

"In *Risk*, Kenny Luck urges you to swallow big and take a risk to live each day for God's glory!"

—DR. RICK WARREN, Saddleback Church

Are **you** willing to trust God
with **everything**?



risk

kenny luck

president and founder of Every Man Ministries
men's pastor at Saddleback Church

God's man
series

risk

Are you willing to trust God
with everything?

kenny luck



WATERBROOK
P R E S S

RISK

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Details in some anecdotes and stories have been changed to protect the identities of the persons involved.

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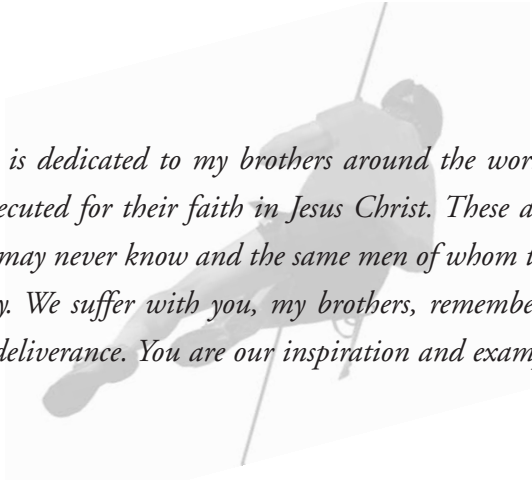
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This book is dedicated to my brothers around the world who are being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. These are the men the world may never know and the same men of whom the world is not worthy. We suffer with you, my brothers, remember you, and seek your deliverance. You are our inspiration and example.

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To the Herd, the men of Saddleback: Thank you for your dedication to being God's men and adventuring with me as God calls us to lead personally, locally, and globally. You never fail to inspire me by how far you are taking your faith. Never stop.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Danny Wallen and Tom Chapin at Every Man Ministries who refuse to let me plateau as a leader and who have the courage and commitment to stretch me (however painfully) so that I can lead out of character. Thank you for pushing me to take the greatest risk of all—not settling as a man and seeking more of Christ's character with each step of my journey.

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On the most personal level, thank you, Chrissy, for risking your heart on me. I am still on top of the world almost eighteen years later.

inner turbulence

The only adequate answer to an aggressively pagan world is for Christians to recover the New Testament power of spiritual aggression.

—KARL BARTH

“I am firing myself.”

The chairman of our company returned my statement with a blank stare. My professional freefall had begun. It picked up even more speed when the second most frightening sentence I have ever uttered escaped my mouth.

“I sense God calling me to work with men on a full-time basis.” I didn’t know exactly what it looked like, but I wanted to help churches connect their men and grow strong men’s communities.

Yet again, no response.

risk

A voice in my head filled the silence. *That sounded even more stupid than firing yourself... In fact, it was idiotic. This little ministry venture of yours will cause major problems for your wife.*

Man, was *that* true! Before I knew it, I was in a war zone, fireworks of fear exploding in my head.

- Boom! *You are the CEO of your company with 265 great employees.*
- Kaboom! *Annual revenues hit eight million this year.*
- Pop! Pop! *You've worked your way to the top over the last nine years, from a marketing assistant to running the show!*
- Bang! *You have a robust 401(k) deal going and are fully vested.*
- Waboom! *You have a deferred compensation package that guarantees you thousands of extra dollars per year if you'll just stay with the company.*
- Shabang! *You have stock options.*
- And for the finale! *Chrissy is feeling financially secure for the first time in twelve years of marriage! After spending the last few years becoming debt free, do you really want to press the nuclear hot button of your marriage?*

Then the counterthought: *You know what you need to do. You just have to get off your blessed assurance and do it.*

Oh yeah, I forgot about that, Lord—The soldier who dropped that God-bomb on me was my pastor. The day before, his words had come thundering from heaven, waking me out of my stupor. After a year of debating God's call about when to start my nonprofit ministry, the answer had come. I had been praying for clarity, and now, finally, here it was, clear as day, in bright, fluorescent green.

But where was that confidence *now*? Instead of feeling like Elwood from the Blues Brothers “on a mission from God,” I felt more like Minnie Mouse and my fingernail polish didn’t match my skirt, if you know what I mean.

