

Session 7: Balancing Priorities & Taking Risks

WCR Summer Elective: God's Will & Making Decisions

Balancing Priorities¹

In a chapter entitled, "Substantial Healing in the Church," within *True Spirituality* Francis A. Schaeffer presented four loyalties of the Christian.² The Christian's first loyalty is to *God as God*. Jesus Christ should be preeminent over every area of a Christian's life. Nothing else should compare to one's complete devotion to the triune God. The second loyalty is to *principles of revealed Christianity*. One must remain faithful to Scripture, truth, and Christian doctrine. The Christian's third loyalty is to the local *church*. One should be dedicated to church organizations only as far as they are biblically faithful. The fourth and final Christian loyalty is *human leadership*. Concerning the four loyalties of the Christian, he writes: "These things must be kept in their proper order. To reverse the order is to be totally destructive."³

It is interesting that Schaeffer did not mention marriage and family among his listing of the Christian's four loyalties, but his focus in that chapter was on healing in the church. It seems likely that marriage and family would naturally fall within the third loyalty of church. It is within the local church that a godly marriage and family practice worship, find fellowship, receive instruction, and are kept accountable in spiritual growth and holiness. Husbands are to sacrificially love their wives. Wives are to respect their husbands. Children are to obey their parents. When the relationships of marriage and family fall into sin and disharmony, the local church is responsible to come alongside, discipline, and restore.

The Bible does not give a concrete approach for balancing marriage, family, and church ministry. In fact, there is a paradox given of both loving and hating one's family for the sake of the gospel. Jesus said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). When visited on one occasion by his earthly family—his mother and brothers—Jesus prioritized his spiritual family saying, "whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt 12:50). All these relationship roles of marriage, family, and church have given responsibilities that require balance in priority of time, effort, and sacrifice.

¹ Josh Berrus, *The Church's Relationship With Patriotism and Politics: An Evaluation of Francis A. Schaeffer and John Howard Yoder*, 15-17.

² Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, 2d. ed., Vol. 3, *A Christian View of Spirituality*, 366-367.

³ *Ibid*, 367.

Saint Augustine of Hippo considered the concepts of ordinate and inordinate loves in *City of God*. He wrote: “This is true of everything created; though it is good, it can be loved in the right way or in the wrong way—in the right way, that is, when the proper order is kept, in the wrong way when that order is upset.”⁴ He went on to say:

But if the Creator is truly loved, that is, if he himself is loved, and not something else in his stead, then he cannot be wrongly loved. We must, in fact, observe the right order even in our love for the very love with which we love what is deserving of love, so that there may be in us the virtue which is the condition of the good life. Hence, as it seems to me, a brief and true definition of virtue is “rightly ordered love”. That is why in the holy *Song of Songs* Christ’s bride, the City of God, sings, “Set love in order in me.”⁵

Augustine believed that love was to be rightly ordered in one’s attachments and affections. C. S. Lewis also explored the ordering of one’s loves between affection, friendship, eros, and charity in his book *The Four Loves*.⁶ In a similar fashion, Christians must rightly order loyalties between the relationships of marriage, family, and church.

A believer’s primary loyalties as taught in Scripture are to God, family, and the local church. The Christian’s first allegiance is to God. The relationships of marriage, family, and church are defined and designated by God Himself in His word. Husbands are to love their wives and serve as head of the home. Wives are to respect their husbands and serve as a helpmate. Children are to honor and obey their parents. A church member is to submit to the local church, as long as it is biblically faithful. A life properly lived in loyalty to God will be demonstrated by a sacrificial loving commitment to marriage, family, and church.

⁴ Saint Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, Book 15, Ch. 22, 636.

⁵ Ibid, 637.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, In *The Inspirational Writings of C. S. Lewis*, 211.

Taking Risks: Notes from John Piper⁷

A. Definition of Risk

Risk is very simply an action that exposes you to the possibility of loss or injury. Risk is woven into the fabric of our finite lives. We cannot avoid risk even if we want to. Ignorance and uncertainty about tomorrow is our native air. All of our plans for tomorrow's activities can be shattered by a thousand unknowns whether we stay at home under the covers or ride the freeways. We must explode the myth of safety and somehow be delivered from the enchantment of security. Because it's a mirage. It doesn't exist. Every direction you turn there are unknowns and things beyond your control.

