

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Trusting God Through Trials, Unanswered Prayer, and
the Mystery of His Loving Control

Rev. Dr. Silas Kanyabigega, PhD

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This transformed text-only edition develops a pastoral theology of faithful endurance. It contains no interior photographs or illustrations. Scripture references are presented for theological study; readers should consult their preferred Bible translation for the complete biblical text.

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Dedication

To Christians who have prayed faithfully and still carry unresolved burdens; to those who continue to trust God while the answer is delayed; and to pastors, families, counselors, and friends who remain beside them.

Preface

This book begins with a difficult but liberating conviction: Christian faithfulness does not exempt anyone from continuing trials. Prayer is powerful, but prayer is not a method of controlling God. The Lord may remove a burden, change it slowly, sustain his child within it, or permit it to remain for reasons known fully only to him.

The central good news is not that every believer receives immediate relief. It is that God remains loving, wise, present, and sovereign in every season. He knows the beginning and boundary of each test. He knows what he is forming, what he is preventing, what he is redeeming, and what he has chosen not yet to explain. His final purpose for those in Christ is not endless suffering but resurrection and the renewal of all things.

The chapters that follow invite honest lament, bold prayer, wise action, communal care, and enduring trust. They reject both despair and shallow triumphalism. They call the church to ask confidently for deliverance while learning to say with Jesus, 'Yet not my will, but yours be done.'

Introduction to the Expanded Academic Edition

Why this expanded edition is needed

Christians frequently receive two incomplete messages about suffering. One says that faith should eliminate serious difficulty; the other treats endurance as silent passivity. Both messages can injure people. The first turns prolonged suffering into an accusation, while the second can discourage prayer, treatment, justice, and responsible action. This expanded edition offers a more complete biblical framework: believers may ask boldly for change, act wisely, lament honestly, and still entrust the outcome to God.

A pastoral and academic approach

The book brings biblical theology into conversation with pastoral care. It asks not only what Christians should believe about providence, prayer, and suffering, but also how those convictions should shape the way churches accompany people in long trials. Doctrinal claims are therefore joined to practical cautions: suffering must not be romanticized, mystery must not become speculation, spiritual warfare must not replace medical or psychological care, and prayer must not replace material help.

The governing theological convictions

Four convictions guide the discussion. First, God's love is revealed decisively in Jesus Christ and cannot be measured only by present circumstances. Second, God remains sovereign even when his purposes are hidden. Third, prayer is genuine communion and petition, not control over divine freedom. Fourth, Christian hope reaches beyond immediate outcomes to resurrection and the renewal of creation. Together these convictions sustain trust without denying pain.

An invitation to the reader

Readers are invited to move slowly through the chapters, test every claim by Scripture, answer the reflection questions honestly, and seek trusted companionship where burdens are heavy. The aim is not to produce effortless explanations. It is to form a durable faith that can keep praying, acting, receiving help, and expecting God's goodness while the full answer remains unseen.

Contents

Copyright and Publication Information	2
Author Information	3
Dedication	5
Preface	6
Introduction to the Expanded Academic Edition	7
Chapter 1 - Faith Does Not Remove Every Trial	11
Chapter 2 - Loved by God in Unresolved Trouble	13
Chapter 3 - God Knows What We Cannot See	15
Chapter 4 - Prayer Is Trust, Not Control	17
Chapter 5 - Jesus in Gethsemane	19
Chapter 6 - Paul's Thorn and Sufficient Grace	21
Chapter 7 - Trials, Growth, and the Purposes of God	23
Chapter 8 - Spiritual Warfare Without Fear	25
Chapter 9 - The Church Carries the Burden	27
Chapter 10 - Waiting Without Despair	29
Chapter 11 - When God Says No or Not Yet	31
Chapter 12 - Deliverance Now and the Final End of Suffering	33

Chapter 13 - Expect Good Surprises From the God Who Watches Over You ³⁵	
Conclusion - Continue to Trust the God Who Loves You	38
Selected Scripture Guide	40
Theological Glossary	41
Pastoral Study Guide	43
Prayers for Seasons of Trial	45
About the Author and Other Publications	47
Notes of the Book	48
Scholarly Contribution and Theological Significance	49
BIBLIOGRAPHY	51
Index of References	52
Index of Authors	53
Index of Subjects	54
Index of Scriptures	55

Chapter 1 - Faith Does Not Remove Every Trial

The promise Christianity does not make

The Christian life is not a contract by which obedience purchases an escape from pain. Jesus never told his disciples that loyalty would make them untouchable. He spoke instead of a narrow way, a cross to carry, opposition to endure, and a peace the world cannot give. A faithful believer may still face illness, financial pressure, family conflict, grief, injustice, temptation, unanswered questions, or long seasons in which nothing seems to improve.¹

This truth must be stated clearly because false expectations wound sincere believers. When suffering continues after prayer, they may conclude that their faith is defective, that God has rejected them, or that a hidden sin explains every difficulty. Scripture does not permit such a simple judgment. Job suffered without the explanation his friends demanded. Paul carried a thorn after repeated prayer. The Son of God entered suffering without ceasing to be the beloved Son.²

Faith is not proved only when a difficulty disappears. Faith is also proved when a person keeps turning toward God while the difficulty remains. The believer does not deny pain, call evil good, or pretend to feel strong. The believer brings the whole truth into the presence of God and refuses to interpret God's love by the changing temperature of circumstances.³

A tested loyalty

Testing reveals what prosperity can conceal. It exposes the objects on which we have quietly depended and asks whether God is worthy of trust for who he is, not merely for what he gives. This does not mean that God delights in distress. It means that no distress is wasted in his hands. He can use what he does not immediately remove to deepen endurance, purify hope, teach compassion, correct priorities, and form the character of Christ in his people.

