

Upward Bound Ministries Newsletter

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Charlie's Chats

Hello again, Upward Bounders! I continue to hear from scores of people who are being ministered to from my newsletters! Never underestimate what God can do through you, no matter who you are, no matter what condition you are in! Some of the sweetest letters of encouragement have been coming from those who are on up in years who can't get around very well, but take the time to write or email. What a testimony they are to me! And again, I hear from scores of folks who had never heard of me, but who received a copy of my letters from a friend who cared about them. What a blessing! As has been my pattern over the past three months, I'll first update you on my condition, then share my honest feelings, good and bad, then share some perspective I am learning that have made me a better man through this. I hope you will be encouraged. This is my longest letter yet, but I feel I have some important things to say. So forgive me now, and gripe later! Haha! Again, please pass this and any of my letters to anyone you want to encourage! Here we go.....

The Latest on My Condition

Well, from the last newsletter to this one, there has been some dramatic improvements and some disappointing setbacks. So goes the roller coaster ride life of Uncle Charlie! (If we could put this ride of mine in an amusement park, we could be rich! Haha!)

The Improvements

I have been working hard with my speech therapist to improve my speech. We had to start from ground zero and I literally had to re-train myself how to talk. I had to concentrate on every word, then every sentence. I had to talk in phrases much like I sing in phrases and learn to keep breathing in order to have any fluency. You would not believe what kind of work that is! Imagine yourself trying to concentrate every time you blinked or every time you breathed. We just don't think about those things. Neither do we think about "how" we talk – we just do it! At first I had to slow my speech down to about half my normal speed and focus on those things. It was so hard that I would literally get bad headaches after talking for the first week. I had to begin journaling each and every conversation I had every day – who I talked to, what the circumstances were, length of conversation, % of fluency, and what I did when I started messing up. I still am accountable for that daily journal in my twice-a-week sessions.

Believe it or not, between that and some cranial treatments I am getting from my chiropractor, we could actually see the weekly improvement! I started last month with only about 25% fluency at most in normal conversations. Here's the good news: I went through a 2-3 week period just recently where I was near or right at 100% fluency when carrying on a normal conversation on the phone or in my surroundings! That has never happened since all this began! My friends last week told me that the difference was like night and day from even a few weeks ago!

Now the Tourettes noises are an entirely different thing. I make those all the time, and sometimes they can be really loud and can catch people by surprise! Really, it's kind of funny. It's amazing how something like that can work to my advantage! For example, if I am standing in a long line at Wal-Mart, all I have to do is start making those noises, and you wouldn't believe how fast that line can clear out! Haha! All those folks just somehow manage to find another line, and before you know it,

I'm at the register in no time at all! Mission accomplished! Haha!

But back to the stuttering – that's what we have been concentrating on most. And thankfully, I finally started making some dramatic improvements in that area. Well, that is, until.....

The Setbacks Began

Just last Thursday I had lunch with Andrew's best friend, who had gone to East Asia to visit Andrew. This young man stutters. He's stuttered as long as he can remember. A great young man, but has a hard time speaking at times. The first 5 minutes with him went great! I was praising God for how far He had brought me and we were both in amazement. Then, all of a sudden, I began to stutter again for the first time in 2-3 weeks. It progressively got worse, and my Tourettes noises got worse, and I began having spasms and jerking like I did in the early days. For the next hour I was in total shock during that whole conversation. I couldn't believe this was happening to me. The rest of the day I never got my fluency back. Then Friday through Sunday went fine. I was back to where I had worked so hard to get. So Tammy and I just figured it must have had something to do with the fact that I was with someone who shares some of my same issues. Maybe the brain remembers, like muscle memory, and something triggers all those bad behaviors again. So we just counted it as a fluke. But then came Monday.....

My Tourettes Specialist in Gainesville – The Big Meeting

Monday was my big appointment for which I had been waiting for nearly 2 months at Shands Hospital in Gainesville. I was really looking forward to this meeting, because in my mind this was the last stage in getting me back to normal.