Then my boss’s mouth finally opened. “Kenny,” he began. *Oh, mama. Here it comes.* “I am so excited for you. What can I do to help you with this transition?” I stood there

paralyzed, unable to respond. “Well,” he said, answering his own question, “since you’ve

The soldier who dropped that God-bomb on me was my pastor.

been with the company for nine years, I can make sure you get a nine-month severance. And if you want, you can house your new venture out of the corporate office rent free.”

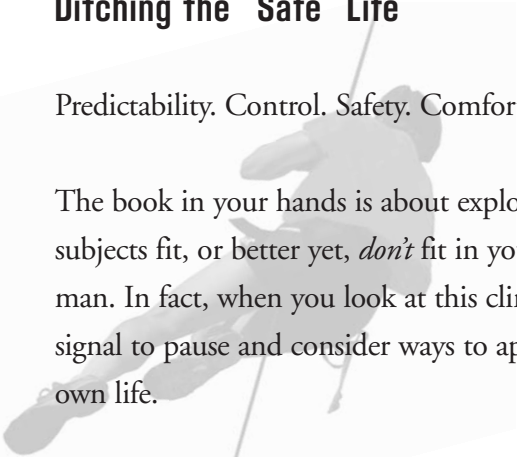
Holy #%\$! I mean, cannoli!*

Well, I used that severance to help launch Every Man Ministries (EMM) in the spring of 2000. God is using the EMM team to help spark a revolution in men’s ministry, spiritually freeing hundreds of thousands of men and igniting the church worldwide through conferences, campaigns, pastors’ trainings, books, and resources.

Charles Spurgeon expressed, for all men who dare to be obedient, the untold power of a small decision for God when he observed, “We do not know all that we are doing when we risk for our faith. Great wheels turn on little axles.” Yes, my brotha! I had no idea how big a small decision to do what God was asking me to do would be for my own life, and eventually for countless other men.

Ditching the “Safe” Life

Predictability. Control. Safety. Comfort.



The book in your hands is about exploring God’s feelings on how those subjects fit, or better yet, *don’t* fit in your quest toward becoming God’s man. In fact, when you look at this climber graphic behind text, that’s a signal to pause and consider ways to apply the principles of risk in your own life.

As with all God’s men, the first disciples had their own “Oh, mama” moments with Christ. Each was on a journey to fulfill God’s purposes for his life. Aware of this, Jesus knew he had to address the whole issue of risky commitment if the disciples were to succeed in their mission after He’d conquered the Cross. He was direct and uncomfortably honest:

Then Jesus began to tell them that he, the Son of Man, would suffer many terrible things and be rejected by the leaders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He would be killed, and three days later he would rise again. As he talked about this openly with his disciples, Peter took him aside and told him he shouldn’t say things like that.

Jesus turned and looked at his disciples and then said to Peter very sternly, “Get away from me, Satan! You are seeing things merely from a human point of view, not from God’s.”

Then he called his disciples and the crowds to come over and listen. “If any of you wants to be my follower,” he told them, “you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and fol-

low me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will find true life.” (Mark 8:31–35, NLT)

Satan had already tried to sabotage Jesus at the outset of His ministry through promises of pleasure and power and protection.

Jesus heard him again trying to lie to Peter. Real spiritual warfare surrounds every good man

Take risks for Me and you will find life. Hedge your bet and you will lose it all.

He wants to use. So He got real. He told Peter and His disciples exactly what was going on. He wanted them and us to know the very real risks we take to follow Him. It means giving up the life you may have expected you'd live to live the one God *calls* you to live.

What's more, Jesus makes it clear to His men that all the energy they might spend trying to eliminate risk would actually work against His purposes in their lives. Jesus knew that very shortly the chips would be down for His guys, and the only true option would be to bet it all. It could not have been a more desperate situation, so He made it plain: Take risks for Me and you will find life. Hedge your bet and you will lose it all.

Jumping into Risk

Tension. Unpredictability. Letting go. Adrenaline.

Oh yeah, baby. Jumping off of things is in our DNA. It took me about two seconds to come up with my short list of things I used to love jumping

off. The roof into a cold pool. Trampolines. The swings. A pogo stick to Billy Joel music, eight hundred and fifty seven times in my parents' garage. Over Calabasas Creek with my yellow Schwinn. Into mischief for the simple thrill of it.

How about you?

Our fathers or mothers looked at us and said, "What were you thinking?" We said, "I don't know."

