

June 18, 2017
Rick Myatt

THE PROBLEM WITH BUYING A CAR Philippians 2:25-30

Just a few months ago I stood in front of Dylan and Amy Burcombe and officiated at their wedding as before an audience of friends and family they recited vows to love, honor and cherish one another as husband and wife for the rest of their lives. There are people in our country today who would say to them, "Are you crazy? Have you seen the statistics on divorce? Have you noticed how few married couples are really happy? Why would you take such a risk?"

I think back to when Laurie and I got married. She was 19 years old! Are you kidding me? What was she thinking? This might have made sense if she lived in the hollows of the Appalachians back in Kentucky where at 19 she would maybe be seen as verging on being an old maid, but not in Southern California. She was a child marrying a guy who had a tenuous job producing an income so meager it seemed impossible they could scrape by on it, and little if any indication that would ever improve in a significant way. She had friends who thought she'd lost her mind. I had friends who thought she'd lost her mind. Her parents thought she was being foolish, though they gave their consent, albeit less than enthusiastically. Many were sure she would wake up in a year or 2 and think, "What have I done? This was a huge mistake." What a risk she took in marrying me.

38 years later we're still waiting for her to wake up and realize this isn't what she wanted to do with her life. You've heard the investment maxim, "the greater the risk, the greater the reward." In other words, to get the big bucks you have to take big chances. If you don't risk much, you won't reap much. That has certainly held true in our life. Laurie took a huge risk in marrying me, but the reward to both of us has been enormous. It has been the biggest blessing of our lives. There is a corollary to that risk and reward principle. It is that nothing significant ever happens without taking a risk. If we try to play it safe at all times, we will never accomplish anything of much value. If we want to be game changers we will have to take risks. We will see an example of that in Philippians 2:25-30.

EPAPHRODITUS PROVED WORTHY OF HONOR

This letter was written by Paul around 61 A. D. likely while he was imprisoned in Rome. He was probably not in some hellhole of a cell, but he was in chains with a constant guard. There was a prison in Rome, and it was truly a dark dungeon, but it was mostly used only to briefly hold condemned prisoners awaiting execution.

The imprisonment of people like Paul was not as bad as being kept in jail because it was a form of guarded house arrest. On the other hand, the Roman system could be tough on prisoners because the Romans didn't think it necessary to feed and care for their prisoners. So prisoners had to somehow find their own sources of food and whatever else they needed to keep alive. Paul had often supported himself during his ministries by being a leather worker, but that was not always possible during his imprisonment.

So he was dependent upon others to provide and care for him. The church in Philippi, amazingly, was one of the most faithful in sending money and food to help Paul. This was amazing because they lived in what Paul called "extreme poverty." Despite the fact that they were destitute, these people somehow insisted on sending gifts to Paul to help him out. One of their members, Epaphroditus, went as part of the delegation to bring the gifts to him and stayed to help Paul. He kept him company, did errands for him and cared for him.

When he wrote Philippians Paul was sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi. He wanted to make sure that the Philippians knew that this faithful guy was not abandoning his post. He was returning to Philippi because Paul was sending him home, not because he couldn't take conditions in Rome anymore.

Paul was super grateful for both the Philippians and for Epaphroditus. He calls him a brother, co-worker and fellow soldier in verse 25. He loved and admired this guy. So he wanted to make sure that when he got home no one misunderstood his homecoming or criticized him. He tells them they should hold him and others like him in high regard. They should honor them.

The entertainment industry is big on honoring people. *Variety* magazine reported that there are 564 award shows on television every year. What a joke. When Paul talked about honoring Epaphroditus he didn't mean they should give him a dumb trophy. He meant they should value him and acknowledge both his character and his work. It had to do with the respect and gratitude they would give him.

Epaphroditus wasn't worthy of honor because he was stronger, more handsome, smarter or more talented than other people. He was worthy of honor because of his character. He was worthy of honor because he loved God so much he sacrificed to work for God's kingdom and he displayed great courage. This guy was clearly a quality man, one Paul deemed worthy of notice. We can see why in this passage.

