

# THE GIFT OF RISK

T H E R A D I C A L Y E S  
O F C H R I S T M A S



vineyard®



# THE GIFT OF RISK

THE RADICAL YES OF CHRISTMAS

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# THE GIFT OF RISK

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Gift Of Risk* Journal experience. The purpose of this journal is to invite you, this Advent and Christmas season, into taking fresh risks with the Holy Spirit. Using examples of true Kingdom risk-takers in the Christmas story, each week you'll have an opportunity to respond to a central idea with a time of quiet reflection and space for journaling.

John Wimber, the late founder of the Vineyard Movement, popularized a phrase that has impacted the church world for almost a half-century. *"Faith is spelled R-I-S-K."*\* In other words, we may say that we have faith, but it is not until the moment we have to put that faith on the line – with real actions of trust and belief in God's willingness to come through – that we see what kind of faith we actually have growing in our soul. The characters in the Christmas story had to put their faith into action, and this guided journal provides a simple roadmap to help you see, hear, and respond to God's invitations to risk in your day-to-day life.

### **How To Use This Journal:**

This journal contains five prompts/practices related to the faith risks the Holy Spirit invites us into every day. Each prompt/practice contains an introduction, a Scripture, a practice, things to notice, and journal space in which to document your experience.

Spend as much time in one practice as you like. The five practices follow the four themes of Advent and Christmas Day, but they are applicable anytime. Dive into the theme that most resonates with what you need, or you think God is welcoming you into. Savor the practice that moves you. Stay there as long as you like.

This season, let's take a journey of the heart into the many risks that made Christmas – the Incarnation – possible.



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### Practice 1 – The Gift Of Risk

*“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” **Matthew 1:21***

#### Intro:

When God said His “Yes” at Christmas, He knew the future it would bring about. And fulfilling His plan through willing, yet scared-out-of-their-wits human beings, seems to be the way He likes to do things.

The purpose of this prompt is to help you connect with the overarching story of risk that flows throughout the Scriptures. Imagine, just for a moment, the entire Christmas project as a great “risk” for everyone involved. Mary risks her life and reputation to see God’s will done. Joseph risks the same, and needs a dream to help him take his next step of obedience. Jesus risks everything in a Gospel drama that welcomes us to follow Him in a life of faith and action. These are the “gifts of risk” in the Christmas story.

#### Prompt:

Settle yourself in a private area. Take a few breaths to calm your body and mind. Slowly read Luke 2:1-20 out loud (a section of the Christmas story). Gently pray, “Come, Holy Spirit... open my mind to perceive the risks that these faithful people took.” Then wait.

Notice what or who comes to your mind. Notice how you feel emotionally about the risks that specifically touch you. Do you identify more with one character than another? Notice any resistance or doubt rising up in relation to how you might become a similar risk-taker in God’s plan. Write down any feelings or elements of resistance you experience.

Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of just how trustworthy He has shown Himself to be in past situations of risk.





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## **Things to Notice:** Identifying God's Invitation To Risk

- Any mental pictures, names, or concepts that enter your mind
- Emotions that arise when you consider taking risks with Jesus
- Any doubt/resistance to believing that God will back you up
- A sweetness or intensity of the Spirit's presence in the moment
- How the Spirit might be giving you an invitation to risk in faith

## **Journal:**

Write down a description of how your body and emotions respond to the Spirit's presence. Write down what the Spirit revealed. List any feelings of doubt or resistance you experienced. What might be the source of that resistance? What is your response to God's next "risk-invitation" going to be?



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## Practice 2 – Facing Your Fear

*“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. ‘May your word to me be fulfilled.’ Then the angel left her.” **Luke 1:38***

### Intro:

Mary is a courageous figure in the Christmas narrative. But when the angel came to her, and we hear her “Yes” to God’s plan – could it be she was as scared of what God was asking of her as you or I might be?

