

Our Doubts Are Traitors

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Are you a risk-taker? Or do you tend instead to be risk averse?

You have the power to choose your perspectives and behaviors. By becoming sensitive to your tendencies, you can learn to evaluate risk more objectively and make your choices consciously and intentionally.

William Shakespeare wrote: "Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt." It is one of my favorite quotes, one I bring to conscious memory when I am tempted to protect myself from failure by not even trying. ("Measure for Measure," Act 1, Scene 4)

Last week, I flew home from a four-day visit with a client. My colleague and I were reviewing the training we had successfully delivered to the leaders of four rapidly growing companies. The entrepreneur who started and nurtured these businesses would be considered successful by almost any standard today. Yet not too many years ago, his ventures had lost millions of dollars.

How do we measure "success" and "failure"? Richard Farson and Ralph Keyes address this question in a small book entitled "Whoever Makes the Most Mistakes Wins: The Paradox of Innovation". In the introduction, the authors assert "Relying on conventional, outmoded ideas about success and failure stands in the way of your ability to innovate, compete, and stay ahead of the curve in a changing economy." That is the key message of the book.

Choosing not to act often correlates to fear—of failure, of embarrassment, of rejection, of loss, of financial devastation, or even of success. What is it that you fear when you hesitate to try?

Young children are not afraid to try. They are not risk averse, as many an overprotective parent can attest. Why is it that children try, fail, and pick themselves up to try again? What can we observe in children who enjoy the play and learning for its own sake? Why do we lose that capacity as we grow older? Why do we become more concerned with protecting ourselves and making sure we look good (or at least avoid looking bad)?

A key is our tendency to focus on self. Are you able to look beyond your inherent selfishness to God's direction to serve Him and His people? And will you trust in His promise to work all things for good for those who love Him and are called to follow the purpose for which He created them?

We humans have a desire to control our situations and our opportunities, yet we have no control except over the choices we make for our response to the endless variety of situations and opportunities that come our way. Do we rely on God to provide our sufficiency?

We move past the risk when we yield to the Holy Spirit, when we operate by faith and not by sight. When we operate by sight, we see only a very short distance into the future. Our tendency to measure "success" over the short-term is what anchors us in doubt and "makes us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt."

Have you given up your childlike ability to play, learn, recover, and try again? What's the worst possible thing that can happen if you live from a sense of vision, persistently responding to the calling to serve and love others?

"Believing what you don't see will happen" defines both "fear" and "faith." Consider which you choose as the beacon for your life!