What qualities would you as a man need to recapture from your boyhood to shape your masculinity in Christ right now?

And that was the truth: there *was* no explanation! We were boys. We were stretching the limits of our courage, testing the limits of our abilities, risking injury for the rush of what

was on the other side of the experience. We lived for that freedom and risked life and limb naturally. What a great life purpose!

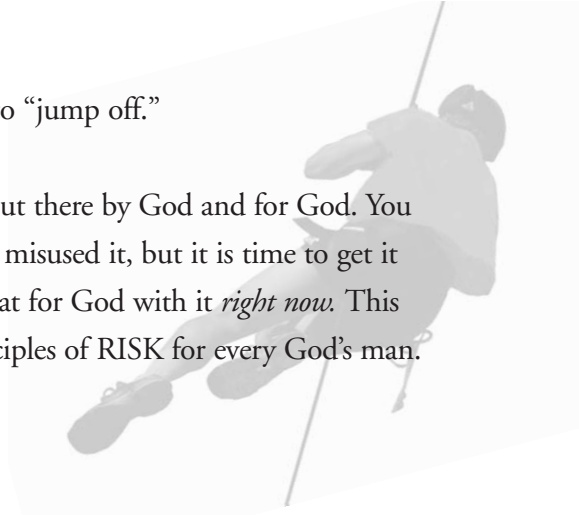
It's not a mystery that Jesus used a little boy to answer the spiritual-significance question: "Who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Imagine being a first-century man looking on, wondering the same thing: "What can I do here that will make me significant up there with God?" Jesus looked at His guys and knew exactly what message to send.

He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18:2-4)

What would this mean to you? What qualities would you as a man need to recapture from your boyhood to shape your masculinity in Christ right now?

Eager to trust. Eager to risk. Eager to “jump off.”

Risk is in the DNA of every man, put there by God and for God. You may have misplaced it, neglected it, misused it, but it is time to get it back. It is time to do something great for God with it *right now*. This means committing to the four principles of RISK for every God’s man. Here they come...



Right View of God

Is He or isn’t He? God, that is. Sounds silly but I am dead serious. Both the root of our fears and our courage to risk hinge on our view of God. A. W. Tozer was on the mark about us when he said, “Were we to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, ‘What comes into your mind when you think about God?’ we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man.” It makes perfect sense. The most important thing about us is our concept of God.

Is He omnipotent or impotent? sovereign and aloof? omnipresent and available? high and lifted up or familiar? punitive or kind? faithful or flaky? loving or vengeful? just or unjust? able or unable to make a difference? creator or kill-joy?

*Little God? Little risk.
Little love for God?
Little love for people.*

When our concept of Him is diminished, so is courage for Him. But if our concept is correct, we become unstoppable for the kingdom. So how

risk

big is your God? The answer to that lies not in your words but in the substance of your actions for Him. If you know He is who He says He is, you will risk big. Little God? Little risk. Little love for God? Little love for people. The connections are endless.

Your concept of God is so important that when it is off, you suffer, your relationships suffer, and your mission for God in the world suffers. Wrong notions rot moral courage. Right notions produce radical actions. In fact, no man's life *for* God will ever outperform his view *of* God. That is why Jesus feared no man. He saw His Father clearly and lived confidently.

They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity. *You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are;* but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth." (Mark 12:14, emphasis added)

What about for you? No person, no obstacle, no dream, no problem, no fear, and no issue in your life is bigger than your God. If He wants something to happen, *nothing* can stop it. And if it doesn't happen at all or the way you envisioned, His purpose will be worked out another way. Brother, that's freedom! You cannot lose. His faithfulness and purpose will *always* prevail. If you see God for who He is, you will gamble hard on His way, just like Jesus did.

As we start to think about risking more for God, we have to guard our minds against thoughts that diminish the reality of His majesty and power.

Identity Settled

When you know who you are, taking big risks makes sense.

But you, *man of God*, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. *Fight* the good fight of the faith. *Take hold* of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Timothy 6:11–12, emphasis added)

Paul knew that the quickest and most effective way to pull greatness out of his pupil Timothy was to remind him of who he *really* was. He might be tempted to pretend to be someone else, but Timothy was God’s man—that was his identity.

His mentor knew that his identity shaped his loyalty and that loyalty is what drives our choices. In Timothy’s life it

*If we call Him Lord,
Lord, we will risk it all
to do what He says.*

meant fleeing inconsistent identities, fighting hard for what he believed, and being loyal to his calling as God’s man.

