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Three Little Words We All Need to Hear

Guest: Kyle Idleman
From the series: Don't Give Up (Day 1 of 3)
Air date: August 12, 2019

Bob: Have you ever thought to yourself, “I’ve had enough here. I’m done.” Pastor Kyle Idleman remembers counseling a woman who felt that way about her marriage.

Kyle: She did not *want to want* to pursue her husband or to pursue reconciliation in her marriage. Family and friends were telling her, “Be done.” She wanted to be done, but she had this strong sense that God was saying, “I’m going to do something. Just watch and wait.” She did that. She said, “I’m not going to do anything except for not quit,” which is the point of the story. She wasn’t even trying. She just wasn’t going to quit.

Bob: This is *FamilyLife Today*. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson, and I'm Bob Lepine.

How do you know when it's time to throw in the towel and say, “This isn't going to work,” or whether you keep standing firm and don't give up? We'll talk with Kyle Idleman about that today. Stay with us.

And welcome to *FamilyLife Today*. Thanks for joining us.

I'm guessing, knowing your background as a college athlete—

Dave: You don't know anything about my background.

Bob: I know that you are a two-time Hall of Fame recipient.

Dave: How do you know that?

Bob: Because your wife, your cheerleader, talks about this all the time.

Ann: That's right. And a two-time *high school* Hall of Fame recipient.

Dave: OK. That's enough.

Bob: I'm thinking what we're going to talk about today is almost second nature to you because to excel at the level of athletics that you excelled at, you have to have a commitment to pressing through obstacles, hurdles—persevering. You don't quit. You hang in there. I think the strength of perseverance—the Bible says we're all to be persevering. In marriage and family relationships we are called up to persevere with one another for a lifetime, right?

Dave: Yes, but I tell you. I don't love any words more than the three words of the book we're going to look at today—don't give up. It is a mantra.

Bob: You've said that.

Dave: It is the way to live! I love this book. I love this concept. I think it's straight from the heart of God.

Bob: Kyle Idleman joins us. He is the author of that book that is "straight from the heart of God." That's pretty good.

Kyle: I'll take that. [Laughter]

Bob: Kyle, welcome back to *FamilyLife Today*.

Kyle: Thanks. Great to be back with you.

Bob: Kyle is the senior pastor at Southeast Christian Church in Louisville, Kentucky, one of the ten largest churches in America. You have probably heard of, or read, or been through the Bible study *Not a Fan*—his books *Grace Is Greater*, *Gods at War*. This book on perseverance is kind of an extended meditation on Hebrew 11 and 12. It was right in meditating on those two chapters that you said, "God's calling His people to get back up and stay with it."

Kyle: I have had, over the years, so many conversations as a pastor with people who are struggling with any kind of issue—maybe it's a marriage issue, any kind of family, maybe it's financial, or some kind of a faith crisis. I became convinced that almost every one of them had this need in common—to be challenged not to give up. That was a common pastoral conversation I was having with people—don't give up, don't give up.

I found that people would often come to church thinking they wanted comfort because of whatever they were going through that was difficult. But what they really needed was some courage. Those things aren't mutually exclusive, of course, right? Comfort and courage can go together.

But there's a difference between someone saying, "You have a seat, take a break, you've been working hard," and somebody saying, "Get back in there, stick with it, and don't give up." I don't know if we have very many people in our lives who will speak courage into us. We have people who'll put an arm around us and give us some comfort—maybe some friends and family—if we're blessed in that way.

But oftentimes we don't necessarily have somebody who will grab us by the shoulders and say, "OK. Now is not the time to give up." Oftentimes you'll see people give up right at a moment where they've never where they've never really been closer to a breakthrough. So, sometimes, the most spiritual thing you can do is just not quit.

Hebrews 11 and 12 is a powerful passage of scripture that challenges us to not give up, to not grow weary, and uses Jesus as our inspiration. It's easy to think of "don't give up" as this trite saying, but the question is, "What's that rooted in?" If it's rooted in something real—if it's rooted in faith—then the foundation is secure. If it's self-taught, if it's looking at yourself in the mirror, and listening to "Eye of the Tiger," [Laughter] saying, "Don't give up," that's going to get exposed.

