

# DO IT ANYWAY



Don't Give Up Before It Gets Good



Foreword by  
Sarah Jakes  
Roberts

*Tasha Cobbs Leonard*

Grammy Award Winner and *Billboard's* Top Gospel Artist of the Decade

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*Tasha Cobbs Leonard*

with Travis Thrasher



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Never Gave Up

Written by Tasha Cobbs Leonard and Kenneth Leonard, Jr.

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Written by Tasha Cobbs Leonard

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*To my father, Bishop Fritz Cobbs,  
for the invaluable lesson you've taught me  
to stay at the feet of Jesus.*

## FOREWORD

When I was growing up in church, Resurrection Sunday was the one Sunday of the year we could count on the church being jam-packed. Everyone from regular church attendees to those who make their annual appearance files through the doors to celebrate that Jesus rose from the grave. Everyone came dressed in their Sunday best to marvel at speeches, sermons, and productions that praise the hallmark of our faith. Less packed were the Good Friday services, where we gathered to acknowledge the pain and suffering that was paid for our salvation.

It's not unique to Christians to give more attention to moments of victory than those of suffering. All of humanity knows a thing or two about burying pain with smiles, performance, and servitude. A person is rarely willing to break open their soul for the world to see the pain behind the gain, but when they do, it makes us all feel less alone. I wasn't sure I could ever experience that in spaces of faith. Too often, we are lauded for our ability to hide our truth and pretend we're fine when we're in pain, but I didn't experience that with Tasha.

Like many of you, I was looking on from the outside as her anointing ascended to unprecedented heights. It was undeniable that she'd been called to bridge the gaps that kept

communities of faith divided. A multicultural grace that translated regardless of denomination or race is too unusual to ignore. There was no doubt that God was giving her the wind to take the world by storm.

So many in her position would have allowed the impact to speak on their behalf, but not Tasha. Whenever our paths crossed, she dared to give voice to the storm. She told me once that she never wanted to be guilty of taking glory that she knew belonged to God. Tasha shared with me the anointing and the scars. She allowed me to see that the oil that moved a room came from her wounds.

I thought she was being a good friend to another woman in ministry, but then I attended an event she hosted for creatives in ministry. I learned that she is not just a good friend; she's a leader on a mission to empower every person she encounters to accomplish their destiny anyway. With each turn of a page, you will realize that this is not just Tasha's story, but it's yours and mine too.

If she could step in the ring and fight your battle for you, she would suit up without thinking twice—I know her heart. But this confrontation is for your destiny, and you are the only one who can render it impotent. So she's done the next best thing. Tasha has done the work of retracing her steps so that you can be led forward with the same level of faith and determination that helped Jesus complete His assignment. You'll find this book as a companion for every season and stage of your life, and though I may be a little biased, I have to say that you truly could not have a more experienced or compassionate coach in your corner.

—Sarah Jakes Roberts, bestselling author of *Woman Evolve*

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## PROLOGUE

There are moments in life when we have to live out the message we say we believe, and those moments usually come when we least expect them. For years, I had been preaching and singing that God is the God of peace, that He's the God who silences the chaos in our lives. But at the start of 2014, after a record-setting "Break Every Chain" year, I found myself suffering through the worst pain I had ever experienced in my life. And I had to do it as the world watched.

On January 18, 2014, I arrived at the Stellar Gospel Music Awards with joy and disbelief. I was still digesting how I had gotten there—and why me? I had seven Stellar nominations and the opportunity to lead worship from the Stellar stage! This was gospel music's biggest night, and for the first time, I wasn't watching from my living room couch. I was a living, breathing, and singing example of Ephesians 3:20:

God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.



I was riding an unbelievable wave that had started almost a year before when *Grace*, my first album with a label, released. It made the top-ten list of *Billboard's* Top Gospel Albums and remained there all year. "Break Every Chain" was on this album, and it was now played and sung all over the world. The week after the Stellars, I was heading to the Grammys, where I had two nominations.

*Oh my goodness, everything is moving so fast, I thought. This has to be God.*

When they announced the New Artist of the Year and called my name, it was extra special because my dad was there! When he told me earlier that week that he was coming with my mom to the awards show, I was speechless. *Daddy's gonna actually miss a church service?*

Bishop Fritz Cobbs had been a pastor since I was ten years old. We all understood the assignment our family had to Jesusup New Life Ministries and the Wayne County community, so I never pressed him to miss a Sunday morning service. I could probably count on one hand how many Daddy had missed in his life. Even our vacations would be scheduled around Sundays. But he put that aside to be with me on this night.

