

## Managing Risk by Syler Thomas

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Vineyard founder John Wimber used to say that faith is spelled “R-I-S-K.” Depending on your personality, that could either excite or terrify you. What’s important is making sure our risks are calculated, for the sake of the Kingdom, and not just a result of brazen foolishness. For instance, letting students jump from the church balcony to the trampoline you set up below will probably *always* be a bad idea. Certainly safety is important. But it can’t be our focus. Is there something God is calling you to that may involve a level of risk, one that might make you or others even a bit uncomfortable?

In his song “Safe,” Justin McRoberts talks about how we as Western Christians can care only about “clean jokes and cleaner fun.” He goes on to sarcastically say how the Christian life often works: “We’ll close and lock the doors to keep the bad ones out/That’s how we’ll show them just how good it is inside this house.” The point is made: when our only concern is keeping ourselves free from the dangers of sin, we lose sight of the holistic nature of our calling. Yes, we’re called to a life of holiness, but also to one of living that life out in front of the world around us. Retreating to our Christian enclaves makes it impossible to tell others about the good God we serve. Is that what we were made for? Have we sacrificed some of our calling to worship at the throne of “Safety”?

### A RISK WORTH THE REWARD

In my context, this was played out in the form of a benefit concert we’ve hosted each of the past few years. It all began when a representative from the International Justice Mission ([www.ijm.org](http://www.ijm.org)) came to speak to our youth group. IJM works throughout the globe fighting justice issues such as forced slavery and child prostitution. They’re mostly lawyers, but they’re more like super heroes, literally fighting evil people all over the world. These speakers leave their listeners disturbed, but motivated to do something about the world’s injustice.

IJM’s founder often talks about the need to take risks in order to accomplish the things God has called you to. For us as a youth ministry and specifically for me as a youth pastor, risk was involved in what we did next. Our students were deeply affected by what they had seen and heard, and they decided one way they could practically help out was to organize a benefit concert, to raise awareness and some money for what IJM does.

The kind of concert that is attractive to many of the youth in our area isn’t your average concert. It’s certainly not a coffeehouse, nor is it even a typical rock concert. The kind of music popular with many of our kids is called “hardcore” which involves loud guitars and a good deal of screaming (You always hear about parents telling their kids that the music they listen to isn’t singing, it’s just screaming. OK, this actually is *just screaming*). The students it attracts are not your “safe” kids. We had more cigarette butts thrown on our church’s front lawn in one night than we’ve had in probably the past 15 years. And the teenagers don’t just stand around or even just wave their hands; they have choreographed dance moves that, to an outsider, look bizarre at best and demonic at worst. To a regular concertgoer, this is just the way it’s supposed to look. We take the normal precautions, obviously: plenty of adults on hand, we call the neighbors to warn

them of the noise, and make sure it's over by 11. But to a concerned adult (or a deacon at our church who is responsible for the upkeep of the building) it looks risky: what if someone brings alcohol in? What if the students get in a fight or cuss each other out? What if someone breaks a leg and sues the church for negligence?

These are real risks, but they're small compared to those who have given up the comforts of the West and risk their lives and well-being to fight injustice in the third world countries around the globe. We were able to bring students inside our church that never would have darkened the door otherwise. And we raised over \$1000 at each concert, which brought the students a strong sense of satisfaction, and helped fight injustice somewhere in the world. In our context, the reward was well worth the risk.

I realize my story is tame compared to the risks many of you face every day. Others of you are in situations where your church board has told you to keep the ship afloat and not to make waves. Don't risk for risk's sake. But don't be afraid to take the risks that God is giving you grace for. McRoberts' song ends with the poignant line: "A thousand times I'd rather fall than be afraid to move at all/And after all, what is this thing that you call grace? Is it safe?"