

A TASTE TEST OF

What To Do When Your Dreams Are Shattered
and Life Is Falling Apart

H A N G
O N ,
L E T
G O

F R A N K V I O L A

A U T H O R O F *I N S U R G E N C E*

HANG ON, LET GO

A TASTE TEST OF

What To Do When Your Dreams Are Shattered
and Life Is Falling Apart

H A N G
O N,
L E T
G O

FRANK VIOLA



The Tyndale nonfiction imprint

Visit Tyndale online at tyndale.com.

Visit Tyndale Momentum online at tyndalemomentum.com.

For supplemental resources and a course that dives deeper into the content of *Hang On, Let Go*, visit HangOnLetGo.com.

TYNDALE, Tyndale's quill logo, *Tyndale Momentum*, and the Tyndale Momentum logo are registered trademarks of Tyndale House Ministries. Tyndale Momentum is the nonfiction imprint of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois.

Hang On, Let Go: What to Do When Your Dreams Are Shattered and Life Is Falling Apart

Copyright © 2021 by Frank Viola. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of burnt paper copyright © happyfoto/iStockphoto. All rights reserved.

Cover photograph of clouds and sky copyright © Laura Stolfi/Stocksy.com. All rights reserved.

Author photo taken by Brandon Gross, copyright © 2019. All rights reserved.

Designed by Faceout Studio, Tim Green

Published in association with the literary agency of Daniel Literary Group, Brentwood, TN.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*,® *NIV*.® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked BSB are taken from The Holy Bible, Berean Study Bible, BSB.

Copyright © 2016, 2020 by Bible Hub. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked CEV are taken from the Contemporary English Version, copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked ESV are taken from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked GNT are taken from the Good News Translation in Today's English Version, Second Edition, copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the *Holy Bible*, King James Version.

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *THE MESSAGE*, copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the (NASB®) New American Standard Bible,® copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.lockman.org.

Scripture quotations marked NCV are taken from the New Century Version.® Copyright © 2005 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version,® copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture verses marked *Phillips* are taken from *The New Testament in Modern English* by J. B. Phillips, copyright © J. B. Phillips, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1972. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked TLB are taken from *The Living Bible*, copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked YLT are taken from the 1898 Young's Literal Translation by Robert Young. Public Domain.

For information about special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Tyndale House Publishers at csresponse@tyndale.com, or call 1-855-277-9400.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN 978-1-4964-5222-1

Printed in the United States of America

| | | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 27 | 26 | 25 | 24 | 23 | 22 | 21 |
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION Why You Need This Book 1

PART 1: WHEN THE STORM HITS

1. Two Kinds of Problems 9
2. A Delicious Irony 13
3. Can You Relate? 16

PART 2: HANG ON

4. The Stages of Your Crisis 23
5. The Day of Trouble 27
6. Reacting to Hurt the Wrong Way 29
7. You Need Friends 31
8. Intimacy with Jesus 38
9. The Trial of Your Faith 43
10. An Outrageous Roller Coaster 48
11. When God Remains Anonymous 50
12. The Hurricane Is on Its Way 54
13. His History Is Our Destiny 59
14. A Way Where There Is No Way 62
15. Pleasure and Pain 66
16. Just Hang On 68
17. A Wrestling Match with an Angel 70
18. Job's Bitter Pill 73
19. Paul and His Thorn 76
20. An Imperfect Storm 78

- 21. When You Need to Regrip 80
- 22. Their Dark Nights End 83
- 23. Embracing Loneliness 85
- 24. God Is Near Nonetheless 88
- 25. Stuck in a Holding Pattern 90
- 26. The Uncertainty of the Cross 95
- 27. Resurrection Territory 98

PART 3: LET GO

- 28. The Art of Letting Go 103
- 29. Giving Up vs. Letting Go 106
- 30. The Fellowship of His Sufferings 109
- 31. How to Survive Your Crisis 114
- 32. Act as If 120
- 33. Psalm 23 Remixed 125
- 34. Outcome Independence 128
- 35. A Titanic Discovery 133
- 36. Passing through Fire 137
- 37. The Breaking of God 142
- 38. Stay in Your Lane 145
- 39. Tick Your Boxes 147
- 40. Walking in the Darkness 150
- 41. Forgiving Others 154
- 42. Hurt People Hurt People 157
- 43. God's Pruning Shears 160
- 44. Peace in the Storm 162
- 45. Don't Believe Everything You Think 164
- 46. Cognitive Distortions 166
- 47. Don't Look at the Wall 170
- 48. The Hidden Destroyer 174

