

Don't Give Up

Choosing Persistence
in a World of
Overwhelming
Resistance

Written by Nick Connolly
Foreword by Jess Connolly

Just Yet

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A Tyndale nonfiction imprint

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*To Jess, Elias, Glory, Benja, and Cannon.
I am the most blessed because of you all.*

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Foreword

Our family loves a little healthy competition.

A game of Monopoly, a challenge to see who can hold the longest plank, or even just a sloppy game of soccer—when none of us actually knows how to play.

One time, when we were waiting in line at a theme park, we all competed to see who could stand on one foot the longest.

We're all *just* stubborn enough to believe that we can outlast each other, and no matter how many times we lose, we sign up for each contest with determination and hope.

By now we should all know, however, that Nick is probably going to win.

He is definitely going to win Monopoly, and he for sure won that one-footed standing competition, but it's not because of force or bravado. He won't even brag when it's done. He has always had the gift of persistence, patience, and the vision that helps you hold on when it doesn't even make sense.

With almost twenty years of marriage and parenting under our belt, I've learned to let him cheer me on rather than competing against him. I've learned that if I can let his gentle wisdom and passionate coaching reframe my thoughts of defeat, I've got a solid chance to outlast whatever is coming against me.

Of course, now I'm talking less about a plank challenge and more about the callings that make up our lives. One of God's greatest gifts to me is pairing with me a pastor, a friend, and a husband (all in one human!) who is not only willing but able to help me push past the inevitable resistance and see what God has in store for me.

I grieve for Nick that he married a woman who could have been voted "Most Likely to Quit When It Gets Difficult," but I rejoice for you and me that he has written this book to give us the insight we desperately need in this season and the ones to come.

These words are going to help you.

These words will leave you feeling seen and met, unashamed about the resistance that surrounds you and equipped to press through it.

These words will leave you feeling more alert to your own desires, more able to fight your own defeat, and more awake to the callings that you're not meant to give up on, just yet.

More than anything, these words will leave you more connected to Jesus—the author and perfecter of your faith.

Take a deep breath. You're in the right spot.

Jess Connolly

**I want to make
sure you reap
the harvest he
has for you on
the other side
of the hard
things you're
currently facing.**

Introduction

“I give up.”

My wife, Jess, and I were in the kitchen on a Saturday morning. The kids were buzzing around us as they made breakfast. One was making oatmeal, another was spreading way too much Nutella on a piece of toast, and cereal boxes were all over the counter. I had just spent time reading my Bible and simply being still. But even though I had just refueled my heart, rather than looking forward to Sunday, I was trying to figure out how I could avoid it.

Not a great state of mind for a pastor.

Our kitchen had the same energy as a Waffle House late on a Saturday night which, if you don't know the reference, is a *lot* of energy. But I was struggling. Discouraged. Jess could tell, and she sat down beside me at the table. Touched my shoulder.

Those three words left my mouth as a breath—I was too exhausted and defeated to use my voice, to even give a firm two-weeks' notice. If I didn't have enough energy to enunciate my plans, I certainly didn't have the energy to officially type up my resignation, hand it in, and formally walk away from the thing I had once felt so sure I was called to do.

You wouldn't have guessed it from the outside. To an observer, I looked like a happy guy standing with his beautiful wife in the kitchen of their brand-new home in a fantastic city. Our four incredible children were creating chaos around us as we talked: we had officially entered into a new season of independence where they prepared their *own* breakfasts. This was a new level of parental freedom.


But I couldn't even muster a smile. Instead, all I could think about was leaving my job—walking away from the dream I had poured my life into building. Things were hard. People were hard. I'm sure I was difficult at times. I know, pastors are supposed to carry a cheerful spirit of optimism like Ted Lasso, with the vigor of an Olympic athlete, topped off with a little bit of Fortune 500 CEO. *Sometimes* I'm like that—I'm a dreamer, after all—but if I'm honest, I hadn't felt that way in a long time.

I was done.

This was a no-gas-left-in-the-tank resignation.

I had no more strength for sermon prep and staff meetings. No vision for the areas where our church could grow. No willingness to meet another person for counseling over coffee. I couldn't even find the energy to refill my heart with what would refresh me. My time in the Scripture had become dry. My prayers seemed to be received by a void, rather than by God. The things that of old had replenished—now felt ineffective.

