

Message ----- Risk: Management vs. Ministry

Karen:

Over the past few weeks you have been learning about different practices of fruitful congregations. We were asked to continue this series by talking about risk-taking mission and service because of how risk-taking ministry has been integrated into our daily life. For the past four years we have both served students at Sacramento State University through InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. We led Bible studies in the dorms, mentored younger and sometimes older students, and planned conferences and outreach events. These experiences revealed how important it is for God's people to take risks in mission and service. And after all risk taking makes all the other practices of a fruitful church possible: extravagant generosity, passionate worship, radical hospitality, and intentional faith development. All these ideals require at one time or another, a risk.

And so the title of our message is: Risk: Management vs. Ministry

### **Risk management story**

Jonathan:

The first time I heard the phrase "Risk Management" was at leadership conference I was attending. At Sacramento State, Frisbee is about the most popular thing to play so it was no surprise to see a few people tossing a disc back and forth at lunchtime. As with most games played with oddly shaped accessories, things tend to get stuck on rooftops. One of my fellow students had deftly shimmied up the wall and was triumphantly perched on the roof with the errant Frisbee in hand. At that moment I heard the person responsible for keeping us all alive mutter, "That's a risk management issue". I was intrigued by this risk management, what was risk management? I spent the rest of the weekend watching students doing dangerous things and asking our leader, "is this risk management"? She confirmed that most of it was. From that experience I learned that risk management is what you do to make sure that you minimize risk or the appearance of risk whenever possible to avoid being held liable for consequences. That was an interesting look into how organizations have to protect themselves. It strikes me that in our own personal lives we also try to manage risk.

### **What happens when we manage risk in our lives?**

When we manage risk we are not responsible for other people's injuries or failures because we distance ourselves from their danger by not suggesting risky behavior. For example, if someone decides to jump off a building and they injure themselves, I could not be held accountable because I wasn't the one to suggest they try. When we manage risk we do not help those around us grow in faith because we do not take the risk of asking them to try things outside their comfort zone. We can become complacent in our own lives because we never take risks. We can have all our ducks lined up, in such tight rows, and our security is found in our plans. By living like this, we don't allow space for God to do great things. What is more, we demonstrate that we do not value the things of God when we will not risk for them. What is demonstrated when a parent will not risk for their child? What is demonstrated when a husband or wife will not risk for each other? No, we must risk for what we value.

The worst thing that happens when we manage risk is that we can become stagnate in our faith. On our honeymoon we were given a room with a “lakeside view”. Unfortunately for us, the fountains that churn up the water, no longer functioned. This produced stagnate water which was overgrown with algae, could not support life and was ugly. Risk is what churns up our lives. We must continue to take risks or we will be relegated to a stagnate life. Believe me, nobody likes stagnate things, especially on honeymoons.

Karen:

**The Beauty of risk taking ministry and service:**

When we reject this stagnant life of risk management, beauty is found through risk taking mission and service. The scripture illustrates the risk Jesus required his disciples to take when he sent them out into the villages. He gave them authority in his name and instructed them to take nothing with them; no food, no traveler’s bag, no money. Jesus wanted them to take the risk of going out into their own people, identifying with him in his mission. The disciples had to depend on God and people they would meet in order to survive. What if Jesus had told them to take a backpack of food and all the essentials with them? They would have been fully equipped with everything they needed. They would not have needed much faith.

Risk taking in mission and service allows us the opportunity to grow in our faith by forcing us to trust that God will act. When we see God act, we are once again reminded of who he is and his plans for our broken world. Taking risks in faith allows us to partner with God on a deeper level because by acting boldly, we can join him in what he is doing. His work is not stagnant or safe. It requires risk. We show that we value God when we take those risks for his purposes. Through our risks in mission and service, God can do amazing things to transform our lives and the communities around us.

Jonathan:

We know a student who truly embraces risky behavior. Not so much in the spiritual sense, but in the “please come down from that cliff” sort of way. Spiritually, we can take the model of those types of people who choose to risk what they have or risk what they are for God.

