

## NEVER GIVE UP

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Cecil Clements

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Scripture: Philippians 1:20-26

What do I do when I don't know what to do? That is a question that has been coming to me through this week. How do we go through this situation when everything in front of us is not very clear; we can't make plans; there is no clarity in situations? We are not able to look ahead and say, "This is what's going to happen, and therefore this is what I can do." What do we do when we really don't know, or can't know what to do?

I'm sure that when you entered 2020, you came through with a great amount of zeal, great amount of planning, great amount of purpose. You crossed over to the year 2020 and said, "This is the year that I'm going to make it. This is what's going to happen in my life. Here's what I'm going to be able to do, and so on." Then January passed, and February came; and all of a sudden, we began to hear things about a disease that was going around in another part of the world which threatened to come into our world as well. And then in March, it did. It created all kinds of chaos, and when April came by, things began to look a little hazy. Then when May came everything turned topsy-turvy. All those carefully laid out plans suddenly didn't make any sense because everything that we thought was stable, in which we could unfold our plans, was now unstable ground.

By the time June came around, you're just in a tired place; you're fatigued, sailing along, and you don't know what to do. Mostly, you're just going through the motions. Some of you are just about ready to throw in the towel, ready to give up. June is not a good month for so many around the world, because all those carefully laid out plans have no way of being fulfilled or materializing.

Church, I want to ask you as your Pastor, how are you doing? Are you overwhelmed with sadness, with sorrow? Have you lost a loved one, somebody you cared for or somebody who you knew who did wonderful work and was such a good person who selflessly gave of himself or herself to the work of God's kingdom, and even to society? Now that person is not there and you're just overwhelmed. You can't believe that life can go on without them. Maybe you've even lost a loved one who has nothing to do with COVID, but who was close to your heart, and you couldn't go for the funeral, couldn't attend the last rights – and that has left you in a kind of a vacuum. Are you overwhelmed with sadness? Maybe there's uncertainty about your job; you entered this phase quite okay and, in the middle, something happened. Your job is at stake, you're not sure whether you can carry on or whether the job is there for you. You're not sure about bills; putting food on the table is causing all kinds of stress and worries. Is that you?

Again my heart goes out to you. Again, I'm asking you as your Pastor: How are you doing? Are you managing or are you floundering? Maybe there are some of you who have some kind of a chronic disease and it's been so fatiguing, taking care of yourself, taking your meds on time. Or maybe going to a hospital, getting treatment every week. It's beginning to weigh you down, and truth be told, you're actually at a place where you feel that you really don't care. "I'm just going to go along and not do anything. Que sera, sera, whatever will be, will be where this path leads, and I'm going to go. I have no more energy or strength or direction or purpose.

If that is where you are this morning, I don't want you to stay there. I've been praying that God would, by the end of our time together, lift you, and set you on a new path that says: this path has direction and purpose and strength and faith and hope; and this path belongs to you.

So, let's look at what God would have for us this morning. I want us to look from two perspectives:

- Looking at it from what God would expect of us, His children, in the situation that we may be in,
- Looking at the way in which scripture has handled it through people who were in our particular situations, who had had the rug pulled out from under them.

Would you open yourself to the Spirit of God and say, "Lord, that's where I am, but I'm willing for Your Spirit to touch me. I need a fresh touch from You. Heavenly Father, would You do that in our midst as we look at Your word? Wherever there are ones who are listening, move into that space, fill it with Your presence, the radiance of Your presence, and let Your word come alive as an encouraging word to set us on stable ground with purpose and direction. Come Lord Jesus.

