

# THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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## Acceptable Risk

*Louis Garbi*

What a tug at our heartstrings when the demagogue says, “If just one life is lost, it is one life too many.” Only a calloused few would say that the life of one man is not important. However, the “if just one life is lost” argument has no basis in the reality of being born on this earth. The process of birth can be dangerous. There are not many activities which do not have some risk attached. How many people have choked to death from eating? How many deaths occur daily from being on the job? Every sector of the blue-collar world involves tools and machinery, all of which have the potential to kill. While the white-collar world probably has a low statistic of death by keyboard, it contains many stress-related issues that are carriers of death. The CDC 2018 data cites accidents, including road incidents and falls, as the number three leading cause of death in the United States. Heart disease and cancer are one and two, respectively. Therefore, we all subscribe to the acceptable-risk way of life as a matter of course. It is such a part of daily existence we hardly think about it.

Arguments about acceptable risk usually occurs when it comes to matters that seem especially perilous and personal. There are concerns over public safety versus the individual’s right. Is personal liberty worth the risk to others? Yet, “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” is one of the leading principles in the Declaration of Independence. Since the rise of Covid-19, to wear or not to wear a mask has been controversial. Along with this has come social distancing, how to safely assemble, the concern over a cough or sneeze, etc. Each one of us has some level of response to this. The question of acceptable risk comes down to the individual. Even if there are government mandates, we as individuals make the final determination of how we will respond. The real area of risk has to do with how much we value our response over loving our neighbors as ourselves. In this, there is an unacceptable risk, a risk to our own souls.

How do we treat others who do not conform to our point of view? Maybe we feel we are taking the high road by wearing a mask. The common reason is, “You wear the mask for the sake of protecting people around you.” However, is it worth risking our souls to speak evil of our neighbors because they do not accept our understanding of good? “Meatheads refuse to wear a mask.” On the other hand, we may feel that freedom is at stake, and that the risk factor of disease is being amped up

by people who want the world to be under their control. Therefore, we refuse to wear the mask. Do we not risk our souls if we revile others who do not share our point of view? “Sheeple” is a common expression of scorn from such (which ironically, is an attempt to cow others into submission). With either position we have a potential and temptation to scorn or belittle those who do not see things the way we see them. Our attitude can contain a potential for being condemned to hell, an unacceptable risk. If we follow Christ, we have an obligation to love our neighbors as ourselves. That is acceptable risk. Loving people in a confused society requires on-the-fly adjustments made with prayer. It requires compromising our preferences. It also requires that we set aside any personal offense we may feel about others who see things differently. We must please our heavenly Father rather than man.

Health and safety and/or liberty are not always the most important. There is an account during the life of Jesus containing the fundamental principle of what is right in the world versus what is right in the will of God.

*Then one from the crowd said to Him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.” But He said to him, “Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?” And He said to them, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:13-15).*

This has to do with one’s need for justice and enlisting Jesus to back it up. Jesus pointed to something more important than a just claim. Covetousness is not just about possessing things; it has to do with having life the way we want it. We can go beyond love in the pursuit of even good things. If our life does not consist in the abundance of what we possess, then what is life? Jesus did not come here to right all wrongs. He came to take us beyond ourselves.

*“Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man” (John 2:24-25).* Jesus could have weighed in with one faction or another. He could have been a populist and drummed up support by appealing to the sentiments and consensus of the masses. He knew what was in man. He knew our human wants, passions, and assessments. He knew that our wisdom would fail. What a sorry testimony it would have been if He used His power as the Son of God to make our dreams come true – a tawdry nightmare. We need/ed someone beyond and above us to help.

Do we take it to heart that others do not follow us as we follow

*continued on the next page...*

Christ? Do we become offended? If so, we need to re-examine what it is to follow Jesus. "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (**Matthew 10:38-39**). Jesus said take up your cross. He did not offer a way catering to our personal sense of comfort and satisfaction. He called His way a cross. It is easier to love those who think along the same lines as ourselves. Carrying our cross, in part, is to love those who do not think like we do.

The way of the cross is found in the attitude and behavior taught by Jesus.

*You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven, for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust* (**Matthew 5:43-45**).