49. Staying Detached 176
50. Abandoning Fix-It Mode 179
51. When God Unhides Himself 182
52. The Story in Our Head 187
53. Be Still and Know 190
54. Just Breathe 193
55. Mountain Lion Energy 195
56. God's Waiting Room 201
57. Blowing Hot and Cold 206
58. The Tears God Keeps 208
59. Encourage Yourself in the Lord 212
60. Six Affirmations 215
61. How to Outsource Your Worry 217
62. A Wall of Reminders 224
63. The Battle Is the Lord's 228
64. Do You Love Your Life? 233
65. Making Jesus First 237
66. The Real Pandemic They Don't Want You
to Know About 240
67. Look Up, Not Down 244
68. When God Delays 246
69. Reframing Rejection 248
70. Living in the End Result 251
71. Take Nothing Personally 254
72. A Recipe for the Desperate 258
73. Stop This, Start That 263
74. Notes to Myself (Excerpts from My Journal) 271
75. The Pieces Are Alive 277
76. Be Resilient 280
77. Work on Yourself 283

- 78. There's No Fix-It Plan 287
- 79. In the Good Hands of God 290
- 80. Give Up Control 296

PART 4: AS THE CLOUDS LIFT

- 81. Invaluable Lessons 301
- 82. The Outcome 313
- 83. Calm, Cool, and Collected 315
- 84. A Special Word to Christian Workers 318

APPENDIX I: Who Brought Your Trial? 325

APPENDIX II: Next Steps 330

Acknowledgments 331

Notes 332

About the Author 341

INTRODUCTION

Why You Need This Book

What is to give light must endure burning.

ANTON WILDGANS

I've written this book for anyone facing an impossible situation. One where you've lost all control and hope has evaporated.

Maybe your child has gotten into serious trouble. Maybe you're facing a severe illness—your own or that of someone you love. Maybe your marriage is in peril or someone dear to you has walked away. Maybe you've lost your job, your career, or your reputation—or perhaps some other turn of events has completely stripped you of power.

The circumstances I have in mind would qualify as a first-class disaster. It could be a health crisis, a relational crisis, or a financial crisis. A crisis so drastic that you feel as though your life is coming apart at the seams. A situation where all your problem-solving powers have been rendered useless and your fix-it skills “aren't worth a bucket of warm spit” (to borrow a phrase commonly attributed to John Nance Garner).¹

If you're in such a situation, this book is for you. If you're not, you will be someday. (Sorry to break the bad news.) In the meantime, what I will share can be of tremendous help to anyone you know who is presently walking through the southwest corner of hell.

Let me make it clear at the outset: This is not a book about

suffering. While I will discuss suffering, it isn't my primary topic. This book is about how to *survive* and *thrive* despite the worst that life can throw at you. And how to be *developed* by adversity rather than *destroyed* by it. It's about how to *respond* when you are facing a major crisis—a crisis where your world collapses and the sky seems like it's falling. And how to come out on the other side, where you become version 2.0 of yourself.

There's no way I can know exactly what you're going through. Maybe it's more horrible than anyone could imagine. But I'm penning this book because I've been through the deepest and darkest of caverns myself, and I have learned some vital lessons that can ensure your survival.

Like you, I've known what it means to drown in an ocean of broken dreams, searing pain, and acute disappointment—to experience suffering that is incalculable and inexplicable.

This book is a lifeline. The principles I sketch out will equip you to kick yourself safely to shore. You might get wet and even beat up, but you won't drown.

I understand the overwhelming feelings of hopelessness and despair that accompany prolonged suffering. I've had times in my life when I felt like a crushed man, on death row, waiting for a pardon that might never come.

I've written this volume to share what I've learned, so that you will be encouraged to keep going, to press on, especially when your circumstances seem the darkest, as well as to navigate the minefields that await you.

Throughout my life, I've made countless mistakes in reacting to hardship, and I have the scar tissue to prove it. So beyond providing encouragement and direction, my hope is to spare you the pain of repeating those mistakes.