EPAPHRODITUS RAN A RISK

Verse 30 says he “risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.” The Philippians, as we have seen, were not in a financial position to provide for Paul’s needs. They sent what they could. But there was a big gap between what they could afford and what Paul needed. Epaphroditus went to be with Paul to try to help fill that gap.

One consequence of his effort was, according to verse 27, he became ill and almost died. We don’t know what sort of illness it was. We only know that he had a potentially fatal condition. Paul saw that illness as a direct result of Epaphroditus’ decision to go help Paul during his incarceration. Paul felt that had he not come to Rome to help Paul out Epaphroditus would not have gotten sick. How his efforts to aide Paul in Rome led to his illness we don’t know, but it is clear that Paul saw them as directly related.

By saying Epaphroditus risked his life Paul was telling us that his fellow soldier knew going in that there was danger to him in making the decision to stay in Rome with Paul. A number of years ago Laurie and I were on vacation with our kids and we took them to a place that we heard had good snorkeling. There was lots of coral and there were few other people there because it was kind of an out of the way spot. We happily did our thing there enjoying the fish and the coral. Several years later Laurie and I had the chance to go back and visit that same spot. When we got there we were surprised to find something new. There was a sign put up by the local authorities warning that sharks frequented that area. The sign had a picture of a shark and said, “Sharks may be present. Shark bites have occurred in this area.” We were stunned. We learned that there had been numerous shark sightings there and several shark attacks. We had no idea. We had taken a risk in swimming in those waters and put our kids at risk as well. But we didn’t know it was a risk. We didn’t think we were taking a risk when we swam there. Since we learned the truth we have never been back to that spot.

Epaphroditus wasn’t like us. He didn’t unwittingly do something that exposed him to risk. Paul said he was worthy of honor because he knew the risk and took it anyway, and it almost cost him dearly. If Epaphroditus had said, “Man, if I’d known this could happen I never would have come here,” Paul would not have considered that worthy of honor.

EPAPHRODITUS WAS COMMITTED

Epaphroditus went because he cared about Paul. He was committed to helping expand the kingdom of God. He saw Paul as playing a critical role in the spread of

the Gospel. So he would do whatever was necessary to ensure that Paul was able to continue his work. There were other believers in Philippi, and they were genuine, wonderful people. But they didn't all go to help Paul out. Epaphroditus did. He was willing to pay the price, to do whatever it took to help the cause of the kingdom of Christ.

It is worth noting his name. It literally means "of or from Aphrodite." He was from a pagan background. Amy calls Dylan "El Guapo." That means "Handsome one." Oddly that is also what the name Epaphroditus came to mean. So he could have been a good looking dude. But the point I want you to see is that he had given up the life that he was used to. He left his former pagan beliefs and culture to follow Christ. And he was committed to serving Christ even to the point that his own life was endangered.

In Luke 9:61 a disciple wannabe came to Jesus and said, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." That sounds reasonable, but it turns out that he meant more than just go home and have a brief visit before following Jesus. He meant he had obligations at home he would have to fulfill for an indeterminate period of time. In verse 62 Jesus answered, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

To put your hand to the plow and then look back was a metaphor for divided loyalty. The Greek poet Hesiod, a contemporary of Homer, wrote of "one who will attend his work and drive a straight furrow and is past the age of gaping after his fellows, but will keep his mind on his work."

Jesus was saying if you want to serve him you must say goodbye to the old values and the old way of life, stop hanging on to the things of the past, and hold nothing back in the effort to follow and serve him.