Unfortunately for me, the very moment I started conversing with the first of several doctors, my system totally short circuited again! Not only could I not control my stuttering, I constantly repeated words and phrases, had body spasms, made very loud Tourettes noises, jerked, twitched, had memory loss – I showed all the bad symptoms that I had shown a few months ago. Unfortunately, it was a really bad day. I lost totally ability to sit still, communicate fluently, or do anything that I had been taught. The good news is that they got to see it first-hand. The bad news is that I found out the hard way that I still cannot handle pressure situations at all. I'm nowhere close.

Prognosis

As I had predicted, they are going to try to put me on another kind of antipsychotic medication that seems to work with most Tourettes patients to calm the motor and vocal tics. I'm kind of a "lab rat" right now, as my kind of Tourettism is very rare. The circumstances, my age, and the possibility of a certain drug that may have contributed make me an "anomaly". (*I think that's another word for "bizarre"!*) ☺ They still have studies to do and my case is still going before a panel of experts for analysis and discussion. This doctor is the one who will initiate it.

I am being told to lay low for at least 2 months in order to see if this drug brings on any serious side effects. Those possibilities usually always exist with powerful medications. I won't go in to them, but let's just pray that I will be "normal" for a change and won't have any bad reactions!

After that, it's trial and error. We spend time making adjustments, and hopefully if everything works and I can begin to handle pressure situations without "wiggling out", then I can start thinking about singing again. There is no short term answer for this and still a lot of questions to be answered. So my touring future is still uncertain. But as long as I am making improvements, I intend to work towards handling stressful situations better so that I can be back out there with my praise team. If God has other intentions, He will make that clear to me. Whatever it is, it will be good! **Even when life is uncertain and shaky, God is steady. His love for us and His purposes for us are certain.** You can "*Put that in your pocket, and don't let nobody hock it!*" haha!

From my Heart.....Lessons I am Still Learning

I wish I could say that I have been the model saint through all of this, but I still have my moments. Thankfully, I usually end up on the right side of things concerning attitude and perspective, but I don't always get there easily. I keep hearing about these wonderful people who go through such hard trials

and how they never seem to complain or murmur or get discouraged. The latest being the popular former White House Spokesman, Tony Snow, who just passed away from cancer. I find myself wondering, “Why can’t I be like that?”

Tell me if I’m wrong, but I really think that even those people have had their moments, maybe when alone or in the privacy of their own home and family. What we’re seeing is the outside persona. You guys see my outside persona, but you don’t always see when I get upset when I have a set-back, or my emotions getting the best of me when I get stressed out. When people see me in public I am a happy, go-lucky person. You would never know about my struggles. But if I’m going to be honest, my “attitude lessons” are a work in progress. I don’t claim to have arrived yet, and don’t know if I ever will. Many times I react first, then regret it, then repent of it, then do the right things. I find myself often asking “Why can’t I just do the right thing from the start?” Haha!

So again, I choose to be open and honest, so that those of you who ask yourselves the same questions won’t feel alone. It’s easy to give answers – it’s another thing to practice them! Having said all of that, here are a few more things I am learning through this journey.

1. **I am learning that I have a ton or more things to be grateful for than I have to be discouraged about.** So I am purposing myself daily to fix my thoughts on those good things, and spend less time dwelling on the bad. Case and point: I was very discouraged and upset over my last two bad episodes after seemingly coming so far in the past 3 weeks. I began to get angry again – not at God, but at myself. I wanted and expected to do better. I’m such a competitor that it didn’t set well with me at all. I really wanted to just let out some words, if you know what I mean! (*My tongue still hurts from biting it!*)

But then when I got home and was going through mail, I found that three of my dear friends had sent me huge checks out of love for me and Tammy. My friend Keith Coast made T-Shirts in my honor, sold them at camp, and gave me the profits. My friend Yancy, who took my place leading worship at one of my camps, sent me a portion of her earnings as a gesture of love. And my friends at Camp Lebanon sent me a check from collections that the kids took each week for me because they love me! My friend Brent Weber, who led worship at the first camp, was instrumental in getting that started. So in the midst of my anger, I found myself staring at these three checks, thinking about the sacrifice and love it took for these three friends to do what they did, and asking myself, “What do you have to be discouraged about? Look at what God is doing for you! Look at what kind of friends He has surrounded you with!”. My attitude immediately changed and I intend to keep it that way.

