

Don't Give Up- God is with You!

John 16:33

Man, I don't know about you guys, but I have all kinds of stories about having to endure and not give up. I studied music in college and actually had a really hard time learning and progressing, even though I practiced all the time. But I tried not to get discouraged, and I just kept practicing, and I prayed that God would help me, and it took 4 years, but God did help me and allowed me after I graduated to play professionally on cruise ships.

I've experienced a really close friend who died, and I was so sad, it seemed like it would be impossible to ever lose the sadness in my life that resulted. But I didn't give up, and I kept trying to understand God, and understand His love, and understand what He wanted in my life- and He brought me through that time of sadness.

I was a missionary for a couple years in the jungles of South America, and there were several times I was faced with impossible situations, really discouraging situations, situations I didn't know if I would survive or not- but I choose to continue to hope in God, knowing that He saw my situation and I could trust Him- and He brought me through every single one of those difficulties.

10 years ago I was building my house, it was during the same time that I first starting ministering part time here at this church. And a friend, with who I had helped start a company- he betrayed me, and removed me from the company, and took money from me. It seemed like an impossible situation- how was I going to finish building the house without a full time job? But I didn't give up. I kept listening to a Christian song that talked about God wanting to turn the bad things in our lives into good things, and that was our prayer- that God would restore and bless us as we continued to trust in Him. Now it was hard, I had to

scramble for work, figure out a lot of details on my own with the house, I road a bicycle pulling a trailer with tools to go work on finishing the house- but God provided and helped me finish the house.

This past week, I've had a guy working for me, attempting to build a carport. And he literally has had problem, after problem, after problem. Anyone ever have a week like that? He went to buy materials, and the store's electricity shut down, so he had to wait all day there in order for them to get the power turned on, so that he could then leave with the right materials for construction. After he finally got the materials, on his way to the build site, he got pulled over on the road by a policeman because the materials were too heavy for his trailer. When he at last arrived to the build site, it was late at night and dark, and the trailer was too low for the driveway, so he had to just drop off the building materials in the middle of the driveway, and they regretfully planned on having to hand carry them up and down from there. The next day, one of his workers injured their hand, and so he had to delay the work in order to find a different worker to help him. When I talked to him on the phone that night, he expressed just how stressed out he was after all the things that had happened. I asked if he happened to be a follower of Jesus, and his response was that he grew up in a church, believes in God- but wouldn't necessarily call himself a Christian. So I told him that was ok, but that I thought it seemed like perhaps God was trying to get his attention about something through these events, and I asked if I could pray for him, and he said yes- so I prayed for him on the phone and he was thankful that I was willing to do that.

At this point, I recognized that he was having a really tough time in life, and that this could be an opportunity for God to work in his life through these challenges, but I was also terrified that he was just going to quit, and I'd have raw, heavy building materials blocking my driveway that I'd have to figure out what to do with. So I thought, man I better find a way to help this guy out, or else he's totally going to get discouraged

and bail on me. Thankfully, a friend helped me on the next day, move the materials out of the way, and we got them to the construction site.

Well, my guy arrived super late that day, because one of his kids had gotten sick. When he and a couple of his crew guys finally got there on site, they worked the rest of that day, but then the following day, the truck they had loaded down with tools stopped running. The engine totally blew up. So they found a different truck, moved all their gear from the busted up truck to the other truck, and came late again to the build site. This was the day about when the Noah's Ark torrential rainfall started that we had to deal with for about a week, and they were going to spend the night that night, camping out, so that they could be there at the build site back early in the morning the next day. I put a large tarp up for them so that they could stay dry while working, and so that they'd have some cover that night as they were camping out. Well, that night, after they had finished working for the day, they drove the truck out for a quick errand, and a drunk driver hit their truck. And he called me at 10 o'clock that night, telling me how shaken up he was, that his stomach hurt, that he was scared since the guy that hit him was drunk and had drunk friends with him that were all acting like they might want to fight.

He told me they had calmed down, and that a first responder had arrived from the fire station who was staying with them until a police officer arrived- but all this had made him really anxious, and this had been like the worst week ever, and so he felt like he needed to call me. I asked if he wanted me to pray for him again, and he replied, "Yes, please do!" So I prayed for him, that God would protect him, and encourage him, and take care of the situation- and after I finished praying, I again told him that even more so, it seems like God is really trying to get ahold of his attention, that God sees him, knows his situation, and wants him to turn to Him, and walk with Him in right relationship. And he responded with voice trembling, "Yes I think so. I

know that God is with me, but I've made my life more about work recently and I need to get in church and seek God."

When I saw him the next day, he told me he already asked his wife to be looking for them to find a good church that they can start going to along with their 2 children.

I'm so glad that he didn't quit on me, but that he endured, and pressed on through the challenges, but I'm even *more* glad that ultimately he allowed the challenges to cause him to focus on God and to focus on his relationship with God- realizing that God is with him. I'm also so glad and thankful that in my life's challenges, God has helped me not to give up, and He has blessed me through the challenges.

In John chapter 16, Jesus is preparing His disciples for His death and departure from this world. And the whole chapter is about Him telling them that it's going to be ok, even if He leaves them, because in a way He's not really leaving them, because He will be present with them through the Holy Spirit. And so the whole chapter is filled with Jesus' encouragement concerning this, and He ends this encouragement to them with these words, the last verse of the chapter: *"These things I have spoken to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."* (**John 16:33**) That word tribulation means pressure- literally or figuratively. It means physically being pressed down, as well as spiritually/emotionally *feeling* pressed down. Jesus here promises us that we will feel pressure in this world- physically and emotionally. There will be stress, hurt, difficult things, there will be opportunity to get discouraged- but He wants us to be encouraged knowing that He has overcome the world. That word "overcome" here is the word from which Nike shoes are named. Yes, Nike is a Greek word meaning to conquer, overcome, prevail, get the victory. The shoe company wants you to think that if you buy their Air Jordans, then you

too will conquer, overcome, and win the ball game- that's what the idea is.

What Jesus is saying here is that *He* has the victory. He has "Nike-d" everything in the world. He's the winner. And He doesn't need Air Jordans to do it. And the encouragement is that if you have made Jesus King in your life- if you've received His forgiveness and are following His ways- then you are on His team. He's the team captain, He's the Allstar player, He's the MVP. The game of life might be tough- you might have some shots blocked, you might have the ball stolen from you, you might made a bad pass, you might airball a 3-pointer and feel really embarrassed, discouraged, stressed- but because you're on Jesus' team- you are guaranteed the win. Jesus is the best of the best in the NBA of life, there is no one who can defeat Him in the finals for the championship.

So I want to encourage us all to remember that Jesus is with us through His Holy Spirit, and He is very much aware of all the challenges in life that we face, and He wants us to endure, persevere, to keep going, keep trying to do the right things, keep following Him, not to give up- knowing that eventually we will win, because we are on His team, and He is the ultimate winner.