

WHEN YOU FALL BACK

Knowing, Practicing, and Returning to Who You Are in Christ

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PREACHING TEXT

“A righteous man may fall seven times and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by calamity.” — Proverbs 24:16

Deliverance is not the finish line of holiness. Many people experience genuine freedom from a demon, a curse, or a stronghold, then find themselves tempted again months later. Not every struggle is a demon. Some people carry a spiritual problem hiding behind a repeated cycle of sin, and getting delivered from that demon is not what fixes everything. God builds holiness through deliverance, but He also builds it through discipleship.

Self-effort alone cannot hold back what an addiction has carved into you. Deliverance removes the demon; it does not remove the flesh. A demon can use the flesh to do its dirty work, but when the demon leaves, the flesh does not become a Christian on its own. It is still there, which means a fall can happen again with nothing demonic attached to it at all. Deliverance is the doorway. It is not the destination.

1 Know Who You Are

Your issue is not your identity; your identity is who you identify with. Sin is not your standing. Jesus is.

A. Sin Is an Event, Not a Person

It is not about how many times you have fallen. It is about who is falling. A righteous person falling does not stop being righteous, and being righteous was never proof that you would not fall. The difference between the wicked and the righteous is not that one never falls; it is that one gets back up.

“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation.”

Matthew 12:43–45

Demons do not return simply because a house is empty. They operate by agreement and legal open doors. A wicked generation has demons return to it, because it is wicked. A believer is not a wicked generation; a believer is a new creation, washed and indwelt by the Spirit. That does not mean a Christian cannot experience torment, but when a believer falls, the return is to a Savior, not to a demon. When a wicked person falls, the demons return to him. When a warrior falls, he returns to Jesus.

B. You Are Not the Last Thing You Did

You are not the last thing you did; you are what He did. Failure is not a person, it is an event. Being saved was never about how many years of sobriety, purity, or clean living you can point to. Church attendance does not improve righteousness. Righteousness was given at the cross, once, and it does not need to be re-earned every time you fall.

“Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”

Romans 6:6

“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 6:11

Reckon means to agree with God about your position. It is a definite act of faith that results in a fixed attitude toward the old self, seeing him where God sees him: on the cross. At first the body will not cooperate; it will feel like pretense. Repetition, not initial feeling, is what turns truth into conviction. The truth has to be repeated until it becomes your truth.

C. Conviction vs. Condemnation

The Holy Spirit convicts of sin, but John 16:8 also says He convicts of righteousness and of judgment. Believers are often only familiar with conviction over sin, but the Spirit also reminds a fallen believer that righteousness belongs to the cross, not to their own performance.

Conviction is specific; condemnation is general. Conviction attacks the issue; condemnation attacks the identity. Conviction is from the Holy Spirit; condemnation is from the devil. Conviction gives hope; condemnation makes hopeless. Conviction leads to repentance; condemnation leads to regret and remorse. Condemnation says, “You are a pervert, an addict, an angry person, you have always been like this.” Conviction says, “You are righteous, but that attitude this morning was sinful,” and it always leaves a way out.

2 Do What You Are

Position must lead to practice. Knowing who you are is not the finish line; it has to be lived out.

A. Righteousness Is Practiced, Not Earned

Scripture repeatedly ties the Christian life to the word “practice.” Those who make a practice of sinning are of the devil; no one born of God makes a practice of sinning; whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God. Jesus said He will tell those who practice lawlessness to depart from Him. The problem is never that a believer struggles or falls into sin; it is when sin becomes a settled, habitual practice. Righteousness works the same way: it is not just picked up once, it is practiced.

“No one born of God makes a practice of sinning... he cannot keep on sinning.”

1 John 3:9

“He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous.”

1 John 3:7

B. Train, Do Not Just Try

You do not rise to the level of your trying; you fall to the level of your training. Nobody runs a marathon on race day by sheer determination. Runners train for months, and the race becomes the natural expression of that training. Someone who tries to run twenty-six miles untrained will collapse, no matter how much willpower they bring to that morning.

Trying is effort summoned in the moment, when temptation is already standing in front of you. It is reactive, and it only draws on whatever strength happens to be available right then. Training is effort applied ahead of time, arranging life around practices before the moment ever comes, so that when it comes, the believer can do what trying alone could never produce.

“Train yourself toward godliness.” The word behind ‘train’ is gymnazo, gymnasium language, the discipline of an athlete in training.

1 Timothy 4:7

“We mistakenly think the way to grow is to try harder, when the way to grow is to train.” Dallas Willard's line captures the whole point: don't try, train.

C. Abstain and Engage

Every spiritual practice moves in one of two directions: abstain, denying the flesh to break its grip, or engage, feeding the Spirit to build new capacity. Paul calls it putting off and putting on. In practice this can look like daily prayer and scripture, weekly gathering with other believers, a sabbath day, tithing, regular fasting, limiting social media intake, and disciplining the body through sleep and exercise.

Grace is not opposed to effort; it fuels effort. Grace is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude that says God owes something because of performance. Effort is an action that flows from already being loved: because God loves me, I will pursue Him. Titus 2 says grace teaches; it does not just impart righteousness and walk away, it trains like a patient coach who stays in the gym with you.

3 Return To Who You Are

When a fall happens, and it will, the direction of the return reveals who you are.

A. Falling Is Not Final, Staying Is

Jesus did not pray that Peter would never fail. He prayed that Peter's faith would not fail, and that when Peter returned, he would strengthen the brethren. Jesus knew Peter would fall; He was not praying to prevent it. He was praying for what would happen after it. You do not drown by falling in; you drown by staying in.

“But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.”

Luke 22:32

B. Two Men, Same Fall, Different Return

Two men fell the same night. Peter denied Jesus three times. Judas betrayed Him with a kiss. Same failure, same darkness, same tears. But Peter returned to his Lord, and Judas went out and hanged himself. Same fall, different return, and the return is what wrote the ending. Jesus had called Judas a devil, so when Judas fell, he fell into what was already named over him. Jesus had called Simon “Peter,” the Rock, so when Peter fell, he had somewhere to return to. He did not just fall from grace; he fell toward a name that was still waiting for him.

“A dog returns to his own vomit,” and, “a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

2 Peter 2:22

But a believer is not a dog and not a pig. When the wicked fall, they return to who they were. When the righteous fall, they return to who Christ named them to be.

C. Still Being Called Home

When Adam sinned, God did not stay silent; He came looking and asked, “Where are you?” That question was never meant to condemn. It was an invitation home. Not every fleshly sin leads to demonization, but there is real risk when sin is left unaddressed. “Don't give the devil an opportunity where he does not have a legal right,” as Dr. Bob Larson has said; any legal right must be repented of and renounced, and old, opportune patterns are broken gradually through correction and surrender. Temptation itself is not sin. A genuine believer can fall into sin without making a habit of it, and every fall can end at the same place: returning to who you already are in Christ.

“Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”

Genesis 3:9

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, thank You for calling us righteous when we don't feel it. Thank You for the cross that already settled who we are, even on the days our own hearts accuse us. For everyone here who forgot who they are, remind them now. For everyone who's been staying away because they fell, call them home. Not to condemn them, but to restore them.

For everyone who's been skipping their practices, bring them back to the gym of godliness, not to perfection, but to training; not to shame, but to You. Falling is not final. Staying away is. So we return, not because we earned it, but because it was never ours to earn. In Jesus' name, amen.