

## One man's near-tragedy helps connect to God

Contributed by Naomi Musch. Living Stones News Writer  
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A tragic fall sent youth worker Dave Johnson to the hospital for 40 days with many crushed and broken bones. But Johnson calls the fall a "divine interruption" and uses his healing time to connect people with God.

One year ago, Youth For Christ worker Dave Johnson plummeted 42 feet from the top of a rock-climbing wall to the floor.

But what seemed to be an almost insurmountable tragedy turned out to be a "divine interruption" that would end up leading Johnson to a broader ministry.

Bonnie Jordan / Living Stones News Dave Johnson is proof that God uses bad situations for the good of His Kingdom. Despite falling 40 feet in a rock-climbing wall accident about a year ago, Johnson used the incident to focus his ministry on being connected and dependent on God.

Johnson and his daughter, Terra, spent the 2007 New Year's Eve day rock climbing at an indoor recreation facility in Duluth, Minn. It had been a good day, one that began with Johnson reading Hebrews 13:5, which reminded him to be content because "(God) has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you."

That verse kept coming back to Johnson later. The fall

He was completing "one last climb" when he let go and his life suddenly and dramatically changed. In a flash that was too quick to respond to, Johnson realized he'd forgotten to connect his carabiner to his harness prior to the climb. Lying in excruciating pain, Johnson knew his injuries were severe.

"But God spoke to me while I was lying there," he said. "God plainly said, 'I let this happen for a reason.'"

That certainty provided a tremendous peace and calm to Johnson.

"I could have gotten so angry at myself for forgetting to hook up," Johnson said.

Instead, he kept listening to God's reassurance that there was a reason for the fall. The prognosis

"It's amazing how fast change can happen," said Johnson, reflecting on what he calls his "40-day wilderness journey," which was the length of time he spent in the hospital where the prognosis was not promising.

Dr. Paul Kosmatka, Johnson's surgeon, didn't sugarcoat his concerns.

He told Johnson that his ankle was "smashed to powder." Johnson also suffered from five broken vertebrae, which compounded his spinal column by 60 percent. Both his wrists were crushed, he had a broken tibia and fibula, and an elbow was dislocated.

It was feared that Johnson's skin would never heal over the wounds, that his bones would not regrow and that he would never walk again.

It also was expected that he would lose mobility in his hands and wrists.

"It's a miracle he's alive," Kosmatka told Roberta Meyer, a friend of Johnson's who recorded much of his journey so that he might later remember the chronological events — and see God's unfolding plan.

In that journal Meyer wrote, "I knew that he could still do all the work God planned and called him to do." She believed he could "still point kids to Jesus" even though he was "totally broken."

"I went from being totally independent, to totally dependent for everything," Johnson said.

But even though he didn't even have the ability to feed himself or move without assistance, Johnson found promise in Scripture. He considered his inability to do anything for himself as nothing short of a spiritual life-lesson. He recalled John 15:5: "Apart from Me you can do nothing." Johnson realized that, spiritually, this was how God wants us to depend upon Him. The connection

Prior to the accident, Johnson had been thrilled to be involved with the opening of a new youth facility in Iron River, Wis., called The Red Zone, where teenagers meet and pray, enjoy Bible study and recreation. But he had been looking for other ways to see the ministry unfold. He said that in the hospital he kept waiting for "some sort of huge revelation"; as to the reason behind his accident. And suddenly it was clear.

"Are you connected?";

God seemed to be impressing that question on his heart. Suddenly his mind was whirring with all the spiritual connections between his fall and the way people often are disconnected to God and one another.

More questions came: "Are you connected to God? Are you connected to the people around you like you should be?";

Johnson immediately began to see how his testimony could help others learn what it means to really be connected to God and serving Him. Prayer powers healing

Submitted photo Dave Johnson's friends took several pictures of him in the hospital because, as one friend put it, "We took a lot of pictures so we'll always remember what God has done.";

While people reached out to minister to him in the hospital, he tried offering encouragement in return. It became his growing desire to infect others with the call to "be connected." He received dozens of cards that were backed with prayer support. One of his biggest thrills was knowing that kids in his youth group were seeing the answers to those prayers in his own body.

"I started to get an infection and the kids prayed," Johnson said.

"The next day it was gone.";

Johnson said that because of prayer, a bone that wasn't expected to grow back fused and became strong again. Skin was grafted over a wound where tissue had died and, remarkably, it healed well.

"It was great to see the doctor all smiling and so happy that it healed the way it did," Johnson said.

For a short time Johnson did suffer from terrible dreams, but even then God was providing a connection through someone else's caring.

"Pastor Lind, a pastor from Hermantown, came in and prayed with me,";

Johnson said. "That spirit of heaviness and darkness left after that.

(That pastor) may never know what he did for me.";

After leaving the hospital, Johnson still needed 24-hour care. But rather than being admitted to a nursing home, Meyer and her family took him into their home.

"It was personally clear to me that he needed to be encouraged," Meyer said. "Dave had fixators in his arms and legs that needed to be washed; he needed medicine, feeding, personal care &hellip; it was a family effort. I really respect Dave for how graciously he handled so much." Connection ministry

A year later, even with scars, screws in his ankle, limited motion in his wrists and an implanted filter to keep blood clots at bay, Johnson has made a remarkable recovery and is back in active ministry.

In what he terms a "letting go &mdash; reaching out ministry," Johnson wants kids to see what it means to "let go of the world and reach out to God and other people." He encourages youth to reach out and "be God to others" by praying for individual needs and providing means through active gifts of ministry.

To further his ministry, he's designing a T-shirt that elicits conversation with the question God laid on his heart: "Are you connected?"; Part of the design shows a climber who has all the equipment, but is missing his vital connection.

For Johnson, his experience has boiled down to recognizing the depth of God's friendship. Johnson holds close a quote by the famous preacher Charles Spurgeon: "Friendship seems as necessary an element of a comfortable existence in this world as fire or water or even air itself. A man may drag along a miserable existence, a proud, solitary dignity, but his life is scarce life, it is nothing but an existence, the tree of life being stripped of the leaves of hope and the fruits of joy. He who would be happy here must have friends.";

Johnson plans to continue sharing the great friendship of God with others.

If you would like Dave Johnson to speak at your church, youth or other group, contact him by calling (218) 348-6494, e-mailing [godwithdave61@yahoo.com](mailto:godwithdave61@yahoo.com) , or through Youth For Christ at (218) 722-9820.