



FOCUS ON FAITH

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NO TURNING BACK

Ever been on a journey and you've felt it was the right way to go but then nagging doubts come creeping into your mind?

I normally possess a pretty good sense of direction. If I've been to a place once it's a fair bet that I can get back there again without too much difficulty. But earlier today I was reminded of an incident that happened not so long ago on a trip to Wales. We came out of a town and I was convinced we were headed in the correct direction. I saw landmarks that I recognised and I knew we were on the right road.

However we were going in totally the wrong direction – instead of heading southwards back towards Bridgnorth we were travelling northwards on the road to Bangor. Of course being a man, it took about 10 miles for these nagging doubts to get to the place in my brain where I was convinced I was in the wrong and that a 180 degree turn-around was required.

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Over the past few months my wife and I haven't had much time to spend with one another. The Children's Festival and other responsibilities have seen to that! But this week we actually sat down to watch a film we'd videoed sometime ago. In the film, 'Vanilla Sky', the wealthy but confused playboy played by Tom Cruise is told, *"Every passing minute is another chance to turn it all around."*

Heady stuff! I wonder how many of us have looked back on our lives and wondered what would have happened if we'd made other choices, taken different routes on our life journey, teamed up with other people, lived in another place. The list of possibilities is endless and so I guess are the outcomes of what could have been, or might have happened, had circumstances just been that wee bit different.

So can we turn it all around? Of course we can't retrace our footsteps; we can't erase the past as you would a video recording that you no longer require. We can try and block out bad memories but the mind has a funny tendency to recall painful situations when we least expect it. Something insignificant triggers an incident we might not have thought about for years but which now results in recollections we'd thought were buried.

On the other hand, some people appear to revel in living in the past. They're forever talking about their great feats of success. At every opportunity they extol the virtues of their achievements in order to impress or possibly obliquely criticise other people.

Now before you get the wrong idea about what I'm trying to say, please let me state for the record that there's

nothing wrong with recalling our successes. But sometimes I perceive there is a sadness within those people who feel the need to keep telling the same old story. It's almost as if what happened years ago was the culmination of their lives and that now nothing they could ever do in the future could eclipse it.

A couple of weeks ago, my friend Eric Stirrup, Pastor of New Life Community Church, Cleobury Mortimer, composed the Prayer for the Week based on the theme – A God of Second Chances. I found the prayer very thought-provoking. How the all-knowing, all-powerful God who knows all about my weaknesses, my failures, even my successes and achievements, still desires to have a relationship with me and gives me another chance to turn it all around. Thankfully He's not fazed by my inadequacies and He has an infinite capacity to provide me with another learning experience when I acknowledge I've got it wrong.

Of course there are things I wouldn't do the same way if I had my time again. There are mistakes I've made that I wouldn't want to repeat. But I can't turn the clock back and whilst I can plan to a certain extent for the future the only certainty I actually have is this moment in time that I'm living now.

There is no turning back in that sense and yet we have the opportunity right now to redeem the past, to learn from it, to let our good and bad experiences mould us into better people. In doing so, we have the opportunity to allow God to work in us.

In the Bible God declares, *"I know the plans I have for you...plans to give you hope and a future."* It's a promise for us all but it rests on a requirement from us. It's that we have to acknowledge our need to put ourselves on God's agenda. It's not that we are pre-programmed to do everything His way, but we do have to declare as Jesus did just before He was taken to the trial that led to His death, *"Not my will but Yours Father."*

We can move forward with confidence when we know – personally – the God of second chances.

If you are interested in finding out more about God's purposes for your life, log on to www.lifting-jesus-higher.org.uk which provides information on local Churches together with contact details, plus other Christian resources and activities.