B. Biblical Examples of Risk-taking

1. Joab and Abishai: "May the Lord Do What Seems Good to Him" (2 Sam 10:11-12)
2. Queen Esther: "If I Perish, I Perish" (Esther 4:15-16)
3. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: "We Will Not Serve Your Gods" (Daniel 3:16-18)
4. Paul: "I Am Ready to Die for the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:21; 21:11-14)
"In Every City . . . Afflictions Await Me" (Acts 20:23; 2 Cor 11:24-28)
5. Jesus: "If They Persecuted Me, They Will Also Persecute You" (John 15:20)

C. Risking for the Wrong Reasons

1. Becoming so fixated on self-denial that we are unable to enjoy the proper pleasures of this life that God has given for our good.
2. Being drawn to a life of risk for self-exalting reasons:
 - a. Impulse of heroism or Lust for adventure.
 - b. Feeling superior by scorning the lazy and cowardly.
 - c. Courage of self-reliance.
 - d. Needing to earn God's favor: Thinking of risk as a kind of righteousness that makes us acceptable to God.

What would be missing from all these mistakes is childlike faith in the sovereign rule of God in the world and in his triumphant love. The power and the motive behind taking risks for the cause of God is faith in the all-providing, all-ruling, all-satisfying Son of God, Jesus Christ. The strength to *risk losing face* for the sake of Christ is the faith that God's love will lift up your face in the end and vindicate your cause. The strength to *risk losing money* for the cause of the Gospel is the faith that we have a treasure in the heavens that cannot fail. The strength to *risk losing life* in this world is faith in the promise that he who loses his life in this world will save it for the age to come. Christ's love for us does not spare us these sufferings. Risk is real. The Christian life is a painful life. Not joyless. But not painless either.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you (John 15:20). You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death (Luke 21:16).

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:31-39).

This slight momentary affliction is preparing [effecting, working, bringing about] for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Cor 4:17)

⁷ John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, Chapter 5.

D. Does God Really Supply All We Need?

Some of the risks mentioned in Romans 8:35 are:

"tribulation" - trouble & oppression of various kinds we must walk through (Acts 14:22).

"distress" - calamities that bring stress and threaten to break us (2 Corinthians 6:4; 12:10).

"persecution" - active opposition from the enemies of the Gospel (Matthew 5:11-12).

"danger" - every kind of threat or menace to body, soul, and family (2 Corinthians 11:26).

"sword" - the weapon that killed James (Acts 12:2).

"famine and nakedness" - the lack of food and clothing.

Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? . . . do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" . . . your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you (Matt 6:25, 31-33).

"Well, which is it?" we might ask. Are Christians subject to "famine and nakedness" or will God provide "all these things" when we need them? Will Christians never hunger or starve or be ill-clothed? Have not some of the greatest saints in the world been stripped and starved?

"They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated-of whom the world was not worthy-wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." The losses and miseries of these believers was not owing to their unbelief. They were faithful-people "of whom the world was not worthy" (Heb 11:37-38).

What, then, does Jesus mean, "All these things-all your food and clothing-will be added to you when you seek the kingdom of God first"? He means the same thing he meant when he said, "Some of you they will put to death. . . . But not a hair of your head will perish" (Luke 21:16-18). He meant that you will have everything you need *to do his will and be eternally and supremely happy in him.*

How much food and clothing are necessary? Necessary for what? we must ask.

Necessary to be comfortable? No, Jesus did not promise comfort.

Necessary to avoid shame? No, Jesus called us to bear shame for his name with joy.

Necessary to stay alive? No, he did not promise to spare us death-of any kind.

What Jesus meant was that our Father in heaven would never let us be tested beyond what we are able (1 Corinthians 10:13). If there is one scrap of bread that you need, as God's child, in order to *keep your faith* in the dungeon of starvation, you will have it. God does not promise enough food for comfort or life-he promises enough so that *you can trust him and do his will.*

E. I Can Do All Things Through Christ, Even Starve

When Paul promised, "My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus," he had just said, "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:12-13, 19). "All things" means "I can suffer hunger through him who strengthens me. I can be destitute of food and clothing through him who strengthens me." That is what Jesus promises. He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). If we *starve*, he will be our everlasting, life-giving bread. If we are shamed with *nakedness*, he will be our perfect, all-righteous apparel. If we are *tortured* and made to scream in our dying pain, he will keep us from cursing his name and will restore our beaten body to everlasting beauty.

F. The Only Road That Leads to Lasting Joy

This is the promise that empowers us to take risks for the sake of Christ. It is not the impulse of heroism, or the lust for adventure, or the courage of self-reliance, or the need to earn God's favor. It is simple trust in Christ-that in him God will do everything necessary so that we can enjoy making much of him forever. Every good poised to bless us, and every evil arrayed against us, will in the end help us boast only in the cross, magnify Christ, and glorify our Creator. Faith in these promises frees us to risk and to find in our own experience that it is better to lose our life than to waste it.

Therefore, it is right to risk for the cause of Christ. It is right to engage the enemy and say, "May the LORD do what seems good to him." It is right to serve the people of God, and say, "If I perish, I perish!" It is right to stand before the fiery furnace of affliction and refuse to bow down to the gods of this world. This is the road that leads to fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. At the end of every other road-secure and risk-free-we will put our face in our hands and say, "I've wasted it!"