

**RISK  
IS RIGHT**

# RISK IS RIGHT

Better to Lose Your Life Than to Waste It

JOHN PIPER

*Foreword by David Platt*

 **CROSSWAY**  
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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# FOREWORD

*David Platt*

*Retreat or risk?* Throughout redemptive history, that question has confronted God's people. As John Piper references in the pages ahead, it was the decision facing the Israelites on a crucial day at Kadesh Barnea. Standing on the brink of the Promised Land, with the guarantee of God within their grasp, they ran from risk and chose to retreat. Instead of staking their lives on the faithfulness of God, they recoiled in fear. The cost was great, and the Lord left an entire generation to waste away in a wilderness until they died.

## **THE COMMISSION IS CLEAR**

Fast-forward a few thousand years, and you come to the people of God standing in a similar moment. We live in a world where half the population is living on less than two dollars a day, and over a billion people dwell in desperate poverty. Such physical need is only surpassed by spiritual poverty. Billions of people are engrossed in the worship of false gods, and approximately two billion of those people are still unreached with the gospel, meaning that they have little chance of even

hearing about the sacrifice of Christ for their sins before they die. Most of the unreached live in hard-to-reach areas of the world that are hostile to Christians—areas of the world where our brothers and sisters are presently being persecuted, imprisoned, and killed.

Though the challenges facing the church are great, the commission Christ has given is clear: make disciples of all the nations. Spend your lives spreading the gospel of God for the glory of God to the ends of the earth. As you go, trust in his sovereign authority, depend on his indwelling presence, and experience his incomparable joy.

### **JESUS IS WORTH IT**

As we stand at our Kadesh Barnea, we have a choice. We, too, can retreat into a wilderness of wasted opportunity. We can rest content in casual, convenient, cozy, comfortable Christian lives as we cling to the safety and security this world offers. We can coast through a cultural landscape marked by materialism, characterized by consumerism, and engulfed in individualism. We can assent to the spirit of this age and choose to spend our lives seeking worldly pleasures, acquiring worldly possessions, and pursuing worldly ambitions—all under the banner of cultural Christianity.

Or we can decide that Jesus is worth more than this. We can recognize that he has created us, saved us, and called us for

a much greater purpose than anything this world could ever offer us. We can die to ourselves, our hopes, our dreams, our ambitions, our priorities, and our plans. We can do all of this because we believe that the person and the plan of Christ bring reward that makes any risk more than worth it.

### **POWERED BY GOSPEL JOY**

In Matthew 13:44 Jesus tells his disciples, “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”

I love this picture. Imagine walking in a field and stumbling upon a treasure that is more valuable than anything else you could work for or find in this life. It is more valuable than all you have now or will ever have in the future. You look around and notice that no one else realizes the treasure is here, so you cover it up quickly and walk away, pretending you haven't seen anything. You go into town and begin to sell off all your possessions to have enough money to buy that field. The world thinks you're crazy.

“What are you thinking?” your friends and family ask you.

You tell them, “I'm buying that field over there.”

They look at you in disbelief. “That's foolish,” they say. “Why are you giving away everything you have to buy that field?”

You respond, “I have a hunch,” and you smile to yourself

as you walk away. You smile because you know that in the end any risk that others perceive is nothing compared to the reward you will receive. So with joy—with joy!—you sell it all. Why? Because you have found something worth losing everything else for.

This is the picture of Jesus in the gospel. He is something—someone—worth losing everything for. When we really believe this, then risking everything we are and everything we have, to know and obey Christ is no longer a matter of sacrifice. It's just common sense. To let go of the pursuits, possessions, pleasures, safety, and security of this world in order to follow Jesus wherever he leads, no matter what it costs, is not sacrificial as much as it is smart. In the words of Jim Elliot, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

### **FEARLESS IN THE FACE OF RISK**

I praise God for John Piper and the way he has shown me and countless others the supremacy of Christ. I was in college when I heard my first Piper sermon, entitled "Christ Died for God." I was compelled by a captivating, biblical vision of a God-centered God, and I began to realize in a fresh way that the ultimate reason for my existence is God's exaltation. Moreover, I began to recognize that my greatest joy is indeed found in God's greatest glory, and Christ is clearly a treasure worth

losing and letting go of everything for. This is a central theme (maybe *the* central theme) of Scripture and is the predominant truth that pervades John Piper's ministry, which is why this book by him on risk makes so much sense.

I pray that God will use it, along with a host of other things, to raise up an army of pastors, missionaries, church leaders, and church members who are fearless in the face of risk because they realize that in Christ, even death is reward. In view of God's great glory above us and in light of the world's great need around us, retreat is unquestionably wrong. For the good of our souls and for the glory of our Savior, risk is most assuredly right.



## Chapter One

# THE ULTIMATE MEANING OF LIFE

Almost everything I have to say is summed up in Paul's passionate words to the church in Philippi:

It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.  
(Phil. 1:20–21)

If you had asked Paul to tell you what the ultimate aim of life is—*his* life or *any* unwasted life—I think this is what he would have said. Honoring Christ, magnifying Christ, making much of Christ. That was the meaning of Paul's life. It should be the meaning of ours. And Paul prays it will be the meaning of his death as well. We live and we die to make much of Christ.

The universe was created for this—making much of Christ. Paul says as much in Colossians 1:16: “All things were created through him and *for* him.” *For* him. That is, for his

glory. For his admiration, esteem, wonder, praise, trust, obedience, allegiance, worship. This meaning of life is global. It embraces all the peoples of the world. Why did God call Paul and make him—and thousands after him—an emissary of the gospel to the nations? He answers, “We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith *for the sake of his name* among all the nations” (Rom. 1:5). For the sake of Jesus’s name.

After Jesus had died and made an atonement for sins, God raised him from the dead and “highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name” (Phil. 2:9). The reason God did this was the universal acclaim of Jesus Christ. He raised him “so that *at the name of Jesus* every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil. 2:10). John Stott warns against the treasonous imperialisms of using world missions as a cloak for pursuing honor for our own nation or church or organization, or ourselves. Then he says stunningly: “Only one imperialism is Christian, however, and that is concern for His Imperial Majesty Jesus Christ, and for the glory of his empire or kingdom.”<sup>1</sup>

This is what we live for, and die for: to make much of Jesus Christ and his glorious, universe-encompassing kingdom. The heart cry of our lives, young and old, men and women, rich and poor, is the glory of Jesus Christ so that *with full courage*

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Romans* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 53.

*now as always Christ might be honored in our bodies, whether by life or by death.*

There are a thousand ways to magnify Christ in life and death. None should be scorned. All are important. But none makes the worth of Christ shine more brightly than sacrificial love for other people in the name of Jesus. If Christ is so valuable that the hope of his immediate and eternal fellowship after death frees us from the self-serving fear of dying and enables us to lay down our lives for the good of others, such love magnifies the glory of Christ like nothing else in the world.

The Bible tells us that Jesus endured the cross “for the joy that was set before him” (Heb. 12:2)—the joy of being raised from the dead, returning to the glory of the Father, saving innumerable people from destruction, making the whole universe new, and being surrounded by countless worshipers forever. There never has been a greater act of love than that Jesus laid down his life to save sinners (John 15:13; Rom. 5:6-8). Therefore, the greatest act of love was enabled by hope of joy beyond the grave.

If Jesus was carried through the hour of death for the sake of others by hope of joy in the presence of God, we would be arrogant to presume we could be carried through death for others without such hope. The early Christians gave their property and their lives for sake of others because they knew

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that on the other side of death Jesus would be their great reward. “You had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, *since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one*” (Heb. 10:34).

Now we are ready to talk about risk.