Bob: As a teenager, Tyler Trent was diagnosed with bone cancer; and for a while, it appeared he had beaten it; but Tyler’s dad Tony says that’s when they got a second diagnosis.

Tony: We had gone through almost 18 months of remission, and life started to get back to normal again. And voila!—it happened again. I was really angry with God. I could not understand why God was asking my family to go through this again; and it took me a while to work through that. I couldn’t sing praise songs; I couldn’t pray; I didn’t want to go to church; I did, but I didn’t want to go; I would go, and I just felt like I was just there. I didn’t really participate or worship the Lord.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, January 9th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. We’re going to hear today about the very difficult path that God put Tony and Kelly Trent on with their son, Tyler, and about the upset that the whole family was praying for. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. You know, I think all of us can remember times in the last 20/30 years when, in professional sports and college sports, there have been moments, where athletes/coaches: all of a sudden, God gets put on display.

I’m thinking about Tim Tebow’s eye-black, and the verses he would put on there, or about—I go all the way back to the greatest comeback in NFL history, when Frank Wright, as the substitute quarterback, and after he had led this comeback—and afterwards they said, “Tell us about the comeback.” He said, “My source of strength is Christ alone.”

We’ve all seen those moments; and at home, we’re cheering; right?—when in the glory of a sporting event, somebody says, “There is something much bigger going on here.” That’s pretty exciting; isn’t it?”

Dave: You know, Bob, when you bring that up, I was never sitting at home watching those games. I was always on a sideline; and that’s exactly what happened when Mike Utley got paralyzed/when Reggie Brown got paralyzed. In the Silverdome, the entire
stadium goes hush. I’m on the field, praying for a man to be able to walk again. You look up, and the entire stadium is praying—agnostics/atheists are praying!

In one second, you realize: “This is a game. What’s happened here is life and death,”—it is so much more important; and there is a belief in a God, who is control of both of those hanging in the balance. That’s one of the things that I love about sport—is it can transcend almost anything and take people’s lives to something that really matters.

**Bob:** There was a Saturday in 2018 when—it was one of those moments, as folks were settling in to watch a college football game, and all of a sudden, we got a story shared with us about one of the biggest fans that the Purdue Boilermaker football team has ever had—a guy named Tyler Trent. We’re going to hear that story and meet Tyler’s parents, who are joining us today.

Tony and Kelly Trent, welcome to *FamilyLife Today*, guys.

**Tony:** Thanks for having us. It’s a real honor and a privilege to be here.

**Kelly:** Yes; thank you.

**Bob:** Your journey—hard journey—that God has had you on over the last—it’s been a five-year/six-year journey for you?

**Tony:** Yes.

**Bob:** —a journey that, looking back, you would have prayed for it to resolve itself differently. Yet, God did some amazing things through the short life of your son, Tyler. Introduce us to Tyler as a kid, growing up. He was smart; he was—what was his nickname? What did they call him?

**Kelly:** Smiley.

**Bob:** Smiley.

**Kelly:** Yes.

**Bob:** Everybody liked Tyler; didn’t they?

**Kelly:** Yes. So, Tyler is our firstborn. He was a really easy kid—such a joy to parent. In 9th grade, I had two teachers come to me and say: “I can’t wait to see what Tyler does. He’s made for big things.” I’m just thinking, “He’s just our child; he’s just normal to me.”

**Bob:** Right.

**Kelly:** But he was a joy.
**Bob:** He was really on top—read books a lot and could pull arcane facts from almost anywhere; right?

**Tony:** Yes; he had an incredibly gifted mind. Usually, when kids are really intellectually smart, they can’t either communicate verbally or written; and he could do both. He had a real mind for statistics and analytical things and read lots of books. I mean, he told me one time that he thought he read a hundred books a the summer. I think it was a little exaggerated. [Laughter] He was listening to podcasts or books all the time

Just to add to what Kelly was sharing—he was, from a young age—you could just tell there was something special about Tyler in that—he always wanted to hang out with adults and always wanted to be a part of adult conversations. We’d encourage him: “Hey, Tyler, go play with your friends.” He just wanted to sit around the dinner table and have conversations with adults. I think, to some degree, he thought it was a little juvenile to do the things that the kids were doing; and he was thinking at a higher capacity, if you will—accepted Jesus at a young age and would do quiet times at a young age. It was just something extraordinary for sure.

