

Getting Back Up

Micah 7:7-9 Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me. ⁸ Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The LORD *will be* a light to me. ⁹ I will bear the indignation of the LORD, Because I have sinned against Him, Until He pleads my case And executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness.

Have you ever seen one of those moments captured in a nature documentary, where some animal is being hunted by predators, and you find yourself cheering for the hunted? Sometimes the prey is a large animal like a wildebeest, or even a young elephant or giraffe, and a pack of lions or hyenas have separated it from the others, and are trying to get it to fall down, and stay down, so they can go for the jugular. But as long as that animal stays up, it is usually too big and even too dangerous for the predators to just pounce on. So they try to wound it here and there, attack it on its side, wear it out, so that it will eventually go down and stay down.

I wonder if our spiritual battles seem like that to heavenly observers. As we make our way onwards to the Celestial city, we're attacked. The attacks can come from the world, from our own flesh, and from Satan. But at some point, we trip, and stumble. We fall. But as the book of Hebrews shows, the difference between the fall of a Christian, and the fall of an almost Christian is very different.

Those we call Almost Christians, at some point, fall, and don't get up. They fall, and turn back. But as we're seeing in the book of Hebrews, true Christians endure to the end. They might fall, but they fall forwards, and they get up.

That gives us an opportunity to step away from Hebrews and ask, how do you fall and keep getting up? Like learning to roller-skate, or ride a bicycle, you learn not only by avoiding falls, but you learn by understanding how to fall, what to do when you do, and how to get up as quickly as possible.

I want to examine the heart of a prophet of God who learnt to fall forwards. He fell, but each fall only slowed him down, it did not set him back. He learnt how to respond to his falls so that they turned into advantages and catalysts for growth rather than pits of despair. The prophet was Micah, who lived around 740 to 670 B.C., ministering in the southern kingdom of Judah. He spoke mostly to Jerusalem, warning them about their apostasy.

Our text comes at the very end of the book. Micah has fallen. Whether he is speaking for himself, or whether he speaks on behalf of the nation is not important. The kind of fall is a fall into sin. We know that by the language he uses. He says in verse 9, "I have sinned against the LORD". So his fall is the fall we believers experience. We don't know what his sin was, and that's good, because it leaves it blank to fill in our fall. The fall is left general so as to be something any believer can relate to. Micah knows he has sinned.

It is not a fatal fall. He has not fallen into apostasy. He has not fallen into denial of Christ. This is not the fall of Hebrews 6.

But he has fallen. You are on the ground, maybe flat on your face. There might be discouragement. You might have stopped the spiritual disciplines. You might have stopped participating in the local church like you should have. You might have stopped praying. And perhaps you have fallen into a sin: grumbling, anger, deceit, pornography, discontent. Micah acknowledges this. The experience of sin is like a nasty trip and fall when you were enjoying your walk.

He describes it another way. He calls his sin sitting in darkness. As if he were in a room with candles enjoying easy communion and now his sin just blew out all the lights. God seems far away. The light of His face seems absent. Communion seems gone. Prayer and the Word seem like trying to read in the dark. In darkness, everything loses its colour, everything loses shape. In fact, there is not much to do in darkness except sit. You can't work, move, read or do much else. Micah finds

himself where every believer finds himself or herself at some point. Fallen, guilty and in a gloomy place where the light of God's fellowship seems absent.

What do you usually do when in this place? It's actually what you do next that makes all the difference. Some Christians live in a cycle of push-crash, surge-slump, because they never really learn how to get up. Some Christians live in a cycle of guilt, obedience, guilt obedience.

Here comes the critical point where the battle is won or lost. Micah knew some things about God that were fundamental to his attitude. Believing those things, he knew how to address himself and his enemies in the middle of the guilt. It is this kind of heart that sustains us through the fight. The Christian life is an endurance event, one with many possible falls. It is not how you start, it is how you finish. *And one of the ways we know how you will finish is what you do when you fall.*

I. Refuse to Pity Yourself

Micah 7:7-9 Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me. ⁸ Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The LORD *will be* a light to me.

Here is the surprising sin that keeps people down – self-pity.

Self-pity is a sin very few will admit to, but it afflicts the strongest and the weakest. What is self-pity? It is any act where our pride focuses our attention on ourselves, and we love ourselves sinfully, not by boasting, as we do when we feel strong, but by commiserating with ourselves with unbelieving, unbiblical thoughts.