The goal is not passive resignation. Christians pray, seek help, resist evil, pursue treatment, repair relationships, work for justice, and make wise changes. Yet they do these things without assuming that faithful action gives them control over the timetable. They act because love and obedience are right, while the outcome remains in God's hands.

Footnotes

1. John 16.33; Luke 9.23; James 1.2-4.
2. Job 1.1, 8-12; 2 Corinthians 12.7-10; Matthew 3.17 and 26.36-46.
3. Romans 5.3-5; 8.28-29; 1 Peter 1.6-7.

For reflection

1. What part of this chapter corrects an expectation I have carried about faith and suffering?
2. What can I ask God to change while still entrusting the outcome to him?
3. What wise action, truthful conversation, or request for help should I take now?
4. How can my church or community share this burden more faithfully?

Chapter 2 - Loved by God in Unresolved Trouble

Circumstances are not the measure of love

The most dangerous conclusion in prolonged hardship is the belief that continued pain proves diminished love. The gospel answers that fear at the cross. God's love was not absent when Jesus suffered; it was being revealed in a form the world did not recognize. In the same way, the presence of trouble cannot by itself tell us whether God is near or whether he cares.¹

Romans 8 does not promise that believers will avoid tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, danger, or death. It declares that none of these can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus. The security of the believer rests not in an uninterrupted life but in an unbreakable relationship. The trial may touch health, plans, reputation, and possessions, but it cannot cancel adoption or remove the believer from the Shepherd's hand.²

God's love may be experienced as comfort, strength, provision, correction, patient silence, or the sustaining grace to survive one more day. Sometimes love changes the situation. Sometimes love changes the person within the situation. Often it does both over time.³

Permission to lament

Trust does not require cheerful speech at every moment. Biblical lament speaks honestly: How long? Why? Where are you? Lament is not unbelief when it is addressed to God. It is wounded faith refusing to leave the conversation. The Psalms teach believers to name fear, anger, confusion, and loss without surrendering the conviction that God still hears.

A church that understands divine love makes room for tears. It does not rush sufferers toward easy explanations. It sits with them, prays with them, and helps carry what they cannot carry alone. Love becomes visible through patient presence long before an answer becomes visible.

Footnotes

1. Romans 5.8; 8.31-39; John 10.27-30.
2. Psalms 13; 42-43; 88. Biblical lament addresses pain to God rather than turning away from him.
3. Galatians 6.2; Romans 12.15; 1 Corinthians 12.25-26.

For reflection

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Chapter 3 - God Knows What We Cannot See

Providence without easy explanations

To say that God is in control is not to claim that we can explain every event. Providence is a confession of God's wisdom, power, and faithful purpose; it is not a license to assign a reason to another person's suffering. Some trials have identifiable causes. Others arise from living in a fallen world. Some involve human wrongdoing. Some are connected to spiritual opposition. Many include several causes at once. God alone sees the complete pattern.¹

The believer therefore holds confidence and humility together. Confidence says that nothing surprises God and nothing places his people beyond his reach. Humility says that his reasons may remain hidden. Deuteronomy distinguishes what has been revealed from the secret things that belong to God. Christian maturity learns to obey what is clear without pretending to possess what God has not disclosed.²

Mystery is painful, but it is not emptiness. The unknown future is known by God. The unanswered question is held within his knowledge. The event that seems chaotic to us remains within the boundaries of his permission and the reach of his redemption.³

A boundary known to God

Every test has a boundary even when the believer cannot see it. God knows its beginning, its intensity, the grace required for each stage, and its final place in the believer's story. This does not mean every suffering will end in the way or at the time we request. Some burdens remain for years; some are carried until death. Yet no trial is eternal for those who belong to Christ. Resurrection places a final limit on sorrow.

Hope is therefore larger than immediate relief. We may ask boldly for today's deliverance while resting ultimately in God's promised renewal of all things. He can end the problem now. He can lead us through a longer process. He can sustain us under a condition that does not change. In every case, his knowledge is complete and his presence is not suspended.

Footnotes

1. Deuteronomy 29.29; Isaiah 55.8-9; Romans 11.33-36.
2. Psalm 139.1-18; Matthew 10.29-31; Hebrews 4.13.
3. Revelation 21.1-5 establishes the final boundary of suffering for those who belong to Christ.

For reflection

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Chapter 4 - Prayer Is Trust, Not Control

Why believers ask

Prayer is the natural language of dependence. We ask because God invites us to ask, because he is compassionate, and because he truly acts in response to prayer. Scripture contains real deliverances: doors opened, illnesses healed, danger restrained, wisdom given, and communities renewed. Christians should never become embarrassed about asking God for concrete help.¹

Yet prayer is not a mechanism for forcing a result. It is communion with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit. Its deepest purpose is not to make God serve our plan but to bring our whole life under his wise love. Petition is therefore joined to surrender: 'Your will be done.' This is not a phrase of defeat. It is the language of a child who believes the Father's wisdom is better than the child's limited sight.²

A faithful prayer may be urgent, repeated, and specific. It may also be tearful. What makes it faithful is not confidence in a particular outcome but confidence in God.³

When prayer does not produce the requested yes

Not every prayer receives the answer we desire. Sometimes the answer is yes. Sometimes it is no. Sometimes it is wait, grow, change direction, receive help through ordinary means, or learn that grace will be sufficient without the requested removal. A no from God is not proof that prayer failed. Prayer succeeds when it brings the believer into truthful dependence and leaves the matter with God.

