

falling
down

Living Without
Training Wheels

Living with God

For however important chastity (or courage, or truthfulness, or any other virtue) may be, this process [trying again after failure] trains us in habits of the soul which are more important still. It cures our illusions about ourselves and teaches us to depend on God. We learn, on the one hand, that we cannot trust ourselves even in our best moments, and, on the other, that we need not despair even in our worst, for our failures are forgiven. The only fatal thing is to sit down content with anything less than perfection.

C.S. Lewis

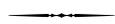
During the latter half of my four-year sojourn in the U. S. Navy, while stationed in San Diego, California, it became the fashion in our small group to acquire and ride a bike to and from work every day. The motives behind this inconvenient fad were both economy and general health but I found the practice to be something akin to daily root canal.

I took no pleasure in arriving at work and arriving back home drenched in sweat and gasping for breath. “It’ll get easier the more you ride,” my more slender companions informed me. Well, it didn’t. It *never* got easier.

When my wife and I moved from National City, a suburb at roughly the same elevation as the Navy base, to an apartment in San Diego proper, in a neighborhood so far uphill from the navy base that its ascent would cause a Sherpa’s nose to bleed, I called it quits. From that point on my mode of transport was restricted to self-propelled vehicles—those with four wheels and a roof—that one could ride without losing five pounds in perspiration.

As a result, curiously enough, while my waistline continued its outward expansion, my slender companions just got more slender. My co-workers not only ended up in superior physical shape, they became expert bike riders. Their pedals had stirrups and straps that held their feet for greater power; they carried all the accoutrements—such things as water bottles, air pumps, lights; they could repair and change a tire on the fly; they could travel long distances without stopping; and they could ride for weeks and months, every day, and never fall down.

Whether we believe that it is possible for a child of God to live his life without ever falling down, or that some falling down will be inevitable, our goal should always be to remain upright. And the amount of time we stay upright is directly dependent on how much time is spent walking with the Lord.



There came a day when a psychologist tried to relieve me of a migraine headache by using a form of image therapy (my phrase)—a method falling somewhere between hypnosis and biofeedback. While I reclined on his couch, relaxed with my eyes closed, he began drawing word pictures intended to have some positive effect on the pain raging between my ears.

He began with images of heat, at one point telling me to imagine a white hot beam of light piercing through the top of my head. That didn't work at all, so finally he switched to images of cold. The word picture that finally brought some relief was one in which I was walking through a snow-draped forest in the cold dead of winter.

Because I prefer being cool—even cold—to being hot, the cooler images were the ones that I better identified with. They were the ones that eventually brought relief from the migraine.

The mental pictures you employ to describe the relationship you have with God are not nearly so important as the fact that you *have that relationship*. You may imagine God the Father as a white-bearded grandfather, floating off the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel; you may imagine Him as blinding light, radiant energy; or you may not be able to describe Him at all, only as unspeakable holiness. You may imagine Jesus walking alongside you, holding your hand; you may think of him leading or pulling you in a certain direction; or you may see Him in the distance, beckoning you toward Him. Maybe He even sits across a table from you, carrying on a conversation.

The important thing is that you have the relationship. If you never want to fall down, the only way to do it is to walk constantly with the One who will hold you up.

The Christian has a privilege too often neglected—that of living, actually *living*, day in and day out, with the all-powerful God of the universe. We too often place God onto a mystical what-not shelf, arrange Him prettily with our other collectibles, and only dust Him off once a week when we feel compelled to pray to Him.

But the God of the Bible is more organic than that. He concerns Himself with the day-to-day minutia of the lives of those who call upon His name. His children matter to Him, and if He weren't interested in having a relationship with them, He wouldn't have bothered sending His Son.

Behold, the Lord God will come with might,
With His arm ruling for Him.
Behold, His reward is with Him
And His recompense before Him.
Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,
In His arm He will gather the lambs
And carry them in His bosom;
He will gently lead the nursing ewes.

Isaiah 40:10-11

It may grieve the Lord when we fall down, but I imagine it grieves Him more when we try to stay up on our own. While we must never forget the majesty of God, nor should we forget that He is the one in charge, we do Him a disservice when we leave Him sitting, untouched, atop the shelf.