#### Philippians 1:20-26

*For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die. For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.*

*Knowing this, I am convinced that I will remain alive so I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith. And when I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what He is doing through me.*

Now we may not get it from what Paul is saying, but he was in a place of really wondering – should I just give up, should I let go? What are my options? If I give up, I will be with Christ and that is so much better. Remember that Paul is in a jail, he's chained to prison guards; he's been through so much. He's written about five of six of his epistles, and he's thinking: I've done so much. What am I doing here? Now I've reached almost the end, I'm sitting in a jail chained to prison guards. I can just give up and I'll be with Christ. But that's not what he does, because Paul realizes two things:

1. He is breathing: he has breath, he is alive, and that God hasn't taken him to be with Him yet. He is still in the world.
2. He realizes that he can still be articulate, that he can still send encouraging letters to people, - that is something he can still do even in the confines of this prison cell. And that's what he did! He still wrote to Timothy, he wrote to Titus – encouraging words to the church on how to build it up and what are rules meant for elders and people in-charge, and leadership, and so on. These have served the church so wonderfully. He wrote all this after he decided that he will not give up and say: Lord, take me. Because he says here, that he realizes:
  - i) I can do more fruitful work for Christ.
  - ii) I can continue to help all of you grow and experience the joy of your faith.
  - iii) When I come to you again, you will have even more reason to take pride in Christ Jesus because of what He is doing through me.

So mentally, he makes a shift and says: This is not the time to throw in the towel saying 'enough'. This is still the time for me to see what I can still do for myself and for people all around me. If God hasn't taken me yet from this world, God still has a purpose for me. And He does, beloved, for you as well. If you have breath, if you look around and see that there are so many things that you can do, then God is saying to you, "I still have purposes that I want fulfilled through you and in you. This is not the time for you to say 'I'm going to give up.'"

Let's also see from another perspective, what God does for us when we are going through a time like this.

Let's look at the way Jesus handled the situation. You remember after His death, all the disciples felt like it was the end. They couldn't make any sense of it. They felt like the rug had been pulled out from under their feet; they were just mulling around, not knowing what to do.

What did Jesus do in this situation? In John 20, and the other gospels, we find that Jesus made appearances to each of them. He was actually meeting them at the point where they were. And at that point, He was changing it and changing the way they looked at it, moving them from a point of despair to a point of anticipation and hope.

John 20:11-16. *He meets with Mary Magdalene at the graveside. Mary thinks He is the gardener and she says, "O sir, if you have taken His body, will you please bring it back?" and she's going on like this. And Jesus says, "Mary," and she recognizes the tone in which He called her. She looks at him and says, "Rabboni!"* In a moment, He has turned her situation from one of desperation, one of hopelessness to one of hope.

But let's look beyond Mary. In chapter 24 of Luke's gospel, the disciples were on the way to Emmaus. We looked at that a few weeks back, and how they were walking along, and couldn't make any sense of what had gone on with Jesus, and how their dreams had been shattered. They were saying, "Let's go on with life; that ream has ended." They are walking and Jesus comes along side of them. He begins to talk to them and explain things, and all of a sudden, their ignorance is turned to an understanding and knowledge of what has transpired, a clear understanding of history, what the prophets had said and how it pertained to the events that had just transpired. So once again, He takes those shattered dreams, reconstructs them, puts them back into them, and sends them back to Jerusalem.

Look again at John 20:19, the disciples were all together in a room and the Bible tells us that the room is shut. They are fearful. It's locked and Jesus comes through and He deals with their fear by saying, "Peace be unto you." And once again, to ones who are completely devastated, who don't know what to do, what the next step is, He deals with their fears and once again, shows them that there can be hope and purpose in their lives.

John 20:26 – Remember Thomas, doubting Thomas, wasn't there. He said, "I don't believe it. Unless I can put my fingers in the nail prints, I will not believe it." And Jesus meets him and says, "Go ahead, Thomas." Jesus deals with their doubts as well. Each place where there were those who had almost given up, whose dreams were shattered, the presence of Jesus or the radiance of God, as we saw in the Psalms, came and uplifted them. It gave them back their purpose.

John 21 – Peter going fishing, going back to the old things, completely disillusioned, not sure of what those three years that he spent with Jesus meant anymore. "Let me go back to doing what I used to do." And Jesus comes to him, and re-commissions him. "Feed My sheep. Tend My lambs. Shepherd My flock." I have work for you to do. Let's get beyond the denial. That's not the end of the world; that's just the beginning. As we start again and I show you the things that can be done.

Out of brokenness comes purpose and direction.

