

**Psalm 37.23-24 (NKJV)**  
***Stumble but Not Tumble***

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand.”

My paraphrase:

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. Though he stumbles, he shall not tumble; For the LORD upholds him with His hand.”

**Introduction**

There were many heart-wrenching stories of how the global financial crisis of 2008 had wrecked the lives of people. A 54-year-old woman in Singapore lost almost \$200,000 because of the financial crash. The sum was about half of the combined savings of her husband and herself.

Two months before the financial collapse, she was diagnosed with cancer. Doctors removed the tumour and put her on a three-year programme of radiotherapy and medical check-ups. Her insurance could only cover half of the mounting medical bills. She was banking on her retirement funds to see her through (i.e. the savings she had invested in the financial market).

Hence, the financial crash really traumatized her. She even thought of stopping medical treatment so that she could save whatever money she still had. Of course her husband, who had at one time quitted his job to nurse her back to health when she had an earlier mental breakdown, opposed her idea. She responded, “If I die, my husband will be sad. But it will only be for a while. If we use up all our retirement savings, the pain will last a longer time ... I’m not trying to hurt him. I’m doing this for him.”

The weight of guilt bore down on her heavily day and night. How could she forgive herself for the burden she had brought upon her devoted husband?

*(The New Paper, 21 Oct 2008, pp. 2-3)*

People face difficult times from time to time. Christians are not exempt from such challenges. But what comfort do we have from the Word in view of such times?

Today, we look at Psalm 37 which is attributed to King David. He's a man after God's heart; one who would seek to walk in God's way. But we all know the human flaws and foibles in David's life. I believe David himself understood that even the "good man" (the one who would go after God's heart and walk His way) would still stumble, lose his way, struggle, and trip and fall along life's journey.

Psalm 37 as a whole is David's declaration that good will eventually be victorious over evil because the Lord stands with the righteous. Often times, the good seem to be losing and lacking while the wicked seem to be winning and prospering. Thus, the good may succumb either because they fear the wicked or they follow the wicked. But David exhorts the good man to hold on, hang on, and press on in the way of God because the Lord is always on the side of the righteous.

When we face difficult times, setbacks or failures in life, the Word of God in Psalm 37:23-24 offers us two truths of comfort.

### **I. God is in control of our steps (v. 23).**

Psalm 37:23 reassures us that God orders our every step. The verb "ordered" is very strong in the original Hebrew. It means to establish something so that it has a strong foundation. God "determines" or "orders" or "ordains" our steps. This includes our going out and our coming in, our lying down and our getting up, our waking and our sleeping, our buying and our selling, our talking and our listening, our walking and our driving. Because He is God, there are no accidents with him. Nothing ever happens to the child of God by luck, chance or fate.

You wonder what the days ahead will bring. You'll have good days and bad days. You have some victories and some defeats. You'll be sick for a while and you'll be healthy much of the time (I hope!). Some of your prayers will be answered in the way you want; some won't be answered in the way you want. Some of your plans will come to fruition; others will remain undone. But know this: Your steps in the coming days are "ordered" by the Lord. He is in charge of the details of your life.

Technology has given us a sense of control over many things.

- With technology, we can see and hear from anyone or any place anywhere in the world (well, almost!). That gives us a sense of all-present.
- With technology, we have access to an unfathomable reservoir of information. That gives us a sense of all-knowing.
- With technology, we seem to have solutions to all kinds of problems—from early warning of impending disaster to environmental control to treatment of diseases to human infertility. That gives us a sense of all-powerful.

Indeed, there is a lot of energy and effort we put in trying to control the world around us. Also, we think we make the rules and if we make the rules, then that means we live anyway we want.

And because we think we are so much in control of our lives and our world, we have lost our capacity to see God's presence in the world. When we see a problem we only think about how to solve it. We never think about if there is some meaning in this crisis, or if there is some meaning in this event that God is trying to get through to us, to communicate to us, to reshape us. The "we depend on God" worldview is not very much our basic lifestyle.

But we are not independent. We are not self-sufficient. By nature there is a part of us that is created to depend on God and God's goodwill towards us. And because of this, we answer to God and He has a right to expect things from us. God gives us responsibilities even as we depend on Him.

In short, in this world of human efficiency and sufficiency, we need to be constantly reminded that God is in control. Yes, we are given responsibilities to respond to what's happening around us but no, we are not in ultimate control.

It's sobering to think of how many tragedies in this world are caused largely by human error and sin. Think about the size of the AIDS epidemic in the world today. It's crushing and it's tied in with promiscuity and sexual abuse. We have problems with our oceans, our forests, our air, and these lead to climatic changes that bring about floods, hurricanes, cyclones, snow storms, drought, etc. We call these natural disasters. But in reality, these are the ill effects of the way we have tempered with our environment for our own selfish profits. Human misbehaviour in the areas of politics, economics, and family has led to genocides, material greed, and domestic violence.

