

August 25, 2013  
Church Planting

*You've Fallen ...But You Can Get Up!*  
Acts 8:9-25

**Opening words:** The end is near. This summer we are looking at the first eight chapters of the Book of Acts. I have called this sermon series, *Church Planting*. So much has happened to this point. The Holy Spirit was unleashed on the world and the church was created. Lives were being changed. The disciples were transformed into apostles, who began to flex their spiritual muscle. Under their leadership, individuals were healed and thousands were experiencing the power of the resurrected Jesus. The church was growing and Gentiles were being welcomed into the fold. Through the eyes of God, everything is perfect. However, perfection does not last long because the church is comprised of human beings. The church has always struggled with her human side. This morning's story illustrates that point.

This morning's spotlight shines squarely on an individual who struggled with his human side. Let me say two things about Simon. First, he is far from perfect. His was known for his use of the black arts and the church has tolerated such behavior. Second, his story is complex. Whenever money is involved, things grow complex. The key to understanding this story is distilling down to its basic elements. It is only when you look at those basic elements that you begin to see the divine truth. The story of Simon is a story of spiritual backsliding. Vance Havner once said, *"Most church members live so far below the standard, you would have to backslide to be in fellowship with them."* May God give you ears to hear this morning's scripture lesson, Acts 8:9-25. Let me call this message *You've Fallen ...But You Can Get Up!*

**Acts 8:9-25**<sup>9</sup> Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great,<sup>10</sup> and all the people, both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, "This man is rightly called the Great Power of God."<sup>11</sup> They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his sorcery.<sup>12</sup> But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.<sup>13</sup> Simon himself believed and was baptized. And he followed Philip everywhere, astonished by the great signs and miracles he saw.

<sup>14</sup> When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to Samaria. <sup>15</sup> When they arrived, they prayed for the new believers there that they might receive the Holy Spirit, <sup>16</sup> because the Holy Spirit had not yet come on any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>17</sup> Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup> When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money <sup>19</sup> and said, "Give me also this ability so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." <sup>20</sup> Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! <sup>21</sup> You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup> Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that he may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart. <sup>23</sup> For I see that you are full of bitterness and captive to sin." <sup>24</sup> Then Simon answered, "Pray to the Lord for me so that nothing you have said may happen to me." <sup>25</sup> After they had further proclaimed the word of the Lord and testified about Jesus, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

I love this story. A faith healer stands in front of a large crowd and says, "I have two people who need healing this evening. Will the first person in need of a healing please come out! A man ran out on the stage by the name of Harry. The faith healer asked him, "What is your ailment?" Harry answered with these shuddering words, "I can't tweak right." He instructed him to go behind the curtain. The faith healer called out, "Will the second person in need of a healing please come out." A man named Frank came out walking on crutches. The faith healer asked him, "Would you like to walk under your own power?" Frank answered clearly, "Yes!" The faith healer instructed him to walk behind the curtain. The faith healer looked at the crowd and said, "Would you like to see a healing this evening?" The crowd cheered their approval! The faith healer then turned to the curtain and said, "Frank, slide your crutches to me. The crutches slid out and the faith healer picked them up. He broke them into small pieces and the crowd went wild. The faith healer declared Frank had been healed. Next, he looked to the curtain and said, "Harry, take the microphone. The next word you utter will be the first clear words in your life. What do you want to tell us? Harry took the microphone and said, "Twank fell down!"

The message for today is not about faith healing. However, I do believe it still happens occasionally. This message is about something that happens regularly, backsliding. Don't act shocked; you can be honest. We have all experienced spiritual backsliding in our lives.

There is nothing easy about living out the faith. The faith runs contrary to the ways of the world. How many times have you backslid spiritually in your life? How many times have you fallen down spiritually? If you have an answer to those questions, then you can relate to this morning's scripture lesson.

We find ourselves in the eighth chapter of Acts, verses nine through twenty-five. The spotlight rests squarely on a man by the name of Simon. He came to Jesus with quite a colorful past. Everyone knew him. He was a local celebrity. He was known for his practice of sorcery, so the ages have called him Simon the Sorcerer. On the day he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior, he must have been on a spiritual high. He must have promised to walk away from his old practices. The Black Arts have never been accepted by the people of God. They are still not accepted by the people of God. At first, everything looks good. He was living a new life with new priorities. Then his old life begins to reintroduce itself. The Holy Spirit came to his corner of the world, Samaria. He sees the difference the Divine Helper is making in people's lives. The Holy Spirit is administered by the simple laying on of hands. He sees the power and he wants that power. He confuses the power of God with the power of Satan. In complete ignorance, he pulls out his wallet and his fall is complete. His picture is not pretty because he looks so much us. We have all spiritually fallen. Have you ever experienced spiritual backsliding? The answer is YES!