It can take many forms. It can be the form of “no one cares for me, or understands my suffering”. It can take the form of “everyone is against me, no one sees my side” like Saul once said. It can take the form of “I'm the only one doing right, bearing the burden”, like Elijah said. It can take the form of “I never get it right, I'm just a big failure”. It can take the form of “it's not fair. My life conspires against me to make me this way.” It can take the form of “no one has it as bad as I do”. But whatever form it takes, the result is always the same: it puts you in a posture of unbelief. In self-pity, you are not looking to God, and seeking him, you are looking within.

Self-pity is the great breeding-ground for sin. There in your self-pity, you begin thinking, “My life is so hard. I deserve a bit of sinful pleasure.” “No one cares for me. I am going to take care of me, because no one else wants to.” “This Christian life is too hard, I deserve some relief.” “I think I'm just one of those people who can't get this Christian life right.” It's from self-pity that the discouraged Christian stays discouraged. In self-pity the Christian who has sinned feels justified to stay in the sin, to get further from God.

But the result is always the same. When in the grip of self-pity, we don't get up. We stay down, feeling despair over having fallen down.

Here's why self-pity hides so effectively. Many Christians confuse remorse over sin with self-pity. When we fall, it's good and natural to feel disappointment and regret. Christians are supposed to feel conviction over sin, guilt over having come short, even shame. But here's the key difference between godly sorrow, and self-pity. For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (2 Cor. 7:10)

Sometimes what we think is feeling sorry for our sins is really just feeling sorry for ourselves.

Holy Spirit-induced sorrow leads you to confess and forsake, and get up. Selfish sorrow leaves you mourning over yourself, licking your wounds, weeping tears of despair. If your regret or pain or guilt or shame over your fall is leaving you in the same ditch, it is not God's conviction. It is, or it has become, self-pity. It makes you stay down, *and it gives you an excuse to stay down.* That's why

the deceitful heart loves it, because self-pity justifies my sinful reactions. But when you're feeling sorry for yourself, you never felt more justified in your life. And you'll get angry with someone who dares to tell you to stop feeling sorry for yourself.

Self-pity starts to love its own misery, and wants to stay there. You love being the tragic character, who was kicked down, and crippled.

But what we read here from Micah is very different. Try to feel the tone in Micah's voice. Is he feeling sorry for himself? Are there any "Woe is me"? Are there any "Is it nothing to you who pass by?" Here is a man fallen. But if you sense Micah's tone, he is defiant. He is gritting his teeth like a Prisoner of War who won't relent to his interrogators. He is staring at the enemy – be it Satan, be it his own flesh, be it the world, and saying with gutsy, single-mindedness – it's not over.

Micah has something which *self-pity stubbornly refuses*: **hope**. Micah has some kind of belief system that right after having fallen into sin, flat on his face, almost pitch dark - he holds up his hand to Satan and says - don't you start snickering at me. This is not how it ends. This is not where I stay. This is not how I finish. I am down, but I am not out.

Satan is called the accuser (Revelation 12:10). Satan delights in our falls. Satan is glad when a Christian's progress is interrupted. But Micah knows that that isn't where the Enemy's chief joy is. Micah knows Satan truly rejoices only when the fall becomes a state. In other words, Satan's joy is not primarily in your fall, it is that you don't get up.

Satan's joy ends when a Christian gets up from the fall and continues. Nothing annoys him as much as a believer who keeps on going. Satan's joy is not primarily in the gloom of sin, it is that you no longer look for the light of God to break in. Satan's joy is that your darkness turns to despair. That as you are in a place of lowness, where the sight of God seems all but gone, you believe the darkness to be permanent and start to turn away, or look within. That's why self-pity is one of his best weapons with a believer.

Step one for getting back up: refuse self-pity. God is a God of great mercy and pity. But you either receive that from Him, and use it to get up, or you refuse His pity, and do it yourself. If you're in the same place, look out for whether this subtle form of pride is giving your heart an excuse to stay down.

II. Preach the Gospel to Yourself

⁹ I will bear the indignation of the LORD, Because I have sinned against Him, Until He pleads my case And executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness.