People like John Wesley, the Father of Methodism. Wesley’s father, also a minister, was very poor and was even taken to debtor’s prison once. It would have been easy for John Wesley to justify protecting his wealth in his own life considering how tight money was for his family. However he chose to serve as a minister and live a life of dangerous risk. As a student at Oxford he lived off an allowance of 28 pounds a year. After graduation and beginning life as a minister, he had an annual salary of 30 pounds. He chose to live off 28 pounds and give away the excess 2 pounds. The next year his salary had raised to 60 pounds, he lived off 28 and gave away 32. The next year his salary was 90 pounds, lived off 28 and gave away 62. Later in life his yearly income had risen to 1,400 pounds, he still lived on 28 pounds a year. He risked the security gained by affluence and chose to live extravagantly generous.

Karen:

Another example of risk taking in mission and service is Kacie Stratton’s ministry in Sacramento. After reading an article in the newspaper about the plight of children and their families in a local low-income community, Kacie gathered people around her from her church

and founded The Greenhouse. I volunteered at the Greenhouse for about three years while I was in college. The Greenhouse's vision is to help unlock the resources of the neighborhood and transform it from one that is merely surviving into one that is thriving. It provides after-school tutoring and mentoring for kids and teens, gives them positive role models, spiritual guidance, love, and stability in a very dangerous neighborhood. Kacie took the risk of living in that general area and integrating herself into that community. She chooses to physically face the same dangers as the children and the families she serves. She also took a financial risk in building this ministry from the ground up. As a result of her risk, the community around her is being transformed.

In my own life, Jon and I led a bible study in one of the dorms, Draper Hall. For me, my decision to lead a small group was a risk because I had never formally led any kind of bible study before. I felt excited, intimidated and in over my head all at the same time. The first week of school, Jon and I were instructed to invite the entire dorm to our bible study. Picture two terrified introverts knocking on around 200 students' doors, inviting them to a bible study neither of us felt competent to lead. We took that risk and as a result, we had about 12 freshmen students actively involved in our bible study! Our group ate together, played together, studied the bible together, and served our dormmates together. As a group, we knocked on those same doors, pockets stuffed with trash bags and took out the entire dorm's garbage. Through this service, we risked identifying ourselves as Christians in an environment that was indifferent to our faith. We risked doors being slammed in our faces and looking like weirdos in front of the peers we lived with every day. As a result of our risk, we became known as a bible study that served and really cared about the dorm community. People came to expect us about once a month, some even stored up their trash, waiting for our arrival. Others posed the hopeful question, "do you guys take recycling?" Our reply, "Why not?"

Jonathan:

A few years after our Draper garbage days, a group of InterVarsity students wanted to know more about what Jesus has to say about poverty. They chose to attend a conference held in the Tenderloin district of San Francisco. I led a small group of Christian students even though I was newly processing the same information. Over the weekend some students slept in the streets with the homeless, others in transitional housing in order to live in solidarity with the poor. My friend Walter and I slept in transitional housing which is where the homeless spend a portion of their time. We were treated to midnight screaming, of "I've been robbed" and policemen banging angrily on doors, cussing and yelling at a homeless woman to shut up. During that night Walter and I were thinking, "What are we doing here?" As a community these College students risked their safety and their health to gain a picture of what it means to live in poverty and to gain insight into what Jesus would have us do in response.

On a more global theme, a couple of InterVarsity staff invited me to come with them on a mission trip to China. I was intrigued but I knew there was no way I could afford the plane ticket. I wanted to talk to some "sensible older folks" thinking they would tell me to play it safe and stay at home. I remember talking with a mentor of mine over a cup of tea. I had just told him there was no way I could afford the plane ride and he asked me if I had the faith to go anyway. I remember dramatically pointing to my shoes filled with holes and saying, "I can't even afford new shoes". I was angry that he was trying to make this a faith issue when in my

mind it was only a feasibility issue. Eventually I decided to take this as a faith-risk. I boldly told people that I was going to China on a mission trip but that I needed help to get there. I raised enough money for myself and more so I gave it to others who were going with me. Here I am in China, where I thought it was impossible to be. God used this time to develop a love for International Students and a desire to enter into ministry as my livelihood.

