



## Week 1 Preaching Resources: The Risk

### Scripture Passage:

John 3:16; Luke 5:1-11

### Focus Statement:

When we say yes to following Jesus, it means we say yes to the risks.

### ME:

Share a story about a time when you took a risk, not sure that you'd be able to complete what you started out to do. What was the value in taking that risk? Have you been stretched beyond your own limits? What has it meant for you to go "all in" on something that you feel called to? Note: The last week of this series will ask you to share the story of your call to ministry, so choose something else! (For example, beginning a program in school when you're not confident you could do it, beginning a new career, even pursuing a hobby or passion).

### WE:

We have all experienced times in our lives when we have to begin something new without any guarantee of success. Offer some concrete examples, like learning something new, starting a new career, trusting in a relationship, trying public speaking for the first time, etc. In all these cases, there are certain risks involved. There are often things that come up that we couldn't have predicted. We are faced with the questions: what do I have to lose, by trusting God, moving in a new direction, going all in?

### GOD:

John 3:16 is one of the most popular verses in the New Testament. The verse sums up how God is committed to being "all in" for the world God has created. God does not simply create the world and then wait to see what happens. God loves the world so much that God goes all in, sending Jesus Christ, God's son, God's very own self, for humanity. Because God is all in for us, we are liberated from sin and death. We are freed for relationship with God and each other, freed and called to be all in for God. God's being all in for us is the foundation of this series.

Not all risks are worth taking – some can be foolish and dangerous. But in Luke 5:1-11 Simon is willing to throw his fishing net "all in" the deep waters, amid exhaustion and fear, because Jesus tells him to, and he trusts Jesus. He has been listening to Jesus teach the crowds and knows that this is someone he can trust, even if it doesn't fully make sense yet (he has been fishing there all night!). The risk pays off with a huge catch of fish, even though there are some scary moments along the way – the nets beginning to break, the boats beginning to sink.



Simon Peter's reaction is very human. He is in awe of what Jesus is doing and exclaims, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" This reaction shows that he does not believe himself worthy to be a part of the amazing things Jesus is doing. Yet Jesus calls him not to be afraid but to follow him anyway, sin and all. Despite how scary it is, leaving their boats, their livelihoods, their families, Simon Peter, James, and John go all in with Jesus. This doesn't mean they are unafraid or that they won't make mistakes along the way, but in response to what Jesus has done, they take the "leap of faith." They do not negotiate with him (to be a part time disciple, to bring their boats, to get other things done first). They commit to fully following Jesus.

**YOU:**

Help the congregation to think about what it means to go "all in" for Jesus. With pastoral sensitivity, describe some of the risks involved. Describe some of the doubts people may have about their worthiness or capabilities. Assure the congregation that Jesus does not ask us to be perfect; he simply calls us to follow him. We do not have to know the outcome ahead of time or be sure of ourselves. We just have to take the first step in faith, and commit to the journey, including the ups and downs. Describe how going all in might look different for different people. For example, for some it might mean joining the choir even though they have always been shy; for others it might mean telling their coworker their story of faith even though they fear rejection; for others it might mean increasing giving to the church.

**WE:**

We are not called to go "all in" for God to earn God's favor or to pay God back for what God has done. Grace is love, freely given by God. By grace, we are freed from having to justify and prove ourselves. We are given freedom for new and abundant life. This is a joyful thing! In gratitude, we are invited to be a part of what God is doing in and for the world. We are called to go all in, to give God our all, so the world can see and know the love of God in Jesus Christ.



## Week 2 Preaching Resources: Common Good

### Scripture Passage:

1 Corinthians 12:4-13

### Focus Statement:

God activates gifts in everyone for the common good.

### ME:

Tell a story about how you discovered one of your spiritual gifts. Was there some trial and error in the process? For example, did you think there was something you “should” be doing, only to find out it was not a good fit? Were there other people you wanted to be like and eventually realized you did not share the same gifts? Was there something you kept coming back to in different ways that you ended up realizing was a spiritual gift (e.g., teaching in different settings before realizing your gift was as a small group leader)? How have your gifts been affirmed by others?

