

Help! I've Fallen and I Can't Get Up!

Genesis 3:8-15; 2 Cor. 4:13-5:1

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We've all seen those commercials where an elderly person has fallen and cries out "Help! I've fallen and I can't get up!" Of course, the ad is for the lifeline necklace one can wear so a call can be made for help. They truly can be a life saver.

Jokes are made about that ad. We see it so often. But really, it isn't a joke when you are elderly and you take a fall and seriously cannot get up. As a pastor, I've known a number of people who fell and were unable to get back up. Luckily most of them did have a lifeline necklace, or a phone close by, or someone in the house with them.

But sometimes a person who falls is hurt pretty bad and can't even crawl to a phone. If they don't have someone checking on them, they can lay there for a very long time. A life could seriously be in danger.

The Scripture passage Karen read in Genesis 3, where the serpent tempts Eve, and Eve tells Adam, and they both go right ahead and taste that first taste of going against God's will. And that event is known as The Fall.

They fell from living in pure perfection and in perfect relationship with God. They went from wandering around in their birthday suits, not even having any sense of embarrassment to suddenly having the knowledge that they didn't have a stitch of clothing covering themselves. So, they had to improvise with fig leaves and whatever they could find.

See, the tree they ate from was the Tree of Knowledge. Satan told them that the only reason God didn't want them to eat from that one tree was because God did not want them to be as smart and knowledgeable as he is. That snake was a devil. And the saying is true – the devil made them do it.

And so, they took that first bite and suddenly they knew. (Not that it really made them as smart as God, but suddenly they knew wrong from right) In fact, they knew they had done wrong so they tried to hide from God.

God comes walking along, calling out for them, and they tell him they were hiding because they didn't have much on in the way of clothing.

That's when God knew what they had done. "Who told you you were naked?" God asked. But he already knew what had happened.

So, they start passing the buck ... Adam blames it on his wife and Eve blames it on the serpent. And they all get kicked out of Paradise and now things are never going to be so good again.

That was the first day of sin and we can thank Adam and Eve and the serpent for having to spend so much money on clothes and having to work really hard to buy those clothes. And then, thanks to them, we also have our days numbered and we are constantly aware that we are dying.

As Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians: “Our outer nature is wasting away.” We see it in the mirror every day as we age. And it’s all because of that one act of disobedience that started the whole thing rolling.

That was one really huge fall for humanity. They fell from God’s grace; from God’s perfect vision and plan for them. And we might laugh a little at the whole story but this fall was very crippling and the first man and woman could seriously cry “Help! I’ve fallen and I can’t get up!” What were they to do?

Adam said to Eve “Now you’ve done it. And there is no turning back.” It was probably the first real conflict between husbands and wives. Accusing each other instead of comforting one another.

Have you ever done something that you really regretted afterward? Maybe something that hurt someone so much that it could never be made right again. Maybe trust was gone or pain caused by harsh words. Or actions taken that simply could not be undone.

It’s a terrible thing to feel so sorry; to have so much regret but to not be able to reverse what has happened. And that is the way it was for Adam and Eve; and that is the way it has been for humanity every day since. There is nothing we can do for ourselves. We have fallen and we cannot get ourselves up.

We know of people who had an accident and it caused them to be paralyzed for the rest of their lives. I think of Joni Eareckson Tada who was very active, playing tennis, swimming, horseback riding. But as a very young woman, she dove into the Chesapeake Bay, misjudging the depth and had a spinal cord injury. She was healthy and strong and vibrant, but suddenly she was paralyzed, dependent on others to do almost everything for her.

Christopher Reeves, who was so handsome and strong – who played Superman in the movie – suddenly was crippled and paralyzed in an accident while riding a horse. For the rest of his life he was dependent on his wife and others. He was dependent on a machine to help him breathe.

