



## Bouncing Back!

by Mark Brunner

### *Hoses!* (1 Corinthians 4:8-9)

Hoses. They're one of those necessary evils you need around the yard this time of the year. Evil not because of what they do, but because of the fact that you need to rewind them once your watering job is finished. Rewinding hose on a carrier is one of those yard duties I really detest. The hose is often gritty to handle and slippery. It's so tedious and the hose is seldom cooperative about it. As you wind it around and around the carrier, there's just something about a hose that isn't very cooperative; almost as if they weren't meant to be put into that position in the first place. One thing that I've noticed, though— Not all hoses are the same. Because of what they're made of, some hoses are more resilient; better able to hold a wind and stay in place.

It's often that way with Christians adversity. Some Christians just seem to be made of more resilient materials than others and it seems it has everything to do in how they are put together from a spiritual perspective.

Here's a story: Cork is the bark from a tree that grows in southwestern Europe. A member of the oak tree family, the Cork tree produces a very unique bark which is honeycombed with small pockets of air, trapped by the bark inside of itself. After six to eight years, the bark of the tree is harvested in such a way as to allow the tree to replenish itself. Because the bark is honeycombed in this unique fashion, one of the most interesting

characteristics of cork is that it is extremely porous yet able to maintain its buoyancy. It can be dropped into water and held under, and when released, it will immediately bounce up to the surface. Yet, when shaped in such a way as to stop a wine bottle, despite its porosity, the wine can't escape the bottle.

Similarly, as Christians, we can be held down and under by the waters of adversity, but when released, we surface immediately. And it's that very ability to bounce back, filled through and through by pockets of spirituality in our lives, that serves as a shining example to the world that no adversity is too deep to drown us. We experience the same difficulties as those who do not believe in the living Lord, but we accept these difficulties with a difference: we have the ability to bounce back with the help of our Savior, Redeemer, and Friend. It's the Spirit that gives us buoyancy and the Spirit that gives us the ability to hold back fear when life's adversities confront us. You just can't hold a good Christian down; they are made in such a way spiritually that bouncing back is all that they can do.

*“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (Matt 6:34)*

## *The Ax That Will Never Lift Us!* (1 Corinthians 4:18-20)

In my boyhood I had a friend who was a “talker.” Everyone knew that Mike would always have something to say about nearly everything. It didn't matter if it was about sports or ornithology. Mike always had an opinion and he was motivated to express it no matter what. My classmates were well aware of Mike's ability for boasting and talk. Most of the time they ignored him. However, I'll never forget the time a number of us decided to call his bluff. Mike had been bragging about how his dad was a great collector of hunting trophies. So, one day, a bunch of the guys went over to Mike's house when his dad was home and knocked on the door. “We're here to see your hunting trophies.” We told him. Mike's dad had no idea what we were talking about and as we were leaving he told us that he “didn't know why we had asked. He wasn't even a hunter.”

Talk is one thing. But we need to followup that talk with actions if we really want to be believed.

Here's a story: The woodsman went out to fell a tree with ax in hand and pulling his cart behind. He took along his young son to help him lift the wood and stack it in the cart. They traveled together down the wooded path until the woodsman came to the tree he had selected to cut down. He took a minute to stare at the tree, from roots to the very crown. He measured it in his mind to make sure he had room to drop it and paced off the direction in which the tree should fall. Then he moved his cart away from the tree and told his son to stand clear. The woodsman then sat down on a nearby stump, took off his hat and fixed his gaze on the tree. After some time the son approached his father and asked, "Father, why do you not put your ax to the tree?" The woodsman replied, "I'm waiting until I work up a sweat first; then I'll fell the tree my son." (Source unknown.)

The best way to strengthen your faith is to exercise it. The Bible tells us that "the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power" (1 Corinthians 4:20). Some Christians talk a lot about their faith. They can really work up a sweat repeating memorized Bible passages and going to and from the church pew on any given Sunday. They know all the right words to say and understand the actions those words ought to lead them to, but their lives don't reflect what the sound of their words. They talk the talk but don't walk the walk. There is no work without the effort. God is waiting for you and I to lift the ax and not the other way around. Working up a sweat is a matter of movement, not thought.

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## *The Silent Treatment!* (1 Corinthians 6:9-12)

Occasionally, I like to get on my soapbox. I have strong beliefs about some things and want others to know about them. I remember a time years ago when I went on the lecture route with my kids and preached a sermon at the

supper table that I thought they would never forget. I injected humor, gave examples and made sure that they knew what I was expecting of them. After holding sway for ten or fifteen minutes, I paused for reactions. There wasn't any. Both Daniel and Hannah, our two youngest children still at home, were staring down into their food. I figured it was because they were looking to find those rogue peas that had rolled into the potatoes. The reality was that their eyes had glazed over from disinterest and they couldn't see their food through the blank stares.

Despite the fact that I firmly believed in what I was saying, I had transgressed one of the most sacred rules of fatherhood. Dad's were meant to be teachers and not preachers.