These sorts of things in our world should remind all of us that for all the advancement we have made, we are still not in control. Our pride is misplaced. We don't make the rules. We will have to answer for the way we live.

God is in control both in our good and bad times. And if God is in control even in the bad circumstances around us, then there is something to learn as we face these difficulties. Maybe the thing we have to learn is that God is there with us, and that He loves us and He will see us through.

Maybe there is something that God is calling us to release. Maybe in struggling with something, we recognize that there is an attitude, a habit, a hurt that God is calling us to release as part of the healing, as part of the change. And maybe there is something new that we have to do. Maybe what God is saying in some of the things that we face is that we actually have to change the way we live. God orders our steps and He is calling us to reorder our lives and priorities. We need to do some things differently. We have to

return to God in our behaviour, to make a determined effort, to begin a fresh effort to obey God.

God is in control of our steps as we face difficulties, setbacks and failures. Since every detail of life comes under God's control, we can continue to trust in Him even when life itself seems to spin out of control.

- What is one thing the Lord is calling you to hand over control to Him?
- What is one thing you need to reorder in your life so that the Lord can order your steps and bring order to your life?

When we face difficult times, setbacks or failures in life, the Word of God in Psalm 37:23-24 offers us two truths of comfort. The first is that He is in control of our steps. God is in control of our steps is not only a comfort, but also a challenge to us to live by faith rather than by sight; to walk in faith rather than in fear. There's a second truth of comfort, and it is ...

## **II. God helps us in our struggle to walk in holiness (v. 24).**

Psalm 37:24 says, "Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand." God promises that though we stumble, we will not tumble. When the path is narrow and winding, it's hard not to fall sometimes. Life is like that. We all stumble in some ways. The word translated "utterly destroyed" (NKJV) means to be cast headlong into a deep pit. It's what happens when you stand on a high cliff peering over the edge and looking down when someone pushes you from behind. When you finally hit bottom, you won't dust yourself off and keep on going. You would be "utterly destroyed" like humpty dumpty whose broken pieces could never be put together again. But Scripture tells us that though we may face difficult circumstances, God will not allow us to be utterly destroyed. The reason is clear. He upholds us with His mighty hand.

The fall might be occasioned by the loss of a job, a health problem, the breakup of a relationship, bankruptcy, or any sort of personal crisis. Or it could be a series of foolish choices that led you in a wrong direction so that you hurt your walk with God and hurt those around you as well.

The Bible tells us the whole truth about human nature. We see people who are faithful one day and fickle the next.

- Noah built an ark in obedience to God and to save his family, and when the flood was over he got drunk and exposed himself to his sons.
- Abraham left the city of Ur by faith, following God's call to the Promised Land. When he got there, he lied about his wife Sarah—not once, but twice.
- David said, "The Lord is my shepherd." But he went on to commit adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah (her husband) murdered in an attempt to cover up his sin.

- Peter boastfully declared that even if everyone else would fall away, he would never fall away from Jesus. But when confronted by a young girl around a campfire after Jesus was arrested, he lost his nerve and denied the Lord three times.

These stories are in the Bible both to instruct us and to encourage us. They teach us that even the best men under pressure can do very foolish things. No one is beyond the reach of temptation. Very godly people can still make very wrong choices. They suffer greatly as a result and cause others to suffer with them. It's good that the Bible shows this to us, or we would be tempted to deny this reality. Today's "victory" may actually set you up for tomorrow's "defeat". By the way, if God had only wanted men who had never fallen seriously in their lives to write His Word, we would have a very thin Bible or even no Bible at all!

Here is another verse we should consider—"Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity" (Proverbs 24:16). We may fall again and again; trouble may come again and again; we may struggle again and again. But it is the Lord's purpose that we should bring ourselves up again and again and again! When you fall, remember this: *God never intends you to stay down forever; He intends for you to get up and keep on walking with Him.*

In life, our struggles are necessary even though they are not pleasant or easy to endure. Sometimes we bring trouble on ourselves by the foolish choices we make. And sometimes we end up hurting ourselves and those around us very greatly by repeating those bad choices over and over again. Marriages end, friendships are broken, churches split, our children suffer, and the cause of Christ is hurt by the things we say and do. Sin has consequences—we never sin without hurting ourselves, and very often, those around us.

But when we sin, we sometimes wrongly conclude that "God must hate me now". And in our despair we want to hide in a closet and never come out. "How could God ever accept me again after what I did?"

The answer is God loves His children with an everlasting love. Nothing we say or do can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39). And when we turn back to Him, we discover the good news that He waits with open arms for us to come home to Him.

There's an application here for the church—we have to distinguish between striving for excellence and striving for perfection. The church is made up of saved but imperfect people. You know it's possible you come in today thinking, "The volume of the mike is not quite right. What's wrong with the people who set it up? Can't they get right something so simple?"

