

SHEILA WALSH

HOLDING ON

WHEN YOU

WANT TO

LET GO

**Clinging to Hope
When Life
Is Falling Apart**



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Introduction

IT ALL STARTED with a magazine article and a question: “Can you tell your story in six words?” Seemed impossible, but I had a three-hour flight, so I thought, *Why not?*

Scottish

wife

mom

clumsy

dogs

Jesus

I looked at the words on the page. All I had was a Scottish wife and mother who falls over her dogs and loves Jesus. Hardly an autobiography.

I dug a little deeper. Where do I start? How do I bring together the pain, the disappointment, the joy, the questions, and tie everything up neatly with a little six-word bow? Not possible. I put down my pencil and stared out the window at the thick, puffy clouds. As I thought back over the years, if I was brutally honest with myself, my life had not turned out as I’d expected.

Introduction

At twenty-one or even thirty-one, life looked fairly straightforward, a clean line, simple. I thought I had the right answers to most things life can throw at us. But somehow those easy answers that had worked when I was younger felt hollow with the passing years, and instead of straight lines, what I saw were circles, coming back over and over to the same place, demanding more authentic answers.

I thought of how I'd pictured my "perfect" life when I was young and naive.

I'd be 5'7".

I'd have long blonde hair.

I'd have glowing skin.

I'd be graceful.

I'd be the popular, gifted, athletic girl in school.

I'd have the kind of laugh that sparkled and drew people in.

Instead,

I'm 5'3" (and shrinking).

I have more gray hair than blonde.

I put concealer on with a trowel.

I trip and fall on most days ending with a *y*.

I was chosen last for every sport known to man.

I laugh like a horse.

Clearly not what I expected.

I'm sure we all have a silly list like this, but these are not the disappointing things that shape our lives. There are moments and events that we did not see coming, and we're not prepared for them.

What about you? When you think about your story, are you living the life you imagined? Perhaps some days, when you have time to

take a deep breath, you hardly recognize yourself in the mirror and you wonder, *What happened?* When life takes unexpected turns, it's easy to feel as if everything is out of control; you feel alone, afraid. When God seems silent, do you wonder if you've messed up?

Or perhaps it's more like that infuriating feeling you get when you've spent hours putting a jigsaw puzzle together only to discover that a couple of pieces are missing. You search under the rugs, in the dog's mouth. You threaten your entire family with no food for a week if they're hiding the pieces, but they're gone.

However, I'm learning that the missing pieces in our lives are not gone forever. They reappear at unexpected moments, and even when it hurts for them to be put back in place, the picture is so much clearer when they are.

I was in the middle of a fun FaceTime call with my twenty-three-year-old son, Christian, when the conversation took an unexpected turn. He told me that he's been dealing with nightmares. I asked him about the nightmares, and he told me that the central theme and the overwhelming feeling he is left with when he wakes up is abandonment. He's an only child, and I know that the thought of my husband, Barry, and me being gone someday is a hard one. But there was more going on here. Even as he talked, I recognized the circle he was drawing, and it was coming right back to me. There is a brokenness in me that has cast its shadow on our son.

After my father's death by suicide, I became hypervigilant about how other people were feeling. If you walked into a room, I could have told you how you were feeling, but not how I was feeling because . . . I wasn't. I remember a night when I was about eleven years old. I got up in the middle of the night to use the bathroom. Seeing the light on underneath my mother's bedroom door, I decided to go in, until something stopped me. She was crying. I had no memory of ever hearing my mother cry. I instinctively knew she would not want me to come in, so I sat down on the other side of her bedroom door and cried too. That night I made an unconscious vow. I vowed that

I would never love anyone so much that if I lost them, I would have to weep alone for the rest of my life.