As I took the stage, I could truly sense God in the room. I'm always so grateful for His presence. What a privilege and an honor! Every time I stand to minister, my desire is always God's presence. We're nothing without *Him*! As I sang "Break Every Chain" under the spotlight, I could feel His strength resting on me.

After I picked up three awards, including New Artist of the Year, a group of us called an impromptu celebration in the suite of William Murphy, my pastor and mentor at the

time. I called my father, saying, “Hey, Daddy. We’re hanging out in Pastor Murphy’s room. If y’all want to come up, let me know.” It was nearly one in the morning, so the chance of my parents joining us was very low (actually nonexistent).

“We’ll be there in a few minutes,” he responded.

*He said yes?*

Once again, I couldn’t believe it! My parents weren’t the hang-out types, so this was another big deal. This special time with them meant more to me than any award or applause. On this night of celebration, they ventured out and we had a ball! My dad was a man of few words, but when something witty came to him, I’d put him up against any comedian. He was hilarious. If preaching didn’t work out, he could easily fall back on stand-up. I was expecting security to knock on the door any second to ask us to keep down the noise because Daddy had us screaming with laughter until three in the morning, talking about everything. Pastor Murphy was rolling on the floor in tears.

When I finally walked my parents toward the elevator, they were both beaming with pride from witnessing all that God was doing. I snapped a photo of my father standing at the elevator, holding one of my Stellar Awards in his hand and grinning with youthful glee. That trophy was my gift of thanks to them for the many sacrifices they made so that my brother and I would want for nothing. Daddy had built a special curio cabinet to house and display my awards.

Just before he stepped into the elevator, this man of very few words said something he always told me: “Daddy loves you, baby.” He gave me a kiss on my cheek, and then the elevator doors closed. My parents were leaving the next morning.

That was the last time I would ever see and speak to my father. None of us could have imagined that God would call him to his eternal home the following day.

Over the years, Daddy had given me invaluable gifts: a rich faith in Jesus, a strong work ethic, a heart for ministry, and many more, including the mentality and grit to live out the message we Christians say we believe, especially when we don't want to. The moments when all that seems left to do is surrender to our circumstances are precisely the moments when we must press on and do the hard thing. To follow God when the way seems impossible, persevere in faith even when the odds are stacked—this is what it means to “do it anyway.”

I've had years of thinking on this principle and putting it into practice, and I know for certain now that my dad was right—because on the other side of endurance is breakthrough and transformation. This one lesson has changed my life in amazing ways time and time again. And I think it will do the same for you.

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## IN LIFE-CHANGING MOMENTS

“Tasha, you gotta sing,” the choir told me. I stood in the fellowship hall of Bennett Union Baptist Church in my hometown of Jesup, Georgia, surrounded by a room full of teenagers looking at me to be the remedy to our problem. Preston, our lead singer, had gotten in a car wreck. He was fine but wasn’t going to make it to our performance. We needed someone to take the lead.

We were part of a community choir, Sounds of Harmony, formed by a group of us teenagers just a few weeks prior. We had decided to do this performance on a whim; invitations were extended by word of mouth through the corridors of Wayne County High School. Before we knew it, the choir had grown to nearly forty people and was loaded with talent: singers, keyboardists, organists, drummers, dancers, you name it! I had been entrusted with the assignment to direct the choir. My job consisted of teaching parts, perfecting arrangements, and giving direction during the performance. I loved my role! But me as the lead singer? Uh-uh. No way.

“What are y’all talking about?” I said. “I can’t lead this song. I’ll *direct* it, but we’ll have to find someone else to lead!”

The last time I had performed in front of a crowd had been in grade school when I sang Whitney Houston’s “Greatest Love of All” at my cousin’s kindergarten graduation. In my opinion, that was a “kiddie” performance I had buried deep in the sea of the forgotten. I was completely perplexed as to why the group members were asking me to sing lead, but they remained persistent. I eventually agreed. Somebody needed to step up and do it.