**Dave:** Yet, you know, he wants to be with adults because he is mature; but he’s really—all the kids loved him; right?

**Tony:** Oh, yes; he had a gift of leadership. I told him—I said, “Tyler, you’re another Billy Graham; your story looks different.”

**Bob:** Here is something you don’t hear often: A kid who reads a hundred books a summer also loves football. [Laughter] I mean, those don’t typically go together.

**Kelly:** No.

**Bob:** It’s either one or the other. When did you recognize he first loved football?

**Tony:** When he was a little kid.

**Kelly:** Day one. [Laughter]

**Tony:** He loved all sports; you know? He loved basketball, too; but—

**Bob:** I don’t mean to be disrespectful at all; but you live in Indiana, and basketball is big in Indiana. [Laughter] How did Tyler become a **Purdue** football fan?

**Tony:** Like I said, he loved all sports; and he actually was a writer for the campus newspaper called the **Purdue Exponent**. I think it was—the timing of his sickness—I tell people: “It was like Purdue football wasn’t great. We just had a new coach, Coach Brohm, that year; and Tyler needed Purdue football, and Purdue football needed Tyler.”
One thing about Tyler’s personality was that, when he committed to something, he was all in. There was nothing you’re going to do to stop him. When he committed to Purdue, he was all-in being a Purdue fan.

Ann: Talk to us and tell us about the time the diagnosis came. What happened?

Kelly: So, Tyler always had plans—like he was always—like he had something coming, whether it was leadership camp, or missions’ trips, or whatever it was; and that summer, he was having problems shooting the basketball.

We went home to Tony’s parents for the Fourth of July, which we always did. My sister-in-law said, “Something is wrong with Tyler.” I was like, “What do you mean?” She’s like, “He is so thin.” I’m thinking, “Puberty,”—like I didn’t even—it didn’t register with me.

I told him—that was July 4th, and he had a trip the next day. I said, “No matter what time you get home that night, we are going to the doctor the next morning.” We did, and we went to a walk-in sports clinic. He came back from his x-ray and said, “I heard the nurse say, ‘This isn’t good.’” Then the doctor walked in; and he is like shaking his head and looking at the scan, and circling it; you know? He’s like, “This shouldn’t be here.” Within—what?—six hours, he was diagnosed.

Bob: What was the diagnosis, Tony?

Tony: It was osteosarcoma, which is bone cancer. You know, it’s one of those situations, where our family was healthy. We’re really active; we went hiking and biking, and had all kinds of fun things, and never was unhealthy. You never dreamt that something like this would happen.

Bob: I’m a default optimist. I would hear something like this; and I would think: “Okay; there may be chemo/radiation, but this—we’ll figure out how to do this. Medical science is good; they can do these kinds of things.” Is that where you were?

Tony: Yes; first of all, we was just trying to grasp what it meant for a kid to have cancer.

Bob: Yes.

Tony: I remember the moment, where I was at. Kelly calls me and says, “The doctors are saying Tyler has cancer.” I’ll never forget looking at Kelly’s face. She pulled up in the driveway, and I hugged her. Yes; it’s—it’s—it’s forever ingrained in my mind. Then you just try to understand and work through: “How do you tell your family that your child has cancer?”

We took a couple days to pray about it and think about it, and God led me to Psalms 103. It says this—it says:
Praise the Lord, O my soul: and all my inmost being, praise His holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all of your sins and heals all of your diseases; who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion; who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the people of Israel.

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse: nor will He harbor His anger forever. He does not treat us as the sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed the transgressions from us.

As a father has compassion on His children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows how we are formed; He remembers that we are dust.

I—after I completed reading that, I challenged my family—not knowing that this is really what it would look like—I challenged my family that, regardless of what happened, we would bring honor and glory to God’s name. We look back on the journey—it’s been a journey that no parent would ever want to go through, but we still see God’s goodness and grace and mercy in all of it.

**Bob:** How did Tyler process?

**Kelly:** So, the morning that we actually/that Tony read that and we told him, he had been doing a quiet time. He was in Thessalonians 5:16-18, where it talks about “Rejoice always; pray continually; give thanks in all things.” He literally looked at us and said, “Well, I think I was meant to be reading this this morning. Like, this is for me.”

However, while I think he started off really strong—and we had amazing support from our church; we still do—but about three or four months into it, he really started to struggle.