I realized that one of the circles I'd drawn was really a wall I'd built around my heart to keep me safe. I remember climbing on the ruins of an ancient Scottish castle near my home when I was a child. There was something about the missing pieces of the walls and turrets that spoke to me. This was not the castle of princesses, it was the castle for those who lived in the ruins of what was. I have always identified with lonely places. Talking this through with Christian and Barry was one of the most difficult and liberating conversations I have ever had. I've always been there for Christian; it's just that not all of me was always available. Somehow, in those early formative years, he had felt a distance. That night, as we talked and tears poured down my face, I felt God place a sacred piece back into the puzzle of my life, reminding me that it's okay to be vulnerable because God is holding on to me, and I am holding on to Him.

I am still learning how to be healed and whole and to trust God with the still-missing pieces of my life, and my son's, because He is still writing our stories. He is still writing yours too. The pieces are not lost. You are not forgotten, overlooked, pushed aside. Your story is simply not finished yet. We all wish we were able to be the perfect parents, partners, friends, to never bruise another soul. But we are flawed, and that's why each one of us needs the Father.

Every morning I take my Bible and a cup of coffee out onto the balcony of our townhouse. I read three psalms and a chapter from Proverbs. The morning after the conversation with our son, I sat outside in silence. As I sat there, a memory came to my mind. It was so vivid, as if I was watching a movie, but I was in the movie and so was our son. It was late at night, and we were flying home through the Chicago airport. Christian was about four years old, marching ahead of me wearing his Thomas the Tank Engine backpack. Suddenly, he stopped. I was just a few steps behind, and when I reached

**Life does not
give us a quick
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always working.**

him, he didn't say a word. He just lifted up his arms. He didn't need to say a word because I heard him.

Mommy, I'm tired.

I bent down and picked him up and held him close. I remembered that night so clearly, even as the picture faded away and it was just me in the morning sun on the balcony. I sat for a few moments in the quiet, and then I stood up, put my Bible down on my chair, and lifted up my arms. I have raised my arms in worship before, but this was different. I was a child needing her Father. I didn't say a word. I didn't have to. I felt held.

I have no idea what's going on in your life as you read these words. What I do know is that we will all face challenges, heartaches, things we didn't see coming. There will be moments when we wish we could rewrite chapters of our stories. But as I began to dig deep into God's Word in past weeks and months, I saw in a way I've never understood before that God has been writing our stories from the very beginning. Life is not out of control, even when it feels as if it is. I promise you that. You are being held, and God is tenderly holding your missing pieces.

I now read stories I've known since I was a child in Sunday school with fresh eyes. Men and women who were at the end of themselves—no hope, no strength—but God was still writing their stories. He was with them, and they were not abandoned, and neither are you.

I still go outside every morning and raise my arms up high; doing so lifts my heart. I turn my face to the heavens, and I am held.

I feel so passionately about the message of this book. Life does not give us a quick fix, but God is always moving, always working. I see this now in ways I've never understood before.

As I've watched God place missing puzzle pieces into the lives of His children in Scripture, each one seems like a miracle. I hesitate to use that word, as we tend to associate a miracle with something that happens in a moment or we doubt that miracles still happen

Introduction

at all. But I believe in miracles now more than ever. They happen in God's time and with them comes hope. So let's take this journey together. No matter where you are as we begin, I'm praying that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you will hold on.

I have a six-word story now, and it became this book.

Hold on and don't let go.

But Jesus replied, "My Father is always working, and so am I." (John 5:17)

1

Holding On When Life Feels Out of Control

I sat there in despair, my spirit draining away,
my heart heavy, like lead.
I remembered the old days,
went over all you've done,
pondered the ways you've worked,
Stretched out my hands to you,
as thirsty for you as a desert thirsty for rain.
Hurry with your answer, GOD!
I'm nearly at the end of my rope.

Psalm 143:4-7 Message

Mental pain is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and also more hard to bear. The frequent attempt to conceal mental pain increases the burden: it is easier to say, "My tooth is aching" than to say, "My heart is broken."