Laurie and I were so excited toward the end of last year when we knew that Michael was going to get out of the Marines and that they hoped to move here to San Diego County. Their search for a house was arduous but they finally found one and entered escrow on it. Because we assisted them in getting a loan we saw the loan papers and the numbers involved. I badly wanted them to move here, but I must tell you when I saw those papers I experienced some serious uneasiness. First there was the cost of the house. It is no surprise to anyone that real estate in the San Diego area is outrageously expensive. I knew that, but looking at the stark numbers caused me to gulp pretty hard. I know what their monthly mortgage payment is going to be and just thinking about it made me nauseous. There are many parts of

the country where they could have bought 3 really nice homes for the price of their house here. I found myself questioning the wisdom of living here. I went on the Zillow web site and researched our home and found out that if Laurie and I were in the market to buy a house now we could not afford our own home! But we all know how buying a home goes. At some point you have to sign those papers and dive in. You own that home and the mortgage that comes with it. Jesus was saying following him is like that. It is not like being in escrow where you can commit sort of but with the option to back out if you find something about the deal you don't like. Jesus was telling us we have to take the risk, sign the papers and go all in.

Epaphroditus lived that out. He could have put his hand on the plow then said, "Uh, wait a minute. If I go up there it's surely going to cost me quite a lot. In fact, it could even lead to me dying. I really want to help Paul out, but I'm sorry. That's a bridge too far." He could have, but he didn't. He simply said, "I'll do whatever it takes" and headed for Rome.

Epaphroditus was all in on following and serving Christ. He considered it worthy of any price he had to pay. He put his hand on the plow and kept moving straight ahead, never looking back.

IMPLICATIONS

RISK IS PART OF LIVING BY FAITH

Let's start with the fact that we are told in 2 Corinthians 5:7 that we walk by faith, not by sight. Faith means believing in something we cannot actually see or touch. It requires no faith for me believe that the ocean is to the west of us. I can see it. It does require some faith to believe that everything in this world is made up of atoms and that those atoms are in motion. I can't see them and I certainly can't see them moving. But I still believe it because I've been given evidence that it is so.

However, I don't risk much by believing in atoms. To believe that a God I cannot see is nonetheless real, that eternal life is real and that it is so important that it should be the priority over everything in this world, requires faith. And it also introduces considerable risk. To live for the eternal kingdom of God means to sacrifice some things in this world, possibly even my life if necessary.

True faith is more than kind of hedging our bets, deciding we will believe in Jesus just in case it is true, but then not having it impact our lives whatsoever. When we say we believe in Jesus, that means we trust him to not only guarantee us life after death, but to be Lord of our lives. We trust him when he promises to always seek

our good. We trust him when he instructs us in how to live and promises that obeying him is the only path to experience life to the fullest even now.

But if we do have that kind of faith it introduces risk, for **Jesus calls us to live in a way that is counter to both what our culture tells us and what our own fallen human nature tells us**. We are guaranteed that to follow Jesus will cost us something. He promises it will totally be worth it. Will we trust him and follow? If we do, risk is part of the deal.

We recently bought a car. The lease on the car we had was up, so we decided to buy a late model used car. I hate buying cars. Making big decisions is usually difficult for me. Difficult as in gut-wrenching. Buying a car is a really big decision, and I hate doing it. I know some people who love buying a car, but for me it is torturous. In the past I have usually put it off until I absolutely have to do it. With trepidation I go to a dealership and I find myself frozen. Why do I have such a hard time? I make it harder on myself than it needs to be. When I get away from the situation and can analyze it objectively I realize that fear gets involved. I am afraid some car salesman is going to pull the wool over my eyes. I'm afraid I'm going to get a bad deal. I'm going to look stupid and get taken advantage of. I look at the thousands of dollars involved and fear that at some point I won't be able to make those payments. The car is going to break down before we get it paid for. Or once I've entered into the deal I will realize I could have had a better deal on some other car that is as good or better than the one I bought. In other words, there is risk involved. I'm a little like one of those guys who is commitment phobic, can't commit to marry a woman because he thinks somewhere in the back of his mind, "What if I marry her, and then someone better comes along?" I am good at conjuring up worst case scenarios to make the risk seem even larger.