Worst of all, I had no more energy to love my wife like I wanted to. I was too tired even to take my kids on fun adventures. Honestly, I had no motivation for anything.



That moment in the kitchen with Jess wasn't the result of a tough week or even a series of tough weeks. It wasn't just a difficult season—as we like to say in the church. These were years of pain, exhaustion, and even despair. Later in this book I'll get into what made those years so hard, but for now, just know that if you find yourself in a similar moment, you are not alone. I see you, and I hear you. I've been there.

I've had my pain, and you've had yours. We each have had our unique struggles. The important thread we share is that we all face resistance. By *resistance*, I mean anything that's causing discouragement, defeat, or even despair in your life. A sense of pushback making every day seem to be an uphill climb rather than a gentle coast. And the pain from that resistance hurts a lot.

Maybe it's a dream that hasn't quite worked out like you'd hoped.

It could be a marriage that's past the days of "for better" and has entered into a time of "for worse." You wonder if staying isn't worth the fight anymore—and the future of your family is on the line.

Maybe a friendship or another key relationship has gone awry. You can't imagine your life without this person, but right now, you can't take another day *with* them, either.

Maybe it's a lack of connection that has you ready to call it quits. After finding yourself in the deep end of a desire to date and hopefully marry one day, dead end after dead end of endless swiping has convinced you to consider a monastic lifestyle.

Relocations and job switches always promise a big payoff. Who doesn't love a new start, especially when the old way is filled

**We all face
resistance.**

**I see you, and
I hear you. I've
been there.**

with so much pain? But once the newness wears off and the challenges arise, will giving up and trying somewhere new be your go-to option *again*?

The list only gets longer. It may seem like whatever you attempt, there's an overwhelming sense of persistent resistance clouding your life.

If you have ever felt hard-pressed, fed up, and ready to quit—my hope is, this book will be your companion. A source of gentle guidance about what to expect and encouragement to access a place of greater persistence and deeper strength—because I know it's in you.

If you follow Jesus, avoiding hard times and escaping pain is impossible. Jesus warned his friends that life would not be easy, telling them, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). There's zero equivocation in that.

But look at what he says next: "Take heart! I have overcome the world."

And on those days when we feel like we really just want to quit—whether it's our calling, our faith, our family, or the cornerstone rhythms of life that keep us healthy and whole—on those days, we need a good path forward, and we need something at the ready that's going to help us hang on just a little longer. Because it's right there in the verse: Jesus has overcome all the trouble this world can throw at us. There *is* a harvest on the other side of hard trials. Right now, handing in your two-weeks' notice feels like all the harvest you need, and I get that.

But what if there's more?

**Jesus has
overcome all the
trouble this world
can throw at us.**

The Scriptures speak of a harvest for those who are willing to persevere through the hard things in life. I want to make sure you reap the harvest he has for you on the other side of the hard things you're currently facing.

Because hard things are always going to come. I'm sorry to say, but my words aren't going to make all your problems go away. The instinct you have to quit—to walk away while it all burns down—isn't going to go anywhere. But if we can befriend that resistance we're facing—if we can learn to acknowledge it, understand it, and be honest with God about it—we will become better equipped to make our way through it.

With that in mind, we're going to get real in this book. We'll dig deep into what the Scriptures have to say about hardship and persistence through it, about what we can learn from these dark nights of the soul. We'll take a look at seven different areas of our lives where resistance seems to continually pop up and wreak havoc. And in the final part, we'll learn how—with God's help—we can hang on to him in each of these areas so that we can walk more confidently in who he made us to be—and emerge in the victory he has won for us.

But let's not get ahead of ourselves. "Just one more page" is the name of the game as we take this journey together. I believe, if you'll take it page by page, we'll get through the dark days together. I don't say that lightly. I speak as one who almost walked away from something very dear to me. In these pages I'll show you what encouraged me to persevere. To stay persistent through the resistance. And I hope it will encourage you too.

**We'll get
through the
dark days
together.**

Here's what I wish I could go back and tell that guy in the kitchen.

Here's what I believe Jesus would say to him.

Here's what I want to say to you today.

Don't give up. Not just yet.

Now, in the pages to come, let's find out why.

