A SHORT BIBLE STUDY

Holding On When Life Is Hard

Hope That Holds · Book 1



Trusting God in storms, silence, and suffering

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

Introduction

Life is hard. We pray and ask God for help, and sometimes it seems like He is not there. We know He can do miracles, yet the trials keep coming. Is God listening? Does He care? Those are honest questions, and the Bible does not run from them.

The hardest season of my life came when my own choices caught up with me and nearly cost me my marriage. What kept me holding on was not inner strength. It was a wife who did not give up on me, a pastor who listened, and a God who met me when I stopped running. I wrote this book because real endurance comes from anchoring to Christ when our own strength runs dry.

This book looks at why God allows hardship, how He works in the middle of it, what to do when He seems silent, and how keeping eternity in view changes the way we climb the mountain in front of us.

1 A storm with Jesus in the boat

In Mark 4:35-41 (SLB), Jesus and His disciples set out across the Sea of Galilee. A fierce storm came up, and waves broke over the boat. Several of those disciples were fishermen who knew that water well, yet they were afraid for their lives. Jesus was asleep in the stern.

They woke Him and asked if He cared that they were perishing. He calmed the wind and the sea, then asked them why they were afraid and how it was that they had no faith. They had already seen Him heal the

sick and cast out demons. Somehow, in the storm, they forgot who was with them.

> *And they feared a great fear, and they were saying to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"*
> **Mark 4:41 (SLB)**

I am not much different. When life is calm, I say I trust God. When the storm hits, I panic. The storm did not mean Jesus had left them. He was in the boat the whole time.

In my lowest season, it felt like everything I had built was going under. Like the disciples in Mark 4, my first instinct was to panic and bail water on my own. Jesus did not remove every consequence overnight, but He kept my marriage and my faith from sinking. A storm does not mean Jesus left the boat.

2 Why God allows hardship

Why does God not take away our hardships? Why does He not give us what we think we need right when we need it? I do not believe God enjoys our pain. I do believe He uses it to shape us into who He wants us to be.

> *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if it is necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the testing of your faith, much more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, may be found for praise and honor and glory at **the** revelation of Jesus Christ.*
> **1 Peter 1:6-7 (SLB)**

Trials pull us out of our comfort zones. When we are torn away from the things we lean on, we see that our trust has to be found completely in Christ. That raises a hard question. Where do I keep my security? In money, friendships, reputation, my job, my family? None of those are bad, but none of them can hold the full weight of my life.

Life has peaks and valleys. On the peaks, things are good, and that is often when my attention to God starts to slip. In the valleys I am forced to lean on Him again. I am learning to see the valleys as opportunities to grow in character and give God the glory.

3 Three ways God works

I have found it helpful to think about three ways God works in our lives. Sometimes He works by intervention. He does something only He can do, and our part is simply to receive it. That is the miracle we usually pray for.

Sometimes He works by interaction. He oversees the circumstances while calling us to step in and act. We become His hands and feet, and He accomplishes His purpose through our obedience.

And sometimes He works by inner action. He does not change the circumstances at all. He changes us. The miracle happens on the inside. Paul prayed three times for God to remove his thorn in the flesh, and God answered, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9, SLB).

When I do not see God changing my situation, I want to ask whether He is changing me. That may be the bigger miracle.

4 When heaven is silent

God speaks to us through His Word, through prayer, through His church, and through the circumstances of life. Sometimes He also speaks through silence. Silence tests whether my faith is real. Am I a fair-weather friend of God, or a faithful follower? Do I worship Him for who He is, or only for what He gives me?

Job asked God why, over and over. When God finally answered, He did not explain Job's suffering. Instead He asked Job questions about creation that showed His power and care (Job 38-41, SLB). Job's comfort did not come from answers. It came from seeing God as He is. I have learned that the deepest comfort we receive comes from God's character, not from explanations.

God also gives us a rhythm of rest. In Exodus 20:8-11 (SLB) He set aside one day in seven for His people. Being still before Him is not wasted time. It is often where we hear Him best.

When I started recovery on May 29, 2020, I faced the damage I had caused one day at a time. I wanted quick proof that everything would be fixed. What I had instead was something better: God was there every step of the way. He never left me, and I never felt that He had. Even when the answers come slowly, His presence does not.

5 Keep climbing

Pastor Francis Chan made this picture well known. Imagine a rope that stretches on forever. A short red section at one end stands for your life on earth. The rest stands for eternity. Most of us spend our energy on that little red piece and forget about the rest of the rope.

Paul put it this way: "we look not at the things being seen but at the things not being seen; for the things being seen are temporary, but the things not being seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18, SLB). Keeping eternity in view does not make today's pain disappear. It puts it in its proper size.

There are practical ways to prepare for the next storm. Walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16, SLB). Put on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-17, SLB). Spend time in Scripture and in prayer every day. Confess your trespasses and stay accountable (James 5:16, SLB). Flee youthful desires (2 Timothy 2:22, SLB). Rely on Christ's strength (Philippians 4:13, SLB).

And remember the reward. James 1:12 (SLB) says the man "who endures trial" will "receive the crown of life." Without Jesus, I am nobody. With Him, I can keep climbing.

Holding On When Life Is Hard

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We pray for help, and sometimes it feels like God is not there. This book looks at the storm on the Sea of Galilee, why God allows hardship, three ways He works in our lives, what to do when heaven is silent, and how to keep climbing with eternity in view.

And they feared a great fear, and they were saying to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

Mark 4:41 (SLB)

Book 1 of 5 in the collection Hope That Holds

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