I know, you're thinking, "Dude, you're pitiful." Guilty as charged. You should feel sorry for Laurie. She's married to a basket case. I can't quite understand my problem. I had none of that risk averse panic when it came to getting married. I never had a moment of doubt about that. And that has been the best decision I've ever made in my life. However, the risk in buying a car comes down to, "what if this turns out to be a bad choice?" To follow Jesus involves facing much greater risk than that.

There is a quote by 12th century Jewish philosopher Maimonides, that helps me be at peace, at least with a car buying decision. He said, "The risk of a wrong decision is preferable to the terror of indecision." I know the terror of indecision and it is miserable. How much more freeing it is to make the decision and go, then

accepting whatever the result might be. We have that same risk when it comes to living by faith. To truly live by faith will cost us something. The risk is that the cost will be too high or not worth what we think we get in return.

We had a guy working on replacing the counters in our kitchen. His name is Miguel. He and I had a brief conversation this week. He asked me if I played golf. I told him I mostly did not and asked if he did. He said he plays soccer. That led to a conversation in which I told him I used to play hockey, but now I'm too old. I reflected on my hockey playing days. When I played I was not much of a force for my team. I mostly took up a little space on the rink. I never really did much of anything to actually exert a positive influence on the game for my team. In part that was because I didn't have the skill to do so. But another part of the reason was that I mostly played timidly. Because of my lack of skill I was always afraid of making a mistake so I avoided taking risks. I played it safe. I was a skating demonstration that if you always play it safe you'll never make much of an impact. The greater the risk the greater the reward. If we are to have an impact in life we will have to take some risks.

Justin Wren was an All American wrestler in college and went on to fight in mixed martial arts. He was highly successful, but his addictions to drugs and alcohol took over his life. He hit bottom, and everyone he knew wrote him off, except for one friend. Jeff was a Christian, and through his efforts Justin became a believer in Jesus. He began growing in his faith and decided he wanted more than anything to do God's will. He wanted to take the risk of radically following Jesus. He went on a mission trip to the Congo where he visited a Mbuti or Pygmy tribe. The conditions there were more severe than anything he had imagined. He wanted to help, so he went to live with a Pygmy tribe for a year. He slept in a twig and leaf hut, ate their food and suffered the same diseases they had. The tribe adopted him and gave him the name Efeosa Mbuti Mangbo. The last part means "the big Pygmy." The first name means, "The man who loves us." He has recently returned to the MMA arena seeking to raise money for the organization he has founded to help the Pygmies.

It is unlikely that we will be called on to take that kind of risk. But every day we face the challenge of whether we will take the risk of letting Jesus be Lord of our lives. Will we accept the challenge of living for God's kingdom instead of our self focused kingdom? I think of married couples and I know that there greatest obstacle to real intimacy and success in marriage is the human tendency to look out for ones self. There is fear if we don't we will become like a slave to our spouse , our needs will never be met and we will end up unhappy. Will we take the risk of

saying, "Maybe that will happen, but the Lord calls me to radically love my spouse, to give up self and serve without reservation?"

Years ago we went to a football game at the Coliseum in LA between USC and Oregon State. We had been to a number of Oregon State games up in Corvallis at Oregon State's home stadium. So like we usually did we wore our Oregon State sweatshirts. But this game was not at the Beavers home stadium. It was on the opponent's home turf. As we walked into the stadium toward our seats we were surrounded by literally thousands of USC fans, a veritable sea of them. They were all wearing SC gear. We were quite noticeable. And we began getting comments. They were mostly good natured, but made it very clear we were the enemy. It occurs to me that situation is similar to that of a follower of Jesus in this world. We are in enemy territory, surrounded by people who see us as outsiders. The question is are we going to take the risk of wearing our Lord's colors? This is not about being obnoxious or offensive. It is merely a question of whether we will take the risk of being as identified with the Lord Jesus as we were identified with Oregon State that day.

Will we accept the challenge of living for eternity rather than the comfort of this world? Will we live without fear, trusting completely in God's love and guidance? Will we take the risk of saying no to self and loving others no matter how much it costs?