We stand to lose much in this world by following such a practice. Many of our personal preferences will be sacrificed. The foremost occurrence in loving our enemies is that we do not become their enemies. For our sakes as well as theirs we must adhere to a singular way of life: bless them, do good to them, and pray for them. Subsequently, they may misidentify who we are and make accusations against us. Our enemies may paint us with broad brushstrokes, or even further. But we can identify with them because we were once as they are now. "For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another" (**Titus 3:3**). We have salvation because of God's mercy. Therefore, loving others with the love of God is an acceptable risk.

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## Overcoming Fear - Part 1

Charles Ingle

The pandemic of COVID-19 has disrupted our lives in more ways than we can imagine and caused a wide range of reactions as we have attempted to navigate through this event. One of the most significant impacts has been the development of a second "pandemic" - fear/worry. We, as Christians, may find ourselves caught up in this fear and preoccupied with it, despite knowing logically that the Lord has not given us a spirit of fear (**2 Timothy 1:7**) and does not want us to live in fear. We

know that we are not to fear death like those who have no hope (**1 Thessalonians 4:13**). But, it is often difficult to get what we know logically to impact our emotions and calm the fears once they have started. Please let me explain a little bit about fear/anxiety.

Humans, unlike animals, have been blessed with two pathways for fear/anxiety to occur in our minds and bodies.

1. The pathway we share with animals is the one where information comes in from our senses, and it can trigger a fight/flight/freeze response in us even before we really know what the danger is. Or, the information is picked up by our minds and we determine whether it is a danger or not. The impulse reaction is much faster than the part of our brain that evaluates whether the danger is real. For example, we notice something in the grass and we jump back before we have time to determine whether it is really a snake, or just a stick. If it is just a stick, our mind tells our system to calm back down -- there is no danger. But our heart may still beat faster for a moment and our blood pressure will rise. This is because our bodies take a moment to calm down after being frightened. If our mind determines it is really a snake, then it sets off the fight/flight/freeze response to energize us to get to safety. With this response, the potential danger is triggered by something our senses have picked up in the present.
2. The second pathway is one that only people are blessed with. It is the ability to imagine a potentially dangerous situation in the future without any sensory information. This God-given talent is helpful in making plans and avoiding potential problems. This makes it possible for God to warn us of the consequences of an action, and we can see what could happen if we choose that action. It is the ability to discern.

Jesus refers to this ability in **Matthew 16:2-3**, when He tells the Pharisees and Sadducees that,

*When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather today: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?*

He refers to it again in **Luke 14:28-30**:

*For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, "This man began to build, and was not able to finish."*

Discernment is what allows us to think ahead and plan. It allows us to see possible problems or dangers so that we can take steps to avoid them. But this ability can be used in a way God did not intend. We can also imagine something so clearly

that we react as if it is true even when it is not. I can imagine some terrible thing so clearly that I scare myself and set off the fight/flight/freeze response in my body. I can sit in my living room in my Lay-Z-Boy and watch a scary movie, none of which is real, and scare myself half to death, causing my heart to race and my whole body to be ready to fight like my life depended on it. All because I can imagine it.

Notice **Matthew 6:25-32**, where Jesus is talking about worry: imagining something bad happening in the future to the point of becoming distressed about it. Notice He said "*Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?*" He is talking about things that we have no control over. This is not talking about looking ahead to make plans. Worry gives us nothing to do but be scared. We often convince ourselves that worrying helps us be prepared for what might happen. Since when did practicing helplessness make anyone more prepared for anything? We are deceiving ourselves and trying to justify our worrying.

The fear reaction in our bodies releases adrenalin into our bloodstream, which causes increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, increased breathing rate, hot or cold flashes, hyper-alertness, hyper-vigilance, etc. These very real

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*Worry gives us nothing to do but be scared. We often convince ourselves that worrying helps us be prepared for what might happen. Since when did practicing helplessness make anyone prepared for anything?*

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symptoms lead us to conclude that what we just imagined is really happening or is going to happen. Because of this reaction in our bodies, it seems like the thought has gained some power over us to make us afraid. We begin to believe that when the worry thought comes up, we can't help but react. It takes us hostage, ties us up, and makes us stay for the whole horror movie. The constant rehearsal of the imagined danger can cripple our ability to live our lives. How many of you have felt that way about worry?

