

Humility cometh after a fall

It's Saturday evening, and I decide to go grocery shopping. No one else will be there, and I can get in and out of the store without crowds.

At the store, I sail into a parking spot right near the door. I'm feeling relaxed and more than a little bit impressed with my cleverness. This is going to be the easiest shopping trip ever.

I walk through the doors and head toward the deli. All of a sudden my feet fly up in the air, my shopping cart lands on top of me, and I'm flat on my back on the floor.

While I'm still trying to catch my breath and figure out what happened, another shopper comes over to check on me.

"Are you OK?" she asks. "The floor is wet. I saw a man mopping it just before you walked in. Do you need help getting up?"

As I get back on my feet, I'm relieved, but I'm also shaken and confused. As I drive home, I keep thinking of how often I take my health for granted. I live each day assuming I will have the ability to serve my husband and children and the strength to balance working a full-time job with raising growing boys. I expect to be able to think and write and plan and carry out those plans. I don't have time for being sick or injured. No mother does!

It suddenly occurs to me that if I had hit my head harder, it might have been a different situation. I would not have been driving myself home to tell my husband the story. He would have been scrambling to pull children out of bed to come and get me.

What if I were really injured? How would he figure out the computer passwords I've never written down and barely remember myself? At work, how would my colleagues understand my notes on projects?

I have no illusion that I am some kind of superhero. But I don't like to acknowledge that I am weak. I try to be many things to many people. I am the kind of person who says yes more than no. I prefer not to ask for help. I just want to handle what I can on my own.

But that's a dangerous place to be. It's so difficult to remember that our strength comes from God and that he gives us our talents, too. We need to rely on others in our lives. And we need to place our trust in our Father in heaven.

Slipping and falling - whether literally or figuratively - always forces me to come face to face with my pride. My fall at the grocery store certainly wasn't as dramatic or transformative as the one St. Paul experienced on the road to Damascus, but it forced me to recognize just how much of my life is not within my control. It also compelled me to come face to face with how much I need to grow in humility.

"There is more value in a little study of humility and in a single act of it than in all the knowledge in the world," St. Teresa of Avila said.

The journey toward greater humility might not be one that comes easily or without significant challenge. It might not even be one I want to pursue. But it is necessary if I'm going to grow in my relationship with Christ.

And, I suppose, the good news is you can be humbled at any moment of the day - even at the grocery store.