C. S. Lewis

I WAS THIRTY-NINE, PREGNANT, and due to give birth in just over two weeks. I was stupid with happiness. We knew it was a boy

and had chosen the name Christian. Barry had followed me around the house for weeks playing worship music to my belly. I think he thought our son would grow up and give Chris Tomlin a run for his money. On the flip side, I was pretty sure our son would come out and punch his dad in the face. “I was trying to sleep in there!”

It was December 2, my last checkup before the big day. I still had two weeks to prepare meals and freeze them. Fourteen days to bask in the glow of being pregnant. Fourteen days of having the best hair and nails of my life. Fourteen days of it just being the two of us and Bentley, our golden retriever. Or at least that’s what I thought until my doctor came bounding into the examination room with a big smile on her face.

“Are you ready?” she asked.

“Ready for what?” I replied.

“To welcome your little one into the world,” she said. “Let’s hit it. It’s showtime!”

She seemed so giddy I wondered if she was drunk.

“My due date’s not for another two weeks,” I reminded her.

“I know that,” she said, “but we’re going to deliver him today.”

“What! Why?” I asked, panic beginning to rise. “He’s not done yet, and . . . I have a casserole in the slow cooker!”

“He’ll be just fine,” she said, scribbling something in my file.

“But why now?” I persisted.

“Well, my husband just surprised me with a golf trip to Hawaii!” she said, clearly expecting me to celebrate with her. I didn’t.

“But I’m not dilated at all,” I told her. “I couldn’t squeeze a grape out, never mind a whole person.”

“We have medicine for that,” she said in an attempt to assure me and then instructed her nurse to get a wheelchair and take me to the maternity wing of the hospital.

Everything was moving so quickly, and I apparently had no say in the matter.

“Barry! Do something,” I cried.

Poor man. He just stood there. He looked as if he'd been stunned by a brick.

"I'll drive home and get your go bag," he said, suddenly snapping into action.

"And the car seat," I yelled to his rapidly disappearing back. "And turn off the slow cooker!"

I'm not exactly sure what was injected into my arm, but I don't recommend it. I went from being in no pain at all to immediately feeling as if I was trying to push a donkey through a keyhole. By the time Barry came back, I was in a bad place and I was really scared.

I wanted my mom.

I wanted my sister.

Nothing felt right.

We had talked about the fact that as this might be my only pregnancy due to my age, I was going to go for a natural birth. Rapid change of plan. There was nothing that felt natural about this. I yelled for an epidural and anything else on the cart.

In our minds, Barry and I had written the story of how perfect this was going to be. We had scripted how we thought our little one's entry into the world would go. Chapter 1 of his story would be a little like this: life-giving pain, moments of rest to recharge for the next wave, little slivers of ice, perchance a back rub. Then breathe, push, breathe, push, breathe, push, wonderful, beautiful baby boy.

Well, that was out the window, and we were now officially script-less.

"I think this will help," Barry said in a desperate moment as he pushed play on his boom box. Remember, this was 1996.

As the strains of "Just hear those sleigh bells jingling, ring tingling too" filled the room, I thought to myself, *I'm going to wake up in a moment. I'll be home in bed, two weeks to go. This is all just a bad dream.* Everything felt surreal and so out of control, and I was pretty sure I'd never be able to listen to Christmas music again.

After twelve hours of the greatest pain I'd ever known, at 5:40 a.m. on December 13, I held my little boy in my arms. He was tiny and perfect.

“Look, Barry,” I said, “you can tell we live in California. He came out with a tan.”

We both marveled at his “tan” until the doctor informed us that he didn't have a tan; he was jaundiced. He spent a couple of days in the NICU, and then we took our slightly paler baby home.

Chapter 1 of Christian's life was not what we expected, but I knew that God was just beginning to write his story. The circumstances of that day felt very out of control, but they weren't really. I was in a good hospital with a capable doctor (even if her golf clubs were in the corner of the room and she smelled of Coppertone!).