2. **I am learning that what goes around, comes around!** You guys no doubt have heard the verse in Luke 6:38 “*Give, and it shall be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.*” Those of you who know me well know that is a philosophy of my life. God has given me a “giving nature”. One of my goals in life has always been to give what I can, when I can to help my fellow man. To me that reflects the character of God. Whether it’s been the extra time and effort it took to invest in youth and youth workers back in the day, or the visits to shut ins, or the extra time and effort it takes to pay attention to kids and make them feel important, or whether it’s words of encouragement for those who are hurting, or giving out money or resources to those in need – the list goes on and on. I don’t say that in a bragging way at all, so please don’t misinterpret what I’m trying to convey. What I am saying is that this has always been a priority in my life, because I honestly do care about people. God put us here to make a difference and I want to be all I can for His name’s sake.

But little did I know that there would come a time in my life where I would be in desperate need of friendship, encouragement and support. Little did I know then that the day would come

when my life would be nearly taken and I would have a really long struggle to get back to normal. And little did I realize during all those times that God would use what I had sown to come back to me, pressed down, running over! Just when I needed it most, I have seen over these past 8 months all those past acts of kindness coming right back to me through God's people – some of the very people that He used me to minister to before! **God is so good, it's incredible.** I am literally overwhelmed when I think about the gifts, the letters, the cards, the emails, the prayers people have sent my way. People from Ardmore, people from my previous churches, people from churches I sang at, children's groups whom God used me to touch, people I have met along the way, friends I have made along the way.

It's not that we give for return. We give out of a motive of love. We try to model Christ. We don't give to get, but I can guarantee you that when we do give, there will come a time that God, because He remembers, gives back to us – sometimes through the very people who have been blessed by our lives! It's God's formula. **Each of you have a lot to give in this world.** It may not be money, but it can be time, a kind deed, a note, a smile, a word of encouragement. The list is countless! Ask God what you can give somebody today! It will not only bless them, but God will bless you. Take it from one who knows!

3. **I'm Learning to keep singing my song!** I've been reading a lot of Joel Osteen's writings, and God has used him to help reframe my mind set into one of a Biblically based, positive outlook on things, even when they don't look so positive. I'm learning not to let my negative circumstances weigh me down. Do I get discouraged? Yes, I do. Do I stress out? Yes, I do. Do I get angry? Yes, I do. But do I stay there? No, I don't!

Look, we're human. We don't walk on water. We're going to react. We're going to have a range of emotions when negative circumstances surround us. *It's what we do with those feelings and initial reactions that count.* And I believe the more we practice having a positive, faith based response – *even if at first we didn't respond the way we believe God wanted us to,* that the power within us, the Holy Spirit, helps us respond better more quickly the next time. And then the next time, and every time after that! My goal is to get to the point to where my initial response will be the one that pleases God. I honestly don't know if I'll ever get to that point because of my humanity, but it's certainly a goal to shoot for! But in the mean time as I strive to get there, I know I serve a God who is merciful and full of grace – a God who understands the way He made me – a God who forgives me – a God who never gives up on me – and a God who is faithful to see me through each trial and give me the strength to walk through the fire. I am not alone and never will be!