Now here is the second reason many Christians don't get up and out of a ditch. They don't know what to do with their shame and guilt. When they sin, they don't know how to preach the Gospel to themselves. Look at how Micah does it.

"I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against Him." Micah is not in denial of his sin. He knows it, he confesses it, he owns up to it.

He also has a realistic view of God. He knows his sin upsets God. Indignation means anger. But Micah understands something. He understands the Gospel. He understands what God has done, how God sees him, and what he can expect from God.

Verse 9: He says he is going to bear the indignation of the LORD until, *Until He pleads my case for me*.

When he says 'plead my case' what comes into your mind? A courtroom scene. Who's on trial? Micah. Or you might substitute your own name in there. On what charge? Of committing the sin which has brought about the fall, the darkness, the indignation. He has, in his own words, sinned against the Lord. So who do you expect the Judge to be? God. Micah pleads guilty to sinning

against God, who happens to be the Judge Himself.

Who do you think the prosecuting attorney might be? Satan the accuser. Perhaps the law of God which condemns us, perhaps our own conscience. And it presses the charges and lays them out before God, crying out for justice to be done upon us.

And who does Micah expect to be the defence attorney? The Lord Himself. The Lord will be His defence attorney against God.

This is justification. The message of the Gospel is that Christ came and lived and died and rose again and took the penalty of my sin and lived a life of perfect obedience and righteousness which is credited to me when I believe by faith in Him. It is not merely that my debt was paid by Him, He credited me with His life. He enters a plea of not guilty for me, because my guilt is taken by the Son of God, and His guiltlessness is imputed to me.

So that when God looks at me, He looks at His Son's obedience and righteousness clothing me, and is pleased. The wrath is gone, the pleasure has come, you dwell in spiritual blessings in Christ forever more. How do you get that? Romans 4:5, 5:1 By faith alone.

Micah is in that sort of relationship. He knows He is justified. Look at the next phrase – and executes justice *for* me. You'd expect that God would execute justice *against* him.

God is angry at Micah, but this is not the punishment, the wrath, the vengeance that God has for those who reject Him. This is the displeasure a father has when his son fails him. Fathers get angry at sons. Not because they do not love them. They get angry *because* they love them. This is the corrective anger that insists upon change for the better for his child.

If God's anger at one of His children were furious judgement, do you think Micah could look up to his accuser with such boldness? Micah knows God is working with him. He knows he has fallen. He knows God will continue to train him. So he looks at his enemy and says - don't you think this is detrimental to me. I will go through his time of purging until God is finished dusting me off.

Here's the result:

He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness.

Look at the catalogue of things he says about God's attitude towards him. He will hear me. He will be a light to me. He will plead my case for me. He will execute justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light. Romans 8:31 – if God be for us, who can be against us?

Micah is preaching the Gospel to himself after he has fallen. Why do you think he does that?

This is Micah's ground on which he keeps getting up. He is absolutely convinced that God is for him. He knows God will discipline, but he entertains no ideas about God being distant or cool or estranged, or provoked to leave. This is a rock-solid assurance, the same God I have sinned against is there to plead my case.

You see, if you want to get up as a Christian, you need to know the difference between justification and sanctification. This is not just for theologians.

Justification is a position God gives us which secures His favour and relationship to us forever.

Sanctification is a process of becoming more like Christ in practice day by day. It is also by grace through faith, but instead of being a once-off position we gain, it becomes a lifelong process we undertake.

Justification is not something you grow in. It is a settled fact from now into eternity. Sanctification is a growth process of becoming more like Christ. Now here is where the crucial distinction must be made. To preach the Gospel to yourself is to get these in right relationship to each other.

What do I mean? How many of us have thought that if after we had sinned, that God no longer saw us as righteous, based on our performance? How many of us have thought that if we read our Bibles and pray in the morning, that we must be more lovable to God than before and He is enjoying us, and if we don't that He is cold and frustrated? How many times have we thought that when we haven't performed a certain sin we are really close to God and He loves us, and when we do perform the sin, we are now estranged and He dislikes us. If you live like that, you will think God's relationship to you, or if you like, your position in relation to Him ebbs and flows depending on your performance. That is the heart of legalism, the heart of works-salvation.

When you live like that, you have a God who pleads your case based upon you, not based upon Himself. Your *practice* keeps altering your *position*.

