

Risky Prayer

n/a

Ready:

“I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.”

– 1 Timothy 2:8

Set

The atmosphere was filled with tension. Players from both teams had been encouraged to protest the game. An outside source was trying to convince players that they were being exploited by big-time college sports. Everyone—including the 74,000 fans watching—was anticipating a conflict, but what people didn’t expect was some risky prayer.

This 1986 football game between No. 3 Oklahoma and No. 5 Nebraska was one of the greatest of all time. Prior to the game, Oklahoma running back Spencer Tillman and Nebraska’s Stan Parker decided to do the unthinkable. They led several of their teammates to midfield before kickoff. The crowd watched in awe as they knelt down holding hands at the 50-yard line. It was risky prayer. People wanted them to be at odds, and instead watched as they came together. It wasn’t the statement people were expecting. The act of kneeling was not a prideful statement to impress people, but a humble act to show who they played for. They had a higher calling—they played for the audience of One.

Today, we see post-game prayers all the time. They’ve almost become tradition. But when is the last time you saw pre-game prayer at the center of the field or court? Players coming together as competitors, not enemies, who desire to help each other play their best and show everyone that God comes first, not last.

Unfortunately, prayer is often an afterthought. How many times have you ended something like an activity, task, project or game, and said, “OK, now let’s ask God to bless this”? Maybe we should, instead, start by praying and asking God to be at the center of everything we do. It’s risky, but maybe it’s what we need. Bending a knee together instead of raising a fist. Joining with our competition in holy prayer.

Prayer has a way of putting things into perspective. It resets the heart, makes things clear and eliminates the noise. Prayer can be risky because of where we pray. When it is done in public, we have to check our hearts and make sure we are not doing it for personal gain or attention. The religious leaders in the Bible were notorious for praying in public so that everyone could see how spiritual they were, and Jesus let them have it for their prideful prayer. Risky prayer is when God gets the glory; prideful prayer is when we get the glory.

Risky prayer also involves courage. It pushes us out of our comfort zone. Courage is simply

doing what we know is right, even when it is hard. Instead of protesting our competition, we pray with them. Instead of criticizing, we pray. Instead of disputing, we pray.

Today, understand that God has called you to higher standard. Be a prayer warrior who is willing to engage in some risky prayer. Change things through your prayers. But be ready because God is bound to show up. He loves risky prayer.

Go

1. Why was it risky for the Oklahoma and Nebraska players to pray before the game? Would you have done it?
2. Have you witnessed an example of risky prayer? What made it risky?
3. Do you pray first before things begin or after? What is the value of each?
4. How does prayer bring clarity? What does prayer do to the heart and mind?
5. In 1 Kings 18:16-45, Elijah engaged in risky prayer. Why was his prayer so risky? What did he have to lose?
6. As a competitor, how can prayer become a part of everything you do?

Workout

1 Kings 18:16-45
Psalm 50:15
Luke 11:1
Colossians 1:11

Overtime

“Almighty God in heaven, help me to have a pure heart when I pray. I do not want to pray to get attention. All glory goes to You, Lord. Show me when and where to pray. Open my eyes to opportunities for risky prayer. I ask for wisdom to know when to pray, even when it takes me out of my comfort zone. It is hard, Lord, to be bold and to initiate prayer. Reveal Your heart for prayer to me. Thank You for allowing me to call upon You, the God of the Universe, for help. Thank You, Lord. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.”



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