

## Don't Give Up

David Flatt

After a long two year imprisonment without a decision from the government, the apostle Paul appealed his case to Caesar. This must have been a dark time. Paul had been promised by the Lord that he would get to Rome. On their voyage, they suffered a terrible storm. Luke captured the sentiment of the crew by writing, "When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned" (Acts 27:20).

The situation was dire; however, Paul trusted the promise of the Lord that he and the crew would get to Rome alive: "Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told" (Acts 27:21-25).

The men suffered shipwreck. Everyone survived. Two-hundred and seventy-six men were saved. Thankfully, most of us will never experience ordeals like Paul. However, there are times in our lives when our resilience is tested. The last year has brought such tests to many. As we begin a new year, more tests will come. This is the nature of life. As we begin 2023, the message is simple: don't give up.

**1. Don't give up on living.** There are different ways we respond to adversity. One defense mechanism is to isolate. We withdraw from relationships. We try to minimize our social interactions. While isolation may be helpful for a time to process grief, it cannot go on forever.

As humans created in the image of God, we are made for relationships. We are social creatures. This is one of the traits we share with our Maker. Therefore, engaging with others is partly how we experience personal fulfillment and reflect the glory of God.

We serve God by serving others; therefore, we cannot live in isolation. Jesus famously taught, "...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Even in the dark times, we have light to share. Don't give up on living.

**2. Don't give up on your family.** The Bible describes Christians as the family of God (Matt. 12:50; 1 Tim. 3:15). During hard times, we tend to push away from the Church. We tend to distance ourselves from our brothers and sisters in Christ. We must do just the opposite.

God created the Church partly to provide love, help, and support to us in life. There is much to be gained from one another. The author of Hebrews urged weary Christians not to give

up: "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:12-13).

We can be one another's harshest critics. We can blame one another for problems. We can complain that things aren't the same. These are the tactics of the devil. He uses these to distrust peace in God's family. Don't let him do this. Don't give up on your family.

**3. Don't give up on Jesus.** Few things in life are as difficult as disappointment. When events do not turn out in our favor, we can become disillusioned. Our disappointment can be directed to Jesus. Tragedy can make His blessings seem hollow and His hope twisted. The devil will use this kind of dangerous thinking to persuade us to give up on Jesus.

Paul did not give up on Jesus in the storm. He trusted Jesus' promise and was saved. Later in his life, Paul was sentenced to death. Paul had done nothing more than what Jesus had commanded; yet, he would not be rescued from the executioner. How did Paul deal with this? He wrote, "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Paul had no one else to help him. He was in an inescapable situation. It was precisely in those situations that the power of Jesus was most greatly experienced. In another letter, Paul wrote, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:8-10). Don't give up on Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

As we begin a new year, remember, don't give up. Keep living. Keep encouraging one another. Keep close to Jesus. By the good grace of God, we can find the path forward.