

Introduction

Not long ago, I parted company with someone and told him as I did, **"Take care."** Along those same lines, my grandson Malachi was climbing on rocks at the park when I suddenly blurted out, **"be careful."** Most of us use those expressions all the time. But should we? Think about what we're encouraging people to be. Take care. That means be a care-taker. Be careful. That means be full of care. But is that really what we want people to be, care-takers who are full of care?

That's certainly not what God wants them to be. On the contrary, He wants them to be dare-takers who are full of dare. We see that in the text we just read, Ecclesiastes 11:1-6. In this text, God declares to each and every one of us, **"I dare you."**

Security Is an Illusion

Let's start with verse 3. Solomon observes that it's going to rain when the clouds are full whether we want it to or not. He also observes that a rotten tree is going to fall whether we want it to or not. His point is that there are countless things in life that we can't control.

Because that's true, he says in verses 2, 5, and 6, we never know what's going to happen. Look at the words **"you do not know"** in these verses. Verse 2 – **"for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth."** Verse 5 – **"you do not know the path of the wind and the activity of God."** And finally verse 6 – **"you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed."**

These verses teach us one of the inescapable facts of our existence. Security is an illusion. I mean by that, there are risks in everything we do. We marry. Will it be for better or worse? We don't know. We start a business. Will it be boom or bust? We don't know. We try out for the team. Will we be picked or cut? We don't know. We share the gospel. Will we be accepted or rebuffed? We don't know. We help someone in need. Will we be appreciated or taken advantage of. We don't know. My

point is that security is an illusion. There are risks in everything we do.

Careful

Now, verse 4 reveals how many people respond to those risks. Solomon pictures two farmers here. The first needs to sow his seed but fears that wind will blow it away if he does. So, he doesn't sow his seed. The second farmer needs to harvest his crops but fears that rain will disrupt it if he does. So, he doesn't harvest his crops. Do you grasp what these farmers did? They eliminated the risks in sowing and harvesting by simply not sowing and harvesting.

That shows us how many people respond to the risks of life. They're careful. What I'm talking about here are safety-first people who never take any chances. They're slow moving, small thinking people who try to eliminate all the risks of failure and pain from their lives.

They accomplish that the same way the farmers in verse 4 did, by doing nothing. If they don't get married, they can't get divorced. So, they don't get married. If they don't start a business, they can't go belly up. So, they don't start a business. If they don't try out for the team, they can't be cut. So, they don't try out for the team. If they don't share the gospel, they can't be rebuffed. So, they don't share the gospel. If they don't help someone in need, they can't be taken advantage of. So, they don't help someone in need.

A family member of mine wanted to go to college, play basketball, and get a diploma. But being a B and C student in high school, he feared he might fail academically in college. So, he didn't go.

Or a married friend of mine wanted to have children. But he feared that they might reject Jesus and go to hell. So he didn't have any.

Far too many people do that. They eliminate the risks in their lives by not trying to do things they're capable of doing or even called to do.

Regrets

But their regrets are great. Researchers asked a sampling of people

over the age of 80 one question, **“If you could live your life over again, what would you do differently?”** Three answers were given far more than any others were: (1) reflect more; (2) do more things that would live on after I die; and (3) risk more.

Notice that answer – risk more. It’s so revealing. Think about it. From the vantagepoint of old age, those people weren’t nearly as concerned about their successes and failures as they were about the risks they hadn’t taken. At the age of 80, life’s successes and failures didn’t seem like such a big deal. But the risks they failed to take did.

The lesson is clear. Not trying to do things causes greater regret than trying to do things and failing or getting hurt. Sydney J. Harris said it well, **“Regret for things we did can be tempered by time; it is regret for things we did not do that is inconsolable”**. That study of 80 year-olds proves him right. Time usually tempers our regret for trying and failing or getting hurt. It usually doesn’t temper our regret for not trying at all.

The single greatest regret we can ever have is this. It is standing before God someday and realizing what we could have *become* but didn’t and what we could have *done* but didn’t - because we weren’t willing to take the risks.

Dareful

So, don’t be careful. Be dareful instead. That’s what God calls us to be in verses 1 and 6.

Verse 1 commands us to cast our bread on the surface of the waters. The language here suggests trade. It suggests sending grain by boat to distant markets. Doing that 3000 years ago when Solomon wrote this text was risky business. Storms could destroy the boat and thus the grain and robbers steal it and often did. But send it anyway Solomon says.

Verse 6 commands the same kind of thing. Sowing your seed is risky business. It can be blown away, eaten by birds, rotted by rain, or dried up by heat. But sow it anyway, Solomon says.

