

A Season of Fall

*And if one falls down, the other helps,
But if there's no one to help, tough!*
- Ecclesiastes 4

How true that the fall season is so beautiful. A natural mosaic of color that lines the hardwood can range from brilliant yellows of a pear skin to the deepest burgundy of black cherry. Yet even in such splendor, this foliage is dying; as soon it will brown, fall, and decay



– leaving only the memory of its beauty and the hope of regeneration in the year to come. Touching on the science of botany, I imagine this process of fall is a nutritional course that replenishes or aids the soil. In order for regeneration – or a new harvest of leaves and other growth – the perennial process must take place as the step toward the promise and hope of another birth, growth and then death again in the continuing cycle of nature.

Unlike this perennial cycle of the seasons or similar processes of nature, *a season of fall* that occurs in human life can arrive in unannounced, irregular, and otherwise unpredictable ways. Possibly without any forewarning or indication, *a...fall* can be abrupt and have broad and deep consequences; not simply a stumble or break in stride, but rather the full course from this initial cliché to the shudder and finally the irreversible and monumental folding, collapse, and descent to a bottom. This series may occur in a moment with the intensity of a summer storm or may begin gradually as a trickle – but *a...fall* is certain however it arrives.

For those who may recall from childhood, a fall such as a bicycle wreck usually resulted in a quick recovery; you might have just picked-up the bike, brushed-off the blood, and taken off again – especially, if friends or other kids were around. There are (or were) the more serious accidents, but these are not the kind that I am trying to describe; no, I am really talking about the kind that could have been routine but that you vaguely remember as just another day at play. Routine though it be (as a kid), a similar accident for an adult would likely leave you on the ground – not crying, but still wreathing and aching from the pain. I have had a few of the accidents as an adult that I believe were similar to those as a

kid and, quite frankly, those as an adult were a lot more painful. Maybe the passing time and faded memory is much the cause for the difference, but I am inclined to believe that kids are usually more resilient and flexible. What is arguable about the difference is that the kid may actually cry – if just for a moment – as a one-time reaction to and remedy for the immediate hurt. In my experience as a parent, this difference is further complicated by observation that the crying does not come in proportion to the apparent seriousness or apparent severity of the accident; kids will *cry over spilt milk* but barely wince from a *wipe-out*. I guess that's why kids seem so resilient or, as my oldest use to say, unstoppable.

Kids are not removed from *a...fall* – as even the essentials of life such as love and security are denied to many of the young and generally innocent. As with the analogous bicycle accident (or other routine accidents), the reaction to or processing of *a... fall* does not take full measure for the young. Yes, they cry and even grieve over the hurt, but the pain seems to bury itself deep within them as something of a time capsule to be optionally removed, opened and processed over some period as an adult. The complexity of this burying of *a...fall* is far beyond my understanding; yet, I know from my own account that it does not take full measure or consequence in the young life but is viewed differently and sometime detrimentally in the years to come. The kid pours out his pain in a burst of tears leaving the consequences to the adult; while the adult contains his crying and carries the consequences beyond the bike trail, into the sunset and perhaps to the grave.

With the certainty that *a...fall* can arise in all ages, the broad and deep consequences are entirely another matter. Again, the result or outcome of a bicycle accident as a kid and adult do not compare; as more accidents as a kid (and usually more biking) left fewer memories of pain. But to qualify the comparison is to elaborate on the difference between these types of accidents and the serious ones involving faster modes of motor transportation: the bicycle is – in the casual use – rather innocuous in terms of an danger for both the seasoned kid-rider and the adult; or expressed in another way, the faster modes have a greater chance and even expectancy of an accident; almost if not invoking consequences, these motorized modes are without the unannounced, irregular, and otherwise unpredictable ways; also convenient is that a bike is a mode shared by kid and adult alike (for most of us) and so the comparison is sensible. The bicycle accident and *a...fall* really have something in common; yes, the unannounced, irregular, and otherwise unpredictable, but also the unexpected or *never-really-thought-it-would-happen* (to me).

Broad and deep consequences could be as serious as death; yes, actual physical death from riding a bicycle. In my very limited though aging awareness, death from a bicycle is rare whether for the casual or seasoned, professional rider; still, death is possible – most likely when mixed with motorized transportation. Notwithstanding this rare outcome, the bicycle still appears to be rather safe; thus, comes the hidden risks with all variety of injuries from the foot to the crown, from a scratch to a gash, and from a bruise to a broken something. “I was just out for a quiet ride when...and look at me now”

One memory of such an accident involved a neighbor of mine who, as an adult, was riding his son’s bike. Without going into the reason or the circumstances, the adult (dad) wrecked on the pavement and tore some of his ear off one side of his head. I didn’t actually see the accident, but saw the blood and pieced the account through friends and other neighbors. Maybe the dad was just trying to relive his childhood or maybe he was trying to impress his kids; whatever the reason, that small bicycle ride resulted in a big accident. I’m sure that *a...fall* was something unexpected or that he *never-really-thought-it-would-happen*.