But you know as well as I do that there are situations that don't resolve that easily or that quickly and their endings are far different from what we would write. What do you do then? How do you hold on when everything goes wrong? How do you hold on when life feels totally out of control? Not only that, but how do you keep believing that God is good when life feels bad?

If God . . . Why?

I was challenged on this very “why” question not so long ago. I'd been invited to speak at a women's conference in the Midwest. After the final session, I stayed around for a while to meet some of the women and sign a few books. I noticed that one woman stood off to one side by herself, and I guessed that perhaps she preferred a more private conversation. When the hall cleared out, she came over and introduced herself. She looked troubled, so I asked her if she wanted to sit down. She was quiet for a few moments and then told me that she had a major problem with my final message.

I reflected back for a moment. My last message had been based on one of my favorite chapters in the book of Romans, chapter 8. To me,

it's always seemed like such a beautiful illustration of the love and grace of God. It begins with no condemnation: "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus" (v. 1). I love this truth. I've seen it set so many people free who've been weighed down by mistakes from the past. I couldn't imagine that text had troubled her. The last two verses of the chapter end with no separation: "And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (vv. 38–39).

I've always found great comfort in those truths, so I was curious to know how she saw them through the window of her own life. I asked her what it was about my message that bothered her. Sadly, her issue was with the love of God. Her individual story is not mine to share, but I've heard the questions she asked that evening from other lips. Perhaps you've heard them too. Perhaps you've asked them yourself.

If God is a God who is loving, why did this happen?

If God is powerful, why didn't He stop that from happening?

If God . . . why?

If God . . . why?

Why?

I think this is one of the greatest challenges to holding on when life feels out of control. We know that if God wanted to change our circumstances, He could. He could save our marriage. He could heal our child. He could help us get a job. He could help us have a baby. So why would we hold on to the One who could help us if

He doesn't? Will we still love and worship a God we don't always understand? Every single one of us has to wrestle with these questions when life falls apart.

I'm not going to try to give you all the answers here, but let me show you what trusting God looked like up close and personal in the lives of two of my best friends, Brent and Jennalee Trammel.

The Trammels have been our closest friends since we moved to Texas seventeen years ago. We used to live just a few houses down from them, and our boys grew up together. I have so many fond memories of sitting with Jennalee in lawn chairs on the driveway watching the boys on their bikes or their skateboards on summer evenings, taking turns bandaging them up when they attempted a new trick that didn't go well. We used to laugh at the reality that if anything was going to go wrong in any house in the neighborhood, it would be the Trammels' house. Burst pipes, which led to the entire first floor flooding, squirrels in the attic, a refrigerator that worked only when it was in the mood, poison ivy on all three boys at the same time. I used to marvel at Jennalee's resilience. No matter what went wrong, she soldiered on with a smile and this familiar saying: "Someday I'm going to write a book!"

But nothing could have prepared her for what was about to happen just before Christmas in 2010. That December, Brent had a seizure one morning as he was about to take the boys to school. After several tests, the doctors discovered that he had a brain tumor. It was shocking news. Brent was only forty years old. A couple of days after the seizure, Jennalee posted this on her Facebook page:

Brent had a seizure Monday and long story short is having a brain tumor removed this coming Friday. He is amazing and strong and if you don't believe in God and have faith in Christ, you would from watching my precious husband deal with this. After hearing the news, he looked at me and calmly stated, "Maybe I was created for this very moment."

On the morning of his surgery, Brent wrote this note to his boys, which I share with permission:

Chase, Cole, and Tate,

It is very early (4 a.m.) and God is at work! I wanted to just take a few moments to let you know how much I love each one of you! You have each made me the happiest dad in the entire world. I am reminded (in Mark 1:11) when Jesus was baptized out of obedience and respect for HIS Father and an audible voice was heard from the heavens when he came up out of the water. "This is my son, in whom I am well pleased." This morning I now realize the amount of love that a father can have for his sons and all of their accomplishments, victories, and yes even defeats. Therefore, I too echo those words from the mountaintop—"YOU ARE MY SONS, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED!" We were never called to walk a faithless simple life but a life full of abundance and grace that only God can give. This morning, Dad will leave for the hospital without any fear of the unknown, and expect miracles to happen. NO MATTER the outcome of the procedure or the diagnosis, GOD IS IN CONTROL and HE will be praised!