Part I

Befriending Resistance

**What if I told you there's more to
your situation than meets the eye?**

**What if I told you that you aren't
alone? That the "raining and
pouring" feeling is a part of
being the people of God?**

**What if I told you that
resistance isn't merely a foe
but can also be a friend?**



A Time to Quit

Sometimes parting ways ensures persistence.

I love the show *Ted Lasso*.

In fact, I'll go on the record and say it's one of my favorite shows ever. For me it's the right amount of humor, sports, and the human heart—all while making witty cultural references. Not to mention it's based in the UK, and one of my most favorite cities is London. It's an incredible cocktail of all my favorite likes.

Don't worry, I won't give away too much, but one of the dynamics of the show is Ted coming to grips with the idea of quitting. Ted, being a coach and natural encourager, always desires for people to keep going and finish the task, match, or whatever they're doing in life.

Quitting isn't an option for Ted.

**We have to
acknowledge
the elephant
in the room:
sometimes
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choice.**

As we find out, this is a pretty deeply rooted idea. We learn his father took his own life—and because of this trauma, Ted feels like his father “quit” on him. This revelation is a powerful moment for the viewer—but it also captures some of the tension you might be feeling as you begin to read this book.

When we encounter resistance, how do we know when to keep going? And how do we know when it’s okay to walk away? As the theologian Kenny Rogers once sang,

*You’ve got to know when to hold ’em
Know when to fold ’em
Know when to walk away¹*

Surely we can’t continue to do everything, always and forever.

Here’s one thing I’ve noticed about our culture—we don’t do tension very well. We favor black and white over gray. We value a quick Google search for the answer over meaningful discovery that takes time. Quick. Now. Hurry. Yes. No. These describe our typical default.

This book is about persistence, especially in the face of resistance, but before we discuss how to do that, we have to acknowledge the elephant in the room: sometimes walking away is the right choice. Sometimes parting ways ensures persistence. But ultimately, there’s a tension here we must learn to embrace: persistence is not black and white. There are times to push through, to keep going. But *there will also be times when quitting and stepping away from a situation is not only necessary but imperative*. Sometimes giving up on

something in your life will actually *ensure* that you'll persist—not in that situation, but in your life.

Let me give you some examples of times when walking away is the right decision.

WHEN THE SITUATION IS TOXIC

A few years into marriage, Jess and I sensed the need to make a very difficult decision. The details themselves don't matter: we knew we needed to be obedient to God and trust him with the consequences of our decision.²

And we knew this decision would affect not only us, but also those closest to us. Nonetheless, we made the decision as a married couple and made the decision known to family. Immediately we received backlash and anger. This response seemed to dominate every conversation I would have with that side of our family. Despite multiple attempts to lovingly change the subject and move on, it became clear things weren't getting better. They were actually getting worse. Then “worse” ended up moving into toxic speech toward our family and me. The hurtful accusations became less about our decision and became really personal.

After much prayer, I knew it was time to offer up an ultimatum: we needed this relationship to move in a healthy direction or it was time to move on. Unfortunately (and painfully), it ended up being the latter. We put a pause on the relationship until we could see fruitful change or come to a point of reconciliation. We made it very clear this wasn't goodbye forever, it was merely goodbye until things changed.

Often times I find myself reciting this phrase: “Even Jesus disappointed people, and he was perfect!” Even though

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but in your life.**

disappointing people is a part of life, it's still difficult. And if you add family dynamics, it makes it near impossible.

At some point in your life, I know you will face a similar situation. The toxic words may come not from a family member but from a different relationship in your life. It might not be a toxic relationship at all, but rather a toxic working or living environment.

Let me be very clear: in order to persevere healthfully in life, sometimes a pause will be required. It might be for good. It might be temporary. Again, there's that dreaded tension rearing its head.

I can't tell you what the right decision is. But I do know that God will guide.

WHEN THE SITUATION IS HARMFUL

It must be said that sometimes situations aren't merely toxic, but in fact are actually harmful to us. Abuse—whether physical, sexual, or emotional—should not be tolerated or endured in the name of persistence.

There are many people out there who will try to convince you otherwise; they'll guilt you into staying in a relationship that is harmful. Unfortunately, they might even offer gospel truths to support their guilt arguments.

Let me be clear: this is far from the heart of the gospel—and the Father. Should you find yourself in harmful circumstances, seek counsel and professional help to the best of your ability. I have witnessed firsthand how a brave individual can be rewarded with breakthrough when they seek help.