These two verses call us to be daring. Be spirited and bold. Leave *the safety zones of our lives and take some risks*. As one poet said it: **“Give us now and then a man – and life will crown him king - who dares to face the consequence – just to risk the thing”**. I love that. That’s the kind of men and women these verses call us to be.

I knew a couple who decided to adopt a hard to place child, an emotionally and physically abused five-year old. The caseworker told them that the boy was a behavioral problem and that there was no telling what they might go through. But they adopted him anyway. It didn’t work out though. He grew up without a sense of conscience and guilt and I mean at all. He cut up all their clothing, abused their other two children, and even threatened to kill them. Finally, eight years after they adopted him, they had to put him in a group home.

It ended badly but to quote the poem I read, they dared to risk the thing. It’s true that they failed. But it’s also true that it’s better to try and fail than not to try at all. At least they didn’t regret what might have been. They were daring.

Begin

And we should be too. Let me ask you a question. What is the noble, challenging, need-meeting, or God-glorifying thing that you should do? Whatever it is, be daring and begin now to do it.

That’s the message of verse 4. Begin now. As commentator Derek Kidner points out, these farmers in verse 4 never began. They waited for ideal conditions to begin sowing and harvesting. But conditions were never ideal and so they never began.

Many people today are just like those farmers were. They think that there’s a perfect time to begin. When the time is just right, I’ll begin this. When the time is just right, I’ll begin that. But the time is never just right and so they never begin.

Solomon’s point in verse 4 is that if we wait for ideal conditions, perfect timing, we’ll wait forever. And the longer we wait, the more tired

and less likely to begin we'll be. William James recognized just that when he wrote, **"There is nothing so fatiguing as the eternal hanging on of an unbegun task"**.

So, begin now. That's what verse 4 challenge us to do. James Stovall said it this way: **"Don't wait for all the lights to be green before your leave the house"**. He was right. Absent exceptional circumstances, begin now.

Milton Hinga was a professor of history for many years at Hope College. He found out one day that no one in a history class had even started their term papers. So, he rose from his seat, paced the floor, and spoke these words to his students: **"I'm about to tell you the most important thing that you will ever hear! I don't care if you flunk this class. I don't care if you forget everything that I teach you in it. But I want you never to forget this next sentence"**. With that, he paused dramatically and with every eye in the class on him, shouted, **"Beginning is half done"**. I like the way Mary Poppins said it even better, **"Well begun is half done"**.

That is so true. What is the thing or what are the things that you should do. If it's to go back to school, fill out your application now. If it's to author a book, write the first sentence now. If it's to adopt a child, call the agency now. If it's to get a job, write your resume now. If it's to get saved, become a disciple of Jesus now.

As Dr. Hinga said it, beginning is half done. Daring starts with doing. Always remember this. You don't have to be great to begin but you do have to begin to be great. So begin – now!

Judging Risks

But how do we know that we should? God wants us to use good sense. He wants us not to be reckless – not to take foolish risks. So how do we know which risks we should and shouldn't take? There are several guiding principles in that regard.

First, never judge risks by your fear. Fear is a subjective thing. I

know a young man who loves bungee jumping off high towers but wouldn't even dream of speaking in public. I love speaking in public but wouldn't even dream of bungee jumping off high towers. You can see that one person's fear is another person's delight. Fear is a subjective thing. Never judge risks by your fear or lack thereof.

A second guiding principle is never judge risks by the probability of success. Suppose that people only tried to do what they knew for sure could be done. We'd probably still be riding horses and cooking our food in fireplaces if they did. Almost all progress depends on someone trying to do what reasonable people say can't be done. David defeating Goliath, airplanes exceeding the speed of sound, and zippers are examples of this.

There's a third guiding principle. Always judge risks by the value of the goal. That's the criterion we should use. The value of the goal determines the risks we should be willing to take. Is this goal valuable enough that it's worth the risks I'm taking in trying to experience or achieve it? If it is, we should take the risks. If it isn't, we shouldn't.

These guiding principles apply to every goal including becoming a friend of Jesus. The risks are great, including, as history shows us, the loss of our very earthly life itself. But the goal is the most valuable of our existence. Being a friend of Jesus is the greatest of all treasures. So take the risks. Abandon your person and life to Him - now.

Conclusion

I came across a poem that is the perfect conclusion to this sermon. It goes like this: **"To try is to risk failure. But risks must be taken because the greatest hazard in life is to do nothing. People who risk nothing, do nothing, have nothing, and are nothing. They may avoid suffering and sorrow, but they cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love, and live. Chained by their attitudes, they are a slave, they have forfeited their freedom. Only a person who risks is free"**. That last line is powerful and true. Today, God is challenging each of us, **"I dare you."** Take the dare. You'll be free if you do.