Do me a favor, the next few days will be very difficult for your mom. Pray for her. Love her. Hug her. Obey her. She is truly the love of my life! We will all need each other over the coming days, but she will need you even more over the next few days.

Below is one of my favorite verses:

Romans 8:38–39

"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" [ESV].

No Fear, Jesus Never Fails,

Dad

He came through the first surgery with flying colors, but his doctor wasn't able to remove all the tumor. It was dormant for some time and then began to grow again. After seventeen months of chemo and radiation, a second surgery was needed, and then gamma knife radiation and a third surgery. The team of doctors left no stone unturned. Throughout the entire painful journey when hope would rise only to fall again, I watched Brent and Jennalee continue to hold on to Jesus, unwavering.

The week before Brent passed, now in hospice care, Jennalee posted this Scripture passage:

No eye has seen, no ear has heard,
and no mind has imagined
what God has prepared
for those who love him. (1 Cor. 2:9)

When Brent took his final breath on earth, Jennalee simply wrote, "He made it. He's home."

That's what they lived for. He held on all the way home.

What I saw in both Brent and Jennalee was a faith in Christ that lasted over the long haul no matter how out of control things appeared to be. Brent never once in ten years asked, "Why me?"

I think most of us can hold on to Jesus when we walk through something that's hard, but how do we establish the kind of faith that refuses to let go when the battle rages on and on and we are at the very end of our rope? For most of us, that became a very real question in 2020.

At the End of Your Rope

We didn't see it coming. No one did. Somewhere on the other side of the world, a new virus was making people very sick, but it was miles from home. Or at least that's what we thought.

In our home, the Christmas tree was still up. (We hold on to our decorations for as long as we can until one of us cracks and calls time on the festivities.) January was slipping out the door, but still I was reluctant to let go of the sparkling lights and my son's handmade ornaments from when he was a child. Each morning I'd open the back door to let our dogs out and pause at the tree to study them. One of my favorites from fourth grade is of Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus made out of clay that had been baked in the school's kiln. The baby is almost as big as Mary. That triggered a few memories.

"We'll need to take the tree down in February," I said to Barry one morning. "Once March hits, my travel schedule is crazy-busy."

That's what I thought at least—and then the bottom fell out of the world and everything familiar and comforting changed. People lost their lives, lost family businesses, lost jobs. School doors were closed, and parents suddenly had to become fifth-grade math teachers. Our churches were locked, and we sat at home binge-watching television shows and gaining fifteen pounds. And for some reason that is still not clear to me, toilet paper became our survival tool. The questions piled on.

God, what's happening?

Do you see us?

Why are you letting this happen?

Will life ever be normal again?

Will we survive this?

When will this be over?

Will our relationships survive this?

Why is everything so out of control?

I don't know how those weeks and months impacted you and your family. It was uncharted territory. We'd never before been in a situation like that in our lifetimes. At first, I honestly enjoyed the

break. I'm used to flying out every weekend to speak, and I'm in the television studio during the week, so for me, living in sweats and not wearing makeup was awesome for a while. I guess I thought the pandemic would last only a few weeks and then we'd all go back to doing what we'd done before we ever heard of COVID-19. But it dragged on and on, and watching the nightly news was heartbreaking. So much pain. So much loss.