Bottom line, we must never confuse persistence with permitting abuse.

RIGHT SITUATION, WRONG TIME

Finally, there are instances when it's just not God's timing or plan. It takes discernment to know when to persevere and when to wait or even pivot completely.

I learned this during my wife's and my journey to found our church, Bright City. I hope to tell you more about this wonderful community we're a part of throughout our time together, but for now here's something most people don't know: even though our church was established in 2014, we actually tried to begin it much earlier—actually six years earlier.

Our family had just come out of a hard time, but we were still hanging on to our dream of believing God would give us the chance to birth something very dear to our hearts, a community church. Despite feeling discouraged from difficulties in a previous church community, three times we sought to raise funds and begin the process. And three times we sensed a little resistance in the form of logistical and financial roadblocks.

We were faced with a decision: We could quit and walk away, forgetting the dream. We could keep going, trying to knock down the door and start our church regardless of the resistance in our path. Or a third option—we could pause in order to gain some perspective. After much prayer and waiting, we embraced what God seemed to be showing us—to wait.

In retrospect, if we had continued, it would have most definitely cost us our spiritual health and vitality. We would've ultimately ended up hating God, each other, and the church. Additionally,

we would've replicated that unhealth in other people. Bottom line, it was the wrong time for the right thing. And the right thing at the wrong time usually makes for the wrong outcome.

Have you ever had something like this happen in your life? Maybe you find yourself there now. You're on the cusp of making a critical move, but you're more unsettled than peaceful. To make the thing happen now could cost your health. Or even worse, fracture your relationship with God.

The thing is, God's plan for our lives is not that we just "do the thing" for the sake of doing it. He wants us to experience abundance. If "doing the thing" comes at the cost of abundance, it might actually be time to pause or even walk away. A mutual, loving relationship with God is always the goal.

Here's what I found out through our season of waiting. For one, it wasn't merely a pause but a time of necessary preparation. We tend to think a "no" or "not now" means we're standing still or moving two steps back. That's not the case with God. He works in our life when our life calls for a momentary break.

Another piece of wisdom surfaced out of the pause. I learned that God knew me better than I knew myself. You're probably wondering what the deferred dream was. The deep desire was to birth a new faith community in Boston, Massachusetts. We established relationships, took many trips to familiarize ourselves with the area, and even got Boston area codes for our mobile phone numbers. Turns out, I'm made more for the southeast than the northeast. It took a little bit of humbling to see this. Could I have started? Absolutely. Would I have

We tend to think a "no" or "not now" means we're standing still or moving two steps back. That's not the case with God.

**Cost and
surrender
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not hate him.**

finished? I don't think so. God knew that then, and I know that now. He knows you better than you do. Rather than kicking against the goads (see Acts 26:14), pause to let God work out the details. He knows you perfectly and intimately.

There should be no pride in your heart if you need to pivot in life or shame if that's what you decide to do. People pivot all the time. Perseverance requires a course correction every once in a while. Does following Jesus come at a cost and require absolute surrender? Absolutely. But cost and surrender should lead us to love God more, not hate him. God doesn't need a circumstantial martyr—someone who sticks it out just so you can say you didn't give up. He already has the perfect martyr. His name is Jesus. No, God's desire for you and me is to follow him in surrender and obedience so we may flourish and grow. Don't stunt your spiritual growth through prideful persistence.

If you're in a situation like ours, try asking the question, "Would continuing in this cause me to love or hate God more?" Be careful, however, with this answer. Sometimes blessing and comfort squelch our love for God too.

The answer will guide you to your next move.

THE ONE PERCENT

I know it may seem counterintuitive, starting a book on persistence with talking about when you *shouldn't* persist. But the thing is, I need you to start this book knowing that the kind of persistence I'm talking about is not one-size-fits-all. It's not a nice, catchy phrase you could buy on a sign at Hobby Lobby and

hang in your kitchen. The presence of resistance always, *always* requires discernment. And discernment is always needed in the tension—the middle. I know God will guide and give you direction.

There's an exception to every rule. This is the one percent. Pausing. Pivoting. Graciously and gracefully giving up. Now let's look at the 99 percent: the times when life does call for persistence in the midst of resistance. And let's learn how we can flourish by committing to continuing instead of giving up.