

## Learning to Fall

Jim was different. Over the past months he had become embittered. It showed. In the lines of his face, the narrowing of his eyes, the tight lips, the hunched shoulders, the sightless stare. It was obvious, he believed the stroke had taken away all the best of his life. No more long country walks, stick brushing away the brambles, binoculars at the ready to spot the wild-life which so fascinated him. Jim had been one of those one-sided conversationalists with whom you didn't have to do much more than just keep up and say 'yes' and 'no', and grunt approval in the right places. But now there were no more long conversations with friends. The friends called in but embarrassing silences, uncertain moods and the obvious difficulty Jim had with forming his words, made the visits short and infrequent.

The thing Jim grieved most was the loss of his independence. Having to rely on Grace whose own health was failing and strangers in the house who had no idea of the precise way ordinary chores should be tackled, irritated him. Over many weeks he stiffened up and lost much of his confidence, along with his sense of humour. It would be fair to say that Jim's spirit was more paralysed by fear, than his body with the stroke.

The one thing Jim did hold on to was his grim determination - what Grace had often called his 'awkward streak'. It was that which, at first, appeared to be his un-doing. One morning, irritated by the banging of the front gate which the postman had not shut properly, Jim struggled and shuffled from his chair in a useless attempt to go out and do something about it. The fall didn't do much damage, but it did put him back into hospital for a few days.

It was a few weeks later when I was to make this next call. I could hardly believe the difference in him. He greeted me with a bright smile, albeit still a slightly twisted smile, though in fact that made it quite appealing. Jim was standing with a stick instead of his walking frame. His other hand gripped the back of a chair. There was a new confidence about him. I was taken aback at the sight of him, but even more by what happened next. I could distinguish his words more clearly. 'Watch,' he said.

Slowly he let his hand slide down the side of the chair. He was falling. I put out a hand. 'No. Let him go.' Grace grinned behind him. I watched Jim sink to the floor, then roll and twist until he was in a position to get to one knee. Using the strength his arms had acquired through the past months he maneuvered his body. Agonisingly, and so slowly, he gradually regained his position against the chair.

His smile said, 'Inside I'm standing tall.' Then slowly forming his words he told me his secret. This few days in hospital had been a blessing in disguise. 'They ... showed me ... how ... to fall.' he said. 'So I ... can ... get up ... again.'

*In personal life, as in church and fellowship, we have to learn to fall so as to be able to get up again. That is, to fall with Jesus.*