



## 5: Risk it! | Pastor Joe Wittwer | July 11, 2010

### A. Fellowship Time (10-15 minutes)

1. Chitchat, perhaps offering coffee, tea, or a cold drink with some snacks.
2. Pray, or invite someone to pray, and open the discussion.

### B. Review Time (Read the summary below to the group: 5-10 minutes.)

**Introduction:** How many of you like a good sandwich? Mark, the author of this gospel, sandwiches two stories together, and starts with the sending of the twelve disciples on a mission tour—that's the first piece of bread. And he ends with the return of the disciples from that mission tour—that's the second piece of bread. In the middle of this story Mark sandwiches the story of the beheading of John the Baptist. That's the meat, so to speak.

**1. The sending of the disciples: 6b-13.** [Read **Mark 6:7b –13** together.] Jesus was going around from village to village teaching. Then Jesus decided to multiply Himself by sending His disciples. He did this because there were lots of villages and only one of Him, and because when He is gone, these men will carry on His mission, so it was time to let them practice. This was their first training run. Jesus sent them with some unusual instructions. They were to take nothing but the bare essentials; no food, no money, no backpack to carry supplies; just the clothes on their back, sandals on their feet, and a walking stick. Jesus wanted them to learn to trust God. Imagine setting off on a two week journey by foot with nothing. Risky! Jesus asks us to do things that force us to trust God. He told them to stay where they were first welcomed until they left town—He didn't want them to be looking for better digs and grub. And if they weren't received, they were to shake the dust off their sandals. Their message was "preached that people should repent." Repent means you turn from your sin and turn to God. You change your thinking and your ways! Imagine Jesus sending you to your workplace tomorrow with this message: "Repent!" That is risky! The striking thing is that it's the risk Jesus took. You might question the wisdom of Jesus in sending out these men. So far in the story, they have not been very impressive. In fact, based on their performance, we'd probably say, "You're not ready to be sent out to preach." But Jesus says:

**Ready or not, here you go!** Do you feel ready to do your mission— what Jesus wants you to do? Here's a Big Idea: **Jesus called you to send you.** "*Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out.*" He calls us into a relationship with Himself that changes us, and then He sends us into a broken world as His agents. He calls us to send us. Every Christian is sent by Jesus. Every Christian is a missionary. **John 20:21** says "*As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.*" We are God's agents, sent by Jesus, to do His work in the world, right where we live. In our homes and neighborhoods, in our jobs, at our schools, where we shop and play—Jesus sends us into all these places as His representative to do His work. God's work is primarily done in the world, not in the church. What happens in the church is that we get trained, equipped, inspired, and prepared for the work in the week to come. Church is like a gas station. We come here to get filled so we can go and do God's work. Jesus and the disciples didn't hang out at the gas station! They didn't spend all week in Bible studies at the synagogue, or prayer meetings at the temple. They went to worship every week, and they prayed every day, but they lived their lives in the world, and did God's work there. We are a sent people. Jesus calls us to send us. We are His agents doing His work wherever we go. We only learn to do God's work by doing it. We've got to get in the water to learn to swim. We've got to get in the car to learn to drive. And we've got to get into the world and do God's work to learn to do God's work! What an adventure! That's the bread; let's get to the meat.

**2. The beheading of John: 14-29.** [Read **Mark 6:14-29** together now.] The story of the Herodian dynasty is like a dirty soap opera. Herod Antipas is one of the sons of Herod the Great, the Herod who was in power when Jesus was born. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea. He divorced his wife, and seduced his brother's wife, Herodias and married her. Herodias was not only his sister-in-law, but also his niece. Herodias had ambition; she lived with

her first husband in Rome on his inheritance, but she was attracted to Herod's position and power. So Herodias and her daughter, Salome, left Rome and moved in with Herod. There was just one problem: this pesky prophet, John. Herod was intrigued by John and invited him to the palace for a private audience, and John had the audacity to tell Herod to repent! He said that Herod and Herodias were living in sin! This irritated Herod, but it infuriated Herodias, because if Herod got it in his head to end their relationship and send her away, all was lost. She had to get rid of John. Her chance came at Herod's birthday party. When Herod was a little sauced, she sent her daughter, Salome in to dance, and it must have been one seductive dance, because Herod promised her anything she wanted. Herodias coached Salome to ask for John's head on a platter. Herod was trapped—he didn't want to kill John, but he didn't want to lose face in front of all his guests. So he caved in and killed John. John's courage was admirable. Imagine standing before the king, the guy who can literally take off your head, and telling him that he was living in sin and had to repent. That takes guts...and faith. This kind of courage is the stuff that spiritual champions are made of. The great heroes of the faith in the Bible and all through history had this same kind of courage. Courage to do or say whatever God asks—mighty causes are calling us—this is the stuff of spiritual heroes. And this is Mark's meaning in the sandwich.

**It's not safe to follow Jesus!** Mark tells the story of Jesus sending the disciples to tell people to repent. And in the middle of the story, he says, "Speaking of telling people to repent...did I tell you about John the Baptist who told Herod to repent? Did you hear what happened? He lost his head." Doing what God asks you to do is risky business. We're taking on a world that is locked in the grip of sin and evil. We're taking on "the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil." It's a war, and in war some people die. **Mark 8:34-35** says *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."* Jesus said that playing it safe is the way to lose your life. But risking everything for Jesus is the way to save it. John lost his head; Herod lost his soul. Who was the real loser?

**3. The return of the disciples: 30-32.** [Read **Mark 6:30-32** together now.] Following Jesus is an adventure, and a risk, and sometimes it can wear us out. And Jesus knows that and said to exhausted disciples, *"Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."* We have to learn to:

**Live with rhythm.** The passage started in verse 7 with Jesus calling them to Himself and then sending them out. It ends with Jesus calling them to Himself again. *"Come with me."* This is the rhythm of life with Jesus. It's the rhythm of engagement and disengagement; the rhythm of work and rest; the rhythm of risk and safety. It's the rhythm of life with Jesus. He calls us first and last to Himself. He calls us into relationship, because it's there we hear what He calls us to do and say, and it's there we gain the strength and courage to do it.

**C. Life Group Questions** (Select, revise, and add as desired: 20-40 minutes.)

1. How do you think the disciples felt when Jesus sent them out to share His message of repentance? Do you feel ready to do your mission— what Jesus wants you to do? Why or why not? How does God want to use you where you live?
2. What did Jesus mean when He said we must take up our cross and follow Him? What does it look like for you, right where you are, to live courageously for God, to risk it for Jesus?
3. Describe what it would look like for you to live with rhythm in your walk with Jesus? Do you lean too heavily toward the rest and safety part of rhythm? How can you find balance that allows you to hear what Jesus says and then go do it?
4. Try to think out loud with your group as you consider this question, "What does God want to do with me and through me in my world today?" Think individually and corporately.

**D. Personal Application** (1-3 minutes)

Take some time to consider what God's work looks like where you live and work and play and how you think God wants to use you as His representative where you live. Talk about this with a friend or a family member this week.

**E. Prayer Time** (As a whole group or subgroups of 3-4; 10-15 minutes.)

- Thank God for sending Jesus into a broken world and preparing us to help others.
- Ask God to help you to do whatever He asks of you, and to have the courage to risk anything for His sake.