As the weeks turned into months, I felt myself spiraling inside. Some mornings I would wake up with such a feeling of dread in the pit of my stomach. It wouldn't lift. It made me feel sick and anxious. All the things I'd learned to help me cope since I'd been diagnosed with severe clinical depression years ago weren't working anymore. I didn't know how to pull myself out of the pit. Some days I just stayed in bed. I would watch our church service online, but I felt a million miles away. Even though I was home with Barry, I felt so alone. I was back in the ruins of the castle.

Then our son contracted the virus. Christian is in graduate school in Houston, and when he FaceTimed to tell us the news, I felt so helpless. Everything in me made me want to drive to Houston and nurse him through it, but self-isolation rules wouldn't let me. Honestly, I wanted to scream, but our fourteen-year-old Bichon Frise, Tink, hates loud noises, so I just cried into my pillow. I was shocked at the level of despair I was feeling. After all these years of trusting God, why did I feel so afraid, so vulnerable?

What do you do when life feels out of control? What do you do when there's nothing you can do? What do you do when you believe that God is good, that God is in control, but nothing makes sense to you anymore? Those feelings can be overwhelming. One of the things I've learned through my depression journey is that when I'm really struggling, it helps me to pray for others. So one evening I went on my Facebook page and simply asked, "How are you doing? Can I pray for you?" I received hundreds of responses, and most of them were heartbreaking.

My husband has lost his job. I don't know how we're going to pay our bills next month.

My dad's in the hospital. He's dying, and they won't let me come to say goodbye.

How am I supposed to homeschool four children and keep my job?

My son committed suicide. I don't know how much longer I can hold on.

My marriage is falling apart, and I don't know what to do.

My children want nothing to do with Jesus anymore. I am brokenhearted.

I'm struggling with anxiety.

Some of the issues were related to the pandemic, but many were simply related to how hard life can be. Some women private messaged me because they said they were ashamed to admit they were struggling.

Let's be honest, sometimes when we're overwhelmed, particularly as Christians, we're tempted to retreat into ourselves. We don't want anyone to judge or shame us. We feel bad enough. Sometimes we don't know how to reach out to others when we're barely holding on. What do we even say? How do we give words to the level of despair we're feeling? As C. S. Lewis wrote, it's easier to say that our tooth is aching than that our heart is broken.

But I know now in a way I've never understood before that when our hearts are broken, we need to be able to say it out loud. If we don't, we sink deeper and deeper into the pit. We need each other. We need to let people into our pain when it is too much to carry by ourselves. We need the companionship of brokenness, of people who love God but don't have all the answers.

When Paul wrote to the church in Galatia, he said this: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2 ESV).

**We need the
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The Greek word used here for “burden” (*baros*) literally means “a heavy weight or stone someone is required to carry for a long distance.” You and I were not designed to carry heavy weights for a long distance by ourselves. When life becomes too much, when everything feels out of control, we need the humility to ask for help, for prayers, to let others know that the weight is too much. That’s what I saw in Brent’s and Jennalee’s lives. They knew that the stone they were carrying was far too heavy to carry alone, even though they had no idea at the beginning how long they would be called to carry it.

As my own despair grew, it brought me to my knees. I’ve had a Bible since I was a child. I’ve read it, studied it, memorized it, and taught it, but I began to dive in as if my life depended on it, because it did. I needed to understand the bigger picture of the story God is writing. Day after day, week after week, I sat out on our balcony with my Bible and a notebook and pencil and asked the Holy Spirit to help me see what I might miss. And He did. The stories were right there in the pages, story after story of people who loved God but felt as if their lives were out of control. Story after story of those who were tempted to let go because they couldn’t see any way out. But God was with them, every moment, every day. Not only that, but as I studied, I saw that Jesus was there. He is there from the first chapter of Genesis until the final chapter of Revelation. It’s always been about Jesus. There has always been a plan. He has always been writing our stories.