INTRODUCTION

I've made the chapters intentionally short. Think of the entire volume as a paint-by-numbers field guide to steer you through your crisis. A practical manual that will help you navigate your personal hurricane and rescue you from sinking into emotional quicksand.

For that reason, I regard this book as a ready resource, a helpful companion that you can return to repeatedly until the clouds lift and the crisis is behind you.

You can't learn to swim only by reading a book. People who try tend to drown. So as you read, it's crucial that you *put into action* the principles I lay out. You must *apply* the content to see positive results.

My motivation and purpose in writing grew out of two common threads—one cultural, the other personal.

Cultural: Over the past five years, it seems that every person I know has been coping with a personal tsunami. This includes people who come up in my newsfeeds on social media. There have been health crises, financial crises, relational crises, turmoil, tragedies, you name it.

Personal: I've lived long enough to have experienced countless trials and adversities. Some were doctoral studies in pain and suffering. Others were impossible dilemmas with no human solution.

The details of my own trials are not essential to our discussion because the principles I lay out in these pages apply to *every* type of crisis, trial, and adversity—be it health, relational, or financial.

One of the lessons I've learned is that if you belong to Jesus Christ, every crisis you encounter will inevitably lead to a spiritual crisis.

The reason is simple. If you are in Christ, God has one objective in your trial—to make you a less awful human being. Or to put it in biblical terms, to *transform* your character and optimize the person you are right now by making you more like Jesus.

This volume, then, is written in the spirit of 2 Corinthians 1:3-4:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

I've gone on record saying that I always write the book that I myself want to read but haven't been able to find elsewhere.

As I reflect on my own times of adversity, during the darkest days I would read and reread dozens of articles by dozens of authors on the subjects I was wrestling with. I would print them out and compile them in large packets held together by large binder clips.

All along, I wished I had just one book that would be my bread and butter through my various ordeals. (Aside from the Bible, of course.)

That's the vision I have for this book, and it's the reason why I wrote it.

As a supplement to what you read here, you can also hear me talk about how to endure trials. Just search for *The Insurgence*

INTRODUCTION

Podcast on your favorite podcast app and listen to episodes 42, 43, 45, 47–52, 61, and 63.

From the beginning of my ministry, the focus of my work has been unveiling God’s eternal purpose. Since 2017, however, the shape of that focus has narrowed, zooming in on the explosive gospel of the kingdom.²

According to Paul and Barnabas, “We must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.”³

The Berean Study Bible puts it this way: “We must *endure* many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”⁴ The English Standard Version renders it, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”⁵

Tribulation, suffering, hardship, and endurance are all required to enter the fullness of God’s glorious kingdom, which is already but not yet here.

As I’ve argued elsewhere, entering the vast dimensions of the kingdom requires much more than simply walking past the ticket gate. Entering the kingdom’s fullness is a journey that involves both adversity and tribulation.

This book is designed to help you traverse that difficult terrain. It’s a deep, intensive dive into how to handle yourself in the midst of your trial.

One more thing before we dive in: I quote various people in the epigraphs at the beginning of each chapter and sometimes within the chapters themselves. These quotes are part of the message, so please don’t ignore them. But just because I quote someone doesn’t mean I agree with everything that person says, believes, or has ever done. All it means is that I find value in that particular quote. Quoting someone is not the equivalent of promoting someone. Even Paul quoted people with whom he disagreed.⁶

HANG ON, LET GO

Finally, if you want to delve deeper into the content and receive direct help during your trial, check out Appendix II: Next Steps at the end of the book. We have a course available that coaches you through your present nightmare.

PART 1

When the Storm Hits

1
—
TWO KINDS
OF PROBLEMS

*There are only two things that pierce the human heart.
One is beauty. The other is affliction.*

SIMONE WEIL

Every one of us faces problems. They are part of life.

Often we have a measure of control over them. Such control can involve planning an intervention for someone you care about who is addicted to drugs or alcohol.

Maybe your marriage is in critical condition, but you can seek marital counseling. If your spouse agrees to go with you, your relationship can be healed.

Maybe you can find top medical doctors to treat your illness (or that of a loved one).

Or you lose a job only to quickly find another.

