

THE RIDE IS WORTH THE FALL

Week #2 of a 3-Week Series, "Lessons Learned from Our Lived Experience"

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LYRICS-"The Fall"

I've been good-time drunk
Enough to be bad-time sober
Broke a map dot's heart when it disappeared over my shoulder
I've been headstrong, rightin' dead end wrong
Good with God, but I dropped the ball
Spent my whole life holdin' on
But even when I fell off

The ride was worth the fall
The fall was worth the smiles
The smiles were worth the tears
Tears were worth the miles
Miles were worth the pain
Pain was worth it all
It's all worth this life
The life is worth the ride
The ride is worth the fall

Had some "nowhere near it's"
And some "almost was's"
Left some mommas in tears
And some daddy's still cussin'
'Cause what I shoulda done and what I coulda been
Even knowin' now what I didn't know, then
I'd climb back on again

The ride is worth the fall
The fall was worth the smiles
The smiles were worth the tears
Tears were worth the miles
Miles were worth the pain
Pain was worth it all
It's all worth this life
The life is worth the ride
The ride is worth the fall

MESSAGE-"The Rid is Worth the Fall"

"The Ride is Worth the Fall." I love this song. Whenever I hear this song come on the radio, it just touches my heart. Sometimes it brings me to tears. Because I think maybe the longer we live, we have more life experiences, right? We have more challenges that we've had in life. And we start to realize that, even with all those challenges, we still would choose life over and over and over again. Even with the pain, even with the hurt, even with the messiness, we still would choose life.

So this Cody Johnson song ... He sings in the song, "The Fall," about the mistakes he's made and the good decisions that he's made. And I think all of us can relate to that. We can reflect back on some of our own mistakes that we've made and also maybe some of the best decisions that we've made.

Unfortunately, sometimes we tend to hold on to our mistakes for a really long time, which just causes us more suffering. And as the song says, too; he says holding on to anything for too long causes us to feel even more lost.

I think the song also speaks to our hopes and dreams that didn't work out. Or the people, the jobs, the homes that we had to let go of and say goodbye to. And yet, here is this powerful chorus. I want you to follow along on the screen here:

***The ride is worth the fall
The fall was worth the smiles
The smiles were worth the tears
Tears were worth the miles
Miles were worth the pain
Pain was worth it all
It's all worth this life
The life is worth the ride
The ride is worth the fall***

And I love that change. Do you hear that change from the first line to the last one, from was to is? It's the acknowledgement of the writer where he's accepting that, not only was it worth the fall as he looks back, but it's worth it now. It was worth the fall. It is worth it. He's affirming it's worth it.

So, there's so much that we can pull from/learn from this song: Knowing that we can make mistakes and it's okay; acknowledging our feelings and even our mental struggles that we have as we go through life. A big theme here of letting go and acceptance, which brings in the importance of self-forgiveness; offering our self-forgiveness.

Ultimately, I think it's a song about our love of life and embracing it: embracing love. And in that embrace of love, embracing life: the beauty, and the messiness that come together to create our lives. And that it's worth living.

So, let's take a closer look at this song. So, we'll start with **THE MISTAKES WE MAKE AS HUMAN BEINGS.** The first two lines out of the gate here, he says"

***I've been good-time drunk
Enough to be bad time sober.***

He says:

***I've been headstrong, rightin' dead end wrong ...
Left some mommas in tears
And some daddy's still cussin'***

Uh-oh, a couple people laughed ... and one was my husband. [Congregants laugh]

Has anyone here made a mistake in your life? Oh, some of you aren't being honest. We've all made mistakes in life, haven't we? Did you know -- and I love this fact -- did you know that Thomas Edison, it took him around 1,000 attempts to create the light bulb? A thousand!

I used to say that all the time to our older son, because if he didn't get something right on the first, second, or maybe third time, he was like, *"I'm not good at it. I don't want to do it anymore."* And so, I would say, *"But it took Thomas Edison a thousand attempts to make the light bulb!"*

He could have -- Thomas Edison -- he could have stopped. He could have looked at that as a thousand mistakes. He could have said, *"I can't do this. I'm failing at this. I'm not going to ever get it right."* But what if he had stopped at the 999th time? He didn't! He took those mistakes and learned more with each attempt. Now sit in this well-lit room, thanks to Thomas Edison, and learning from his mistakes.

There's a great quote from one of my favorite authors, Brad Stulberg. He has a new book out called "The Way of Excellence." And here's what he says; it's on your screen. He says:

"You failed? So what? Welcome to being Human. You aren't going to melt. You are going to learn. You're going to get stronger. Perfectionist (B.S.) and fear of failure kills dreams. Unlearn it."

And he goes on to talk about how ... Because he works with world-class performers. And he says every world-class performer -- from entrepreneurs to chefs, from musicians to surgeons -- one of them avoid failure, because they know that failure is not only inevitable, but it's the way to get better. So, we, too, can use our mistakes to get better.

