

“No Turning Back”
By Chris Ulrich
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2011 has come and gone and now we're starting to get the ball rolling for 2012. Ultimately, a new year is a chance to start over, or reboot, in a lot of ways, and to think about what we've accomplished or didn't accomplish. Personally, I'm not much for New Year's resolutions, although I'm not against them, either; it's just a personal choice. I do like to think back on what has happened and to be able to remember what God has done for me and what His has done for us. However we reflect on this past year in all its challenges and its victories it will do us well to thank God what we're still in the faith.

I'd have to say that, personally, it was a somewhat difficult year. Work has been grueling, although I would say that I'm thankful to God to have a job. The housing market has continued to be brutal, and any seeming hopes for recovery (and selling a property) seem to decrease as time goes by, but I would say that I'm thankful to have a house. My health has betrayed me on a few occasions; there were a few unexpected trips to the hospital and so forth and so on, but thank God to still be vertical. I'd like to ask a good friend and good brother to share with us this morning about what it means to him to have gotten through 2011 and what it means to be looking forward to 2012.

Deuteronomy 4:4 ...ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive...

Jim Martin: How many of you have a testimony? Have you noticed that the first four letters of testimony are 'test'? Earlier last year, I came down with emphysema in my right lung. I started feeling sick here in church—I had to get up and stand in the back because I couldn't catch my breath. I went home and I lay down... I was supposed to start a job for a client, but I just couldn't get going. On Tuesday, he called me, "Hey, look, I understand that you're sick, but you took my money, and I don't know you, so I either want to see some work getting done, or I want my money back." So, Wednesday morning, I got up, and I went over and got the job started, then I made an appointment to see my doctor. While I was on my way to the doctor's office, though, the Holy Ghost told me, "Never mind your doctor, just go straight to the E.R." so I went to the emergency room at Saint Therese (Vista West). Within a half hour of getting there, I suffered a full respiratory failure. They were able to keep me alive by putting me on oxygen. Later, they transferred me to Victory (Vista East), and I stopped breathing again on the way there. I suffered chronic chest pain. After four days, they put me on full life support. I was on life support for 7 days. They say that once you go on life support, your life expectancy is about 50/50. My wife was looking at becoming a widow at age 42. My daughters were thinking that they might have to raise their kids without a grandfather. My emergency room doctor, Dr. Johnson, told me that it was the first time in her career that she really thought her patient was going to die right in front of her. My wife was in my room, praying, and wondering if I was going to make it, and I opened my eyes and smiled

at her, and then went back to sleep; but then she knew, “He’s still in there.” They say that once you go on life support, your life expectancy is about 50/50, and if you cough up your breathing tube, that decreases your chances by about 25%. I coughed mine up twice. When I finally recovered consciousness, I didn’t have any eye-hand co-ordination. Rick Hahn was trying to feed me Jell-O, and every time he put some in my mouth, I would just go, “MMMMMM, MMMMM,” and it kind of scared him, but I hadn’t had anything to eat in so long, it just tasted so good! When I was released from the hospital, I was presented with a bill for \$670,000. I just had to chuckle. Where do these people think I’m going to come up with \$670,000? But I knew that God had brought me this far, His would bring me all the way. A charitable organization paid the entire \$670,000. People had been giving me money to try to help out, but, each time, God laid it on my heart to give that money to someone else. If you sew seeds of faith, it will come back overflowing. If God laid it on your heart, then trust His. You can’t outgive God.

Keeping Ourselves from Turning Back

Isaiah 51:1-3 ... look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit...

It’s good to look to the hole of the pit that we came out of so that we have the right perspective of where God has brought us from, and don’t forget the misery that surrounded us. Satan would like nothing more than for us to yearn for the comforts of things that we used to do, especially when we face extreme challenges after we’ve decided to follow Jesus. He also wants us to think that if we give of our lives, our time, and our money to God then we’ll have nothing left for ourselves. Ultimately, it’s a matter of convincing ourselves that God has us in ministry for His good purpose and that when we cleave to the L we will live to see another year.

Luke 21:34-36 ...take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged...

There are countless verses which allude to the importance of prayer and it can never Bible underestimated. The Bible tells us to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and I believe that’s what we need to do and won’t compromise that. Prayer is our direct communication to God and if we believe that God is for us and not against us, then we will not turn back.

Reconciliation

James 5:19-20 ... he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul...

What happens if someone we know decides to turn back? What happens when that someone is us? Sometimes our steadfastness in the faith is what causes a backslider to return to the faith. Sometimes someone else’s steadfastness in the faith is what causes us to return. We can’t ever shut the door on someone else because, God knows, we’d never want the door shut on us.

Jesus was our perfect example and even during His crucifixion He prayed to His Heavenly Father to forgive those who had falsely pronounced judgment against Him. There's no doubt that it took every bit of strength to muster that forgiveness. As difficult as it is sometimes to turn the other cheek and overcome evil with good, it is what the Bible teaches us to do.

Galatians 6:1 ... ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness...

The key here is restoration. It's always better to err on the side of mercy and not being judgmental when we're on the side of helping somebody get back because we'll all be in that boat at one time or another, and need restoration ourselves.

2 Peter 3:9 teaches us that it is God's will that none would perish, but that all would come to repentance and knowledge of the truth. It's certainly easier said than done, but we need to keep in mind on a regular basis that God is counting on us to be His living examples of truth and godliness. We need to remember that we might be the only lifeline between someone's decision to backslide or to stay in the faith. Ultimately, it's their decision, but are we going to be like the father who welcomed back his prodigal son, or are we going to be like the resentful and angry brother who felt that he didn't get what he deserved?

Going Forward

2012 is now upon us and God has given us another year. Lots of pundits are talking about the world ending sometime this year—maybe it will happen, and maybe it won't. Jesus said Himself that no man knows the day nor the hour (Matthew 24:36), so if anyone ever tells you that they know, you can quote Jesus.

But having another year staring us in the face shouldn't be cause for alarm. I'm not saying that it will be easy, but to borrow an old song lyric, Jesus never promised us a rose garden, but He did promise us strength and peace to go along with the hardship, and, in the end, eternal life. So, what does it mean to go forward as a Christian? What is our measuring stick of progress? How do we know if we're on the right path?

Proverbs 13:11-12 ...now is our salvation nearer than when we believed...

Even if we sometimes don't feel as though we are progressing spiritually, we have the comfort of knowing that we are nearer than when we first believed. We can't turn back the clock and recover the opportunities we may have missed, but we need to forget those things that are behind. Whether it's been 50 years, 25 years, 5 years, or 5 minutes since you first heard the truth of God's Word, God has given us His truth for a reason, and it's to go forward and not turn back.

Hebrews 10:38-39 ...we are not of them who draw back into perdition...

We can have goals and aspirations in this life, but the saving of our soul should be our greatest goal.