Those are all circumstances where you have some control.

But there are situations where you have no recourse at all. They hit you like a thunderclap, broadsiding you from out of nowhere.

They put your life on pause, and you can't be sure how they will turn out.

I've had some pretty harrowing experiences in my own life. And so have scores of people I know. Here are some examples from the lives of some of my close friends (with names changed to protect their identities).

Jared's mother has fallen into a coma. The doctors can't be sure when, or if, she will ever awaken.

Lara was told by her doctor that she has come down with an incurable, debilitating disease. Outside of a miracle, she will either die within months or live the rest of her years in horrible pain.

Scott has gotten into legal trouble, and there's nothing anyone can do to rescue him.

Tammy's daughter refuses to participate in an intervention for her substance abuse problem. She recently survived her second overdose.

Caleb's teenage son has schizophrenia, which often torments him with delusions and hallucinations. Now he's run away from home, and no one can find him.

Josh has experienced severe trauma, and his day-to-day life is an open wound. He is bent on committing suicide and refuses to seek help.

Erin's son experienced a sudden cardiac incident and is now on life support. The doctors aren't sure if there's brain activity or not.

Heather's longtime boyfriend has broken up with her, shattering her hopes and dreams for the future.

Ashley's husband left her in the lurch. He refuses marital counseling and has cut off all communication.

Landon's wife has abandoned her faith in God and is treating

Landon miserably. He dreads waking up every morning and doesn't know how or when his life will ever become bearable again.

Jason's fiancée suddenly ended their relationship. He is devastated and doesn't know whether he can go on.

Mackenzie broke up with her boyfriend due to his violent tendencies. He has threatened to kill her, so she now lives with paranoia, looking over her shoulder at every turn.

Gavin is enduring a hailstorm of withering criticism. People he's trusted are stabbing him in the back and twisting the knife.

Brooke has a jealous acquaintance who has made a calculated effort to assail her character and discredit her good name. It has become so severe that she's unsure whether she will ever get her reputation back.

Justin lost his job due to a pandemic. He hasn't been able to find work and doesn't know how he'll provide for his family.

Pam contracted a coronavirus and has been put on a ventilator. The doctors say she has a slim chance of survival.

Tyler and his wife adopted a special-needs baby who needs ongoing heart surgeries, each of which causes the child's life to hang in the balance.

These are all unnerving experiences that would send most people into a free fall, where solid ground is out of sight.

At times like these, there's only one thing to do . . .

HANG ON,
AND LET GO.

Sound contradictory? Well, it is. Sort of.
Actually, it's paradoxical, like many other things in life.

HANG ON, LET GO

In the face of the whirlwind, you hang on tightly to God. At the same time, you let go of the outcome.

You let go and hang on.

You hang on and let go.

As you read these pages, what I mean will become clearer.

More importantly, you'll learn how to do it.

You'll also learn a little-known secret I discovered:

The Lord is waiting for you to hang on and let go. This is what opens the door for Him to intervene and do what only He does best.

A DELICIOUS IRONY

*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking
new landscapes but in having new eyes.*

MARCEL PROUST

The story of Abraham and his son Isaac exemplifies how a person can hang on and let go at the same time.

God made an ironclad promise to Abraham. He told him he would be the father of many nations and his descendants would outnumber the stars.

What's more, God told Abraham that Isaac would be the medium through which this promise would be fulfilled.

At some point during Isaac's life, however, the Almighty commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice—literally!

For certain, Abraham found himself locked on the horns of a dilemma.

Scripture tells us that Abraham obeyed. He *let go* of his most precious gift—his son. Abraham *surrendered* Isaac to God.

Yet at the same time, Abraham didn't give up on God or His promise. He *hung on* to both.

Hebrews 11 explains how:

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.¹

Abraham let go of Isaac but hung on to God, believing that the Lord would raise Isaac from the dead after Abraham killed him.

This was an outrageous test of faith, the trial of Abraham's life.

But as I contemplated this story during one of my morning prayer walks in the cool fall Florida weather, it suddenly dawned on me how a person can let go and hold on at the same time.

It's an uncommon paradox, a delicious irony.

These two spiritual impulses—hanging on and letting go—are always in constant collision.