But if it's rooted in God, if it's rooted in our faith in Christ, it makes all the difference.

Bob: This is a theme throughout scripture—the idea that we are to persevere in the face of trials. It's kind of written into the job description of what it means to be a follower of Christ, right?

Kyle: It is a thread. You see it in the Old Testament and the New Testament as well. If I could have variations of "don't give up," it would be "be strong, be courageous, be brave." That is a constant theme because that is a confidence that we can have as followers of Jesus, as children of God. It's not surprising that that is a theme because of who is on our side. If God is with us, then who can be against us? So, don't give up.

Dave: We probably should read the passage for the listener to hear, "This is where a lot of this comes from." As I open the book and started reading this, one of my favorite passages, it's one of those you've heard. The way, Kyle, you break it down is so insightful. I'll read it for you. "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles. Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Consider Him, who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart" (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Bob: Why is that one of your favorite passages?

Dave: It's what Kyle gets into in the book. It's rooted—the perseverance, and the overcoming, and the "never give up, never stop"—is rooted in someone that followed that for us. It's our leader. It's Jesus. So, you'd go back to Him.

I love how you broke it down. I've preached this before, and I've never done as good a job as you just did through the book—saying, "Let's break it down in three sections." You start with this cloud of witnesses. Let's start there.

Kyle: OK. Yes.

Dave: What does that mean? I've heard all kinds of interpretations. I've probably preached it wrongly. What is this cloud of witnesses, and how does that help us "don't give up"?

Kyle: Hebrews 12 begins with, “Therefore, since we’re surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.” It’s pointing us back to Hebrews 11, which is sometimes called “The Hall of Fame” for faith. You have all these heroes of Scripture referenced in Hebrews 11. It’s pointing us to them, but it says, “We’re surrounded by a cloud of witnesses.”

That word, “witness,” it could be translated one of two ways. It could either be “someone who sees,” which is, I think, how we would typically capture this. We are being watched—this idea that in the stands, watching us run our race, are these great heroes of the faith. They’ve run theirs; the baton has been passed. Now it’s our turn.

The other way, though, and I think this is probably the more accurate way to interpret the word “witness,” is “someone who speaks.” There’s a few reasons, if you do the word study, why it makes sense if it’s someone who speaks. It’s the idea that their story of faith speaks courage into our story. It’s this idea that we read, we learn, we study these heroes of the faith, and it’s as if that story is waiting for us at a turn, where we have been running, and running, and running, and at just the right point when we’re really tired, they speak to us. They start to tell us, “Here’s my story. It was hard for me. Here’s what I went through.

Sometimes people read Scripture, and they wonder why certain things are included—why all the obstacles and challenges, and the low points in people’s lives. That story is meant to speak courage into your story. We have these witnesses who *are* watching, and who are speaking, and their stories speak courage into ours.

Bob: Part of the reason the Hebrews 11 stories speak courage to us is because every person who’s listed in Hebrews 11 is a flawed individual.

Ann: And have gone through trials—hard things that have been difficult.

Bob: And not been superheroes going through trials—

Ann: Exactly.

Bob: —but real human beings with real problems in how they lived out their faith who persevered and are in the Hall of Fame because they persevered even though they were deeply flawed people.

Kyle: I was struck your story that you shared of visiting a young couple in the hospital as you talked about this. Can you share that?

Kyle: I don’t make a ton of hospital visits at the church where I’m a pastor. We have a team of incredible pastors who take great care of our folks. But sometimes, I’ll get called in, especially when the situation is dire. One of the things that God has taught me, because of that, is He has allowed me to have a front row seat when people go through some of the most devastating, desperate moments of life.

So, there was a young couple in our church who I happened to know. They were trying to get pregnant, and this was their first child. She was going into labor. They called for family and friends to meet them at the hospital. This was going to be a great day of celebration for them. And the baby was stillborn.

I get a phone call and rush over to the hospital. I walk into the hospital room where the mother is there, and she's surrounded by some family. They point me towards the *next* room, a little room off to the side, where the father is. He's sitting—and the lights are down—he's sitting in a rocker and holding his child and saying goodbye. He's by himself.