We should resist formulas that blame the sufferer. Unanswered prayer is not always caused by insufficient faith. Jesus prayed in Gethsemane with perfect faith, yet the cup was not removed. Paul

prayed repeatedly about his thorn, yet received sustaining grace rather than removal. These passages protect the church from condemning people whose burdens continue.

The mature believer can say two things at once: 'Lord, please change this,' and 'Lord, if you do not change it now, keep me faithful.' Such prayer neither lowers expectation nor demands control. It asks boldly and trusts deeply.

Footnotes

1. Matthew 6.9-13; 7.7-11; Philippians 4.6-7; James 5.13-18.
2. Matthew 26.39; 1 John 5.14. Christian petition remains subject to the wise will of God.
3. 2 Corinthians 12.8-10; Romans 8.26-27.

For reflection

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Chapter 5 - Jesus in Gethsemane

The holy prayer of surrender

Gethsemane gives the church its clearest pattern for prayer under unbearable pressure. Jesus did not hide his anguish. He told his friends that his soul was overwhelmed with sorrow. He asked that the cup pass from him. The request was not sinful, weak, or faithless. It was the truthful cry of the incarnate Son facing suffering.¹

Then Jesus placed the request within obedience: not my will, but yours. He did not call the cross good in itself. He entrusted himself to the Father who would bring redemption through it. The cup was not removed, but the prayer was not ignored. Strength was given for the path, Scripture was fulfilled, sin was borne, and resurrection followed death.²

Believers should not compare their trials to Christ's unique atoning work, yet they may learn his posture. We can name what we want, refuse false spirituality, ask companions to watch with us, and submit the outcome to God. Surrender is not the absence of desire. It is desire placed into trustworthy hands.³

Presence before explanation

In suffering, people often ask first for an explanation. God often gives presence before explanation. Gethsemane did not contain a lecture about every reason for the cross. It contained prayer, companionship, obedience, and the Father's sustaining purpose. Likewise, believers may receive enough light for the next step without receiving a complete map.

The church serves sufferers best when it imitates this pattern: stay awake, remain near, listen, pray, and do not replace companionship with slogans. A person can endure much when he or she is not abandoned.

Footnotes

1. Matthew 26.36-46; Mark 14.32-42; Luke 22.39-46.
2. Hebrews 5.7-9; 12.2; Philippians 2.5-11.
3. Psalm 46.1; Isaiah 43.1-3; Hebrews 13.5-6.

For reflection

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Chapter 6 - Paul's Thorn and Sufficient Grace

A faithful apostle with an unremoved burden

Paul's thorn in the flesh overturns the claim that spiritual maturity guarantees relief. He asked three times for it to leave. The repeated request shows that persistence in prayer is right. The answer, however, redirected his hope: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' God did not explain every detail or grant the requested removal. He promised adequate grace and purposeful power.¹

Sufficient grace does not mean the thorn became pleasant. It means the burden could no longer define the meaning of Paul's life. Weakness became a place where dependence on Christ was made visible. The apostle's usefulness did not wait for perfect conditions. Ministry continued from within limitation.²

This protects believers from postponing faithfulness until every difficulty ends. A chronic illness, disability, grief, unanswered family problem, or recurring weakness may change what a person can do, but it does not remove that person from God's love or service. Calling can be reshaped without being cancelled.³

Grace for today

God usually gives sufficient grace in daily portions. We often want strength for the next ten years while he gives strength for today. This rhythm keeps the believer near the Giver. It also allows the community to participate, because grace often arrives through meals, medicine, counsel, friendship, financial assistance, and the quiet faithfulness of others.

To receive grace is not to stop seeking change. Paul asked for removal before he embraced the answer he received. Christians can

continue treatment, prayer, advocacy, and practical action while refusing to believe that life is meaningless until the burden disappears.

Footnotes

1. 2 Corinthians 12.7-10.
2. 2 Corinthians 4.7-18 shows divine power displayed through fragile human vessels.
3. Galatians 6.2; Acts 2.42-47; James 5.14-16.

For reflection

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Chapter 7 - Trials, Growth, and the Purposes of God

Formation without romanticizing pain

James teaches believers to consider trials within the horizon of joy because testing can produce steadfastness. Paul speaks of suffering producing endurance, character, and hope. These texts do not command enjoyment of evil or denial of trauma. They identify what God can form through conditions that are genuinely hard.¹

Pain itself does not automatically make a person mature. It can also make a person isolated, bitter, fearful, or exhausted. Growth occurs as suffering is met by grace, truth, community, wise care, and persevering obedience. The church should therefore not tell sufferers merely to 'learn the lesson.' It should help create the conditions in which endurance becomes possible.²

Some purposes become visible: patience deepens, pride softens, compassion expands, priorities change, or a new ministry emerges. Other purposes remain known only to God. We are not required to discover a complete explanation before we can trust him.³

Testing is not rejection

Biblical testing aims at proven faith, not abandonment. A refiner watches the fire; he does not forget the metal. A gardener prunes because fruit matters. These images must be used carefully, never as excuses for abuse or neglect, but they remind believers that divine attention can be present in painful formation.

