

*The only people who never fail are those who never try.*

*Ilka Chase*

Safety is a very big issue in the present day work environment. It certainly has become extremely important at the company where I work. This emphasis is great, for we would all like to live in perfect safety; nobody wants to become injured or killed. Unfortunately, life does not always work out that way.

When I began to go to graduate school, I worked as a research assistant in one of the labs. One of the first jobs I was given was to build a vacuum cell by attaching calcium fluoride windows to the ends of a copper cylinder. The glue that I had to use was called "red glyptol" and was sort of like a silicon cement. It wasn't long until I had the glue all over me, but could not get the window to stick the way it was supposed to. I was a little frustrated, so I decided to go talk to my advisor, Dr. Mason. I wrapped the window in a cloth and placed it carefully on a table. Then when I reached for the doorknob to leave, I noticed the glue all over my hands. Naturally I grabbed the first rag I saw, and guess what! The window hit the floor and broke. Now I was really frustrated!

I couldn't get my hands clean right then, so I went on to see Dr. Mason. As I entered the office I told him that I had had an accident. Well, I've never seen anyone jump up so fast in all of my life. He saw all of the red on my hands and thought I was bleeding to death! After I explained what had happened, and how sorry I was, he gave me some very good advice. He told me that the only way that I could keep from breaking anything was to never do anything.

We all want to be safe, but to be perfectly safe we would never be able to go anywhere or do anything. We would never be able to take even the slightest risk. This is the same attitude that the man had who was only given one talent in the parable found in Matthew 25:14ff. Each of the servants was to take the talents they were given by their master and make a profit for him. "But the man who had received only one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money." When his master returned, he rewarded the other servants who had increased the wealth of the estate. But the man who had received the one talent said, 'Master... I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' He was so afraid that he would lose what he did have that he did nothing. So his master condemned him and threw him out into the darkness.

We have to realize the relative value of things. Is it better to be perfectly safe and do nothing? Or is it better to suffer the risks we necessarily encounter in the world in order to accomplish something for Good? We may break something in the process of building something worthwhile, but it may not be significant when put into the proper perspective.

This reminds me of a friend who had built a beautiful house. I was helping him move something in and commented on how wonderful it all was. Someone else noted that one of the windows in the decorative front door was cracked. I couldn't help but think that this one thing that was broken did not really compare with the magnitude of what had been built correctly. We need to count all of the blessings of life, and not just the problems.

We must be able to risk damage in our lives and relationships. We can't withdraw from life, as did early Christian monks who hid in caves or stayed on top of a pole to keep from being tempted by the world. Sure, they were safe from sin, but they were totally isolated from being able to do Good. And that is what God created us for (Ephesians 2:10). So let us not let our fear of failure cause us to bury our talent. The only sense in which we can be perfectly safe (or saved) is to submit ourselves to God and trust in his everlasting grace.