

# Risky Business

## *Are People Worth It?*

June 30, 2024

*This morning, we're lookin' at the risk versus reward in relationships!*

So the million-dollar question is this: **are people worth it?**



Now, *risk* is all about *cost* – what you might *lose*, but *reward* is all about *payoff* – what you stand to *gain*. And the biggest rewards usually carry the biggest cost. Take Mountain climbing – just to get to the top of Mount Everest will run you about \$70K in training, travel, REI gear, and Sherpas. That is, of course, *if* you make it. 1 in every 60 people make it and well over 300 people have died trying, and another 200 people have never been found. And *yet*, many still believe, getting' to the top of the world's tallest peak, is *worth* the *risk*. But, really, the most high-risk, high reward thing we can do is get out of bed in the morning and simply walk out the front door. Yikes, I mean, there are people out there! And **relationships with other people are risky**. There's lotsa risks – *physical costs*, *emotional costs*, *financial costs*, and the costs of my precious “*me time*”. So, the question we all ask from time to time is, **is it worth it?**

Listen to the story Jesus told about the cost to one man walking out the door in the morning:

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite ... But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him’, he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ [Then Jesus asked] “Which of these three was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” - Luke 10:30-37 NIV

That's people, – life's biggest risk *AND* reward – the guy wouldn't *have gotten beaten* if it wasn't for other people, BUT – he may not have lived if it wasn't for other people. The truth is, **other people supply both our biggest blessings and our biggest challenges**. Unfortunately, it's all too easy to take the path of the Priest resistance.

**For these two, the injured guy was too messy.** They didn't want to get their hands *literally* bloody. And it would interrupt *their* agenda. But here's the problem, these men knew what they *should* do; they were experts in God's Word.

**They knew the command to love God *and* love neighbor. But apparently, they saw too small of a reward to take *this* risk.** Here's what Jesus has to say about that:

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. ... But love your enemies, do good to them ... Then your reward will be great – Luke 6:32-35 NIV

You know, forgetting to love your enemies is not just a challenge for those other guys: when my wife and I were newly married, and I was in the middle of seminary, we lived in a condo up in Bellingham. It was brand new, looked nice from the outside, but the walls were paper thin. Initially we didn't have any neighbors, things were great, we had the whole place to ourselves! That was short lived. Within a few weeks a single dude moved in next door. We would say hey now and then, he knew I was going to school to be a pastor, but and for some reason, this guy and I had instant beef. We didn't look like each other, act like each other, and probably didn't smell like each other. And I was pretty convinced we didn't worship the same God. And wouldn't you know it, we shared a bedroom wall with this guy. Erica and I were always trying to be nice, quiet neighbors and I think because he couldn't hear us, he thought we couldn't hear him. Well, he was wrong. Now I love movies, but not like *this* guy. It was 24/7 movie marathons next door, bumping his surround sound. And it wasn't *Pride and Prejudice* or *Little Women* over there – always *Jurassic Park*, *Saving Private Ryan*, or *The Fast and Furious*. So, I spent a number evenings walking over there asking him to turn it down or gently knocking on our shared wall as another reminder.



But one night his subwoofer woke us (and our brand new baby Avery) so I jumped up out of bed, intending to give one of those shared-wall “courtesy taps” but I saw red, I was so angry that I basically body-slammed the wall; like a wrestler flying off the top ropes! And what I heard next wasn't the subwoofer or the voice of Vin Diesel- but all kinds of crashing and things breaking.

Later I discovered I had knocked a bunch of family pictures and glass art off his wall. And you know what – I didn't even feel bad about it...that was until the next day. I knew better; but in my me I could no longer see the reward in putting up with this guy's noise. Just so you know, I did later apologize. So, what's the moral of the story? *Don't ever buy a condo.* No, **there's a cost to loving your neighbor. It's rarely easy, rarely fun, and rarely immediately rewarding.**

Loving your neighbor costs more grace, mercy, and compassion than most of us are willing to muster. **And that means we can't do it without Jesus!** In the fog of relationships, it's sometimes hard to see the payoff and hard to see the reward behind the risk.



