian but is married to an unbelieving wife.

The kind of marriage where the husband and wife are unequally yoked can be among the most miserable of experiences anyone could ever have. Yet nothing was more miserable than what our Lord Jesus went through.

Peter's encouragement to husbands is contained in just one verse (vs. 7) but it is full of truth:

"Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."

This is risky business for the husband who has a wife who is not meeting his needs. She is not respecting him—cutting him down in front of his friends and in front of the children. She doesn't praise him for the good things he does. Perhaps she is not meeting his physical needs.

It is easy for this man to be embittered toward his wife but God tells him to take the risk to:

1. Notice her – *"You husbands likewise, live with your wives..."*

It's just old-fashioned chivalry or courtesy to acknowledge your wife.

Acknowledge her when you get home from work, before you do anything else.
Acknowledge her when she enters a room when you are talking to someone or on the phone.
Acknowledge her when she leaves the table at the restaurant to go to the ladies room.

Notice her "new hair styles;" Notice her new dress or outfit. Notice her perfume. Notice how she decorates the home. Notice when she's sacrificed to cook you a good meal.

2. Listen to her - *"... live with your wives in an understanding way..."*

Husbands are commanded by God to dwell with their wives according to knowledge. This means that you have to study your wife--learn her like you would a repair manual or a play book.

It is only through listening to her that you will come to *know* her. Don't grunt "uh-huh." Talk to her—hold a conversation with her.

3. Appreciate her - *"...as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor..."*

Open the door for her. Help her to be seated. Handle her gently. Know what agitates her. Be familiar with what causes her to be anxious.

4. Minister to her - "...as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered."

Value her opinion. Yes, God has granted you headship as a husband but consider your wife's feelings.

This is risky business for both the husband and wife—especially for those who are in a difficult or challenging marriage.

The letter of 1st Peter is written to Christians who are suffering unjustly because they are Christians.

He tells you how to get along with people who call you *evildoers* because you are a Christian. He tells his readers how to get along with governments that treat them bad because of their faith. He calls his readers to submit to a boss who mistreats them because they are Jesus followers.

He deals with each of these hotspots of human suffering in the Christian community by focusing on the supreme example of the One who has already run the race of suffering.

When Jesus was cussed at He didn't cuss them out in return.

When Jesus was insulted He didn't cast insults in return.

When Jesus suffered He didn't threaten.

When sinful men mocked and ridiculed Jesus He could have struck back but He didn't.

When sinful men punched His face and pulled out His beard, He who spoke the worlds into existence could have taken them out, but He didn't.

Peter tells us that Jesus didn't get even but "*committed Himself to Him who judges righteously...*"

Jesus was willing to commit all of what He was going through to the Father's care and "let the chips fall where they may."

It's risky business to obey the law of the land—you just can't trust the cops these days.

It's risky business to please God by doing your best on the job—your boss may never notice you.

It's risky business to give the first part of your income to the Lord—you have bills to pay.

It's risky business to reverence your husband—he might take advantage of your love and you might get hurt.

It's risky business to love your wife—she might be cold and indifferent to you for the rest of your life.

If there was no heaven—these kinds of risks might not be worth it.

If this life was all there was, these risks would be too high.

If Christ had not risked it all for me—it would be a no brainer for me—I would not take the risk.

But Christ did risk it all for us—He left Heaven's glory and came into this dark world to redeem us from our sins. Praise His Name!