The church sanctuary was packed with around two hundred people. Our concerts had become a big deal in our community. These encounters provided an outlet for worship and entertainment on nights that normally would have been spent watching reruns on TV or talking on the phone to pass the time. There wasn’t much else to do! There were so many students in our choir, and often their entire families came out to enjoy the concert and support them.

The song I was being pressured to lead was “Now Behold the Lamb,” written by Kirk Franklin and originally led by Tamela Mann. The mere fact that this was a Tamela Mann song was an intimidating thought. Her voice is packed with power, authority, and precision. Our group sang a lot of songs written by Kirk Franklin; I’d venture to say we sang his whole collection, top to bottom!

I stood in front of our choir and the congregation as the music began to play, closed my eyes, and belted out, “Now behold the Lamb, the precious Lamb of God.”<sup>1</sup>

With my eyes tightly shut, I lifted my voice. It felt as natural as breathing. I always knew I could sing, but I didn’t

believe that it was my calling. Failing in front of others was a big fear for me. But I simply let go of that apprehension and sang the song, even in the face of fear. It didn't feel like a performance; it felt like purpose!

I'd never dreamed of being the one in the spotlight. I had been extremely comfortable with my background roles. But this moment revealed both to me and those in the room that there was more in me I needed to discover!

When I opened my eyes at the end of the song, I saw a room overwhelmed by God's presence. People were bowing. Hands were lifted. Faces were full of tears. I looked over at my parents, locking eyes. I believe we all knew this would be the beginning of a journey destined by God.

But I felt confused. *What is happening here?*

I had been in many church services where the presence of God could be felt in a tangible way. I had sung in choirs my entire life. I had played the keyboard for many revivals and church gatherings. But this was different. This response didn't come from a crowd simply wowed by a good voice. This was more than that.

This was an anointing.

It felt like God had just opened a door and I walked right through it. I knew He was leading me to my purpose. I glanced over at my parents once again, and their expressions mirrored what I was feeling. *This is something special.*

This moment—this precious moment singing about the Lamb of God—was something we needed to stay in. We could not move from that moment. For a while after the song, people remained in worship.

I realized then that God had entrusted me with a special

gift, a gift that was greater than I could've imagined. Now I needed to take the gift and do His work with it.

I believe we all have gifts that are waiting to be unlocked with a simple yes. Sometimes the gift lies dormant until we awaken it. This can occur after a long season, but it can also come from a single experience. Our yes may come from a challenging moment or from one of insight where we suddenly have a glimpse of what really lies within us. Or maybe the yes is a reluctant acceptance of our gift because of the push of others; we need to pay more attention to the talents people see in us.

\* \* \*

My childhood memories often come with a soundtrack. Songs were always being sung, whether it was by me or someone else in my family. Everybody on my mother's side loved to sing—my aunts, my cousins. On Christmas and other holidays when everybody gathered, we would all sing. We called ourselves the Jacksons of Georgia. So even though music was part of my life growing up, I was not the “chosen” singer in our family. If anybody would have been expected to have a musical career, it would have been Quita and Tesha, two of my cousins.

Quita and Tesha attended the same church that I did. Back then, it wasn't typical for churches to have multiple choirs, but our church had four: the senior choir, the adult choir, a teen choir, and a youth choir. Aunt Charlene, one of my mother's sisters, led all of them, so naturally it made sense that her daughters were musically gifted. My cousins had gorgeous voices then as well as now.



We loved to have church no matter where we were. At school, we gathered in the hall, singing church songs between classes:

*I get joy when I think about what he's done for me.<sup>2</sup>*

*This is the day that the Lord has made;  
we will rejoice and be glad in it.<sup>3</sup>*

*Living, He loved me; dying, He saved me;  
Buried, He carried my sins far away.  
Rising, He justified freely forever:  
One day He's coming—oh, glorious day!<sup>4</sup>*

My aunt Linda was a history teacher whose classroom was located near where we'd gather in the hall. It never failed: She would hustle out into the hallway and disrupt our "church service" to scold us for being out of order. She would quote her translation of Ecclesiastes 3:1: "There is a time and a place for everything under the sun," she told us. "But this is *not* a church house—this is a schoolhouse!"

We would scurry out of the hallway with laughter and joy. We knew that she loved to hear us praising God, because it was what she and so many others had trained us to do. And our worship made an impact on the other students around us. We witnessed students being saved and converted because of our decision to be loud about our faith. We just couldn't help ourselves.

