

## Upright

**B**ECAUSE MY PARENTS COULD NEVER AFFORD to buy me a bike that would be so quickly outgrown, I never had a bicycle with training wheels. I never had my own bike until it could be one large enough that it would have been pretty embarrassing to have training wheels attached.

As if it happened just last night, I recall getting that first bike. It was on the occasion of my 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. The bicycle was a 26-inch model painted a bright, fire engine red. I remember going to bed that night with that brand new red bike parked smack at the foot of my bed, where I could lie there and keep an eye on it, and make sure nothing happened to it before morning. I can still taste the anticipation.

While I never had one of my own, I had plenty of opportunities to observe bikes with training wheels. Simple inventions, these wheels were attached to the frame, one on either side of the rear wheel, and positioned just a few inches above the ground, so that if the rider tipped just a little in either direction, the training wheel on that side would make contact with the pavement.

Bikes with training wheels never fall over; there's always a wheel there to keep the bike and rider upright. The many bumps and scrapes, cuts and bruises of my childhood attest to the fact that bikes without training wheels certainly *do* fall over from time to time.

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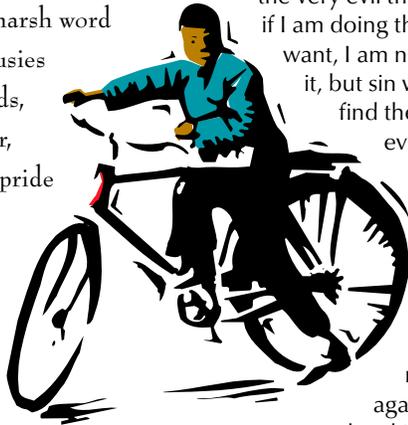
At the point of our salvation—at the moment in which our eternity with Christ is sealed—we are issued the Holy Spirit as a permanent resident. The gentle Spirit comes in to live with us, to counsel, to guide our steps, and to be our permanent connection to the Father. What we are *not* issued, however, is a set of training wheels.

Some people believe that it is possible to live the Christian life without ever falling down. To those people—people

who think they never fall down—I would say that that has never been my experience. It *has* been my experience, however, that in the Christian life, we do fall down from time to time—just like all those imperfect saints that populate the pages of Scripture.

How do we “fall down” in our walk with Christ? What is the spiritual equivalent of tipping over when riding our bike?

We fall down whenever we behave in a manner unlike Christ—whenever we “miss the mark”: the harsh word said in haste, petty jealousies that come between friends, failing to forgive another, giving in to temptation, pride that becomes a barrier to righteousness, silent envy that causes us to take what is not ours, a cold heart regarding the plight of another, laziness that permits the ways of the world to win out over the ways of God. And beneath it all, the lingering residue of unholy passions weaned and nurtured before we came to know Christ.



Is falling down supposed to be a part of the Christian life—or does it represent a measure of defeat in a life that has failed to attain some mystical level of purity? Interestingly, in his most thorough and profound treatise on Christian doctrine, the apostle Paul includes the following personal note.

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

*Romans 7:18-25*

When we pray, our prayer does more for us than for God. And when we fall, we are the ones who come up bruised and bloody from the experience, not the One who set us atop the bike.

But why do we fall down? We certainly haven't planned to; it's not what we *want* to have happen. But, like clockwork, just when we have resolved never to fall down again—there go our wheels out from under us.

Those of us who fall down from time to time—those who longingly understand that absolute holiness will never be attained this side of heaven's gates—can take some comfort from Scripture, which is filled to overflowing with stories of those who fell down from time to time.



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All of us, even if we have no constitutional temptation to fickleness, must feel our own weakness if we are really quickened of God. Dear reader, do you not find enough in any one single day to make you stumble? You that desire to walk in perfect holiness, as I trust you do; you that have set before you a high standard of what a Christian should be—do you not find that before the breakfast things are cleared away from the table, you have displayed enough folly to make you ashamed of yourselves? If we were to shut ourselves up in the lone cell of a hermit, temptation would follow us; for as long as we cannot escape from ourselves we cannot escape from incitements to sin.

*Charles Haddon Spurgeon*