You know the scene. The details of the story are different, but the storyline is the same. It all begins with a promise made on some spiritual high. Perhaps it happened at some spiritual retreat weekend. Perhaps it happened at the addition of a new member to the family. Perhaps it happened at the end of some personal crisis. Perhaps it happened when the preacher found just the right words at just the right moment. The details don't matter. The only thing that matters is it happened. You promised God you will live a better life. You promised God to make Him your top priority. You promised God to be more like Jesus every day. You were not lying. You made that promise with a sincere heart, but life itself, has a way of eroding away the long term impact of that promise. It is hard to soar like an eagle when you are surrounded by turkeys. It is hard to live a better life when you work with fools. It is hard to live a better life when you face family problems.

It is hard to live a better life when you experience disappointments. It is hard to live a better life when you are smothered with concerns. It is hard to live a better life when you are buried by responsibilities. The promise of a better life is replaced with your old patterns. There you are, lying on the ground criticizing yourself. Church is a place where honesty is encouraged. Let's be honest. Spiritual backsliding is a part of life. You are not the first person to fall and you will not be the last.

This is the good news for today. Spiritual backsliding is not terminal. The Bible doesn't tell us, but I like to think Simon corrected his ways. He got up and moved forward. Because of the grace of God, we have another opportunity to get up and move forward. Proverbs 24:16 says, "*Though the righteous man falls seven times, he rises again.*" The number seven in the Bible means "many." In other words, a righteous man falls many times in life, but he always gets up to try again. How many times have you fallen spiritually? How many times have you gotten up? Is anyone one here content lying on the ground? As your pastor, let me say this: get up on your knees and try again. This message is written for those who want to try again.

Ever so briefly, I want to give you three words that will help prevent your next fall. Each word is very practical and each word is very Biblical. Each word begins with the letter R. The first word is the word REGULARLY. The second word is the word RUN. The third and final word is the word REMEMBER. These three words will help you keep moving forward in the faith. So if you are ready to begin say, **"Amen!"**

### **Regularly**

The first word is the word *regularly*. 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, "*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?*" In other words, you need to regularly examine your faith. It is true for both your body and your soul. Regular examinations are vital. Only a fool would not take advantage of modern medicine. Only a fool would not turn to God regularly. When was the last time you gave yourself a spiritual self-examination? The word is *regularly*.

### **Run**

The second word is the word *run*. 2 Timothy 4:7-8 says, "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*"

*Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*” What is Paul saying? He is saying life is a race. The goal is not simply running in the race. The goal of running any race is to win the race. No one runs a race hoping to finish in the middle of the pack. No one runs a race hoping to finish last. The goal is not just to finish the race. The goal is to win! As you run the race of life, are you keeping the finish line, heaven, in mind? Are you practicing today what you will do in heaven for eternity? The word is *run*.

### **Remember**

The third and final word is the word *remember*. Hebrews 10:32 says, *“Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering.”* It is important to tell your testimony for two reasons. First, you need to tell others what God has done for you. Second, you need to remind yourself what God has done for you. How many times have you turned to him when life was hard? How many times has God gotten you through some difficult situation? The word is *remember*.

Several years ago, I officiated at a wedding here at Western Reserve. It was one of those weddings I do for non-church members. I will be honest with you. I don't even remember the name of the bride or the groom. However, I do remember the wedding was traditional in nature. The ushers walked out of the side door with the groom. The bridesmaids walked down the center aisle. The groom brightened when the back doors opened and he saw his bride for the first time. They said their vows flawlessly. They exchanged the rings without mishap. They lit the unity candle on cue. Everything was perfect until the congregation said the Lord's Prayer. Somewhere between "Our Father" and "Amen", there was a sudden commotion. I looked over to my left and saw one of the ushers had passed out. The good news is he responded quickly and was back on his feet before 'Amen'! Most of the congregation didn't notice. We finished the service and the day continued.

It was while they were taking pictures I found the young man. At that moment he looked fine. I think his name was Shawn and he was a Marine who was home on leave to be in his friend's wedding. I asked him the question, "Are you ok?"

Before he could answer, his significant other spoke up. She was a little mousey girl with a low-cut dress. She kept pulling up the top of her dress so she wouldn't expose herself to the world. She looked at him and said, "He is fine. He drank too much last night, got up early to go golfing with the other ushers and hasn't eaten a thing so he would be hungry at the reception. He is fine! He is an idiot but he is fine. The only thing damaged is his big Marine ego." I said, "I am glad you are OK and I glad you recovered quickly."

There are days when you are going to be just like that young Marine. The question is not if you are going to fall. You are going the fall. The question is, how fast are you going to get up? I hope you get up so fast that your world doesn't even notice. That is possible if you can remember these three words.

**Regularly – regularly examine your faith.**

**Run - Run the race to win.**

**Remember - Remember what God has done for you.**

And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"