We can demand things and put the bar too high for others. Thus, we get disappointed and frustrated with people—e.g. our spouse, our children, our

parents. Certainly we want to be excellent, but let's not confuse that with perfection.

Our salvation rests not on our performance but on God's unchanging character. Martin Luther once said that it takes three things to make a man of God—meditation, prayer and temptation. We're fine with meditation and prayer because we know we need to read the Bible and pray. But we may not want to add "temptation" to the list. What Luther meant is that godly character can only be developed in the crucible of life where we fight many battles with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Prayer and Bible reading alone cannot make us godly. Rather, we may become isolated in our own ivory tower. We need the struggles of life to make us strong.

Yes, we don't go round looking for temptation to test ourselves. But when we do fall into temptation, God can use it to make us strong as we struggle to walk in holiness. God helps us in our struggle to walk in holiness. He is at work in our trials and in our falls, perhaps in a way we never know and never see when we are going through them. Nothing is wasted with God. Here's a thought that may encourage you—*God loves you even more dearly when you struggle because that's when you need Him most.*

Billy Moore grew up in a tough city in the US to an impoverished family. He got involved with crime when he was young. He later joined the army, got married. His wife left him and took their kid with her. He was broke and desperate.

One night he broke into the house of a 77-year-old man with a gun in hand. The elderly owner of the house was awoken by the noises, got up to check, and caught Billy Moore in the act of ransacking his house.

In the ensuing struggle, Billy Moore shot twice into the head of the elderly man, killing him instantly. He then ran away with \$5,600 in cash.

It didn't take long for the police to track him down. They arrested him and took him to jail. He's charged with capital murder. There's an electric chair waiting for him.

Billy Moore's mum was a Christian, and she knew a Christian couple who lived not far from the jail in Georgia. She called and said, "I got a son, and he's on death row. Would you please go visit him?" They went to visit Billy Moore and they said to him, "Jesus is willing to give you a fresh start and new chance in life."

Billy looked back at them dumbfounded and said, "You got to be kidding me. Don't you realize my situation here? I murdered an old grandfather. I am charged with a death penalty case. My life is over. There are no new beginnings for me."

But that Christian man looked back at Billy Moore and said, “No, you don’t understand. Jesus Christ loves you so much He wants to find a way to make your life count.”

Billy not only heard these words from this man and woman, but he saw Jesus in them. He said later, “Nobody ever told me Jesus had died for me. It was a love I could feel. It was a love I wanted. It was a love I needed.” And so Billy Moore got on his knees in his jail cell and prayed to accept Jesus into his life.

Billy went to court and pleaded guilty. He said, “How can I tell you I didn’t do it when I did?” They found him guilty and sentenced him to death. But the criminal justice system is slow. It took 16 years of living in a prison cell waiting to die. But during these 16 years, Billy opened his life to God. God changed him from inside out.

Billy Moore became a model prisoner, so much so that the guards had a nickname for him. They called him “the peacemaker”. Billy had Bible studies with the other inmates, and one by one they found redemption and new life in Jesus Christ. The place that had been awful and violent became a place of hope where people cared for each other.

The question is not will God forgive you for what you have done. The question is will you let God forgive you like Billy Moore. The question is not whether or not God can forgive you or change you or give you purpose in life. The question is will you invite Him to change you. Will you invite Him to give you a purpose for living beyond just going to work everyday?

In 1990 the court system finally caught up with Billy Moore. On 21 August 1990, seven and a half hours before Billy Moore was to be electrocuted, something amazing happened. The Georgia Pardon and Parole Board held an emergency hearing about a model prisoner they’d heard about.

The five members of the Pardon and Parole Board looked at the lifestyle and testimony of Billy Moore, and did something so amazing it made the front page of the *New York Times*. They looked at Billy Moore and said, “We are going to show you mercy.” They threw out the death penalty against Billy Moore and did something that had never been done before. It was the first time in American history a confessed killer on death row was to be set free.

Today, Billy Moore is a pastor. He preaches every Sunday and tells of the wonderful grace of God.

(<https://www1.cbn.com/700club/billy-moore-living-death-row>)

## Conclusion

To the people of God, the Word says today, “Be encouraged—the future rests in the good hands of a God who loves you more than you can imagine. You may stumble, but you won’t tumble. This is God’s promise to you.”

For those who don’t know Jesus Christ, the Bible says there is one step you can take to experience God’s hand holding you up so that you will not tumble even as you stumble in life. It is the step of faith in Jesus Christ. Reach out to Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. And He will come to you and order your steps even in the difficulties, setbacks and failures you may face in life. Would you take that step of faith to believe in Jesus Christ today?

*We will stumble in life from time to time, but we will not tumble without any chance to start afresh because God is always on the side of those who belong to Him.*

Pray that the Lord will lead and help you and me to respond to Him accordingly in our respective life journeys. Amen!