And Brad Stulberg -- In his book, he offers a few steps that we can take if we feel like we've failed or made a mistake. He says, *"Accept the hurt. You care; you tried; you failed. It doesn't mean that you're a failure."* And I want you to really hear that: *"You're not a mistake. You're not a failure. You just have made a mistake or you may have failed, but it means you're human and you're amassing experience."*

So, feel the feelings. Process them. Brad Stulberg recommends about 48 hours. Process them, and then learn and then get back on the horse, so to speak. But be humble. Keep learning. Keep growing. Keep going.

And most importantly, know that you can do hard things. That's author Glennon Doyle. That's her tagline, right? You can do hard things. We can do hard things. So those mistakes -- those supposed mistakes -- are really just adding experience, information, wonder to your life.

Because, as Cody Johnson sings, *"The smiles were worth the tears. The tears are worth the miles. The miles are worth the pain. Pain was worth it all."* It's all worth this life.

And it flows into another important message from this song, and that is to **ACKNOWLEDGE OUR FEELINGS**. Acknowledge our feelings around challenging times and the downfalls of our lives. Because life can be painful and it can bring some mental health struggles with it.

So, I want to remind all of us that our feelings are really messengers. Our feelings are messengers that are telling us what's going on inside of us. They're there to help bring an awareness to us of what we need more of or what still needs to be healed within us.

Here's what Buddhist Buddhist Nun Pema Chodron shares with us. You can follow along on the screen. She writes:

"Feelings are actually very clear moments that teach us where it is that we're holding back. They teach us to perk up and lean in when we feel we'd rather collapse and back away. They're like messengers that show us with terrifying clarity exactly where we're stuck."

In other words, get curious with your feelings and when your feelings arise. Sit with the discomfort. We're not used to this in our society. We want to scroll right past everything, including our feelings. Sit with the discomfort and acknowledge it. Ask it: What is it there to tell you? What does it want you to know?

So, if you're feeling anxious: *"Hi, anxiety, I see you. What's the message that you have for me this evening or today? Hi, sadness, I see you. What's the message for me?"*

But we also can't believe everything our mind tells us. Because something that happened in the past, we might hold on to" *"Well, if it happened then, it might happen now in the future."* And if we keep holding on to this thought, these old beliefs of, *"Well, it happened in the past, so therefore it's going to happen in the future,"* we're limiting ourselves.

So, give yourself a new story. Your brain can restructure itself to a new belief. Remember, whatever you repeat to yourself is what you're going to believe. Whatever you believe is what you're going to create.

So, believe that -- even if life didn't work out exactly the way you thought it might -- you did something you knew you could have done differently or you shouldn't have done at all, find a new belief around it. Feel it, process it, learn from it, and grow.

I love this quote from a recent Daily Buddhist post here on your screen:

"One of the deepest forms of strength is meeting your own pain with compassion instead of judgment. It's not about pretending everything is okay. It's about meeting things as they are and gently responding from there."

In other words, acknowledge them, but don't give every feeling a permanent home. Let them be visitors. Let them arrive, let them stay for a while, and then let them leave.

And that brings us to the next lesson from this song, which is **ACCEPTANCE AND LETTING GO**. The author of the song, he's accepting what has happened in his life: the tears, the disappointments, the angry parents, the holding on even when he knew he needed to let go. He accepts all of it: the pain and the smiles.

The only way that we can move on in our lives is to embrace life and to accept exactly what is happening or what has happened. *"In this moment, it's just this."* In every moment: *"And this is what it is."*

This is a practice I usually will use if I'm stuck in traffic. Not here in Arizona, of course. But when I'm back home in California, and there's five lanes of traffic not going anywhere, and I have to say, "Stacy, it's just this." Now, I might have to repeat that many, many, many times. [Congregants laugh]

"Accept it. You're not going anywhere, Stacy. You're stuck in traffic. This is what it is. It's just this."

And with that acceptance comes a letting go: a letting go of all the feelings that are wrapped up around that. And that allows more space within us and in our lives for new growth, more awareness, more opportunities, more life to come in.

It's okay to not have the same people or the same routines for your entire life. Some people are meant to be there for a season or a chapter. So, our acceptance brings us to this letting go, and our letting go gets us to acceptance. It's kind of a Catch-22.

But I always like thinking about the palm. When the palm is closed, I'm holding on tight. I'm holding on tight to the old beliefs, old relationships, old thoughts. But when I let go, my palm is open. There's an acceptance of, *"Hey, this isn't working anymore."* I let go of it. Now I'm open. My palm is open to receive.

See, the more that we fight what's happening, right? With our closed palm? We're fighting what's happening or we're ruminating about what we did or didn't do -- the more we hold on to the grievance, - the more we cause our own suffering. The more we're beating our own selves up.

So, acceptance mean: *"Right now it's this."* And although it might be uncomfortable, it does bring you to peace. Because you stop fighting and struggling with the past and with yourself.

And a lot of times I have found that when you look back and you think, *"Wow, what didn't work out for me was actually for my highest good. What didn't work out for me -- I think there was an angel around me. I think there was Spirit protecting me."* You can really see the things that didn't work out for your highest good as a redirect for your highest good.