In **Matthew 6**, Jesus says three times to "*take no thought*." How many times have you read "*take no thought*" (KJV) and felt frustrated because it seems like God is asking you to stop something you can't control?

First of all, we need to identify the lie. Just because I feel out of control doesn't mean I am out of control. Worry starts with a thought, a temptation. Can we avoid temptation? Yes, some of the time. But certainly not all the time because Christ was

tempted just like we are. So if He couldn't escape temptation, I'm not going to be able to. The problem isn't that the thought comes to mind; that is unavoidable because our minds are always thinking of options/choices, good and bad. **James 1:14-15** says, "*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*" Notice that we are tempted when we are drawn away with a lust and lured by it, but only when it has *conceived* is it sin. The word "conceived" is defined as "to clasp, seize, help." When we take hold of the temptation and go with it, then it is sin. The problem is that we believe we have no control over the thoughts -- they take us hostage. But that is not true.

God shows us how we can control those thoughts that tempt us to worry and despair. Let's see if we can figure out how God says to do it....

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Because of limited space, this excellent article from Charles had to be divided into two parts. The second half of the article will be printed in the May issue of this publication, Lord willing.

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[gospelmessage.net](http://gospelmessage.net)

You can read the rest of Charles' article on "Overcoming Fear" at <https://www.gospelmessage.net/articles> where it will be published in its entirety on April 1, 2021.

Over the past few years, your editor has made several other resources available at [gospelmessage.net](http://gospelmessage.net):

1. Articles from the last ten years of this publication can be found in the **MENU** under **ARTICLES**. Brother Dan Huff has also copied hundreds of articles from previous years into HTML format. Your editor hopes to make these available in future years.

2. PDF and eBook versions of *The Gospel Message* are posted on the first day of every month. These versions are free for everyone to download. Look in the **MENU** under **ISSUES**.

3. A PDF archive of the issues from 1961-1998 and 2012-2019 is available in the **MENU** under **ARCHIVES**. You can download these PDFs by decade. They have been converted to a searchable PDF format. Your editor is indebted to Brother Dwain Stoops for the work he did to scan scores of old *Gospel Messages*.



***Please check your expiration date!***

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Your editor and publisher have discussed making a subscription-based digital form of *The Gospel Message* available. The potential need for such a version became apparent during last year's business shutdowns. Thankfully, the printing business used by your publisher was designated an "essential business" by the county authorities. Thus we were able to continue printing *The Gospel Message* without interruption.

For the foreseeable future, your editor intends to provide PDF and eBook versions of *The Gospel Message* online, free-of-charge. Please feel free to take advantage of this, and all other resources on [gospelmessage.net](http://gospelmessage.net).

## *Glory to God!*

The **Church of Christ** which meets in **Bakersfield, CA** rejoiced when **Cathy Wilkinson** was baptized for the remission of sins on February 14. Sister Cathy was introduced to the church by her mother and was baptized after much Bible-reading, lessons, and soul-searching.

## *Blessed Are the Dead*

**Joseph William Rhoads**, 89, of Kirksville, MO went to be with his Maker on March 5. Brother Joe was united in marriage May 20, 1955 in New Cambria, MO to **Loretta Cook**. Joe and Loretta were never idle and were always together. Brother Joe faithfully attended **the church in Kirksville**. If a church meeting was held in Northeast Missouri, Joe and Loretta were present. His steadfast faith will be missed. Brother Joe is survived by his wife, Loretta.

**Wilda Ann (Surber) Rottmann**, 94, of Meadville, MO passed away March 1. Wilda was a lifelong farmer's wife and homemaker. She enjoyed cooking, gardening, watching and attending sporting events, socializing, and feeding and watching hummingbirds as well as spending time on the farm. Sister Wilda was a faithful member of **the church in Meadville, MO**.

## *Special Meetings*

The church which meets on **Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO** invites you to a one-day meeting scheduled for May 29. More details will be available in future issues.

### **2021 Meetings**

May 29.....Murray Road, Lee's Summit, MO  
June 12-13.....Vandalia, IA  
July 5-9.....Midwest Bible Campout, Eminence, MO  
September 4-5.....Labor Day Meeting, Pleasant Hill, IA

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