Here's a story: A well-known professional golfer was playing in a tournament with former President Gerald Ford, fellow pro Jack Nicklaus, and Billy Graham. After the round was over, one of the other pros on the tour asked, "Hey, what was it like playing with the President and Billy Graham?" The pro said with disgust, "I don't need Billy Graham stuffing religion down my throat!" With that he headed for the practice tee. His friend followed, and after the golfer had pounded out his fury on a bucket of golf balls, he asked, "Was Billy a little rough on you out there?" The pro sighed and said with embarrassment, "No, he didn't even mention religion." Astonishingly, Billy Graham had said nothing about God, Jesus, or religion, yet the pro stomped away after the game accusing Billy of trying to ram religion down his throat. (R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*.)

God wants believers to live their faith, not preach it. That's what Graham had done by living as a Christian on the golf course but not necessarily talking about it. He walked the walk, and it was obvious. In this way religion takes on an osmosis character as our actions seep into the lives of others even more effectively than our words. When you and I demonstrate kindness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness, we don't have to talk about it; we need to live it. Our "religion" is more a matter of how we live than what we preach. Sometimes the "silent treatment" is far more effective than the soapbox.

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## *If The Field Cannot Be Plowed!* (1 Corinthians 6:9-12)

There is an old saying that “Nature is biased to the wilderness and not the fruitful field.” Ask any farmer and he can tell you that if it doesn’t come down from above in the form of weeds it comes from below in the form of rocks. Weeds from above and rocks from below, a farmer’s curse. A fertile field remains a fertile field only as long as a farmer takes the time to kill the weeds and remove the rocks. A field’s natural state is weeds and rocks, not wheat and tilled soil. A farmer has to set standards for the field he’s planning on working and then make sure that those standards, weeding in the spring and fall and rock-picking after first and second plowing, are followed. Let them slip for a season and fruitful can easily be replaced by wilderness faster than you think.

And so it is for our bodies as well. God has set standards by which we are to regard them and maintain them. Unfortunately, those standards have slipped and the weeds and rocks have invaded.

Here’s an insight: U.S. Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan recently published a disturbing essay entitled “Defining Deviancy Down.” In a recent issue of *The New Republic*, commentator Charles Krauthammer writes that “Moynihan’s powerful point is that with the moral deregulation of the 1960s, we have had an explosion of deviancy in family life, criminal behavior and public displays of psychosis. And we have dealt with it in the only way possible: by redefining deviancy down so as to explain away and make ‘normal’ what a more civilized, ordered and healthy society long ago would have labeled—and long ago did label—deviant.” (Christian Research Institute letter, December 6, 1993.)

What had once been a cleared field, in terms of human relationships, has now become a place strewn with the boulders of unrighteousness and the weeds of degeneration. There was a time in our country when fornication was against the law. Today most would laugh if such a thing was even talked about. Someone mentioned to me recently that a law forbidding adultery with a large fine would probably reduce the divorce rate in our country by 30%.

Unfortunately, as a society we have learned to tolerate what our forefathers would have gone to great lengths to eliminate. In fact they legislated against many of the things today that we legislate to tolerate. Lowering our standards to tolerate what God teaches in His Word is immoral may give society the ability to overlook the boulders and the weeds, but it does not please God. Try as we might to live with unrighteousness, a time is soon coming when the field can no longer be plowed and God will look for another.

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## *Only An Uh Oh Away!* (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Did you ever notice that, if you're going to fall down a flight of steps, it's usually the first step that determines the fall or not. Holly and I were cleaning out our attic the other day. It had been years since we had straightened things out in the attic and now it had become a major job. We were determined to get rid of as much as possible and save only those things which really mattered. In the process we collected a fair pile of old boxes and miscellaneous junk that now occupied the landing going down to the Great Room. I made a number of trips up and down the stairs without issue; that is until one particular trip toward the end of the day. Unlike the previous descents, I didn't mark that first step with my eye prior to stepping out. Perhaps my view of the steps was blocked or I had my mind on the boxes I was carrying. Whatever the case, I hit it oddly with the heel of my right foot and lost my balance. Down I went. What had been safe passage for hours had turned into a nasty fall. For want of a quick glance, my shins are now the worse for the wear.

When it comes to temptation in our life, marking the first step often determines whether or not we travel safely over sin or fall into it.

Here's a story from Aesop's Fables: A man came into a forest and asked the trees to provide him a handle for his axe. The Trees consented to his request and gave him a young ash tree. No sooner had the man fitted a new handle to his axe from it, than he began to use it and quickly felled with his strokes the

noblest giants of the forest. An old oak, lamenting when too late the destruction of his companions, said to a neighboring cedar, “The first step has lost us all. If we had not given up the rights of the ash, we might yet have retained our own privileges and have stood for ages.” (Aesop’s Fables)

There’s something to be said of winning or losing that first step. If we give Satan and sin even one inch of our lives, they will come and take it all and ultimately destroy us. It’s been said that “Sin is not in the act, but in the choice.” We always have the choice to look before we step out into a life of sin. The Bible tells us that “God is faithful. He will not let you be tempted beyond that what you can bear” (1 Corinthians 10:13). God opens our eyes to sin. But, we need to be the ones doing the looking. Sin doesn’t just happen, it occurs over a course of time, to be sure. But, once you’ve taken the first “bad” step into it, the rest is a slippery slope. Focusing on that very first step is the wise thing to do. Once you’ve stepped wrong, the fall is only a matter of an “Uh Oh” away.

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