When my sister was young (from kid to teenager), she had several bicycle accidents: first, she crashed hard going down killer-kill; then she lost control of her bike and went reeling off a catwalk into the sand below; and who knows how many other such accidents that probably left my parent’s wondering if she should just stay off the thing. Before they came to a conclusion however, she was driving a car – which gave them a more legitimate reason to worry in view of her questionable skills at managing two wheels, let alone four. Thinking back on my vague memory of her driving wrecked, I never really gave it much thought at the time; but as an adult, I think that she was just prone to accidents – as they say – and experienced *a...fall* more frequently than the average kid. But what is the average?

One of the most ridiculous accidents happened to be my own. At about the age of 11, I received the very popular 10-speed for Christmas. Painted a school-bus yellow over a 26-inch frame, my Huffy was every bit the pride-and-joy. Having never really dabbled with 10-gears – or even three for that matter – my immediate attention to these two handles as the distraction that lead to the ridiculous accident. Whizzing from my driveway with eyes turned to the gears, I did not notice that a Sears service truck was curbed-parked at my next door neighbors; well, I did not notice until I could see the eyes of the splattered bugs on the grill surrounding the Ford insignia – but by then it was too late. Some time after initial impact, I peeled myself from the grill – fortunately short of the fate of many bugs – and

crawled back to the house in major pain and humiliation. My school-bus yellow Huffy now had impressed forks and I had bruises to body and the soul. So much for the pride-and-joy ten-speed and, as far as those gears, I will never look down again!

With the possible exception of my neighbor, these accidents lose comparison with *a...fall* (beyond the unexpected...) because the outcome is not nearly as life changing or dramatic; and again, the accidents occurred as a kid with all the previously described deferments. For all I know, my sister may never ride a bike again; but I doubt that she ever thinks about the series of accidents or even one for that matter. No, she is too busy as adult – with kids of her own – and an endless set of professional and personal objectives and interests. To begin to compare with *a...fall*, her accident(s) would have most-likely occurred as an adult, would have unexpectedly rendered much pain and loss, and be a periodic thought or even concern to the day. This set of circumstances and conditions mark the occurrence and path of *a...fall*.

My most recent bicycle accident (and there have been few) was less than three years ago. A neighborhood lot was a popular hang-out for the local kids to ride bike, motorcycle and go-cart. On an impulse and without the characteristic notion of any accident, I ventured-off to achieve the status of any kid though falling (literally) short with proof of my aforementioned claim (that kids are more resilient). Traveling no more than 5 mph's, I hit a rock (not a boulder) and slipped from the bike at a rate that could have easily qualified as slow-motion; yet, following the course of *a...fall* with every step from the cliché to the shudder and finally, landing among a heap of rocks. Realizing almost instantly that I had twisted an ankle, I did not know the extent of injury; no, I did not break my ankle and did little damage elsewhere but again, less than 5 mph!

Lifting my body from the rocks was met with the sharp pain from the ankle up to my brain – followed by a momentary nausea stemming from the pain. Attempting to put my weight on it was useless and all could think about was the ridiculous fall and the last time I twisted an ankle playing basketball. Condensing the rest of this accident into a single sentence, the ankle took months to heal and I'm not so sure that it is all the more vulnerable or weaker from before. I guess I'll have to have another accident – bike or basketball – to prove it! What is certain however is that I will not forget the possibility that even a slow speed and slow fall can cause such pain, slow to heal and slow to forget.

In this outcome of the analogous bicycle accident is the match or comparison to *a...fall*; that is, the *slow to heal and slow to forget*. Where the kid has the characteristic to forget, or least defer, the adult must deal with the pain and all its broad and deep consequences. Leaving aside the type of accident – or the outcome being an accident at all – pain is something that results in *a...fall*; it is the inevitable outcome for which we cannot always share or understand, but which cannot be forgotten in cause, condition, and continuance.

I suppose that once the body is lifted and returned to the home, medicine can render some help and guidance toward healing; still, the pain can go on and, as sometimes applied in such cases, given over to natural or supernatural healing if possible. Over some time, nature may work its course, but not always without some lasting twinge and attention (or favor) to that ankle or otherwise source of pain. Pain from *a...fall* can go away; yes, nature can work its course with and without professional intervention; though I believe and trust in the intervention by prayer. There is the possibility that, even as healing arrives, a re-injury can occur. At worst, is that we can experience *pain from dawn to dusk* as described in Ecclesiastes. It is possible that *a...fall* can have some cyclical (not perennial) taking on a kind of seasonal effect; but then there are several possible outcomes that may never fully repeat or reoccur.

In the dead of winter, after the hardwoods have shed, I walk into the woods alone. The only sound being the steps beneath me, the quiet and serenity of the winter has its own beauty though far from the splendor of the fall; most appreciated, is the silence that makes for thought and stillness. Stopping here and there, I reflect on the recent bicycle accident – perhaps prompted by a twinge in that ankle or the momentary fear that I may re-injure it on this uneven ground. The broken silence of my steps remind that soon the dead leaves will dissipate, the trees will bud and foliate again and the woods will come alive with sounds of birds and insects. I hope and pray that the thought and stillness is not wasted by moments of pain or the fear of further pain; but that the time is valuable and worthy in bringing healing and the understanding that *a...fall* happens to us all at some time in our adult lives. As for the deep and broad consequences – the pain in sorted degree and distance – I walk on with the hope of further steps, lesser fear, and greater faith for seasons to come.