### WE:

We all have spiritual gifts but there may be times when we wonder what they are or how we can use them.

### GOD:

Verses 6-7 are key to this passage. They emphasize that it is the same God who not only gives us all different spiritual gifts but also “activates” them in us. All people have skills, talents, and passions that can be used in a variety of ways – to enrich their families, personal lives, for profit or gain. We may not even recognize they can be *spiritual* gifts. However, when the Spirit of God activates these gifts, we can use them for the common good.

Sometimes we may feel that certain people are more spiritually gifted than others or that there is one right way of serving the church and the world. We may be afraid to be vulnerable, fear rejection, or fear we are not good enough. But as 1 Cor. 12:12 illustrates through the metaphor of a body with many parts, we are all gifted in different ways. Each gift is equally necessary to the church’s functioning and its mission in the world. It is the same Spirit who gives these gifts to each of us and unites us together. Through the power of the Spirit and our baptism (v.13), we are all affirmed.

You may consider pointing out that this passage precedes 1 Cor. 13, the famous passage about love that is often read at weddings. In the context of today’s reading, we can see that the “love passage” is less about romantic love and is more about what really matters in our relationships with God, each other, and the world. We can think about the love passage as instructions for how people with different spiritual gifts can be in relationship and work together. Our differences, even the good ones, can tempt us to think that our way is better, or can cause us to be impatient in working together. But if we embody love through patience, kindness, humility, and hope, we can work together, using our diverse spiritual gifts for the common good.



**YOU:**

Encourage people to think about their passions and talents. Then help them imagine how these might be spiritual gifts, how they might be “activated” for the common good. Offer some examples (e.g., Maybe you love to cook. You can cook for a homeless shelter and serve others while doing something you love.)

**WE:**

What are some of the gifts your congregation has that can be used to serve others? Call them to go deeper in those gifts. What would it look like for people to go “all in” with their gifts and to encourage one another in those gifts? Sometimes we are content to “do church” on Sunday morning and forget about it the rest of the week. How might we use our gifts to go “all in” for God?



## Week 3 Preaching Resources: No Strings Attached

### Scripture Passage:

Acts 2:43-47

### Focus Statement:

The gifts given by the Spirit are not to be used only in the local church community, but also to bless the wider community.

### ME:

When have you or your congregation (preferably your congregation) been a blessing to the wider community? Or when have you been on the receiving end of help or love from a church you didn't belong to, or witnessed their impact in the wider community?

### WE:

We all have a sense of what makes a community welcoming and what a difference a welcoming community can make. Hopefully, most of us have experienced this welcome firsthand. Offer some examples of what makes a community welcoming (e.g., when people go above and beyond, are genuine, when the generosity of others draws us in and invites us to learn about Christ and faith). Sadly, some of us may know what a welcoming community is like because we have experienced its opposite. In today's scripture, we get a picture of the earliest Christian community and the way it blessed the broader community.

### GOD:

Some of us have become accustomed to thinking of our churches as places we go to get our fill on religion, spirituality, or inspiration, similarly to the way we go to the grocery store for food or the cinema for entertainment. We see our involvement and offerings to the church as a way to keep it up and running - "open for business." As long as the customers (members) are happy, that is what matters. In part, this is a byproduct of the way our society works.

The picture of the earliest church in Acts is radically different from that. The people's faith was not a small part of their lives. They were "all in." This is clear in the way they devoted themselves to the church community – to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers (v.42), by living together, and sharing what they had, and providing for everyone's needs (v.44-45). This doesn't mean people stopped working or having personal lives. They were "all in" for God, which meant God was in everything they did. Verse 46 says they didn't just worship in the temple; the people praised God at home and in fellowship through meals shared together.



Because of the way the Christians lived their faith, people in the community witnessed the power of the Spirit working through them. They were a blessing to the wider community – the passage says they had “the goodwill of all the people.” The church was not just tolerated or respected in the community, it was well-liked, to the extent that people were drawn to become part of it: “day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.” This undoubtedly had to do with the way the people of the church used their gifts to help bring others to faith. We get a picture of a community that finds joy in generosity (v.46).