The believer may ask: What obedience is possible today? What false belief is this trial exposing? Who can help me? What good can I still do? These questions are different from blaming oneself. They turn attention toward faithful response without claiming certainty about hidden causes.

Footnotes

1. James 1.2-4; Romans 5.3-5; Hebrews 12.10-11.
2. The New Testament never commands believers to call evil good; see Romans 12.9 and 1 Corinthians 13.6.
3. 1 Peter 1.6-7; Genesis 50.20; Romans 8.28-29.

For reflection

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Chapter 8 - Spiritual Warfare Without Fear

Resistance under the rule of Christ

Some Christian suffering includes temptation, accusation, deception, division, or direct spiritual opposition. The New Testament calls believers to resist the devil, put on the armor of God, stand in truth, and remain watchful. Spiritual warfare is real, but it is never presented as a battle between equal powers. Christ has triumphed, and believers stand within his victory.¹

Not every problem should be labeled demonic. Illness may require medical care. Depression may require professional treatment and patient support. Conflict may require repentance and better communication. Poverty may require material assistance and structural justice. Discernment refuses both naturalistic denial and spiritualized oversimplification.²

The armor of God is not a collection of magical techniques. It is a life shaped by truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer. Much spiritual warfare looks like ordinary faithfulness maintained under pressure.³

Standing when the battle continues

The command in Ephesians 6 is repeatedly to stand. Sometimes victory is dramatic deliverance. Sometimes victory is refusing a lie for another day, forgiving without returning to danger, asking for help, maintaining prayer when emotions are numb, or continuing honest work while outcomes remain uncertain.

A prolonged battle does not prove Christ is absent. It may be the very place where his sustaining authority is displayed. The believer fights from belonging, not for belonging.

Footnotes

1. Ephesians 6.10-20; James 4.7; 1 Peter 5.8-9.
2. Colossians 2.13-15; Hebrews 2.14-15; 1 John 4.4.
3. Luke 10.25-37 and James 2.14-17 illustrate that spiritual faith includes practical care.

For reflection

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Chapter 9 - The Church Carries the Burden

No one should suffer alone

The command to bear one another's burdens turns private pain into a responsibility of the whole church. Prayer is essential, but prayer should not become a substitute for action. If a person needs food, safety, transportation, medical attention, counseling, rest, or protection from abuse, the community should help provide it.¹

Sufferers are often exhausted by explaining themselves. Wise companions listen before advising. They do not compare wounds or demand quick recovery. They keep confidences appropriately, while acting when someone is in danger. They understand that trauma, grief, and chronic illness affect concentration, energy, memory, and spiritual emotion.²

Pastors must reject teachings that turn every unresolved difficulty into a moral accusation. Discipline has a place when sin is clear, but suspicion is not discernment. The church should be a community where people can say 'I am still struggling' without being treated as spiritual failures.³

Hope made tangible

God's control does not make human care unnecessary. Providence frequently works through people. A phone call, a meal, a doctor's skill, a counselor's wisdom, a legal advocate, a job opportunity, or a faithful friend can be part of God's answer.

When the problem cannot be solved, presence still matters. The church can remember dates of loss, accompany medical appointments, provide respite to caregivers, and continue praying after public attention fades. Long trials require long faithfulness.

Footnotes

1. Galatians 6.2; Romans 12.15; 1 Corinthians 12.25-27.
2. James 2.14-17; 1 John 3.16-18. Prayer should not be used to avoid concrete assistance.
3. Proverbs 18.13; Job 2.11-13; 1 Thessalonians 5.14.

For reflection

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Chapter 10 - Waiting Without Despair

The difference between waiting and inactivity

Biblical waiting is active trust. It watches, prays, obeys, seeks wisdom, and refuses destructive shortcuts. Waiting may include changing doctors, applying again, setting boundaries, learning new skills, confessing sin, or asking the church for help. What it does not do is seize control through methods that contradict God's character.¹

Delay can distort time. A month feels like a year when pain is constant. Believers need rhythms that reduce the weight of the future: daily bread, short prayers, regular rest, honest conversation, Scripture in manageable portions, and specific practical steps. Hope becomes livable when it is practiced in the present tense.²

The question 'How long?' is biblical. The answer is often not a date but a promise: God hears, God remembers, God will judge rightly, God will renew strength, and God will make all things new.³

Guarding the heart during delay

Delay creates particular temptations: envy of those whose prayers seem answered, shame about one's condition, obsession with signs, vulnerability to manipulative promises, and the urge to isolate. Naming these dangers helps believers resist them.

A waiting believer should be cautious of anyone who guarantees a miracle for money, claims secret knowledge of God's timetable, or forbids medical and psychological care. Faith does not fear truth or responsible help. God is not honored by exploitation dressed as confidence.

Footnotes

1. Psalms 27.13-14; 130.5-6; Isaiah 40.28-31; Romans 8.24-25.
2. Habakkuk 2.1-3; Luke 18.1-8; James 5.7-11.
3. Acts 17.11; 1 John 4.1; 1 Thessalonians 5.19-22 call for testing spiritual claims.