People knew I could sing. But here's a little-known fact that I'm sure you didn't know: I was a baller. That's right—I

was the captain of our basketball team. Sports were a big deal in our family, and I loved being part of a team sport. I believe the lessons I learned from team sports play a vital role in my being the leader I am today.

Many of the girls on our basketball team were also a part of our community choir, so, of course, we had worship on the bus while riding to games. We all believe that Coach Daniels, who also grew up in our family church, secretly awaited our bus church services, even though she never showed it.

So, yes—a singer, a basketball player, and a pastor’s kid. Being a PK meant that I did whatever my hands could find to do in ministry. I filled whatever need popped up: “Sure, I’ll play the keyboard.” “I’ll teach Sunday school.” “I’ll clean the church.” I would do anything.

But lead singing? It just wasn’t a role I played until this one mind-blowing night. Everything changed after that evening when I sang “Now Behold the Lamb.” There was a monumental shift. I started leading more and began to really cultivate my gift of singing.

\* \* \*

Church has always been part of my life, and so has working hard. Before my father started his own congregation, we belonged to my mother’s family church. For years, Daddy worked a career job at Rayonier paper mill in Jesup. It was only when I was in middle school that he left his job at the mill to go full-time in the ministry. My dad went through the ranks of church assignments, starting out as a brother and then becoming a deacon, a minister, an elder, the assistant

pastor, and eventually the pastor and bishop. He was serious about God's church: very committed, always forging forward, always being an example to me, my brother, and so many others.

Dad was born in Screven, Georgia, a small town about fifteen minutes outside of Jesup. Once reaching middle school age, all the kids who lived in Screven were bused over to Jesup for school. That's where he met my mother, Bertha Lockley, when she was thirteen years old. Soon after, the two started dating, and they remained together for thirty-eight years of marriage.

My father spent many long days at the church, but one of his creative outlets was building. He was a carpenter, just like Jesus! He loved to work on projects, and many of them he engineered himself. It was nothing for us to come home and see new additions to the house that Dad had just built. "I'm going to turn the garage into a sunroom," he told us one afternoon before starting to work on it. That's exactly what he did: He renovated our garage and made it into a beautiful sunroom for our family to enjoy, and then he built an additional garage onto our house. Even when he wasn't working at church, he was constantly working on something. That hard-work ethic was something I grew up watching and later found myself practicing, which I believe helped me cultivate my gifts.

Many people have shared that when they hear me sing, they feel they are experiencing a mixture of preaching and singing. I agree. After ministering at Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, Pastor Joel Osteen rushed onto the stage, grabbed my hand, and stated, "It's like you're singing and prophesying all at the same time."

Led by the Spirit and after realizing the gifts God had given me, my dad tried even harder to foster the communicator in me. So instead of focusing on having me sing, he would put me up to preach. “I want you to teach this class,” he would say. He saw that I had the gift of singing, but his actions revealed that he knew there was something more important, more foundational to cultivate. I can imagine what was going through his mind at the time: *I need you to have a foundation assured, Tasha. I need you to know the Word of God. I need you to know how to articulate and communicate it well so that when these doors open, you’re not just singing songs but you have a revelation about what you’re singing.* He knew that doors were going to swing open one day, so he pushed my character and my relationship with Christ.

“Baby, you really have to stay at the feet of Jesus now,” Daddy told me. “God is up to something special.”

Of course, I didn’t realize all that at the time. I didn’t understand what he was doing and why he was pushing me into leadership in the church. But he was showing me the things that I walk out now in my life. Even after I found success in the music industry and signed to a label and was winning awards, he always had the same message.

I would call him and say, “Hey, Daddy, there are going to be thousands at the concert tonight.”

“Do good, baby,” he’d reply. “Talk to you later. Stay at the feet of Jesus.”

In the same breath, I could tell him I was preaching at a small church up the street and that would excite him even more than my singing at the White House. He realized that knowing God’s Word would keep me grounded.

\* \* \*

My dad wasn't the only person who knew those doors would one day open for me. Perhaps even more than him, it was my mom who believed in the anointing God had put on my life.