Consider referencing Deuteronomy 14:28-29 as an illustration of how God’s people are called to be present in and to their communities, to focus not only on their own sustainability, but on serving others. We serve a God who went “all in,” not just for us, but for the whole world (John 3:16). We are called to do the same.

**YOU:**

What does it mean for the congregation to have goodwill for all people? How often the generosity of the church seems like it has strings attached! In our generosity, are we considering the goodwill of all people, or thinking of ourselves? Offer some concrete suggestions on how people can be generous, welcoming, and “all in” for God wherever they find themselves (at home, work, church in relationships etc.). How can their lives reflect the love of God and draw people towards the community of faith?

**WE:**

The early Christians in Acts were all in. What steps does your congregation need to take to be all in? Acknowledge that going all in involves taking risks, and putting aside what we know and are used to. Help your congregation to envision what could happen in the church and how the church could be a blessing to the community if, together, you went all in.





## Week 4 Preaching Resources: Commit

### Scripture Passage:

Ephesians 4:22-24, John 3:16

### Focus Statement:

On this “Commitment Sunday,” we can play it safe or go all in.

### ME:

Pastors all have a call story. Take this opportunity to share your story with the congregation, because it is an all-in experience. Share the risk you experienced, stepping all in. If you are preaching this sermon and you are not a pastor, tell a story about a time when you took a risk and made a big commitment, going all in. What was that like? What did you learn from it and/or how did you see it impacting others for good?

### WE:

Remind the congregation about what you discussed in week two of this series. We have all been called and gifted to serve. God calls us, like the early church in Acts, to be all in, sharing those gifts for the betterment of the world. Going all in requires commitment. At some point, we have all encountered a moment where we had to take the risk of committing to some life change (you may offer some examples like a new job, moving, etc.). “One reason people resist change is they focus on what they have to give up rather than what they might gain.” We can get stuck in the decision-making process, reluctant to take the next step. But if we want to move forward and see real change, commitment is necessary.

### GOD:

In Ephesians 4:22-24, the apostle Paul uses the imagery of putting on new clothes to describe the life of faith. Through grace, God makes us a “new creation”. “So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor. 5:17). We do not and cannot make ourselves new but when we recognize that Christ has already done the work to make us new, we are called to live differently. We have to “clothe ourselves with the new self.” What good is being made new if we do not live in new ways, if we do not live *into* our new selves? Consider using an illustration that will be meaningful to your congregation (e.g., receiving an exciting new gift at Christmas and then not using it, letting it collect dust in a corner, or receiving a promotion but then just doing your old job duties).

This new life requires commitment from us. Paul describes what this looks like in today’s reading – it is “putting away” our former self, turning away from our sins and committing “to be renewed in the spirit of our minds,” growing ever more like God “in true righteousness and holiness.” For some, this may sound overwhelming. The point is not that we must suddenly become perfect, but that we choose to say “yes” to what God is doing in us and fully commit to the process of growth and renewal.



A distinctive emphasis of John Wesley, the leader of the Methodist movement, was that Jesus' work of salvation does not end with forgiveness and pardon of sin. He called that "justifying grace" and compared it to the doorway of a house. Jesus *continues* to work in us to make our lives new and make us reflections of God in the world. Wesley called this work "sanctifying grace" and compared it to being *inside* the house, after we have walked through the doorway. Although we can only take that step by grace, it is a step we must take if we do not want to stand in the doorway forever. This is commitment.

**YOU:**

Highlight that the life of faith is not just about receiving a "new self," but also about a new way of life. Being all in will require reordering your priorities. Offer some appropriate and pastorally sensitive examples of what this might look like for your congregation. You may choose to share commitment cards, step charts, or other generosity and stewardship resources. Remind people that this is not just about money, but about an all-encompassing commitment in life to live in a way that honors God.

**WE:**

We can be a more powerful witness to the Kin(g)dom of God when we are "all in" together, when we do this as a community and not just alone as individuals. What would it look like for your congregation to grow in the likeness of God in true rightness and holiness within your community? Consider challenging your congregation to go further and deeper in a current ministry or ministry they have been contemplating, or to think and talk about how they might do so. Create a vision that people are excited to commit themselves to.