For reflection

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Chapter 11 - When God Says No or Not Yet

Receiving an unwanted answer

A no from God can feel like silence, but it is not the same as absence. Sometimes the desired path would harm us in ways we cannot see. Sometimes a greater good requires a different route. Sometimes the reason remains hidden. Christian trust does not pretend that an unwanted answer is emotionally easy; it believes that the Father's character remains good when his decision is difficult.¹

The believer may grieve the answer. Acceptance is often a process, not a single moment. Jesus repeated his prayer in Gethsemane. Paul repeated his request concerning the thorn. Repetition can be part of surrender. Over time, the prayer may change from 'Remove this now' to 'Show me how to live faithfully here,' without losing the freedom to continue asking for change.²

Not yet also requires discernment. Some delays call for perseverance in the same direction. Others call for a changed plan. Wisdom grows through Scripture, prayer, mature counsel, circumstances, and attention to responsibilities already given by God.³

Trust beyond understanding

Trust is not certainty about the next event. It is settled confidence about the One who holds the next event. We may not know what God will do, but we know what he has revealed of himself in Jesus Christ: he is holy, compassionate, truthful, self-giving, and victorious over death.

When explanations fail, the character of God becomes the resting place of faith. The believer says, 'I do not understand this

decision, but I will not build my theology only from this painful moment.'

Footnotes

1. Deuteronomy 3.23-27; 2 Samuel 12.15-23; 2 Corinthians 12.8-10.
2. Matthew 26.36-46 demonstrates repeated petition joined to surrender.
3. Proverbs 3.5-6; Psalm 131; Romans 8.28-39.

For reflection

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Chapter 12 - Deliverance Now and the Final End of Suffering

Ask for present deliverance

Christians should pray with expectation because God can intervene. He can heal, provide, reconcile, protect, open doors, expose injustice, and bring a trial to an end. Testimonies of deliverance encourage the church when they are told truthfully and without turning one person's experience into a universal formula.¹

When relief comes, gratitude should replace pride. The delivered person did not necessarily pray better than the person still waiting. Grace is a gift, not a ranking system. Those who receive relief are called to remember those whose burdens remain.²

Hope that cannot fail

Christian hope finally rests not on the promise that every problem will end before death, but on resurrection and the new creation. God will wipe away every tear. Death, mourning, crying, and pain will not have the last word. This final deliverance is not an escape from God's world but its renewal under Christ.³

Therefore every trial is temporary in the largest and truest sense. Some end quickly. Some end after a long process. Some are transformed rather than removed. Some remain until the believer enters the presence of Christ. None will cross into the completed kingdom.

This distinction protects faith from disappointment while preserving bold hope. We ask for healing today, and we await the healing of creation. We resist evil now, and we await its final defeat. We grieve honestly, and we grieve as people whose future has been secured by the risen Lord.

Footnotes

1. Psalm 34.4-7, 17-19; Acts 12.1-17; James 5.13-18.
2. John 9.1-3 warns against automatically linking another person's suffering to personal sin.
3. 1 Corinthians 15.20-28, 50-58; Revelation 21.1-5; 22.1-5.

For reflection

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Chapter 13 - Expect Good Surprises From the God Who Watches Over You

Hopeful expectancy in every test

Even while you endure many tests, continue to expect good surprises from God. He watches over you. The trial may occupy your attention, but it does not occupy all of God's activity. He can be preparing provision you cannot yet see, opening a door you did not know existed, bringing the right person at the right moment, protecting you from a danger you never recognized, or forming strength within you that will become visible only later.¹

This expectancy is not denial. It does not pretend that the present trouble is small or insist that tomorrow must contain the exact miracle we have imagined. Christian hope remains honest about pain while refusing to believe that pain is the whole story. Because God is attentive, wise, and free, a closed path today does not exhaust the possibilities of tomorrow.²

The phrase 'good surprise' should therefore be understood through God's character. His gift may be a sudden deliverance, but it may also be unexpected endurance, clarity after confusion, reconciliation, timely assistance, a new vocation born from loss, or a quiet awareness that we are not alone. God's goodness is larger than one preferred outcome.³

The God who keeps watch

Scripture describes the Lord as the keeper who neither slumbers nor sleeps. His watchfulness does not mean that believers never experience danger; it means that danger never places them outside his knowledge and care. Nothing reaches his people without passing before his sight. Nothing prevents him from sustaining, guiding, correcting, or redeeming.

God may appear silent while he is arranging circumstances beyond our view. Joseph could not see the future good while he was in the pit or prison. Ruth could not see the full story when she entered Bethlehem as a grieving widow. The disciples could not see resurrection while Jesus lay in the tomb. In each story, God's hidden activity eventually became visible.

We must not turn these stories into a timetable or promise that every earthly loss will be reversed in the same way. They teach something more durable: the visible moment is never the complete account of God's work. The believer can remain open to grace that arrives from an unexpected direction.

Practicing expectant trust

Expectant trust prays with open hands: 'Lord, I do not know how you will help me, but I believe you are watching over me. Make me attentive to the gifts, people, warnings, and opportunities you send.' It keeps the heart from becoming so fixed on one answer that other forms of grace are overlooked.

Such trust also gives thanks for small mercies. A peaceful hour, a faithful friend, a useful conversation, strength to complete one task, or wisdom to avoid a mistake may be the beginning of a larger answer. Gratitude does not minimize the continuing trial; it recognizes that God's goodness is already present within it.

Wait, then, for good surprises without demanding their form or timing. Ask boldly, watch carefully, act wisely, and remain thankful.

The God who loves you is not distracted. He sees the entire road, and he can still bring goodness from places that now seem empty.

Footnotes

1. Psalm 121; Matthew 6.25-34; Romans 8.28. God's watchful care does not mean the absence of trials.
2. Genesis 39-50; Ruth 1-4; Luke 24.1-12 illustrate divine activity that was not immediately visible.
3. Ephesians 3.20-21; James 1.17; 1 Thessalonians 5.16-18.