So, acceptance means making peace with the beginnings and the endings, knowing that it's all part of one big, beautiful life experience.

One of my favorite authors also is Yung Pueblo, and he writes, *"Maturity is accepting that endings are a part of life. Jobs change, who you hang out with changes. Your idea of what is good evolves. An ending is a sign that you're opening a new chapter."*

Life has ups and downs. Life has great joys and great sufferings. It just does. We can't "positive think" it away. And that's acceptance. That's letting go of any expectations -- unrealistic expectations -- we might have to have of ourselves, "*I've got to get back up and positive really quick.*" No! It just is. Life just is.

And so, again, from the chorus. Again, I love this part, because we go from the ride was worth the fall to the ride is worth the fall. That's acceptance of what was to what is.

So, when he sings, "*The miles are worth the pain; the pain was worth it all; it's all worth this life,*" that's acceptance. And it helps us to continue to create a fuller life and to see the full life that we've created for ourselves. So, it's in his letting go of what he thought his life was going to be or look like that allows him to embrace the smiles and enjoy the ride fully.

And so that leads us to **FORGIVENESS**. One reason we have a hard time letting go and accepting is because we think that, by forgiving ourselves or another person, that we're letting ourselves or that other person off the hook. We get stuck in believing that we could have done something differently. Our minds replay the situation and think about, "*You know, gosh, I could have said this, I could have done this; why didn't I do this?*" We argue with ourselves instead of accepting.

Acceptance sometimes in those situations feels like approval. But in that acceptance -- that forgiving -- that's where the freedom's at. So, I guess the question really comes down to: How long do you want to carry the past?

How long do you want to carry the past? Forgiveness means cutting those energetic ties to the other person or that situation. It doesn't mean what you or that other person did was okay, but it does free up energy within you -- just like the open palm -- to have room to live and to love more freely.

Everything -- everything! -- is an opportunity for our own growth, for our spiritual maturity, for our own awakening.

And now, notice I did not say everything that happens is for a reason, everything is for a lesson, everything is God-ordained, or the Universe is giving it to me. No, I did not say that. I said: When life happens during those challenging times, there are opportunities for our soul's growth. There are opportunities for us to ask: Will I choose to learn and grow from this or not? No judgment. But here's an opportunity for my soul's growth and awakening. I can choose to learn and grow from this or not.

Or you can even celebrate. "*Hey, here's an opportunity for my soul's growth.*" "*Hey, here's a way for me to learn patience.*" I use that one a lot. [Congregants laugh] It's kind of a mantra.

By looking at the falls in our life this way -- "*Hey, here's an opportunity for me to learn and grow and awaken more*" -- then this question then starts to engage us in forgiveness. Forgiveness naturally, then, is another step to this. And it's that forgiveness that allows us to live more fully, even in, again, the messy parts and the beautiful parts.

Living fully means living courageously instead of choosing what feels safe, Because safe can feel ... Well, it can keep us feeling small -- it can keep us feeling like we're in a box -- while living courageously allows us to feel like we're living large. Like we're experiencing everything that life has to offer for us.

And I think what Cody Johnson's song is really saying is that the point of life isn't to avoid the fall. It's to discover what the fall has to teach us. Because we all fall. Because we all make mistakes. Because we all have moments that we wish we could go back and do differently. But our falls become our teachers. They become opportunities for our own growth and awakening and to discover something new about us. Maybe a new strength; something that we can then share with other people. And the falls, we're reminded here, are worth the smiles.

So, the lessons that we learn from this really heartfelt song about the ups and downs of life: We all make mistakes, and we are not our mistakes. Everything we experience is an opportunity for growth and awakening.

We learn our feelings and mental struggles matter. It's not to deny them and push them away. We acknowledge them; we feel them; and we learn from them so we can allow that wisdom to propel us forward.

We also learn there's a power in acceptance and letting go. Acceptance allows us to stop fighting what is, while letting go frees us to move forward. It's in the letting go that life becomes richer.

And perhaps most importantly, we're called to forgive ourselves. Self-forgiveness allows us to release the weight of the past, strengthen our spiritual tenacity, and open ourselves up to what's possible right now: the present moment -- the only moment we have. Because life is worth getting back up on the horse.

I know in my own life, through some challenges -- especially health challenges. But those challenges, those times that I have felt knocked down, and it really was about trusting the process of life, but also what helped me get back up was LOVE. Love for my children. Love for my husband. Love for our family and our friends, our community. It was that love that helped get me back up. Because love is what gives our lives meaning.

Ultimately, I think "The Fall" is a song about our love of life. It reminds us that living fully means embracing all of it: again, highs, lows, laughter, tears, and the falling and the rising. And when we embrace all the aspects of this beautiful, messy, imperfect journey, we become richer and we become more at peace ... because love is always there.

So, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to say: Let's all choose love this week. Because every fall is an invitation to rise. And every day is an invitation to live more fully. And every day living more fully is an opportunity to choose love.

And so that's the wisdom that we take from the Cody Johnson song, "The Fall." Blessings, everyone!