

Mini Devotionals for Women of Faith

Women at the Well

by Ashley Christine Dyer

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Lessons on a Bicycle

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” (Proverbs 3:5–6)

The air whipped through the bright, shiny streamers decorating the handlebars of the pretty purple bicycle I had fallen in love-at-first-sight with at a Toys “R” Us store a year or so before. As I pedaled forward, a tinge of fear caught in my throat. “Don’t let go!” I yelled back at my dad who was running alongside me with his hand securely holding my bike steady so I wouldn’t fall. This was going to be the biggest accomplishment of my five years of life!

My dad had driven me to the church’s empty parking lot on a Saturday morning along with my adored bicycle. With me standing next to him, he had carefully unscrewed the training wheels that had acted as companions to my big white rear wheel. This was the day I was going to be a big girl—the day I would learn to balance and maneuver on my own—no training wheels necessary.

“Remember to look where you’re going,” my dad called out.

Why did his voice seem so far away? I quickly glanced behind me to ensure my dad’s large, strong hand was still securely embracing the back of my bicycle, but before I could scream, “Help!”, I swerved, and that was it. Kindergartner down!

I saw my dad running towards me as I examined my scraped knee. Before I knew it, he was at my side.

“Are you ok, Ash?” he asked.

“Why did you let go?!” my betrayed voice managed to get out as I struggled to hold back tears.

“You were doing great!” he said. “You didn’t need me. You just have to remember to look where you’re going. You always go where you’re looking.”

He quickly inspected my knee, but it wasn’t bleeding. I guess he deemed I’d be fine. “Alright. Let’s try again,” he said with a smile.

I glowered at him. “Fine,” I said. “But only if you promise you won’t let go!”

“I’ll be with you the entire time,” he said with another smile. “You’re almost there! You can do it!” He was so enthusiastic. It was kind of contagious.

I got back on my bike with an added measure of excitement and courage and soon enough, I was off again. I concentrated on looking where I was going, and I was definitely doing fairly well until it came time for me to turn.

Although I continued to look where I was going, my bicycle began tilting to one side, and logically, all I could think of doing to counter it was to lean the other way, which apparently was the wrong decision. Before I knew it, I was back on the ground with a bruised elbow. My dad ran up behind me. So much for promising to “be with me the entire time!”

“Are you okay?” he asked again.

“You let go again!” I said scowling, pointing out the obvious.

He inspected the bruised elbow and then looked at me, “When you turn, you have to lean into the turn. It might seem kind of scary at first, but you won’t fall. I promise. It will actually help you turn more smoothly.”

There were so many weird rules to riding a bicycle! Who had made these up?!

“Come on!” my dad said with another contagious smile. “Let’s try one more time! Before you know it, you’ll be a pro!”

It was hard to stay mad at my dad. “Okay,” I said as I mounted my bike one last time. “But don’t let go this time!”

I pushed off again and pedaled forward, making sure I was looking ahead. I cautiously prepared myself to lean into the upcoming turn and surprised

myself when I experienced first-hand what my dad had been trying to explain. Turning *was* a lot smoother when I didn't try to resist and actually embraced leaning in the direction my bicycle was tilting. I tried again on the other side. I didn't fall! Amazing! I pedaled even faster, concentrating on the exhilaration of suddenly being able to travel so speedily and the wind cooling me down in the warm summer sun. This was so much fun!

Then all of a sudden from off in the distance, I heard my dad yelling, "You're doing it, Ash! All by yourself!" I turned my bicycle towards him, beaming as I pedaled now faster than ever to get back to him. He had let go again. Typical Dad. But this time I wasn't mad. My five-year-old mind was finally able to comprehend his wisdom in allowing me to go on by myself under his watchful eye. I'm not sure I ever told him, but in my heart, I remember thinking, "Thank you for letting go."

Looking back on this experience, I believe there is more to be learned from it than the basic rules of how to ride a bike. I think this can also be compared to how following God works.

First, we always go where we're looking. We can only follow God when we're looking at Him and what He wants for us. Our focus needs to be on Him and His plan rather than all the distracting things going on around us or whether or not His Hand is still holding our bicycle steady. Those distractions can just end up leaving us with a scraped-up knee and Him trying to remind us to keep our eyes on the true prize.

Second, we have to lean into the turn. At times, our all-knowing Father in Heaven places turns on our metaphorical bicycle trails. Our natural instinct is often to resist them, or lean the other way, for fear we will fall if we let ourselves move where our "bicycle" is taking us. These turns could be big life-changing events or the lack thereof, or they could be small spiritual promptings we receive.

If we follow our natural inclination to counter the turn because it is scary or uncomfortable, or even because it's not the direction we ourselves want to go, we may end up down on the ground with a bruised elbow. At this point, we can count on our loving Father in Heaven running to our side to remind us that we have to lean into the turn of His plan for us.

Although leaning in might seem kind of scary at first, we won't fall. That's a promise. It will actually help us turn more smoothly. He doesn't want us to miss out on the joyous ride He has prepared for us, complete with the wind blowing through our hair on a warm summer day as the sun shines down through the clouds and the birds chirp from the trees. "I'll be with you the entire time," He'll say with a smile. "You're almost there! You can do it! Come on! Let's try one more time! Before you know it, you'll be a pro!"

Last but not least, I want to address our constant plea to God to "don't let go!" There are definitely times when God is up close and personal, grasping onto our bicycles to steady them when they are wobbling back and forth. But, at other times He may find it more appropriate to allow us to go ahead on our own. With a loving push, He helps us start and then lets us go free. He knows that holding on will hinder rather than encourage our progress and our ability to achieve great things on our own under His watchful eye.

Now, don't get me wrong. He will never abandon us. He'll be there to yell out guidance and direction from a distance and to check on us each time we fall to make sure we're okay. But, sometimes He allows us to try out the trail independently. Although that may at times lead to small falls, those falls can be necessary learning moments. When we react by glowering at Him with a betrayed look on our face, His simple response will be like that of my earthly father: "You were doing great! You didn't need me. But here are some pointers to help prevent that from happening again."

The falls on my bicycle that day taught me important lessons I was able to use to master the art of riding a two-wheeler. Although there were scrapes and bruises involved, they ultimately led to my euphoric ride of glory at the end of the day as my sweet dad yelled from a distance, in a voice of utter excitement and joy for me and my accomplishment, "You're doing it, Ash! All by yourself!"

It will be at that point that our young minds will finally be able to comprehend the wisdom of God in allowing us to go on by ourselves under His watchful eye. It will be at that point that we can turn to Him and say, "Thank you for letting go."

Today, I invite you to reexamine where you are looking and what direction

you're going. Are your eyes on the Lord and His plan for you, or are they getting caught up in the distractions so prevalent in our day? Are you embracing the "turns" the Lord has placed in your life, or resisting them due to fear or discomfort? Are you comfortable going ahead on the trail with God lovingly watching from a distance, or do you feel like God has metaphorically "let go" of your bicycle? After careful evaluation, set some goals that will help you progress on your "two-wheeler mastering" mission and place deeper trust in God and His plan for you. And, as you push off, full speed ahead, think of the contagious enthusiasm of your Father in Heaven as He encourages, "You're almost there! You can do it! Come on! Let's try one more time! Before you know it, you'll be a pro!"

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