For reflection

1. What part of this chapter corrects an expectation I have carried about faith and suffering?
2. What can I ask God to change while still entrusting the outcome to him?
3. What wise action, truthful conversation, or request for help should I take now?
4. How can my church or community share this burden more faithfully?

Conclusion - Continue to Trust the God Who Loves You

The final confession

A Christian may be loyal and still be tested. A Christian may pray and still continue fighting the same difficulty. A Christian may love God and feel tired, confused, or afraid. None of these facts proves that God has stopped loving the believer.¹

God knows why each trial has been permitted, including reasons he has not revealed. He knows its limits, the grace required, and the way it will finally end. He may answer prayer by removing the problem. He may answer by changing circumstances gradually. He may answer by giving strength, community, wisdom, treatment, or a new path. He may say no or not yet. His answer is not always the yes we request, but his love remains the foundation beneath every answer.²

Continue, then, to pray. Continue to seek help. Continue to resist evil and practice wisdom. Continue to tell God the truth. Even through all the tests you endure, wait with hope for good surprises from God, because he watches over you. Continue to trust when you understand and when you do not. The sovereign God is not careless with your life. In Christ, suffering cannot separate you from his love, weakness cannot cancel your calling, and death itself cannot destroy your future.³

God will end every sorrow in his time. If he ends a particular trouble now, give thanks. If he allows it to remain, receive today's grace and keep walking with him. He knows what he is doing, even when you do not know what he is doing. His wisdom is complete, his authority is unthreatened, and his love has been demonstrated at the cross and confirmed by the resurrection.

A prayer of persevering trust

Father, I ask you to remove the trouble that weighs on me. You are able to change what I cannot change. Give healing, protection, provision, justice, and peace according to your wisdom. Yet I place my request in your hands. If the answer is delayed, keep me from despair. If the answer is different from what I desire, keep me near you. Give me grace for today, wise companions, courage to seek help, and strength to obey. Teach me to trust your character when I cannot understand your plan. Through Jesus Christ, hold me until every sorrow is ended in your kingdom. Amen.

Footnotes

1. Romans 8.31-39; Hebrews 13.5-6; 1 Peter 5.6-11.
2. Psalm 121.3-8; Isaiah 46.9-11; Philippians 1.6.
3. Revelation 21.1-5; Romans 8.18-25; 2 Corinthians 4.16-18.

For reflection

1. What part of this chapter corrects an expectation I have carried about faith and suffering?
2. What can I ask God to change while still entrusting the outcome to him?
3. What wise action, truthful conversation, or request for help should I take now?
4. How can my church or community share this burden more faithfully?

Selected Scripture Guide

God's presence in trouble

Psalms 23; 27; 42-43; 46; 73; 88; 121; Isaiah 43.1-3

Testing and endurance

Romans 5.1-5; James 1.2-8; 1 Peter 1.3-9; Hebrews 10.35-39; 12.1-13

Prayer and surrender

Matthew 6.5-13; 26.36-46; Luke 11.1-13; 18.1-8; Philippians 4.4-9

Unremoved burdens

2 Corinthians 4.7-18; 12.7-10; Galatians 6.2

God's inseparable love

Romans 8.18-39; John 10.27-30; 1 John 4.7-19

Spiritual resistance

Ephesians 6.10-20; James 4.7-10; 1 Peter 5.6-11

Final hope

1 Corinthians 15; 2 Corinthians 5.1-10; Revelation 21.1-5; 22.1-5

Theological Glossary

Christology

The theological study of the person and work of Jesus Christ. In this book, Christology centers the interpretation of suffering in Jesus' cross, resurrection, intercession, and continuing presence with his people.

Divine freedom

God's perfect liberty to act according to his holy wisdom and love. Prayer is meaningful and effective, yet it does not place God under human control or obligation.

Eschatology

The theological study of the last things, including resurrection, judgment, the return of Christ, and the renewal of creation. Eschatological hope places present suffering within God's promised future.

Grace

God's unearned favor and active help. Grace may appear as forgiveness, strength, wisdom, community, provision, transformation, or endurance when a burden is not removed.

Lament

Faithful speech that brings grief, protest, fear, and confusion before God. Biblical lament refuses both denial and abandonment of the relationship with God.

Pastoral theology

The disciplined application of Christian doctrine to the care, worship, witness, and shared life of the church.

Providence

God's wise preservation, governance, and direction of creation toward his purposes. Confidence in providence does not give human beings complete knowledge of the reason for each event.

Sanctification

The Spirit's continuing work of conforming believers to the character of Christ. Trials can become occasions of growth, although pain by itself does not automatically produce maturity.

Spiritual warfare

The believer's resistance to temptation, accusation, deception, division, and demonic opposition under Christ's authority through truth, righteousness, faith, prayer, and obedient life.

Theodicy

An attempt to account for the goodness and power of God in relation to evil and suffering. This book offers a pastoral framework while recognizing that Scripture does not disclose every hidden reason.

Theology of the cross

An approach emphasizing that God's saving power and wisdom are revealed supremely in the crucified Christ, often in forms that contradict ordinary expectations of visible strength.

Triumphalism

The distortion of Christian hope into the claim that faithful believers should enjoy constant visible victory, health, or prosperity in the present age.

Pastoral Study Guide

Purpose

This guide is designed for personal reflection, pastoral conversations, small groups, and theological classrooms. It supports careful discussion but does not replace professional medical, psychological, legal, or safeguarding assistance. Group leaders should never pressure participants to disclose private experiences.