The purpose of this prompt is to connect with how Mary’s life might mirror your own. We are familiar with Mary’s story – perhaps too familiar! We can miss the true humanity she brings to the moment of her angelic encounter. Surely there was shock, a deep breath in, and perhaps fear that struck her the moment she saw the angel.

But then the angel speaks, as God does, with authority and goodness. The promises of God probably came flooding back to Mary’s mind, as she remembered how faithful God had been to her in the past. From this firm ground of trust, Mary is ready to risk everything, and even every person, she holds dear. It is not only her own reputation she brings to the moment; it is the reputation of her family and friends that she might also have felt to be “on the line.”

### Prompt:

Settle yourself in a private area. Take a few breaths to calm your body and brain. Slowly read Luke 1:38 again. Open your hands and gently pray, “Come, Holy Spirit... help me face fear and remember how You have been faithful to me in the past.” Then wait.

Notice what or who comes to your mind. Notice your mind quieting as you remember ways God has been faithful to you, even recently. Notice any resistance rising up. Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of His peace, and trustworthiness. Re-visit this process as often as you have time and remember the faithfulness of God to you today.



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## **Things to Notice:** Identifying God's Invitation To Remember

- Any mental pictures, names, or concepts that enter your mind.
- Your heart settling as the memories come.
- Any fear in believing God is as present for you now as He was then.
- A sweetness or intensity of the Spirit's presence in the moment.

## **Journal:**

Write down a description of how your body and emotions respond to the Spirit's presence. Write down what the Spirit revealed. List any feelings of doubt or resistance you experienced. What might be the source of that resistance? What is your response to remembering how faithful God has been to you in the past?



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## Practice 3 – Trusting Your God

*“When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.” **Matthew 1:24***

### Intro:

Joseph must have had some hard questions when Mary first told him about her pregnancy by the Holy Spirit. When God gives Joseph the gift of a dream to allay his worst fears, did it still take a leap of faith for Joseph to move forward with trust?

The purpose of this prompt to connect with the Holy Spirit and the risk that comes when we hear “bad” news. In this passage, Joseph – a respectable man with dreams of a wonderful marriage, a beautiful family, and a fulfilling career, gets the shock of his life. His soon-to-be wife is pregnant. With another man?

As a man who is “faithful to the law” (Matt. 1:19a), Joseph wants to do the right thing and “divorce her quietly” (v. 19b). We don’t know how long Joseph had to wrestle with God over Mary’s news, but we do know that it took a dream to bring him to trust.

### Prompt:

Settle yourself in a private area. Take a few breaths to calm your body and mind. Slowly read Matthew 1:18-25. Open your hands, and gently pray, “Come, Holy Spirit... show me how to trust you in my crisis situations right now.” Then wait.

Notice what or who comes to your mind. Notice how you feel emotionally about your situation. Be honest with God about those feelings. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to help you see how the Father might be changing you right now through this trial. Re-visit this process as often as you have time and remember.



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## **Things to Notice:** Identifying God's Invitation To Trust

- Any mental pictures, names, or concepts that enter your mind.
- Emotions that arise when you remember that God's plan is bigger than what you may perceive it to be.
- Any risk you feel in trusting that God is involved in your situation.
- A sweetness or intensity of the Spirit's presence in the moment.

## **Journal:**

Write down a description of how your body and emotions respond to the Spirit's presence. Write down what the Spirit revealed. List any feelings of doubt or resistance you experienced. What might be the source of that resistance? What is your response to becoming aware that God could have more up His sleeve in your situation than you are aware of? What risk is God asking you to take?



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## Practice 4 – Letting Love Lead You

*“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” **Luke 22:42***

### Intro:

In the Christmas story, Jesus is an infant who will grow up parented by Joseph and Mary. How might Jesus’ role models have influenced His life of risk? Why have Jesus-followers been risk takers ever since?