So I am learning to control my thoughts. Ephesians 5:18 says to be *“ever filled with the Spirit”*. One way I can do that is to *“keep singing my song”* in my thoughts. When bad things happen to us, our human nature is to tend to dwell on those negative things. Isn't that so true? I remember when I would do a concert. Let's say 99% of it turned out great, but I goofed up 1% of the time. What is the natural tendency? To dwell on the 1% I did wrong. It's one thing to recognize it and learn from it, but it's another to keep running back to it in my thoughts. That mind set comes from the accuser, the devil. Don't we all tend to do the same thing? We must understand that our minds are the devil's workshop! I believe our thoughts and our perspective carry us a long way in life, in one direction or another. They can defeat us or they can make us winners. That's why we must keep singing God's song in our hearts and minds.

Here's how it's working for me. OK, I get bad news from the docs. OK, my body didn't respond well last Thursday or on Monday. Am I going to stay down about it, or am I going to pick myself up in my *thought life* and start praising God for the *good things* going on in my life?

What will I choose to think about as an act of my will in order to honor God? I am learning to make a melody in my heart anyway! I think about Christian songs that minister to me and I hum them in my mind. I fill my mind with Christian music or I find scripture and articles and quotes in Christian books and dwell on those things. I think about the things I have to be thankful for today. I am learning in my thoughts to thank God during the day for the little things I see. I thank God that I am alive! I whisper prayers for people I come in contact with. I pray for God to show me ways to be a blessing to someone else today. I think in my mind, “God is showing favor in my life today, and someone is going to see it”. I think about my countenance. I don’t walk around, drooping, slumping shoulders, head down. I carry a smile on my face on purpose. I show enthusiasm. (*The word “enthusiasm” comes from a Latin root that means “in God, or God within”*). Joel Osteen put it this way, “*Stop dwelling on what’s wrong and start being grateful for what’s right!*” God puts it this way “*Walk in the Spirit!*”

The fact of the matter is we all face and will continue to face problems and difficulties in this world. They will vary in degree. If we say to ourselves, “I’ll wait until this problem is over and then I’ll get my song back”, we’re fooling ourselves – because there will always be something else to deal with. *If we take that perspective, we’ll miss out on the joys of life that we can experience even in the midst of the pain we are going through.* I cannot tell you the fulfillment and sense of purpose I have felt through this ordeal. It’s because the Lord is teaching me to have a positive mind set and make the best of whatever situation I am in. I am weak, but He is strong! You see, it’s not about what we can or cannot do, or where we are at in life. **It’s about God’s power in us and His desire and ability to shine through us.** He has the incredible and unmatched ability to make us victorious and to use us to make a difference to the audience He has given us. People watch us. How we handle adversity speaks loudly to them! And it starts in our minds and in our hearts.

I encourage you today to be like a blooming flower that sticks out to someone else who is walking through a patch of weeds in their lives. I guarantee you they notice the flower! But if we’re all caught up in discouragement and self pity ourselves, they will never see the flower God intended for them to see. And we will never experience the peace of God that is ours to claim. Bloom where you are at! No matter what YOU are surrounded by..... be it bad circumstances or bad people with bad attitudes! Bloom where you are!
Paul said it best in Romans 8:37 “*in all these things* we are more than conquerors”. Notice he didn’t say “when all the difficulties have passed, then I’ll have joy”. He said “in the middle of my adversity (*and he had plenty of it*) I will have a song in my heart anyway!” Wow, what a perspective!

Let’s get our song back! Let’s be contagious! Let’s make people better off by knowing us, seeing us, talking to us than they were before they encountered us – with God’s power and light shining through us! Start in your mind and determine to keep singing your song! God knows it’s not always easy. That’s why the Bible says to offer a “*sacrifice*” of praise. Sacrifices aren’t easy. They are an act of the will. But with God’s help, we can do it! **Sing a song in your mind – then let it permeate to your attitude – then your countenance – then your behavior.** And you will see the favor of God shine in your life and it will bring a new perspective to your trials! I hope these words encouraged you today! If they didn’t.....smile anyway! ☺

That for the Day

It’s not the years in your life that count.....it’s the life in your years. - Abe Lincoln

**Cya here, there, or in the air!
We’re Upward Bound!
Uncle Charlie**