You all know. There's just nothing you can really say in those moments. So, I sat with him for a few minutes. I knelt down to pray for him. As I was praying for him, we could hear singing coming from the other room. They were singing the Tomlin song, "How Great Is Our God." It grew louder, with more conviction. "How great is our God, great is our God."

The courage that that family had in that moment—that's not from themselves—you don't drum that up. That comes because of their faith in Jesus, because of the hope, as Paul says in Romans, "it doesn't disappoint."

Those are the stories—in some ways, those are the modern-day stories—of Hebrews 11.

Ann: Yes.

Kyle: Those are the heroes of the faith *today*. That inspires. You hear those stories, and it helps you keep going.

Bob: People will hear stories like that, and I, at least, will think, "I don't know if I could do that. I don't know if in that moment that would be my response." I think there are two things to consider when you think like that. First of all, God gives grace in the moment when you need it.

Kyle: It is sufficient.

Bob: You might not think you could do it because you're not in that moment, and God's not pouring out that grace to you. But in the moment, you find God supplies it.

There's a second thing, and that is that you have to have a foundation built so that when the storms come—this is Matthew 7, right? Built your house on rock so that when the storms come, your house isn't destroyed.

You isolate, Kyle—when you talk about the crowd of witnesses—you say they help us keep believing in moments where there's doubt; keep fighting in moments where we're discouraged; and keep a perspective on what this is. This is where I will oftentimes—and I don't mean this to be trite—but I am oftentimes with folks in hard circumstances. I will say, "The Bible calls what we're going through now 'light and momentary afflictions that securing for you a great weight of

glory.' What we're going through feels hard. It's a light and momentary affliction compared to the glory that's ahead for us."

That's the kind of perspective that help us, in the moment, go, "OK. God's still in control. I can still trust Him."

Kyle: Yes. I personally went through a time in ministry—it would have been around 2014 or so—where I was pretty discouraged and felt worn out, tired. It was surfacing at home. I was not enjoying people the way I normally would have. To be honest, I was feeling sorry for myself. I was in that mode where I was the victim. I could tell you a half a dozen things in my life that were not fair.

We went as a family to Haiti during that season for eight weeks. I spent most every day with a Haitian pastor named Idri. Idri lived with his family in this tiny little hut with no air conditioning, no windows. He'd put three or four of his kids on his motorcycle and take them into school every day. Then he'd go preach up in the mountains where he didn't get paid a penny. His wife would make enough money in the market for them to eat and have a place to live. He would plant these churches up in the hills.

He had a joyful spirit. He could not have been more grateful. Spending some time with him helped me change my perspective. It helped me see some things differently and realize how much I have to be grateful for.

A shift in perspective can sometimes make all the difference in persevering. We see things a little bit different.

Dave: That story about the couple in their twenty-third year of marriage—she finds out her husband has an affair. Talk about that. When I read that, I was like, "Man!" Reading it, I'm out. I don't know if I would be able to keep fighting, and yet—tell that story because it's pretty—you know that story, and you know the couples. I want to hear it from your personal standpoint

Kyle: One of the things I have been inspired by as a pastor over the years is people who have fought for their marriage in times where—in my mind—they didn't have to. Like, "You've got an out here, and I don't think I could do that." You see them fight for their marriage, and then how glad they are that they did.

Watching people go through that has changed how I counsel people about, "Look. You want to know you gave this everything you've got. You can look back and say, 'I fought for this.'"

The story you're specifically speaking about—Colleen is her name. She did not *want to want to* pursue her husband or to pursue reconciliation in her marriage.

Ann: Because she had grounds for divorce. Most people would tell her that.

Kyle: Right, right. Then it turned out there were multiple affairs. It wasn't just a one-time thing. More secrets were revealed. Family and friends were telling her, "Be done." She wanted to be

done, but she had this strong sense that God was saying, “I’m going to do something. Just watch and wait.” She did. She didn’t believe it. She told God, “I don’t think you will. I don’t think it is going to change.”