### **The risk we are now taking**

Now Karen and I are taking a new risk. After graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science, I felt called to ministry with College students. I now work for InterVarsity as a campus minister, leading bible studies, mentoring and providing spiritual guidance to the students. I am raising financial support like a missionary in order to devote my life to ministering at Sacramento State and to support my new family of Karen and myself. I am also starting an International Student ministry at Sacramento State. International Students are among the most overlooked groups on campus. One statistic told me that most international students never set foot in an American home. That shames me. I want to provide hospitality to students who are far from home, who have not been given the chance to hear Jesus' teaching and who very much need someone to help them adjust to their strange surroundings. This is me with one of those international students. Chong Yu Wei was an international student from Taiwan and we welcomed him into our community. Right here I am teaching him how to do a hoe-down. College is the time when students will decide what they will be and do for the rest of their lives. It is a place where the future leaders of the world commune and where the people who can change the face of the world are formed. It is so important to have Jesus' message be a part of that place.

Karen:

My risk was choosing to partner with Jon in his life and ministry. When he proposed, he had recently started fundraising for InterVarsity and had raised about 120 dollars a month as income. I knew it would be a long process, but because I believed in InterVarsity's mission and I loved Jon, I took this risk. I followed him into the uncertainty where nothing was guaranteed. At that point, I had two years left to earn my master's in speech pathology. In September of 2007, I wrote in my journal, "I've never had to wonder if I would make it. I'm excited and terrified at the same time and I will learn what it means to say that God provides."

### **How God has met us already**

One way that I learned about God's provision was through an amazing gift from my best friend, Alyssa and her husband Steve. As we drove to their house for dinner, Jon and I heard a pledge drive on the K-Love Christian radio station. They announced that they needed five 100 dollar supporters in the next hour. Jon joked around saying that we should get a pledge drive on the radio for InterVarsity. I laughed at first, then my stomach dropped and I expressed how scared I was about fundraising. Jon told me incredible stories from his childhood about how God provided for his family: random gifts from people, clothes left on their doorstep, praying for things and watching them happen. I told him that I didn't have experiences like that to hold onto; I wanted to tangibly understand that God would take care of us. Jon assured me that God would give me those experiences and through them, I would learn to trust in God's provision. We arrived at Alyssa and Steve's house and after enjoying dinner, they gave us a check for Jon's

ministry at Sacramento State. They had some extra money and wanted to help us as much as possible. I held in my hand a check for 500 dollars, the exact amount we heard on the radio pledge drive earlier that night. We were completely blown away by their generosity. It was a risk for them to give us that gift because they were newly married and Steve just recently started working as a high school teacher. They could have chosen to save that money, but instead by taking that risk they met us in our need.

Another way that God met us in our risk is with our living situation. We were on a tight budget, looking for cheap apartments when an older missionary couple asked us to look into a duplex that a friend of theirs would be renting. Even though we knew we couldn't afford it, we met with the owners and saw the two-bedroom duplex. The owners loved the idea of the house being used for ministry and chose to rent it to us for far below market value. We now live in a wonderful home with nearly everything on our "wish" list and extremely close to the campus. We never could have expected how God would bless us.

Jonathan:

When we discussed marriage, we had hoped to have at least 70% of my budget pledged before our wedding. As the weeks sped by, we resigned ourselves to the fact that that goal could not be reached. After 6 months of fundraising and just 5 months away from the date, we had about 30% pledged. But in the last few weeks before our wedding several large donors took us on as their missionaries. We reached 72% of our budget and praised God for his provision!

We want to encourage you to take the spiritual, emotional or financial risks that God presents to you. We would like to invite you to partner with us in our risk in whatever way you might be able, whether it be monthly, annual or a one-time gift. This is an opportunity to take a risk of your own and see the amazing ripple effects of your generosity. And we encourage you to talk to us after the service, we'll be in the back room, if you would like to learn more about how you can invest in college students and their spiritual lives. Risk taking may be scary, it may be different, it might seem illogical but risk taking in mission and service is essential to spiritual growth. Risk taking makes everything else possible...extravagant generosity, passionate worship, radical hospitality and intentional faith development. God did not create us to be a stagnate community; he created us to be fully alive.

\*\* If you are interested in supporting Jonathan and Karen's ministry with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at Sacramento State, you can e-mail them at [kmkbear@aol.com](mailto:kmkbear@aol.com) or [nova\\_lead@yahoo.com](mailto:nova_lead@yahoo.com).