When I think of The Fall – of the first humans disobeying God, the loving Creator – I get this image of God having sorrow. The perfect world was now blemished. His children were forever paralyzed – crippled and helpless to save themselves from destruction. They had put a wedge now between them and God. The easy, relaxed relationship between the Heavenly Father and the children was now messed up. They chose to do it. And the consequences were dire.

God is a just God and what he told them about sin and death was a reality. But, God is also a loving God. Adam and Eve were still loved by the Creator. And all the generations of people after them were loved as well.

How sad to see his children not able to walk in his plan of joy and perfection. How hard it must have been for God to see how helpless, how paralyzed his humans were; how lost they were; how much they were looking for God but could not seem to find him.

St. Augustine said that we all have a God shaped hole inside of us that only God can fill. Yet, we tend to try in every other way to fill it. There are so many things in life that we think are the answer to our search for pleasure.

We work hard to make lots of money so we can buy lots of things – like clothes because we don't want to be naked. We buy bigger houses; we eat our way into oblivion; we drink too much or take drugs so we can just numb out and not feel how lost we are sometimes.

Help! We've fallen and we can't get up.

Do you remember me telling the story a while back about David and Saul's son, Jonathan? Saul became very jealous of David and was trying to have him killed. But David and Jonathan were very close friends. Best friends. In fact, they made a blood covenant together.

When you were a child, did you ever become a "blood brother" with a good friend? Making a little cut or prick in your finger and putting your open, bleeding spots together so your blood mingled? So you would each supposedly have the other persons blood running with yours through your veins?

Well, that's similar to what David and Jonathan did. And they swore that if anything happened to one of them, the other one would make sure their offspring were taken care of.

Now that sounds like a reasonable thing to us, but in that day, if someone became king they would have the opposition killed – and all their family as well so there would not be any remnant that might rise up and threaten them later.

Mephibosheth was Jonathans young five year old son. When his nurse heard that Saul and Jonathan had been killed, she fled with the young boy and hid him away, fearing that now that David was king, he would come looking for Mephibosheth and have him killed since he was the last one living of Saul's and Jonathan's family.

Mephibosheth was crippled in both his feet and he was very dependent on others helping him to get around. As he grew he ended up living in a village called LO debar (which actually means "trash heap.")

King David asked if there was anyone still living in Jonathan's family and when he was told about Mephibosheth he sent for him to be brought to the palace. Of course, Mephibosheth thought he would be killed, but David told him: "Don't be afraid, for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table." (2 Samuel 9:7)

It's such a great illustration of God's love for us – his children who are crippled from The Fall. We expect death because of our sin, but God sent his son, Jesus, to restore all that was lost.

By the blood of the New Covenant – by Jesus' own blood shed for us on the cross – we have been restored to life abundant – life eternal; and we have been made heirs to the throne of God, our King. We are reconciled to God our Creator and even though we are still helpless when it comes to saving ourselves, God looks on us with mercy and grace and provides for us what we could never do on our own.

Of course, this earthly world is still imperfect. We still sin and we continue to find ourselves paralyzed from The Fall. But those of us who know we are loved and forgiven, who have experienced this amazing grace are able to find strength and to allow God to use even our affliction for his purposes.

Joni Eareckson Tada learned to paint, holding a brush in her teeth, she has written over 40 books about faith and encouragement. She has become a great witness to the faith using her situation to praise God and to share God's love with so many other people.

And Christopher Reeve, along with his wife Dana, after so much agony and pain, created the Christopher Reeve Foundation to speed up research through funding, and to use grants to improve the quality of the lives of people with disabilities.

We are still living in this world of imperfection and sin and because of it we are still suffering from The Fall. But, with faith and trust in Christ, we can allow God to use our disabilities for good.

And Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence ...¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

⁵For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Christ is like our blood brother. By his blood covenant we are saved from death. We are given the promise of life in the house of God throughout eternity.

Help! We've fallen and we can't get up? Our help comes from the Lord our God, the Maker of heaven and earth. Amen.

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