

# How Can Being Mindful Help Us in Suffering?

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At a recent doctor's appointment, the check-in staff handed me a neon yellow wristband labeled "FALL RISK" that I had to wear all morning in the clinic. I'd fallen months earlier, and this was designed to remind others to be careful around me. But instead of reminding others, everyone I saw reminded me to be careful saying: "Did you know the best way to prevent falls is mindfulness?"

After I got over the initial irritation (which may have taken all morning), I realized that I needed to be more mindful. Not only to prevent physical falls but also to prevent spiritual ones. **We are most at risk of falling when we aren't paying attention, confident we're fine.** When we are ignoring the present moment, pushing past what's right in front of us, to focus on something else. But when we're mindful, we stay completely present to the current moment, aware of what's happening around us and in us.

**While mindfulness is a good practice in everyday life, it's especially important in suffering, when we are tempted to either look longingly at the past or fearfully at the future. When we stay in the present, we are more aware of the grace and strength God is offering us every moment.** It helps me to say: *Lord, help me sense your presence and provision, right now in this struggle. What do you want me to notice? What are the dangers and temptations around me?*

Awareness and humility are critical, as 1 Corinthians 10:12 reminds us, "Let anyone who thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall." This verse captures the essence of mindfulness – recognizing our vulnerabilities and temptations. At the Last Supper, the disciples were confident about their faithfulness, but hours later Jesus urged them, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation" (Matt 26:41). They were about to face massive suffering, the seeming death of their dreams, and Jesus knew each would face unique struggles. He knew they needed to stay alert, recognize their temptations and to pray for strength so they wouldn't fall.

**What are your temptations in suffering? What makes you a fall risk?** Some people are tempted in their suffering to walk away from God. To determine that he doesn't love them, isn't good, and that faith isn't worthwhile anyway. I have dear friends who have walked away from faith saying those very words. <https://www.vaneetha.com/journal/what-good-is-god>. But for me, as a woman who has tasted and seen that God is good in the worst of circumstances, my temptation isn't walking away as much as it is leaning away. I've been tempted to stop turning to God, to stop looking at him, to put distance between my heart and God. While I may quote stirring and helpful verses that seem tailor-made for the situation, my true affections can be far away.

When I stop reminding myself of the truths I know and just mindlessly repeat them to others, I'm a fall risk. To keep from falling, I need to be mindful - mindful of what my temptations are, mindful of where God is in this moment, mindful of my emotions. If I'm not, I brush off what's hard, minimizing it to myself and others, repressing my fears and emotions. It's easier that way. **But when I keep myself from feeling, I also keep myself from God's grace. I hold a fragile and superficial peace, one that can shatter unexpectedly, rather than grasping the sturdy peace he offers after wrestling with him.**

My younger daughter will be getting married two days after this post comes out. And as I'm writing this, I have a cyst on my spine which is pressing on a nerve, and I've been concerned for weeks that I wouldn't be able to walk or stand, even for pictures. In addition, my hair has started falling out by the handfuls due to a thyroid issue that began earlier this year. As a back-up, I got a wig that I may wear for the wedding so I can style it as I'd originally planned. At first I wanted to hide that from people, but I realized I don't need to be ashamed of it. I care about how I look at my daughter's wedding and my mobility and hair are both part of that.

These issues may sound superficial, especially since my concerns are more about appearances than pain and suffering. ***And since I often want to look more spiritual than I really am, I'm tempted to pretend that I don't care, to laugh about it, and to say it's all fine.*** But it's not fine for me and the Lord has been drawing me to acknowledge it. To lean into him, tell him my deep sadness, grieve these losses, ask for healing as well as wisdom on how to move forward. I am staying mindful of what's hard. I'm freely giving it to God, not trying to deny it to seem more holy.

After my son Paul died, I wasn't aware of how much a fall risk I was. I was teaching our church's women's Bible study and I felt other people's faith was on my shoulders. So I let them think I was stronger than I was while silently drifting from God. But ***I have since learned that God wants the real me, the me who doesn't deny or repress my struggles but rather honestly lays them before Him. And when I'm real with God, I can be true to myself and to others.***

***I'm learning to live my life authentically and mindfully. Staying present, mourning the things I've lost, admitting my deep longings and fears, not feeling I need to cover them up or apologize for them.***

This is where I'm finding freedom and rest. Where I'm encountering God and his endless grace. Even as I'm willing to let my tears freely fall.