There is a risk of deciding that what we want more than anything is to glorify God. Will we risk to trust him, praise him and live in peace and joy even when life is handing us not just lemons, but rotten lemons? There is a powerful testament to the reality of God when we go through hard times and respond with faith, peace and joy even in the midst of disappointment or hurt. You and I are presented with risk every day of our lives. Will we live out on the edge, pursuing with reckless abandon the adventure of living all out for our Lord Jesus?

RISK REQUIRES COMMITMENT

We have seen that Epaphroditus went all in on following Jesus. He counted what it would cost him, and he realized at a minimum it would be a lot, and at a maximum it would cost him everything in this life. And he believed it was worth the cost. He held nothing back, but went all out in his commitment to serving Jesus.

That is going to be necessary for us to take the risk inherent in following Jesus. We have to decide that letting Jesus be Lord is more important than anything else. If some risk is involved, so be it. I was thinking about Danny Martin, Gary and

Cathy's son. He is in his third year of professional baseball. Only about 1 percent of high school baseball players will have the chance to play minor league baseball. But only about 10 % of minor leaguers will play at least 1 game in the major leagues. In other words, the odds are heavenly against Danny ever making to the Show. By far the most likely outcome will be that he dedicates years of his life to a life of crummy places to live, lousy food, long bus rides, almost zero pay and lots of hard work, but with the likelihood he will never play in a major league ballpark. 90% of the players he is competing with and against are never going to reach their dream of playing Major League Baseball. At best he started out with 1 chance in 10 of making it. During those years only a commitment to the goal will get him through. I had a friend who was projected to be a major leaguer some day, but he decided he didn't want it bad enough to suffer through years of minor league baseball, and he gave it up. There have been and will be discouraging times, low points that seem hopeless. One big element of that test is commitment. Will he keep working, keep going when it is hard and he is weary?

That's about commitment. Famous mystery writer Agatha Christie once said, "There was a moment when I changed from an amateur to a professional. I assumed the burden of a profession, which is to write even when you don't want to, don't much like what you're writing, and aren't writing particularly well."

In one of the most famous stories in the Bible 3 of Daniel's good friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were fellow Jews living in exile in Babylon. They were in prominent positions in the Babylonian regime, even though they were faithful to their God. When they refused to compromise their convictions and their faith in God, the king threatened to throw them into a blast furnace so they would be burned to death. The king said, "What good is your God going to be when I throw you into that furnace? He can't help you then. You're going to die an excruciating death." Daniel 3:17-18 says they responded, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up." They knew the cost. The risk was staring them in the face. But they were totally committed to doing God's will not matter what the cost.

That is what is going to be required for us to accept the risks that come with following Jesus. We must decide that nothing in this life is worth comparing to serving and obeying him. We must decide that this is what we will do no matter what the cost. We need to be very clear that this is a decision we make. It is a choice of the will. It is not something that happens to us. We decide it.

COMMITMENT IS DEPENDENT ON FAITH

The only way we will make such a commitment is if we are convinced that the end is very real and totally worthwhile. If you go into college thinking you might as well because you don't know what else to do and you're not at all sure it is worth anything, you will not finish. If you go into a marriage because it seems the logical next step in your relationship but you don't think it can actually work and probably isn't worth the sacrifice, your marriage doesn't stand a chance. And if you aren't totally convinced that God is very real, that he loves you, and that you can trust him 100% with everything in your life, then you are going to hedge your bets. You might sort of follow Jesus, but after putting your hand on the plow at some point you are certain to look back.

Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also along with him, graciously give us all things?" This was a crucial verse for Laurie. She said she had tried living her way, getting what she wanted for herself. She got it, and found out it wasn't what she wanted. Then she read this verse and realized if God loved her so much that he would give that which he loved most in order to save her, surely she could trust him to give her true good in life. So she committed to letting him have his way in her life.

