

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
AUTHOR OF *INSURGENCE*

HANG ON, LET GO

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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.