To put it succinctly, Abraham let go of Isaac 1.0. But he had faith that God would raise his son from the dead, giving him Isaac 2.0.

Of course, the Lord stopped Abraham before he lowered the knife, so Isaac didn't need to be raised from the dead. But in the mortal danger of our own adversities, we must hang on and let go before we'll see our resurrection.

In the following chapters, I'll explore the principle of hanging on. Then I'll shift gears and discuss the critical lesson of letting go.

A DELICIOUS IRONY

But know this: It is when you hang on and let go that God turns your trials into treasures, your pain into pearls, your suffering into service, and your burdens into beauty.

CAN YOU RELATE?

How to get beyond one's anxiety and trouble to the center of one's own spirit is one of the most formidable hurdles to serenity and inner peace.

HOWARD THURMAN

As I look back on each of the adversities I've faced, certain patterns emerge.

Your life is humming along fairly well. Then suddenly, you wake up to discover you're not in Kansas anymore (or Disney World—pick your metaphor).

The ground caves in and you can't see straight, think straight, or walk straight.

The emotional roller coaster you've been forced to ride is unrelenting. The "fasten seat belt" sign is lit the whole time.

The first month is the beginning of sorrows. The second month is darkness beyond description, a slasher film out of which you cannot awaken.

To drill down deeper, I've felt each of the following at one time or another:

CAN YOU RELATE?

- A complete loss of appetite, so much so that I had to punch new holes in my belt (or buy a shorter one).
- A loss of steady sleep. Waking up with eyes wide open at 3 a.m. was routine. That's when the "mind movies" start to run, replete with scenes of terrible scenarios that make *The Walking Dead* seem real.
- A sense of hopelessness.
- Feelings of resentment.
- A staggering amount of self-loathing (because I've always felt some measure of guilt with all my trials).
- Moments of profound confusion.
- Acute loneliness and mental angst.
- An ache in my heart that won't dissipate.
- Unbounded restlessness. I couldn't go anywhere to feel at peace.
- Unexpected bouts of bitter weeping and emotional agony.

I felt like I was watching a horror movie, strapped to the theater chair with my eyelids forced open by duct tape.

Some days I got so depressed my eyes would cross. I felt lower than a whale's navel.

I thought I had been ejected to the leper colony, living in my own private hell.

There were times when I was so down my knuckles would drag on the floor. Some mornings it took every ounce of energy I had to claw my way up to the bottom.

I marched off the map of normalcy. I was looking into what seemed to be a bottomless abyss.

My stomach felt like it was in a vise grip. My heart felt like it was being cut out of my chest.

There were days when I felt as if I belonged to a zombie class. I had joined the brokenhearted and the walking wounded.

My brain turned into tapioca. I couldn't concentrate or keep a coherent thought in my head.

I performed my daily activities on cruise control. I was on a collision course with the death of all my plans and dreams, heading straight into the mouth of the lion.

For weeks on end, I endured beautiful highs and bone-rattling lows. On some days I was in such disarray that I was absolutely allergic to positivity.

I was emotionally exhausted as I stared death in the face.

The most basic activities in life seemed like formidable tasks.

One minute felt like an hour; a day felt like a week. Time didn't seem to move.

There were moments when I was teetering on the edge of insanity. The whole experience was surreal.

Most days I didn't thrive; I just survived.

I wondered if the fever would ever break.

I even began to bargain in my mind, willing to give anything to bust awake from my hellish dream.

I hoped the entire experience could be erased from my memory

banks. As time went on, it became painfully clear that without a direct intervention from God, there would be no light at the end of the tunnel. I would sink to the bottom of the lake, never to be seen again.

My world was coming apart.

The angels leaned over the balcony of heaven waiting for my reaction.

Some days I gloriously triumphed. I managed to keep my composure. Other days I failed miserably, living on the edge of anxiety and despair.

During my most trying moments, I felt irritable and unmotivated, and I momentarily entertained the wish of nuclear annihilation upon the human species.

The Lord was holding all the trump cards at the poker table, and I felt as if I wasn't holding a single card.

In short, I was playing a waiting game with God. And only He knew how everything would turn out.

I suspect you can relate to some of this.

If so, there's only one way out, which I'll explore in the next section.

For more
information
on the book
including free
audios and a full
course, go to
HangOnLetGo.com