Do you notice Micah saying, "I will bear His indignation, and He will plead my case when I have read my Bible and prayed consistently, and attended all the services and dealt with every sin in my life and done all I know is right?"

Micah does not give his behaviour (practice) as a basis for God's favour (position). It is the reverse. He gives God's favour as the basis for him getting up and carrying on. There is world of difference between letting your sanctification flow out of your justification, and letting your sanctification become your justification. One is to make your works the basis of your favour with God. The other is to make God's favour the basis of your works.

Micah regarded justification as a basis to fight sin, not fighting sin as a basis of justification. Can you see that Micah was saying, such is God's commitment to me, I know I will get up again? He was not saying, such is my commitment to Him, I know I will get up again. He based his works on justification, not his justification on works. We seek sanctification not to gain favour, but because we have favour.

Do you have the kind of theology which can understand how God can be displeased with you as a sinning child, and still be pleading for you and working for your good? That's justification.

In fact, you need to be like Micah in this way. He knew his sins were forgiven sins. That's why he kept fighting. *The sins you defeat are defeated sins*. The only way to defeat the sins is to see them as punished, covered sins. When I make war on my sins, I know they are already punished covered. When you keep getting up, and saying – this one too, was bled for, paid for, and plead for before the throne of God. I hate it, will turn from it and go on by the Spirit of God because He accepts me – you will weaken those sins till they have no hold on you.

If you turn this around and say, I will defeat these sins so that God will accept me - you are dead. If you live in a kind of conditional acceptance with God, your joy and your progress will be conditional. The condition will be your performance. But if you live in the air of Acceptance in Christ, your life will flow out in living, fighting, depending, grateful faith.

Now it is all very well to not pity yourself. That's the first step, to make sure you don't stay down. It is essential that you preach the Gospel to yourself, so you know God is cheering you on and sustaining you. But then be very aware that you don't deceive yourself and leave it there. Because without the third step, you still haven't got up. You're still on the ground, only now you're feeling a bit better. But Micah shows us the third step.

III. Recommit Yourself

Micah 7:7-9 Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me....

⁹ I will bear the indignation of the LORD,

Micah is not going to give in to self-pity and guilt and shame, that's first. He has hope. Second, he believes God is on his side. But he now speaks of his resolve to get back up, and start doing what he hasn't been doing. He recommits himself to get back to living for the Lord.

Notice three of his commitments.

Patience: Verse 7: I will wait for the God of my salvation. Micah is patiently waiting on God. Micah is not going to insist upon God pulling him out that second, nor throw a tantrum if he doesn't overcome this sin overnight. He is not going to give up because God doesn't grant revival overnight. He is not going to throw in the towel if God leaves him in a dark night of the soul for a period of time. His confidence in the character of God and his justification leads him to say – I can wait.

Sometimes there's an impatience that comes to those who desire to get back up. Living in an instant world, we get the idea that once we decide to re-commit, it should be like pressing the reset button on your computer or phone. Just re-boot. But the Christian life is not at all like that.

When it comes to living for God, your character is shaped by your attitudes and affections. And your attitudes and affections are shaped by your habits. If you have been in a bad habit for a long period of time, whether it be the bad habit of not praying, or the bad habit of disrespecting an authority in your life, or the bad habit of time-wasting, then that repeated action has been shaping your whole disposition, attitude, outlook. That in turn has been shaping your character, the very person you are. You can't change what has become a character trait in a moment.

So people arrive for marriage counselling, or counselling for an addiction, and often think that what took years of bad habits is now going to be reversed through a session or two. Weeks, months, years of coldness to the things of God, doesn't become zeal and love for God in one moment of repentance. And when there isn't nearly overnight revival, the person gets impatient, and upset. "It's not working. We're still fighting! I'm still depressed! I still feel cold!"

But to recommit is to be patient enough to allow the Lord to restore you, however long it takes.

25 The LORD *is* good to those who wait for Him, To the soul *who* seeks Him. 26 *It is* good that *one* should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD. 27 *It is* good for a man to bear The yoke in his youth. 28 Let him sit alone and keep silent, Because *God* has laid *it* on him; 29 Let him put his mouth in the dust-- There may yet be hope. 30 Let him give *his* cheek to the one who strikes him, *And* be full of reproach. 31 For the Lord will not cast off forever. 32 Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion According to the multitude of His mercies. (Lam. 3:25-32)

Are you willing to recommit and be patient? If you're serious about getting back up, are you humble enough to accept that getting out of a ditch of your own making may not happen overnight? Can you be committed to a process?

