

Surfing Above the Net

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.”
John 10:28

Many years ago, I awoke on Christmas morning to find a bicycle waiting for me under the tree. Although several decades have passed since that day, I must admit that no Christmas gift before or since gave me greater delight than that blue Schwinn. And I still recall the process of learning to ride my first bike. Before I could attempt such a feat, the vehicle needed a necessary structural modification—training wheels. So my father attached a rather large pair to the hub of my bike’s rear tire to prop it upright. Whether or not I wanted them was inconsequential; my vote didn’t count, and I was too young to appreciate that my physical safety depended on this unsightly prosthesis. Though the older kids seemed to fly by on two wheels compared to me wobbling erratically on four, still my little legs pumped the pedals with all my might. Then one day I was ready to ride without those training wheels and my wobbling ceased. From then on I flew like the wind, perfectly balanced on two wheels.

In a sense, learning to ride a bike can be compared to growing spiritually, for both require security and freedom. The security of training wheels provides children freedom to wobble while learning to ride bicycles. Similarly, the security of God’s unwavering forgiveness provides His children freedom while learning to walk by faith. Though we may fail, God never will. Nothing—including our own failures—can snatch us from His hand; and this security frees us to leave the past behind and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Years ago, this marvelous truth wasn’t apparent in my life. As a young Christian without knowledge of God’s Word, I thought I could escape sin through my own efforts. Of course I failed. Consequently, guilt and anxiety consumed me; whether my infractions were large or small, it still rang loud and clear that I’d missed the mark. Moreover, the harder I tried to be sinless, the more magnified my failures appeared. My mind wasn’t set upon God; instead I was preoccupied with my inability to overcome my shortcomings. I felt miserable, and far away from God’s grace.

But He reached out to me. Not because I was good, but because I needed Him. “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free (John 8:32).” For the first time in my life I learned about God through His Word. Through both learning and trusting it, God filled my mind and heart with Truth that replaced what had been a dark vacuum of ignorance. Consequently, I discovered freedom from the guilt and anguish caused by sin. Instead of focusing on my own futile efforts to be perfect, I learned to confess sin to God and let Him cleanse me from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). God’s perfect forgiveness enabled me to let go of past failures so that I no longer walked a spiritual tightrope in fear of failure. Though I stumbled, His everlasting arms were always underneath. God’s grace didn’t demand the impossible condition that I be sinless; rather it liberated me, a sinner, to learn and grow, for “He teaches sinners in the way (Psalm 25:8).”

In the Bible are examples of victory in spite of weakness. God didn’t abandon His children who failed, and many later achieved spiritual greatness. King David committed adultery and murder, but he confessed and received blessing from God. Peter denied Jesus, but repented and later triumphed as a leader in the early Church. Hebrews 11 extols a number of believers including Abraham and Moses, even Sampson much of whose life was checkered. Even these stalwarts weren’t without lapses of faith. Nonetheless, their stories teach that if they succeeded in spite of failure, there’s hope for all of us as well.

The security provided by God’s forgiveness serves as a safety net under girding the spiritual health of His children. When we stumble, He’s eager to forgive us, just like the father of the prodigal son who ran to meet his wayward child returning home. But though this gift to us is totally free, Christ paid dearly for our freedom. What a great motivator to love and worship Him! Moreover, being touched by His grace helps us to effectively deal with other stumbling brothers and sisters, speaking the Truth in love. For who among us hasn’t erred and needed God’s mercy?

Only after this earthly life will threats of sin and failure cease. When we stand in eternity with Him, we’ll be perfected forever and know what it means spiritually to surf *without* the net.

By Mary Nixon