Because she grew up attending a Pentecostal church, where oftentimes there was lots of celebration and dancing, my mother would always be the one in tears. She was an intense worshipper. During the praise moments, she would be crying with her hands lifted to the heavens. Even though doing so wasn't very popular in the church that I grew up in, she was passionate in her worship. She had a job for thirty-eight years working at Fort Stewart, a military base in Hinesville, Georgia. Sometimes once she got home, my mother would just sit in her car in the garage and weep while singing and listening to worship songs.

After my experience of singing in front of the choir, Mom came in one day and revealed what she had just seen from God. "Tasha, the Lord just showed me your name in lights," she said with eyes full of emotion and tears streaking down her face. "He told me that people will know your name before they know your face."

I wasn't sure how to respond. My mind said, *Okay, that's crazy*, while my heart said that I believed her. Mom was the one who decided to act on my talents.

That moment when I received my first Grammy, people knew my name and knew the song, but for many, that was their first time seeing my face. It wasn't until I mounted the stage, adorned in an electric-blue ensemble that demanded attention, that people realized, *Oh, she's the one who sings*

*“Break Every Chain.”* Mama knew doors would open, so she acted on that revelation and began to prepare me, as well. My mother believed in my eighteen-year-old self so much that she became my “momager” and began to drive me up and down the coast to sing at churches and events.

Back then, she had a white Toyota Sequoia, one of those oversized SUVs that could fit eight or nine passengers. (I believe sometimes we would squeeze in about ten.) Mama would drive me and some of the same teens from Sounds of Harmony choir to churches that invited me to come. Bubba, Ramon, Paul, and Shamar became my personal musicians. My cousins Tesha, Shania, and Asha would sing background as we performed at churches on the East Coast, going between Jacksonville and Orlando in Florida, and from Savannah to the Carolinas. My mom would pack little snacks and sandwiches and drinks in the Sequoia, and then off we would go.

My parents believed in me so much that they spent their money helping me make demos. I created a demo of the CeCe Winans song “Alabaster Box,” and we sold it everywhere we went. People were buying it. It was a big deal on the East Coast!

\* \* \*

If you can’t tell by now, my parents were gung ho about their kids. They were going to do everything in their power to make things happen for us. They had seen God’s hand on my life and wanted to prepare a way for my future in bringing our worship to many others. But they also wanted to teach me some valuable lessons that would train me for the rest of my life.

When I think back to my mom driving eight and nine hours in a car with all of us aggravating kids, it's obvious that she believed in us. She showed me the value of hard work, which is one of those foundational principles my parents laid down for me that I live by still today. It feels so old-school: riding in a car from venue to venue, performing songs, and gaining fans one at a time. The rise of social media and overnight pop sensations has changed the musical scene. But what I saw was that hard work and long hours and persistence pay off.

The other foundation—the most important one—was the foundation of family, the value of home. Yes, ministering God's Word and seeing lives changed is an amazing thing, but when it's all said and done, family has to come first. And if I can't minister to my family, I can't minister to anybody. That's what Mama and Daddy were teaching me as they poured into my life. It starts at home with your family. It starts with knowing what your faith means to you. And then you walk it out through hard work, prayer, and commitment.

Just recently, I was asked what advice I would give to an up-and-coming talent. That type of inquiry is always challenging for me because people truly want a cookie-cutter answer. The truth is, there is no magical formula. My response was, first, change your desire. Don't desire to be a rising star; desire to be the best you are called to be today! If that's singing in the community choir, do it with heart and passion. If that's teaching a Vacation Bible School class, make it so your students never want to leave. If that's ferrying your kids to and from activities, find a way to influence them in a positive way. If that's coaching a loud and wonderful basketball team,

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lead the players with energy and excitement. Each step on the journey of life is an important one.

There are no wasted steps. Overcoming my fear of having to lead a song in my teen choir was possibly one of the most vital steps toward my Grammy win. But even more important than that, it propelled me in finding God's purpose for my life. After we uncover those gifts that God has placed inside us, we need to unveil them to the rest of the world!

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Ask yourself if there is something you've been wanting to try but have held yourself back from based on a preconceived idea of your limitations. Sometimes you will never learn what you are capable of until you allow yourself space and grace to test your skills. Our greatest gifts and talents are realized just beyond our comfort zones. Pray and invite God to help you dream and envision what your future may be like if you overcame this limiting fear.

Don't let your comfort zone and preconceived limitations stop you from finding your God-given potential; do it anyway.



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