

FEBRUARY MONTHLY THEME:  
RISK—BALANCING COMFORT AND FEAR

By definition, taking a risk involves exposure to possible danger, harm, or loss. No wonder we so often approach risky situations with caution or even fear. And yet, taking a risk is also what often opens up new possibilities. In our lives, we all face situations that ask us to take some kind of risk, moving us out of a place of comfort and inviting in a degree of fear. Everything from loving another person to driving a car on Boston Post Road to starting a new job involves risk. Experiences of risk-taking can be painful, but they can also be places of growth, wisdom, and meaning. How do we decide when to take a risk or when to hold back? What emotions or ideas help us respond to the inevitable encounters with risk in our lives? As we consider the theme of risk this month, we are invited to consider how to balance comfort and fear, loss and possibility in our choices, actions, and attitudes.

**Which question is calling to you? Where is it leading you?**

1. What does the word “risk” mean to you?
2. How do you feel about taking risks? How do you calculate or assess risk?
3. Do you respond differently to various kinds of risk (eg. physical, emotional, professional, financial)?
4. What is one piece of advice you would give about taking risks in life?
5. If you have children, how do you decide how much risk to allow them?
6. What are the risks you have taken in your life to open yourself to some new adventure, challenge, or deeper spiritual growth?
7. What risks have you avoided or retreated from? Why?

**Wise Words:**

Each moment is a leap forwards from the brink of an invisible cliff, where time’s keen edges are constantly renewed. We lift our foot from the solid ground of all our life lived thus far, and take that perilous step out into the empty air. Not because we can claim any particular courage, but because there is no other way. *Han Kang*

Pearls don’t lie on the seashore. If you want one, you must dive for it. *Chinese proverb*

There is no discovery without risk and what you risk reveals what you value. *Jeanette Winterson*

Do not be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Curiosity will conquer fear even more than bravery will. *James Stephens*

When you take risks you learn that there will be times when you succeed and there will be times when you fail, and both are equally important. *Ellen DeGeneres*

Being safe doesn't mean you won't be sorry. *Katerina Stoykova Klemer*

There are two types of risk in life: the danger of trying and the danger of not trying.

*Nick Vujcic, Life Without Limits*

The word 'risk' derives from the early Italian *risicare*, which means 'to dare'. In this sense, risk is a choice rather than a fate. The actions we dare to take, which depend on how free we are to make choices, are what the story of risk is all about. And that story helps define what it means to be a human being.

*Peter L. Bernstein, Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk*

The practice of love offers no place of safety. We risk loss, hurt, pain. We risk being acted upon by forces outside our control.

*bell hooks, All About Love: New Visions*

If you are afraid to take a chance, take one anyway. What you don't do can create the same regrets as the mistakes you make.

*Iyanla Vanzant*

I have not always chosen the safest path. I've made my mistakes, plenty of them. I sometimes jump too soon and fail to appreciate the consequences. But I've learned something important along the way: I've learned to heed the call of my heart. I've learned that the safest path is not always the best path and I've learned that the voice of fear is not always to be trusted.

*Steve Goodier*

There are times when fear is good. It must keep its watchful place at the heart's controls.

*Aeschylus*

Passion is one great force that unleashes creativity, because if you're passionate about something, then you're more willing to take risks.

*Yo-Yo Ma*

The ethic of risk is characterized by three elements, each of which is essential to maintain resistance in the face of overwhelming odds: a redefinition of responsible action, grounding in community, and strategic risk-taking.

*Sharon Welch, Feminist Ethic of Risk*

The willingness to show up changes us, It makes us a little braver each time.

*Brené Brown*

And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.

*Anais Nin*

The only choice we have as we mature is how we inhabit our vulnerability...our choice is to inhabit vulnerability as generous citizens of loss, robustly and fully, OR conversely, as misers and complainers, reluctant and fearful, always at the gates of existence, but never bravely and completely attempting to enter, never wanting to risk ourselves, never walking fully through the door.

*David Whyte, Consolations*

Risk is one of the qualities of any good decision. This is so because, decision itself is a risk. Therefore, making a decision literally means, taking a risk.

*Godspower Oparaugo, The Power of Decision*

## Resources

- On discerning risk in social actions: ["Risk, Courage, and Discernment: Spiritual Preparation"](#) by Rev. Elizabeth Nguyen (UU)

## Books

- *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*, by Brené Brown
- *Feminist Ethic of Risk*, Sharon D. Welch (UU scholar)