

Dear Walt,

I thought of you when my sister and I recently went to a Bruce Springsteen concert. My first exposure to Springsteen was when you took me to a concert a couple of years ago in Cincinnati. I knew I was in for a wild time when everyone in our group passed the ear plugs around before the concert began!

Have you heard his newest CD? There's not an original composition on the disc. The songs date from the Civil War to the Great Depression. Backed by fiddlers, an accordion player, and a horn section, Springsteen performed the entire CD in concert. He took a giant risk by foregoing the large arenas to play unfamiliar material. This wasn't a safe, greatest hits concert.

Boy, was he in his element! Springsteen's passion for the music and the band's enthusiastic style was epidemic--the audience responded wildly with dancing and clapping (I clapped but didn't dance!). The concert reminded me how good artists become lost in their performances. There's almost an out-of-body experience where you lose consciousness of yourself in the spirit of the moment. Artists talk about time standing still when they paint or perform.

Passion, that intense emotional excitement that drives people to take risks, is in the soul of an artist. Passion drove Michaelangelo to resist a Pope in order to complete his vision for the Sistine Chapel. Passion drove Van Gogh to experiment with brash colors and daring brush strokes. Passion drove Handel to complete the Messiah, despite his critics labeling it as "secular" music.

Passion was also characteristic of Jesus.

There are many stories of passion and risk in the Gospels but one stands out to me--clearing the temple of moneychangers. Let's imagine the setting. The Court of the Gentiles was a noisy, smelly place where Gentile seekers and converts gathered to pray. When Jesus walked in, the moneychangers' yells would have vibrated through his ears and the animal smells would've filled his nostrils.

Why money changers? Pilgrims coming from all over the Roman Empire needed to convert their Roman currency into Temple currency to pay the Temple tax in order to worship. Exorbitant prices were charged for changing money. By overturning the tables Jesus was directly challenging the authority of the High Priest, because the tables were there with his authorization.

After carefully knotting together his whip, this outraged rabbi chased and flogged people, overturning tables, with birds and coins flying everywhere. Like Aslan the lion, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Jesus is not

safe but He's good. Watching the scene unfold, the disciples stood with their mouths open and remembered the Scripture, "Zeal for your house consumes me."

This act, coupled with others, drove the chief priests and the teachers of the Law to look for ways to kill Jesus (Mark 12:18). His passion moved Him one step closer to Gethsemane.

I enjoy the line from author Philip Yancy, "How could telling people to be nice to one another get a man crucified? What government would execute Mr. Rogers or Captain Kangaroo?" Jesus was a man of passion, not the passive persona that's often portrayed in popular media.

Without passion, Walt, the sharp edge of our ministries become dull. Regularity, predictability, and familiarity soon replace wonder, intensity, and spontaneity. Before I meet with people I'm discipling, I'm drawn back to a recorded conversation with one of my heroes, Theodore Roosevelt. A visitor wrote after seeing the President, "He overcame me . . . he poured into my heart such visions, such ideals, such hope, such a new attitude to life." Roosevelt was a man of passion.



Think back on the Springsteen concert. Here's a mature artist who could have played it safe. Recruit the band. Pack the stadiums. Play the same songs. Bruce took a risk to pursue his artistry. Suppose the crowds are small and the CD sales low? Does he play it safe and continue to do what pleases his fans? This is the dilemma of artists in any media. It's also the dilemma of disciplinators.

It's easy to play it safe with people. Instead of asking bold, probing questions, I'm tempted to keep the conversations harmless and routine.

Rather than sensitively admonishing and exhorting people, I play it safe with familiar suggestions or pat-on-the-back affirmations. It's easier being nice than being passionate. Sometimes I reflect on my relationships and wonder, "Is there anything dangerous going on here?"

Author John Eldridge put this issue of risk in perspective for me when he wrote, "He [God] rigged the world in such a way that it only works when we embrace risk as the theme of our lives. Which is to say, only when we live by faith." Artful ministry is about faith, passion and risk-taking.

Let's continue to correspond, Walt. I look forward to your reflections on Bruce, risk, and passion.

Your artful disciplinor friend,

Rice