God Is in Control

Let’s take it right back to the beginning. After Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and disobeyed God, it looked like the whole world had spun out of control. Everything was ruined. Nothing was perfect anymore. Everything seemed lost. But right there in the first few pages of God’s Word, we read what’s called the *protoevangelium*, the first announcement of the gospel. It’s in Genesis 3. God spoke

to the serpent and said, “I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel” (v. 15).

From the descendants of the woman who had fallen for the lies of the enemy would come our Savior, Jesus. Yes, Christ’s heels would be bruised on the cross, but He would rise again, defeating death and the grave and crushing Satan’s head for eternity.

Or think of Noah. When God told him to build a boat, doing so would have made no sense. Many theologians believe that up until that moment in history, it had never rained before, so why was he being asked to build a boat? Not only that, but what was a boat? Once Noah, his family, and the animals were tucked inside, the sky let loose and it rained and the flood came. How were they supposed to survive? There was no dry land anymore. They couldn’t live in a boat forever! Everything looked out of control, but it wasn’t.

What about Joseph? He was attacked by his brothers, trafficked into Egypt, and eventually thrown into prison. His life was out of control in every way that would make sense to us, but it wasn’t. The final pieces in his puzzle are amazing.

Abraham, Moses—they both had stories that made no sense for years. Abraham was told to leave his homeland and everything he knew for a promise that wouldn’t be fulfilled until his old age. And Moses tended sheep for forty years before God called him to free the Israelites from slavery.

And what about the children of Israel? Think about how they must have felt when they were halfway across the Red Sea with huge walls of water on each side and a furious army on horses and chariots right behind them. Try to put yourself there. If you remember the end of the story found in Exodus 14, you know that they made it all the way across safely. But when they were just halfway through, it must have been terrifying.

Think about King David. We love the psalms, but half of them were written when he was in the middle of something terrible.

Save me, O God,
for the floodwaters are up to my neck.
Deeper and deeper I sink into the mire;
I can't find a foothold.
I am in deep water,
and the floods overwhelm me.
I am exhausted from crying for help;
my throat is parched.
My eyes are swollen with weeping,
waiting for my God to help me. (Ps. 69:1–3)

Those don't read like the words of a man who feels like everything is under control.

Or think about the man whose story we find in Luke 23:32–43. He is a man on death row awaiting execution in the morning. Try to put yourself in his shoes. You're going to die today. There's nothing that can stop that. The final moments of his story are radical.

On and on I read. I read until tears poured down my cheeks and I raised my arms in worship. The Bible is full of story after story of men and women just like you and me who found themselves in situations that felt completely out of control. But God was with these men and women. Not only that, but He held all the missing pieces to their stories.

So right here in chapter 1, I'm asking if you're willing to take a deeper look with me and get a bigger picture of who God is, who we are, and see that no matter how we feel, our lives are not out of control. They may be out of comfort at times, we may be out of answers, we may be filled with pain, but our lives are not out of control.

But here's the irony. Are you ready for this?

They never were under our control.

That dread in the pit of my stomach.

Having a baby at thirty-nine when my doctor was halfway out the door to board a plane to Hawaii.

**Nothing was
or ever has
been out of
God's control.
God has always
been in control.**

Every single thing I was trying to control was out of my control. The truth is they had never been in my control, but the greater truth is this: nothing was or ever has been out of God's control. God has always been in control. That's what made me raise my arms up to my Father. I finally made peace with that truth and surrendered everything.

The Scripture passage that had been a lifeline for me so many years before became a lifeline again.

Yet I am confident I will see the LORD's goodness
while I am here in the land of the living.

Wait patiently for the LORD.

Be brave and courageous.

Yes, wait patiently for the LORD. (Ps. 27:13–14)

So I hold on. Will you hold on too?



HOLDING ON TO HOPE

- 1 • We were not made to do life on our own; we need to let people into our stories.
- 2 • Jesus is still writing your story, and He holds all the pieces.
- 3 • No matter how things appear, God is in control.

*Father God,
When my life feels out of control,
I choose to hold on to You.
Amen.*