But she did that. She said, “I’m not going to do anything except for not quit,” which is the point of the story. She wasn’t even trying. She just wasn’t going to quit. She stepped away and watched and saw how God began to change and transform her husband and how that eventually brought reconciliation. They would say that going through that season was one of the best things that ever happened to their marriage.

Now, looking back on it, she would tell you that the most important thing was not that they went to counseling, that they enacted certain principles. It’s just that she didn’t quit. Then to see how the ripple effect of them not quitting—how that affects their kids, and now how it affects their grandkids.

Ann: How are they doing now?

Kyle: Good. Great. In fact, one of the beautiful things about this story is that he blesses the fact that the story’s in this book. I sent an email out, and said, “Is it OK if I share this story. I’ll change your name, and I’ll change a few details.” She said, “Let me talk to my husband.” She comes back, “We don’t want you to change our names. We don’t want you to change details. This is our story. This is how God has worked in our marriage, in our relationship.”

Bob: We’ve got listeners right now who are in that circumstance—married to someone who has been serially unfaithful—wondering, “How do I know what’s the right path for me? Is it always keep fighting? Is there a right time to give up?”

If you’re doing pastoral counseling with somebody—

Ann: —or if this is your daughter—

Bob: Exactly, right. Is there a way to know, “I should persevere?” Versus, “No, I’m continuing to put myself in danger or harm or—”

Kyle: Certainly, I think if you’re putting yourself in danger or harm—

Bob: —if there’s physical abuse or emotional abuse—

Kyle: —you need to get out and you need to get help. Absolutely. I wouldn’t have said this ten years ago, but I will not counsel a couple—or a husband or a wife—I will not counsel them to get a divorce. That doesn’t mean there aren’t grounds for it, but you’re not going to hear me say, “Give up.” I’ve seen so many people who have endured and fought through it. They’re so glad they did.

I know sometimes in the moment, it seems like the only option—and it seems like this is going to make me happy—but if you’ll stick with it, oftentimes, there’s a redeeming work.

So, I think it's hard to trust our own perspective on it. We need godly counsel when we need to hear some wisdom from people who aren't necessarily connected to us and the situation. I do believe that oftentimes, we quit too soon. We quit too early.

Dave: My wife doesn't like this, but every year at Christmas, I always want to watch *The Family Man*. You guys know that movie?

Various voices: Yes. Sure.

Dave: Nicolas Cage—. Every year. I did it again this year. She's like, "Really? We're going to watch it again?"

Ann: Every other year would be fine.

Dave: Yes. For years, I was like, "Why do I love this movie?"

Ann: I asked him that this time. You need to think, "What is it in this movie that resonates with your heart?"

Dave: I now know. Sitting here right now, I just connected one more dot. It's a long story, so I won't go into it. It's basically a movie about a single man who's living the life in Manhattan years after he said goodbye to his college sweetheart. He wakes up with what they call a "glimpse"—this is what your life would have been if you had married her.

He doesn't know what's going on, but he wakes up and he's in a house in Jersey. They've got two little kids, this unbelievable marriage. Then near the end, it goes back to real life, and he realizes, "I would rather have that life than the life of being the bachelor in Manhattan."

So, he chases her down. She's a lawyer now—a non-profit. Do you remember the scene in the airport? She's getting on a plane to go somewhere, and he runs up. And that's where—I cry every time because she's like, "Jack, that was years ago. We're fine. You need closure? You've got it. I'm fine." You guys have never seen it. He's like, "We have a house in Jersey! We have two little kids!" He starts yelling stuff. And, of course, she has no idea what he's talking about.

Here's why it's so emotional for me. It's my story. I just connected it out right here, Kyle, as you're talking. The house that my mom and dad had was in Jersey. I had never connected that much. I know it's emotional for me because when I watch that, I'm the son whose mom and dad *did* split up wishing they would've stayed together, wishing they'd have kept believing, kept fighting, and kept a different perspective.

My dad, who's passed now, would say to you, "I wish I would've fought—harder." Such an important message. Again, there's discernment and wisdom to know when and when not—but

there's a person right now that I'm talking to, that Kyle's talking to. I'd say to pick up Kyle's book as well, but I'd say, "Don't quit." Hang on, fight, and see what God may do.

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