In the same way, Jesus pulled His guys in tight to emphasize that their identity meant lining up on the right side of the ball. “If you belonged to the world,” He said, “it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but *I have chosen you out of the world*. That is why the world hates you” (John 15:19, emphasis added). The crystal clear message: blending in with the world is not the mark of His men.

Here’s a spiritual fact: we risk more for God when our identity is firmly *in God*. Today, His Spirit is confronting all His men everywhere with the same question: “Are you on *this* team?” Jesus made a habit of confronting guys posing as believers (as opposed to risking as believers) by asking: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46). In other words, “Identify with Me fully; don’t just pay lip service.”

risk

No faking it. Flip the question over and you get the solution: if we call Him Lord, Lord, we will risk it all to do what He says. And every time we choose Christ, our identity becomes more deeply imbedded in Him.

To risk more for Christ we need to be squarely in Christ. No wavering. So decide now where your identity and loyalty will lie if you want to experience maximum connection with God and His purposes.

Sacrifice Like Christ

These famous words of martyred missionary Jim Elliot make him the patron saint of spiritual guts in my book: “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose.” In a single sentence he captures the essence of what it means to risk spiritually. At some point we stop caring about earth in order to populate and invest in heaven. In Elliot’s case, he traded his bride, his career, and ultimately his very breath for Jesus’ sake and for the sake of the gospel. He lost his life to gain his life. His talk of sacrifice was matched by a life of sacrifice.

And while few of us will be called to give our lives, millions of us will be called to sacrifice our wills for His will, material wealth for spiritual wealth, earthly recognition for heavenly recognition, carnal appetites for godly appetites, career dreams for God’s dream, corporate ladders for family health, and convenient compromise for spiritual integrity. Sacrifice and suffering loss for the sake of our faith is what connects the God-Man and God’s man.

In bringing many sons to glory [your name implied here], it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.

Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. (Hebrews 2:10–11)

Jesus was made fit to lead us through suffering. Naturally, if He lives in you, God will continue to make you fit to lead by calling *you* to a sacrificial life. More important, sacrifice *for* Christ is what unites you most deeply *with* Christ. How else could the apostle Paul write, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and *the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings*” (Philippians 3:10, emphasis added)?

Risking for God is synonymous with sacrificing for God, and it is not a burden; it is a privilege as God’s man. It is a special bond we share with Christ and part of our worship. We lay our lives on the altar so He can use us mightily for His work.

Men who dare greatly for their faith have asked and answered this question: *Am I willing to sacrifice my agenda in order to be used for God’s agenda?*

Kingdom-Build

When your view of God is right, your identity as God’s man is settled (as in, no more competing identities), and you are willing to sacrifice your agenda for His service, it’s time to build something that will outlast you. It’s time to invest in something you can’t take with you but something you can send ahead to eternity. It’s time to get busy building the kingdom of God right where you live, in your local church, and in your world. It’s time to start thinking outside the box and dream—dream big God dreams.

The kingdom doesn't need more religious guys. It requires more big, hairy, audacious dreamers. Think I'm playing you? Listen to Jesus describe the kind of man God uses for breakthrough works of His Spirit in the world. Could He be talking about you?

From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and *forceful men* lay hold of it. (Matthew 11:12, emphasis added)

As soon as John started talking about a Messiah, the battle line was drawn. Men throughout the centuries have been challenged to cross that line, out of comfort and into risk for their King. Forceful men have been moved from within with God's vision for kingdom expansion. And even today, forceful men still hunger and thirst for the kingdom of God to explode in people's hearts wherever they may be. The kingdom mentality is not for the spiritually timid; it is for the man of war. And it *is* about winning—souls, communities, people in desperation, countries in darkness, and all the particular battles of your world. It's about winning men you know to join forces and affect the course of history.

I had a missionary from Kenya write me recently about the AIDS and orphan epidemic in his country. His assessment on the ground gave me a glimpse of the global impact men have and a template for the solution in many cultures: "Here in Kenya," he said, "we don't have an AIDS problem; we have a man problem." He went on to describe how migrant labor forces men to seek work in cities far from home: they sleep with prostitutes, then come back and infect their villages with the virus. He begged me to come and join him to bring men's ministry rather than

medicine. Africa needs men who make things better, not men who make messes—Africa needs leaders.