Go to a circus, if you can find one, and you will see trapeze artists. I would want no part of flying around up in the air like that. Ah, but what if there was a net underneath you that would guarantee that you would not get hurt? Maybe then you'd take the risk. The character of God is our net. We are not working without a net, and believing that is what will enable us to make the commitment to facing whatever risk may come.

Paul was saying in Romans 8:32, "God has proven his love for you. He has proven he is wise and is always looking out for your good. So you can have faith in him." Let's put our trust in God, let's commit to obey him in all we do, and let's leap with both feet into taking the risks we face, knowing as long as we are obeying God the risk will be worth the reward we receive.

FAITH PRODUCES CONFIDENCE

Here's the truth about life. It is risky. The risks start the moment we wake up. We face the reality that we can get out of bed and face the potential trial and obstacles of the coming day, a day in which anything and everything could go wrong. On the other hand we could just stay in bed and deal with the risk that we will accomplish

exactly nothing of any value whatsoever. Every decision we make, everything we attempt to do involves risk, at least at some level.

I suffered for most of my life from canker sores. The kind I had were worse than what many people get. They weren't little sores that were a nuisance. They were man-eaters, evil excruciating things that made eating or talking nearly impossible. I learned that taking lysine should help, so I've done that and it helped a lot. But I was still getting them. They weren't as frequent and when I got them they weren't in the league of what I used to get, but were still unpleasant. I feared maybe I'd just always have to live with them. Not long ago Toby got a couple that were in that man-eater class. He'd had enough. As a medical student he decided to research them. He found out that many tooth pastes contain a compound that will make you susceptible to canker sores. He found a toothpaste that doesn't have that compound and started using it. He recommended it to me. I started using it, and since then I haven't had a single one. So here's the thing: I was taking a risk just by brushing my teeth! Who knew that going to the toothpaste aisle in the store was taking a risk?

Every single decision we make involves risk. We have little idea of how some decision we make might go totally wrong or have completely unforeseen consequences. So nearly every moment of life is fraught with risk. My problem with making decisions is because of fear. I know there's risk and I let fear take over. When fear gets involved we become paralyzed. That makes life miserable. It causes me to become boring. I tend to only want to go to restaurants that I consider safe and order the same thing off the menu. Like I said, boring. God has not given us a spirit of fear. So where is that fear coming from? Aha, the evil one wants us to be completely paralyzed and dominated by fear. That is not how God designed us and wants us to live.

So there are several verses that if we keep our focus on them to live. Proverbs 16:9 says "In their hearts human plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps." So as we take the risk, as we make our decisions, we can do so without fear, knowing that God is directing our steps. In John 8:12 Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follow me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." So Jesus will lead us in his light.

Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." So we might take the risk and have it all seem to go bad, to have the worst happen. But even in that God is at work and he will make good come out of it in some way.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "We all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory." As we take the risks no matter what happens God is at work changing us into the image of Jesus, which is more important than anything else we might do. If we truly are taking the risk of living for God's glory, then we are achieving our great goal, so we have reason to rejoice and be bold.

Laurie and I were recently at a place that sells granite, quartz and other countertop material. We needed to replace our ancient tile counters in the kitchen because they were ugly, chipped, dated overdue for a change. But for us, this is a big deal. A lot of money is involved here. The place we went had an overwhelming number of options. I found myself thinking, "What if we make a bad choice? What if we choose something that looks bad? We're stuck with it." Ah, what if. Risk and fear are involved. Here's what helped. All right, suppose we make a terrible choice. Suppose what we choose looks terrible? So what? God is still directing us, Jesus is leading us in his life. God is still working out good even in this. And we are still being transformed into the image of Christ. Who cares if the counters look good?

I felt free to make a decision with confidence, to take the risk and not give it another thought. That's why as Paul said in Romans 8:37 "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." God wants us to go through life boldly. Like the old Star Trek, we are to boldly go where no one, well maybe some others, have gone before. He wants us to face life each day without fear.