



DON'T GIVE

I'll never forget the three words my childhood guitar teacher told me: "don't give up."

Gary Epperson, my guitar teacher from the time I was nine, has been an important person in my musical apprenticeship. He is a high school teacher who lives in my hometown of Garner, North Carolina, and plays with a local band. Gary says I had natural rhythm the first day I played for him. For a while, Gary pursued being a musician in Nashville, and he was good! The music industry was a lot different back then, and Gary gave it a good shot but eventually realized he was too old to become a breakout country artist.

Gary's stories about the business side of Nashville—the dog-eat-dog world—along with his fond and bittersweet memories of trying to make it, sometimes made me wonder if I really wanted to make a run at it. It definitely sounded intimidating. Yet right before I went to Hollywood Week for Season 10 of the singing competition *American Idol*, Gary gave me a bit of advice.

"Don't stop," he said.

He was specifically talking about the moment I might find myself forgetting the lyrics of a song. Gary told me people who simply quit singing are always the first to be sent packing. But these two words take on a bigger meaning to me. They're a mantra of sorts to motivate me to keep going, no matter what.

*God loves us too much to
leave us the way we are*

During round three of *American Idol*'s Hollywood Week, the contestants were given a list of songs to perform. I honestly didn't know any of them, but I chose the popular country song "I Hope You Dance" by Lee Ann Womack. I only had hours to learn it. I can be a fast learner, but I sure didn't learn this song fast.

When I end up performing, with the band accompanying me, well . . .

Would you believe me if I said I really felt inspired to write a few of my own lyrics?

The performance was a train wreck.

Sometimes you just strike out. But I remember what my guitar teacher Gary preached: "Don't quit; keep singing." And that's what I did.

They should've voted me off right then and there. I felt like I had let down myself, my family and everyone I knew.

Eventually, all of us contestants were divided into four groups. Each group was placed in a room. While waiting, I knew it was all in God's hands—well, in Jennifer Lopez's, Steven Tyler's and Randy Jackson's hands, too. When the

continued on page 24 >>

UP
37 SCOTTY
MCCREERY

judges walked in, the room went completely silent until we heard, “You’re all going through!”

I was safe . . . and surprised again. I walked up to Jennifer Lopez and thanked her. I looked her in the eyes and said, “Y’all should have cut me.” She reassured me otherwise and gave me a hug.

I went on to win Season 10 of *American Idol* in 2011 at the age of 17. Today, I have released three albums and toured with Rascal Flatts, Brad Paisley and The Band Perry as well as on my own. I’ve written the book *Go Big or Go Home* where I’m given the opportunity to share my experiences, what I’ve learned along the way and encourage others to pursue their dreams. While the words of Gary and many others still influence me today, there has been a much larger influence to thank for helping live out my dreams.

My family and the church I’ve grown up attending have led me to find the One I turn to for true strength, guidance and forgiveness. In my church group, we said the letters of B-I-B-L-E stood for “Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth.” To me, the Bible is a guidebook, not a rule book.

I have also learned the Bible is a history book, as well as a book of prophecies fulfilled through Jesus. For example, the Old Testament book of Micah says a ruler will be born in Bethlehem. Isaiah says the Messiah will be from “the house of David.” Well, both Mary and Joseph, Jesus’ earthly parents, were descendants of King David. Isaiah 53 says the Messiah will be “despised and rejected by mankind . . . pierced for our transgressions,” and “by his wounds we are healed.” To me that’s full-on talking about Jesus. Doesn’t get more real than that.

I know there are all sorts of doubters who wonder whether God is in our world. I’ve wondered the same thing at times. But God is in the same place He was when His Son died on the cross. Watching, waiting, hurting. I know people ask why God lets bad things happen. Why is God hard on us sometimes? I gotta believe it’s because God loves us too much to leave us the way we are. There are lessons in our struggles. Some lessons we figure out; some we might not figure out until we’re on the other side of Heaven.

I think of the words in Jeremiah 29:11: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

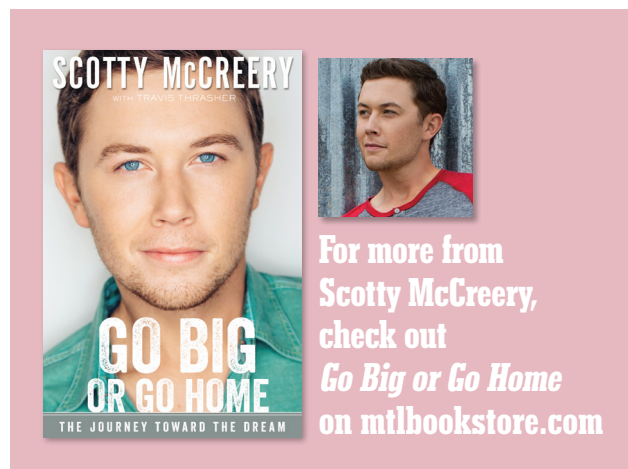
Hope. A future.

These words encouraged me from a very young age. And even years later, I continue to remind myself that God has plans, and they’re good ones.

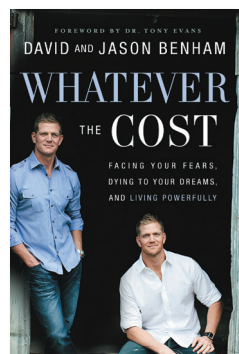
I know that God is always there and always with me, whether I’m singing on a stage, pitching in a baseball game, or hanging out with my family and friends. That gives me a confidence that can’t be taken away by anything else. My faith allows me to know fully who I am. I think the public

appreciates that honesty. There’s not a “music celebrity Scotty” and a “private life Scotty”—there’s just Scotty. I am who I am. I base every decision through my faith.

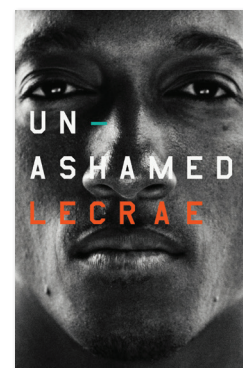
I also have to remain strong and remember the values I’ve grown up learning about my whole life. Like the warning from my favorite Josh Turner song: “Watch out, brother, for that long black train.”



Related Products:



Whatever the Cost
David & Jason Benham,
\$22.99



Unashamed
Lecrae, \$24.99



Laughing in the Dark
Chonda Pierce, \$16.99