**It's simple and pretty easy to sit in our lazy boys and talk about love, but it's another to actually get up and do it.** Cuz, giving like the Samaritan means sacrificing our precious stuff from our oil, wine, and donkeys (he obviously had other plans for that oil and wine) – to our time, energy, and attention. The truth is if we say we follow Jesus, we have to actually *live* like it!

Now, I am not in the practice of picking up women I don't know, but one day I just had to (I've got your attention now don't I). A few months ago, as I was driving into work and I spotted a woman walking along the road. I had never met her, had no idea where she was going, but I could see that her shoes didn't fit and were barely holding on. I knew wherever she was going, she wasn't going to get there anytime soon. It was that moment when the Lord gives you a nudge and you can't simply look the other way. So, I introduced myself we loaded up her stuff and she got in.

As Christina and I drove to the other side of town, she just couldn't stop saying "thank you" the whole time. I asked her about her family, about Jesus, about who she is! I don't remember many of my drives in to work in the morning, but I remembered this one... I drove all the way in with big tears in my eyes! Maybe some of *you* may have seen Christina or know her, but I can guarantee you if you see her, and stop and say hello, the reward will be worth the risk.

It's easy to feel like well I'm just one person, I mean, what can I do? I'm just one opinion, one voice, one vote. True, but as a wise man once said, "the power of one person doing the right thing for the right reason, and at the right time, is the greatest influence on our society."

The challenge is there are some conflicting messages out there. One message in our world today would say: set your own course; pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Be your own man, and be your own boss. The other competing message is you need others; people are important. If we know relationships are essential to our emotional, mental, spiritual, health, why are we not living like it? We so often get caught in the middle. Somewhere in between, **leave me alone and I can't do this alone!** Well, which one is it...the answer is, BOTH!

And if you're skeptical, or not sure if Christian community is for you, I want to highlight three rewards that I believe are worth the risk.

### **Community brings *purpose*.**

An isolated, lonely, hermit life is no way to live. You may be tempted to close the blinds with a bag of chips in one hand and the remote in the other but there's no *glory*, no *reward*, and certainly no *fulfillment* in the lazy boy! Community gives us the *opportunity* to live out the love we're called to! If we are not around other people, then who are we loving on? My self?

### **Community brings *accountability and healing*.**

James told the church to:

Confess your sins to each another and pray for each other so that you may be healed. –  
James 5:16 NIV

Sin gets in the way of all our relationships. Our relationship with God, our relationship with others. Sin isolates us, makes us avoid eye contact, and keeps us from walking through those doors on Sunday morning. But *community* brings *accountability*; it allows us to *discuss* our mistakes and receive the prayer, wisdom, and the healing we all need!



## Community brings life.

We all have shortcomings, blind-spots, and areas to grow in. Community acts as the mirror to help reveal those very things. Unless others are there to help me look more like Jesus, it's all too easy to assume I must be doing pretty good. But Community helps refine the rough edges we all carry! And what's in it for you? Everything! Jesus asks:



“What good will it be for [you] to gain the whole world, yet forfeit [your] soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?” – Matthew 16:26 NIV

Nothing! There's no reward worth *that* risk!

It would have been a culturally acceptable response for the Samaritan to leave the Jewish man along the road there to die. To look the other way. Samaritans and Jews were enemies. He didn't get out the scales to weigh the pros and cons. We don't have any evidence that he judged the injured man; didn't say, “well this is deserved. Don't you read the news; this road is dangerous. I mean, you were out past your curfew, so there you go!

Just like us, the man along the road was *undeserving* of the mercy of the Good Samaritan. The man along the road didn't deserve it, but the Samaritan gave anyway. No strings attached.

So, are people worth it? Absolutely! But not because of them, but because we serve a God who says people are important and **the true rewards in this life, are ones you can't see.**

So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. – 2 Corinthians 4:18 NIV



Aren't you glad that when Jesus examined the risk – knowing the cross would cost Him His life, He decided you were worth it.

That is what He was willing to pay. What we ourselves deserve is guilt, shame and condemnation, yet what we receive from Jesus instead is the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life.

There is no bigger or better reward than loving your neighbor – which is quite obvious when you're the neighbor in need! And there may be no bigger risk; but one day as you stand before Jesus may you hear:

“Well done good and faithful servant ... ‘Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.’” – Matthew 25:23, 40 NIV