Discipline: Verse 9 I will bear the indignation of the LORD. To bear God's indignation is to accept God's chastening, accept God's discipline. Micah could say I will go through whatever training processes I need to purge this out of me. But I will submit to the training process of God to get me where I need to be. Micah is ready for training, ready for discipline.

Micah expects that it will contain some hardness, some unpleasantness. Micah accepts that there are consequences for his sins that he has to live with, and work to undo, and that there is now a training process that God will have for him. And he is willing to bear it.

You find this missing so often. You meet the Christian who has drifted far, and now things are a mess. The marriage is a mess. The parenting is a mess. The thought life is a mess. There is depression, anxiety, worldliness, impurity. But then this Christian thinks that because he or she has admitted he's in a bad place, and come for counselling, or asked for discipleship, that you should give him some zinger of a wise saying, some powerful word that will be instantly transformative. And when you do, as I do, begin giving people some homework, some Scriptures to study, some texts to go through, you see the disappointment on the face. Homework? Work?

That shows that the person doesn't want to get up. He wants to be lifted up. He doesn't want to run.

He wants to be carried. Micah says, I know that getting back to where I was will take work, and I am fine with that. I will do whatever it takes, however long it takes, to get back up.

To recommit is to accept discipline. I don't necessarily mean punitive discipline. I mean formative, training discipline. To get fit again, you accept that being unfit is going to make getting fit again harder. But you don't get fit by looking at pictures of fit people. Nor do you get fit by getting upset with the owner of the gym when he gives you a program. You recommit to the training. You got unfit through laziness, and now you will only get fit again through sweat. You got spiritually unfit by neglecting some things you should have maintained: prayer, meditation on the word, giving, serving, corporate worship, self-examination, reading. Now it is time to take them up again, and to do so deliberately.

In the time of the Puritans, one of the methods they saw to get someone back up was what they called healing by contraries. What they meant by that was the way to get out of a sin is to begin doing the righteous opposite. In other words, the man given to stealing, was now to give himself to a regular habit of giving to others. The person given to grumbling, was to take on the habit of regular, public thanksgiving. Of course, this is entirely biblical. Ephesians 4 shows us that that what you put off, you must replace with the opposite virtue that you put on. 25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," (Eph. 4:25) 31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:31-32)

You have been spiritually slothful? Replace it with diligence. Agree to meet with some other believers for prayer and study at 6am. You've stopped reading the Bible. Accept the discipline of a Bible reading program. You've stopped serving. Accept the discipline of signing up for regular weekly service in church. You've become a grumbler? Meet weekly with someone who holds you accountable to give thanks.

If you are committed to getting up, then give up on instant Christianity. There are no spiritual steroids to give you double the bulk in half the time. There are no "I lost 40 kgs in two weeks by drinking this mixture" in the faith. No, 1 Timothy 4:7: and exercise yourself toward godliness. (1 Tim. 4:7) Gumnazo = train like an athlete.

Devotion: Verse 7: I will look to the LORD. His confidence in God's view of him causes him not to hide amongst the trees of the garden or look inwardly to try and find relief. He does not look at others to compare himself and find relief. He looks straight to the Lord, because he knows there is mercy there. To fall forward is to look to the LORD immediately after a fall. Take the knowledge of God's displeasure as Father, and go to him. He is your judge and your advocate. He is your Father who is unhappy over your sin, and delighting in you.

People will get it wrong about you again and again, but God never will. You will get it wrong about yourself, but God never will.

You can get everything right and still fail to do the thing which is at the heart of all this: love God. Be devoted to him in personal communion. Getting back up is not primarily becoming faithful in church and serving, and stopping ungodly associations. It's primarily returning to your first love, communing with God in His Word, in prayer, with His people.

For an almost-Christian staying down is no surprise. But for the Christian it is unacceptable. You have a merciful Father, you don't need to pity yourself. You are justified, so your sins are defeated sins. Preach the Gospel to yourself. Get up. Start your training program again. Be patient with the process. And be looking to God in love.