Suggested eight-session plan

Session 1 - Faith and persistent trials

Read Chapters 1-2. Identify expectations about faith that may shame believers whose burdens continue. Discuss how the cross establishes God's love more securely than changing circumstances.

Session 2 - Providence and mystery

Read Chapter 3. Distinguish confidence in God's rule from claims to know the hidden reason for another person's suffering. Practice language that is truthful, humble, and comforting.

Session 3 - Prayer and surrender

Read Chapters 4-5. Compare bold petition with controlling prayer. Study Jesus in Gethsemane and write a prayer that names a desired outcome while entrusting it to the Father.

Session 4 - Sufficient grace

Read Chapters 6-7. Discuss the difference between glorifying pain and recognizing growth formed by grace. Identify practical means through which sustaining grace may arrive.

Session 5 - Spiritual and practical care

Read Chapters 8-9. Consider how spiritual resistance, medical care, material assistance, justice, and church companionship can work together.

Session 6 - Waiting and unwanted answers

Read Chapters 10-11. Name the temptations created by delay. Develop a short plan for active waiting that includes prayer, rest, wise action, and accountable support.

Session 7 - Deliverance and hopeful expectancy

Read Chapters 12-13. Discuss present deliverance, final redemption, and good surprises from God without turning hope into a guaranteed timetable.

Session 8 - A rule of persevering trust

Read the conclusion. Create a personal or communal rule of life for seasons of trial: daily prayer, weekly support, appropriate care, truthful lament, gratitude, and concrete acts of obedience.

Guidance for facilitators

Begin and end on time. Establish confidentiality with appropriate exceptions for danger or abuse. Listen before advising. Avoid comparing suffering or promising outcomes God has not promised. Make room for silence and tears. Where a participant may be unsafe, encourage immediate contact with qualified local services and responsible authorities.

Prayers for Seasons of Trial

A prayer when the burden remains

Faithful Father, you know the weight I carry and the answer I desire. I ask you to remove this burden and open a path I cannot make for myself. If the trial remains today, give me today's grace. Guard me from shame, fear, and isolation. Lead me to wise help, faithful companions, and the next act of obedience. Keep my heart near you while I wait. Amen.

A prayer when God seems silent

Lord, I do not understand your silence, but I bring my confusion to you rather than turning away. Remember me in mercy. Help me recognize your presence in Scripture, in faithful people, in ordinary provision, and in strength I did not create. Preserve me from false promises and teach me to wait without surrendering hope. Amen.

A prayer for healing and responsible care

God of life, bring healing according to your wisdom. Guide physicians, counselors, pastors, caregivers, and all who offer help. Give courage to seek treatment, patience with the process, and discernment about every recommendation. Protect me from exploitation. Whether healing comes suddenly or gradually, let truth, compassion, and gratitude govern the journey. Amen.

A prayer for the church

Jesus Christ, make your church a safe community for those who suffer. Teach us to listen without accusation, pray without manipulation, give without pride, and remain when answers are delayed. Show us when to speak, when to be silent, and when to act. Let no member carry alone what love enables the whole body to share. Amen.

A prayer of hopeful expectancy

God who watches over me, keep me attentive to your good surprises. I do not demand their form or timing. Open my eyes to unexpected provision, protection, friendship, wisdom, opportunity, and peace. When the road looks empty, remind me that your work is larger than what I can see. Make me thankful for every sign of grace. Amen.

A prayer of final hope

Risen Lord, anchor my life in the future you have promised. Every present sorrow has a boundary before your kingdom. Hold me in faith until death is defeated, tears are wiped away, and creation is made new. Until that day, make me courageous in prayer, steadfast in love, and faithful in hope. Amen.

About the Author and Other Publications

Rev. Dr. Silas Kanyabigega, PhD

Rev. Dr. Silas Kanyabigega is a theologian, educator, pastor, and organizational leader whose work brings biblical teaching into conversation with Christian formation, leadership, preaching, and the life of the church. His academic preparation includes doctoral studies in educational and organizational leadership, ministry, and systematic theology. He serves through IMC Academic Press and the International Movement for Christ.

His writing is directed toward pastors, theological students, ministry leaders, churches, and readers seeking biblically grounded guidance for Christian discipleship. A recurring concern in his work is the relationship between faithful doctrine and the practical realities of spiritual growth, suffering, proclamation, and ecclesial life.

Selected publications

Les manifestations charismatiques dans les Eglises du Rwanda: Une etude theologique et historique. A theological and historical study of charismatic manifestations in Rwandan churches.

La Predication Centree sur Jesus-Christ: Fondements bibliques, theologiques, spirituels et homiletiques pour une proclamation fidele de l'Evangile. A study of Christ-centered preaching and faithful gospel proclamation.

Kwizera Yesu Kristo: Iherezo ry'abatizera Yesu. A Kinyarwanda work addressing faith in Jesus Christ and the destiny of unbelief.

Further information

Author and ministry information is available at www.movement-for-christ.com. Published by IMC ACADEMIC PRESS in the United States of America.

Notes of the Book

Purpose and central claim

This book offers a pastoral and theological account of faithful Christian endurance. Its central claim is that loyalty to Christ does not exempt believers from continuing trials, and that an unresolved burden does not prove the absence of divine love. Prayer remains a real appeal to the living God, but it is not a technique for controlling his answer. God may remove a difficulty, transform it gradually, sustain the believer within it, or permit it to remain for reasons known fully only to him.