He finished by saying, “If men start making different moral choices, the country will change.” How many other communities around the world could say the same thing?

From leading nations to providing for families, men are needed to plant churches, equip future leaders, assist the poor, care for the sick, and educate the next generation. A vast army is being raised, and troops are being delivered to global hotspots in record numbers. For example, Rick Warren’s Global PEACE

Over the next couple of decades it will be the most powerful show of force the church has mounted in history. And men will be at the center of this movement.

Plan network is mobilizing one billion believers to “go” as Jesus commanded and slay these global giants. The deployment has already begun. Over the next couple of decades it will be the most powerful show of force the church has mounted in history. And men will be at the center of this movement. The biggest needs will be met not by politicians, by the United Nations, or by throwing money to poor countries. They will be met by God’s people. Rick believes, as I do, that our team has the widest and best distribution network in the world—it’s called the church. And the world is waiting for its redeemers (little *r*) who can tell the good news of the Redeemer. Men will be the tip of the spear on many fronts of this titanic kingdom advance.

Will *you* be in play?

Stepping Off Spiritual Ledges

“Dad,” Ryan said, “Jenna wants to jump off.”

“What?”

“She said she wants to jump into the ocean.”

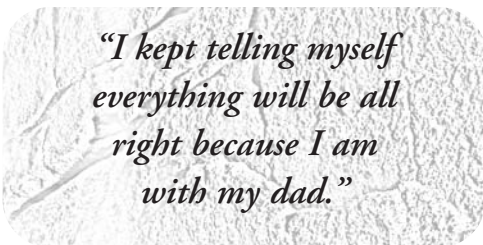
Disbelieving, I asked Jenna myself to shake her into reality. “Jenna, you want to jump off *that* ledge with *me* into the ocean?”

“Yep.” It seemed desire trumped dissuasion. Ryan and I were having too much fun to resist, she was watching, and there was no height requirement.

“Great! Let’s go,” I said, half expecting her to bail out once she looked down.

Not a chance.

The drop into the ocean was seven times higher than my little princess was tall. And I need to emphasize “princess.” Jenna’s world is that of Polly Pocket, Groovy Girl dolls, ballet, art class, and Dora the Explorer—not dropping into quarter pipes like her older brother or diving into the ocean from a twenty-foot ledge. Jenna’s previous record height was two feet of elevation in a backyard pool. So for *her*, this was a titanic leap into the deep blue.



“I kept telling myself everything will be all right because I am with my dad.”

“One. Two. Three. Go!” On the “Go!” signal Jenna jumped off, dropped twenty feet straight down in all of one and a half seconds, and then plunged five feet underwater. After surfacing, she used her first breath to exclaim with a huge smile, “That was fun, let’s do it again.” Of course, right?

This became more than a cute story or proud parenting moment as we climbed that ladder out of the ocean and started walking up the stairs for round two when I asked her, “So what were you feeling before you jumped off, Jenna?”

“I was scared,” she confessed, “but then I just told myself to calm down. I kept telling myself everything will be all right because I am with my dad.”

Some of the spiritual ledges you’ll see in the coming pages have the potential to strike real fear into you. But there is no fear in risking spiritually and trusting God, who is bigger than your fear of stepping off. Your Father is with you to take you safely off the ledge into the unknown waters of His will and escort you safely to the next jumping-off point. In the chapters that follow you will learn how to safely jump into the risky waters of:

- fierce loyalty
- singular obedience to God’s Word
- abandoning approval
- dangerous service
- killing sin
- aggressive honesty
- man-zone responsibility
- freedom through authentic friendships

risk

- imitating Christ
- speaking boldly in the moment
- changing another's life
- accepting pain
- powerfully masculine emotions

You will be reading many stories about God's men—ones who stepped out in faith and others who shrank back in fear. You will see how a life of risking for God leads to freedom and how risking less leads to bondage. You'll definitely laugh. You might cry. You might fall to your knees in the middle of a chapter. Whatever you might feel or be motivated to do as a result of this journey toward courageous faith—listen to God and know that many of your brothers around the world are fighting this same battle to trust God in bigger ways.

Ready to jump? Then take your Father's hand, thank God for that feeling in the pit of your stomach, start turning these pages, and start living the way you were created to live—daring greatly for God.