Maybe for you today, as you listen, you're saying: My life is pretty much the same as those disciples. My life too, is just a life of broken dreams, castles that have crumbled. I've lost the sense of purpose and direction. I'm just going through the motions. Maybe God is saying to you – Stop! Take a good

look at Me and what I want you to do. Beloved, the one thing that you and I should never do in this situation is to give up. Never give up and say that I can't go on – not as long as we have God on our side.

So what do we do? How do we not give up? Let's start by believing what the Bible says. There are so many promises in the bible, and we've looked at how to delineate between promises that are specific and general; promises that are for you and me and promises that were for people in antiquity. But there are so many promises.

*I will not leave you or forsake you.*

Maybe some of you are thinking that you are all alone in this. God is saying: No, you're not. I'm there with you, and My promise to you is still operational. I will never I leave you; I will never forsake you. Maybe what you need today is to just land on some of God's characteristics, because we know that the more we know someone, the better we can trust them.

When I teach bible study to some of our young people, I always tell them: ask all the questions of a passage – how, when, why, where, what – ask all the questions, and get answers if you can. Then put those answers together and try and get a greater breadth or scope to that passage. But then at the end of it, look at the passage and ask yourself – what characteristic of God comes through this passage? Write it down and then use a highlighter and highlight it. Because there will be days when you just can't get into the Word, but you can take your journal and leaf through it. And as you leaf through it, you'll see the highlighted parts in your journal that says:

- God is faithful.
- God is strong.
- God is kind
- God is compassionate
- God is omnipotent
- God is omniscient
- God is omnipresent

And faith arises, beloved, because this is the God in whom you and trust with our lives and in our future. Get to know the characteristics of God.

Then call out to somebody whom you can trust. I'm sure that you have someone to whom you can bare your soul and say, "Hey, this is what's happening to me. Maybe it's a friend of yours you are close to. Maybe it's your pastor, or a teacher, or a counsellor, or your parents. Somebody whom you can trust and say, "Hey, I'm struggling. I really need to talk about what's going on with me. I really don't have any faith right now. I'm going through a difficult time." And beloved, others, we can have faith for you. We can help you through a time like this, as God works through those people to bring back hope into your life.

Never give up. Why? Because, for one, the Bible says so. The Bible consistently says, especially if you read Revelation. Seven times it says, "To them that overcome, I will give." Maybe this morning, God is saying to you, "I want you to be an overcomer. I don't want you to give up. My children don't give up, and you're My son, you're My daughter, and I'm not going to let you give up. I will walk you through this period as well." The Bible says so. We have hope a change could be just around the corner. We have grace – His power manifests in our weakness. We have power – I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. We have faith – we know that to them that love God, all things work together for good, to them that are called according to His purpose. And we have good friends all around us.

Beloved, as you go through this time when you really don't know what to do in this situation, the one thing that you know for certain that you ought not to do is never give up, because God is on your side and my side. Even though we have dark clouds all around us, the silver lining is the radiance of His presence, still shining through and saying, "You can trust in Me."

Fanny Crosby wrote about 8,000 hymns during her lifetime. She became blind soon after birth, and yet, the songs that she has written have brought such meaning and encouragement to thousands and thousands of people over the years. The choir is going to sing this song for you, 'Never Give Up' and our prayer as we offer it to you, is that faith will rise within you. Those of you who have been down and out and ready to throw in the towel, will get up and say, "I'm not going to give up. Not today! I'm going to trust Him." So, would you listen? Would you let hope and encouragement rise within you as the choir sings this beautiful song by Fanny Crosby and music by Ira Sankey.

Never be sad or desponding,  
Only have faith to believe;  
Grace, for the duties before thee,  
Ask of thy God and receive.

Never give up, Never give up,  
Never give up to thy sorrows,  
Jesus will bid them depart;  
Trust in the Lord, Trust in the Lord,  
Sing when your trials are greatest,  
Trust in the Lord and take heart.

What if thy burdens oppress thee?  
What tho' thy life may be drear?  
Look on the side that is brightest,  
Pray, and thy path will be clear.

Never be sad or desponding,  
Lean on the arm of thy Lord;  
Dwell in the depths of His mercy,  
Thou shalt receive thy reward.

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