Method and scope

The argument proceeds through biblical synthesis, theological reflection, and pastoral application. It gives special attention to Job, the Psalms of lament, Jesus in Gethsemane, Paul's thorn in the flesh, the church's ministry of burden-bearing, and the Christian hope of resurrection. The book does not attempt to explain the hidden cause of every affliction. It distinguishes responsible trust in providence from speculative claims about another person's suffering.

How to use this book

The chapters may be read privately, in pastoral counseling, or in a church study group. Each chapter ends with questions for reflection and concise footnotes that identify its principal biblical foundations. The selected Scripture guide, bibliography, and indexes are designed to support further study. Readers facing medical, psychological, legal, financial, or safety concerns should combine prayer with appropriate professional and community assistance.

Scholarly Contribution and Theological Significance

A theology of endurance without triumphalism

The book contributes to pastoral theology by resisting two opposite errors: despair, which assumes that suffering has escaped God's care, and triumphalism, which assumes that faithful prayer must produce immediate relief. In conversation with Augustine's account of rightly ordered hope, Martin Luther's theology of the cross, John Calvin's doctrine of providence, and contemporary theology of suffering, it locates Christian confidence in the revealed character of God rather than in predictable circumstances.

Prayer under divine freedom

Its theology of prayer preserves both genuine petition and divine freedom. The believer is encouraged to ask specifically and persistently while surrendering the result to God's wisdom. Gethsemane and 2 Corinthians 12 provide the controlling patterns: an ungranted request is not necessarily a faithless request, and sustaining grace is a substantive divine answer even when removal is withheld.

Providence, mystery, and moral responsibility

The book treats providence as confidence in God's wise rule, not as permission to name hidden causes. This distinction protects sufferers from blame and protects theology from presumption. Divine sovereignty does not cancel moral agency: believers still seek treatment, resist abuse and injustice, practice discernment, and carry one another's burdens. Providence often works through these ordinary means of care.

Eschatological hope

Finally, the argument places every temporary outcome within the resurrection of Christ and the promised renewal of creation. Some trials end now; others do not. Yet no sorrow has an unlimited future in the kingdom of God. This eschatological horizon allows the church to pray boldly for present deliverance without making present deliverance the measure of God's faithfulness.

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Index of References

Gethsemane: Matthew 26.36-46, 17, 19, 31, 38; Mark 14.32-42, 19; Luke 22.39-46, 19

Job: Job 1.1, 8-12, 11; Job 2.11-13, 27

Paul's thorn: 2 Corinthians 12.7-10, 11, 17, 21, 31, 38

Providence: Deuteronomy 29.29, 15; Genesis 50.20, 23; Romans 8.28-29, 11, 15, 23, 35, 38

Resurrection and new creation: 1 Corinthians 15, 33, 40; Revelation 21.1-5, 15, 33, 38, 40

Suffering and divine love: Romans 5.8, 13; Romans 8.31-39, 13, 31, 38, 40

Waiting and endurance: Psalms 27.13-14, 29; James 1.2-4, 11, 23; Hebrews 10.35-39, 40

Index of Authors

Augustine, 49, 51
Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 51
Calvin, John, 49, 51
Carson, D. A., 51
Kanyabigega, Silas, 1, 3, 47
Lewis, C. S., 51
Luther, Martin, 49, 51
Moltmann, Jurgen, 51
Plantinga, Alvin, 51
Stott, John R. W., 51
Swinton, John, 51
Wright, N. T., 51

Index of Subjects

abuse and safety, 25, 27, 43
answered prayer, 17, 31, 33
church, burden-bearing, 27
divine control, 15, 17, 38
divine love, 13, 38
divine mystery, 15, 23, 31
eschatological hope, 15, 33, 38, 40, 41, 49-50
faithfulness, 11, 21, 29, 38
good surprises, 35, 38, 45
grace, sufficient, 21, 41
grief, 13, 31
healing, 17, 33, 45
lament, 13, 41
medical and professional care, 25, 27, 29, 43, 48
pastoral care, 27, 43-44, 47-48
perseverance, 11, 23, 29
prayer, 17, 19, 21, 31, 33, 38, 45-46
providence, 15, 27, 41, 49
spiritual warfare, 25, 41
suffering, 11-38, 41, 43-46
testing, 11, 23
unanswered prayer, 17, 19, 21, 31
waiting, 29, 45

Index of Scriptures

Genesis 39-50, 35; 50.20, 23

Deuteronomy 29.29, 15

Psalms 13, 13; 23, 40; 27, 29, 40; 42-43, 13, 40; 46, 19, 40; 88, 13, 40; 121, 35, 38, 40

Isaiah 40.28-31, 29; 43.1-3, 19, 40; 55.8-9, 15

Matthew 6.5-13, 17, 40; 26.36-46, 17, 19, 31, 40

John 9.1-3, 33; 10.27-30, 13, 40; 16.33, 11

Romans 5.1-5, 11, 23, 40; 8.18-39, 13, 15, 31, 38, 40

1 Corinthians 15, 33, 40

2 Corinthians 4.7-18, 21, 38, 40; 12.7-10, 11, 17, 21, 31, 38, 40

Ephesians 3.20-21, 35; 6.10-20, 25, 40

Philippians 4.4-9, 17, 40

James 1.2-8, 11, 23, 40; 5.13-18, 17, 33

1 Peter 1.3-9, 11, 23, 40; 5.6-11, 25, 38, 40

Revelation 21.1-5, 15, 33, 38, 40; 22.1-5, 33, 40