**Bob:** He is going through chemo at this point?

**Kelly:** Yes.

**Bob:** And—
Dave: Is chemo weekly, daily—what?

Kelly: Weekly.

Dave: Yes; yes.

Kelly: I probably spent more time in the hospital than I did at home. It was in-patient. Osteosarcoma—they haven’t had new treatment for over 35 years—like there is one way to treat it. They say, “It’s either successful, or it’s not.” We spent a lot of time in the hospital.

I just think he was such a leader at school, and he had so many friends; so to be removed from all of that, for that much time, really got to him, mentally.

Dave: Yes; you write in the book, where he—

Kelly: —he was suicidal.

Dave: —got really depressed.

Bob: We have him describing what it was like during that time. Are you okay if we play—

Kelly: Absolutely.

Bob: —Tyler talking about it?

[Previously Recorded]

Tyler: You know, when I was first diagnosed, I was 15 years old. You know, I was very immature, I would say. I entered a state of depression—of questioning God and asking the questions of: “Hey, am I ever going to be able to throw a football with my kid one day?”—because of the way osteosarcoma works is—before they had any treatments, they’d just amputate your arm; they’d just get rid of the tumor. They had told me that; that’s scary for a 15-year-old.

There was a lot of: “Am I going to live? Am I going to die?” I entered a state of deep depression because of that. Basically, I had to decide, in my mind, that I was either going to kill myself or the cancer was. I actually tried a couple of times and, by the grace of God, did not succeed.

[Studio]
Bob: Listening to him describe that, and hearing him say, “I was pretty immature, at the time,” I’m thinking, “You sound remarkably mature for a 15-year-old young man, processing life-and-death issues.”

But as parents—when your son is discouraged and depressed, and thinking, “What am I living for?”—Mary Ann and I said to each other, at one point, when we were raising our kids: “I would rather you suffer than any of our kids suffer,”—not that you wish anything on anybody—but “I’d rather me suffer first/second you, before any of our kids have to suffer.” For parents, to watch your kids go through this—

Ann: It’s our greatest fear, and you were walking through, probably, your greatest fear.

Kelly: Well, it’s not natural.

Ann: Exactly.

Kelly: Yes.

Tony: Yes; it was—I told him, all the time—I said, “Tyler, I would take this from you in a heartbeat.”

Dave: Yes.

Tony: He said, “Dad, you don’t want it,”—just the kind of kid Tyler was. I mean, he was—I mean, he always was trying to protect Kelly and [me].

When you go through something like this, it’s extremely difficult. I mean, it’s—I share all the time that: “My son had cancer. He had the physical cancer; but my family got cancer, too. It was like a bomb went off in my house in that—there wasn’t a big boom, and there wasn’t shrapnel that came from the bomb—but the shrapnel was dealing with life, and the sound is the crying of your family.”

Having your child, Tyler, lying flat on the floor—and crying and banging his foot or his hand on the floor; and the other boys’ crying, and Kelly trying to help them—and I’m stuck with like being a deer [looking at headlights] in my eyes—praying to God to help me to make/to lead my family because I don’t know what to do.

It’s a hard journey that Kelly and I, and Tyler as well—we don’t want anybody else to have to go through with it; so part of the passion is to try to help find a cure.

Ann: So, your entire family is grieving—Tyler is grieving; you guys are grieving; and you have two other sons. What was their response, and how did you deal with that?

Kelly: Blake writes a chapter in the book—it’s called “Harsh Realities.” He went through a really, really hard time his 10th and 11th grade years. Ethan just likes to keep busy and
distracted, and he doesn’t want to think about it. So, yes, we’re working through those things; but by the grace of God, Blake is thriving today; he is doing beautifully.

**Bob:** Kelly, do you think some of what had him spiral out—I mean, certainly the grief and the trauma—but Tyler is demanding all of your focus and attention; and here is a young man, in the middle of adolescence, and Mom and Dad have to be occupied elsewhere?

**Kelly:** Well, right; and if you can imagine, I was homeschooling at the time. Ethan was in 4th grade; Blake was in 8th; Tyler was in 10th. I was hardly there—I have beautiful friends that helped me, but it wasn’t Mom.

**Bob:** They had to feel abandoned—

**Kelly:** Right.

**Tony:** Yes.

**Bob:** —not that you had anything else you could be doing.

**Kelly:** Oh, no. Yes/no; I agree.

**Dave:** Can you tell us what your walk and your relationship with God was like as you were walking through this darkness?

