

*Everyday Missions:
How Ordinary People
Can Change the World*
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Kingdom work can be risky business

Safety has become one of the major gods of our time. Everyone is familiar with the philosophy of “Safety first!” and we do everything we possibly can to keep safety the priority. It has even become one of the major drivers (if not sometimes the main one) in our decision-making processes. There is big business in selling the many products that promise us safety. A person now needs a home alarm system, car alarms, a cell phone and insurance on everything, all to “protect” ourselves.

The lengths we will go to in hopes of keeping safe can be amusing. A visiting friend of mine found a great deal for a rental car at \$20 per day. But at the counter with the rental agent, he was talked into paying \$15 per day extra for insurance and another \$6 per day for the GPS device. Both were sold under the auspice that he would be a bit safer, especially driving through the dangerous city. Was he renting a car or trying to purchase a “safe” visit to my city?

The internal message lurking behind the overt message of safety is fear. We have bred a society trapped in fear. And that insidious fear hinders us greatly.

The question for me is this: Are we willing to knowingly take risks? Are we prepared to turn over our fears and insatiable need to feel safe to God as an offering? Are we willing, for the sake of the kingdom, to face dangers head-on, knowing that we cannot even pretend to protect ourselves from the consequences?



A major aspect of the search for safety centers on control. The idea is that the more we can control a situation, the safer we can make it. We want to influence the outcomes as much as possible. The concept of entering a situation and not being in charge is, for some of us, a completely overwhelming thought. But in a theological sense, control is illusory. Does God give up his control to us? The answer is absolutely not. God asks us to trust him to protect us, but he does not give up or share control.

Risk eliminates the smoke and mirrors of safety by pushing us to evaluate the things we have accumulated to feel safe and to recognize their true



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Are we willing to knowingly take risks?

value and places in our lives. When we take a risk, there is the possibility that things can go wrong. There is the chance that what we set out to do could completely backfire.

Bob Lupton, who is a friend and mentor of mine and lives and works in Atlanta, had the vision to take the old Atlanta stockade, an old prison which had been closed for decades, and turn it into transitional housing for working people who needed an extra hand to get back on their feet. The stockade was an old concrete structure that would have been torn down if it was not for the fact that demolition of a building with six-foot concrete walls in some places was way too expensive, and so it sat. The structure was full of trash and debris of all kinds, with water leaking through the concrete floors from years of neglect. Bob and a colleague looked at this overwhelming chaos and decided (they might say they were led) to take a risk on redeeming this awful space. They put their reputations, time, money and their whole selves on the line.

Are we prepared to turn over our fears and insatiable need to feel safe to God as an offering?

Twenty years later, the old Atlanta stockade is now called Glencastle: sixty apartments serving families in transition. Its gorgeous architecture, marble floors and Southern-style porch serve as a place of beauty to the community instead of blight. The old stockade that was once a place of pain and tragedy now represents hope and redemption, all because a few instead of running from risk embraced it with vision and creativity.

Are there places in your everyday life where God is calling you to take a risk for the kingdom?

—Adapted from chapter seven, “Risking Safety”



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BIO

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Leroy Barber, President,
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Leroy Barber has dedicated more than twenty years to eradicating poverty, confronting homelessness, restoring local neighborhoods, addressing racism and living what Dr. King called “the beloved community.”

In 1990, burdened by the plight of Philadelphia’s homeless, Barber founded Restoration Ministries to serve families and children living on the streets. In 1997, he joined FCS Urban Ministries to serve as the founding director of Atlanta Youth Academy, a private elementary school providing quality Christian education for low-income families in the inner city.

Barber is currently the president of Mission Year, a national urban initiative introducing eighteen- to twenty-nine-year-olds to missional and communal living in city centers for one year of their lives.

Additionally, Barber is the pastor of Community Fellowships Church and serves on the boards of Atlanta Youth Academy and the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA). He is also the author of *New Neighbor: An Invitation to Join Beloved Community* and a contributor to *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity . . . and Why It Matters*.



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