The purpose of this prompt is to connect you with how Joseph and Mary modeled letting God’s love lead them, and how that love bore fruit in Jesus as the ultimate risk-taker. Have you ever thought about how deeply influential the lives of Joseph and Mary would have been to the young Jesus? Growing up like any child does, even though Jesus is both fully God and fully human (Philippians 2:6-11), we have to believe His parents had some residual impact on Jesus’ life – even through risk-taking.

With two risk-taking parents, Jesus, the Son of God, shows us the fullness of what it means to take risks when the only safety net is the Father’s love for you. Jesus was about to take the biggest risk of His life. He asks for the cup to be taken from Him. He asks to be relieved of His duty if it is at all possible. In the end, Jesus leaps headlong, holding the Father’s hand, onto the dark road that will lead to the cross. That same road, traveled out of love, will lead through the cross to the resurrection – and the beginning of New Creation life for us all.

### Prompt:

Settle yourself in a private area. Take a few breaths to calm your body and mind. Slowly read Luke 22:39-53. Open your hands and gently pray, “Come, Holy Spirit... show me ways I can follow you and take risks because of Your love.” Then wait.

Notice what or who comes to your mind. Notice how the Spirit answers your prayer. Do you feel a call to love and risk? Ask the Spirit to help you receive love and risk. Re-visit this process as often as you have time and remember.



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### **Things to Notice:** Identifying God's Invitation To Let Love Lead You

- Any mental pictures, names or concepts that enter your mind.
- How your body responds to the intensity of His love for you.
- Any doubts you have about deserving God's love.
- A sweetness or intensity of the Spirit's presence in the moment.

### **Journal:**

Write down a description of how your body and emotions respond to the Spirit's presence. Write down the "love" the Spirit revealed. List feelings of doubt you experienced. What might be the source of doubt? Review the gift of true love the Spirit extends to you. Can you feel it? Does it change any aspect of your emotions as you write how you feel? If you don't feel His love, write that down, and ask the Spirit to open you up even further.





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## Practice 5 – Christmas Day

*“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.”*

**1 John 4:18**

### Intro:

“There is no fear in love,” the Scripture says (1 John 4:18). How did you handle the fears of the last year? Could you and I live more fearlessly in the coming year, taking God at His promise to be our Emmanuel – “*God with us?*”

The purpose of this prompt to connect with the way God sees your walk with Him over this past year. Trials and troubles came your way. You were cornered by fear at some moments, then freed by love in others. Perhaps you had to wrestle with conversations with family members, or to get used to a new way of doing daily life. No matter your experience, this is the time to consider the meaning of Jesus’ name, *Emmanuel* – “God with us.”

### Prompt:

Settle yourself in a private area. Take a few breaths to calm your body and mind. Slowly read 1 John 4:13-18. Open your hands and gently pray, “Come, Holy Spirit... I am ready to risk with You in the coming hours, days, months, and year.” Then wait.

Notice what or who comes to your mind. Notice how much you needed to rely on the Spirit’s comfort, help, and strength this past year. Re-visit this process as often as you have time and remember.



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## **Things to Notice:** Identifying God's Invitation To Risk Again

- Any mental pictures, names or concepts that enter your mind.
- How your body responds to the memories of this past year.
- Any doubts you have about taking new risks with Jesus.
- A sweetness or intensity of the Spirit's presence in the moment.

## **Journal:**

Write down a description of how your body and emotions respond to the Spirit's presence. Write down what the Spirit is revealing to you about last year, and this coming year. List feelings of doubt you experienced or are experiencing. What might be the source of those doubts? Review the invitation to follow Jesus into moments where He is truly all you have to hold onto. Will you say, "Yes" to the next risk ahead?

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The Vineyard Movement, since birth, has valued seeing individual Christians experience God in their daily lives. Through spiritual practices such as worship, fellowship, mission, the reading and application of Scripture, soul care, family care, healing of the broken, cultural influence, the compassionate ministry of the Holy Spirit, and loving our neighbors, the Vineyard community of churches seeks to be intentional about nurturing the lives of those who call us their family.

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