**Tony:** So, the first time that Tyler got sick—it was actually really good, I think. Kelly and I were working really well together. We had so many people praying for us. I tell people that I had an extraordinary experience with just the presence of the Lord in my heart and in my soul. It was really something I never experienced in my life before. It felt like, a little bit of, heaven to be honest with you. It was just a small glimpse of what heaven—the peace of heaven might feel like.

The first time, it was good. We had gone through almost 18 months of remission, and life started to get back to normal again. And voila!—it happened again, and I was really angry with God. I could not understand why God was asking my family to go through this again, and it took me a while to work through that. I couldn’t sing praise songs; I couldn’t pray; I didn’t want to go to church; I did, but I didn’t want to go; I would go, and I would just—felt like I was just there. I didn’t really participate or worship the Lord.

**Bob:** At the same time, Tyler had almost a completely different perspective—

**Tony:** Yes; he did!

**Bob:** —on the second occurrence than you had. In fact, we’ve got a clip of him talking about what happened with him when he found out that his cancer was back.
Tyler: I was really hard on myself because I felt like I hadn't really used my story for the Lord’s glory. I felt like I could have done more with my cancer to glorify the Lord. I went through some really dark patches. I lost—ruined a lot of relationships/lost a lot of friends because of just how I dealt with things. I was really hard on myself, and I felt like I just hadn't done enough.

So, when I was diagnosed for a second time, I felt like it was the Lord really pushing me to turn the whole struggle over to Him and just use it for His glory.

Tony: So, that’s when the second time rolled around. Tyler really grabbed a hold of the verse that Kelly mentioned earlier—that 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 verse, where it says, “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances”—which is what Tyler did so well—“for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” He truly believed, I think, in his heart, that this was the journey that God put on Tyler’s heart and what Tyler’s life was meant for.

Bob: The next two years would be incredibly difficult, physically, for him/for you; and yet, some amazing things happened. That’s what we’ll get a chance to hear from you guys about this week.

I want to encourage listeners—we’ve got copies of the book that Tyler wrote. He sat down and talked with a writer before he died, shared his story; and so, this book, *The Upset: Life (Sports), Death…and the Legacy We Leave in the Middle*—it’s his story, in his words, told to John Driver.

We’ve got copies of the book in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center. It’s a remarkable book. You can order it from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. Again, the title is *The Upset: Life (Sports), Death…and the Legacy We Leave in the Middle* by Tyler Trent. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com to order or call 1-800-FL-TODAY. Again, the website: FamilyLifeToday.com; or call 1-800-FL-TODAY for more information on the book, *The Upset*, by Tyler Trent.

Let me just mention, as well, while you’re on our website, there is information about the new video series that Dave and Ann Wilson have put together for married couples that’s called *Vertical Marriage*. It’s a five-session series that is designed for small group or for Sunday school classes to look at how your marriage can go vertical—how you can keep looking to God to direct your marriage. That series is now available. You can find out more when you go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com.
Then one final thing we want to let you know about—and that is the special offer we are making to FamilyLife Today listeners because we’d love for you to be more actively involved in reading and studying God’s Word in 2020. We’ve talked to our friends at Logos Bible Software, and we are making available to you a free download of their Bible software, together with a library of more than $2,000 worth of books and resources. There are commentaries, and classics, and different versions of the Bible available.

I know you are thinking, “So what’s the catch?” The catch is—we hope you’ll spend more time in God’s Word in 2020. The folks at Logos are hoping you’ll want to add to your library once you get the software; but as soon as you download it, you can start off, right away, exploring what this powerful tool can do. With the resources that are available, you can dig right into God’s Word and have some great tools you can use for Bible study.

Again, the software is free. Go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com, and click on the link that will take you to the download site. You can start using this software immediately—not only on your computer—but it’s available for your mobile device, for your tablet. It’s a great software system; and it’s our gift to you as we begin the new year together. Download it when you go to FamilyLifeToday.com and click the link for Logos Bible Software.

Then I hope you can be back with us, again, tomorrow when we’re going to continue to hear about Tyler Trent’s battle against bone cancer and about the upset that he predicted that nobody believed would really happen—that his Purdue Boilermakers would beat Ohio State in football. We’ll hear the whole story when you join us back tomorrow.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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