



Holding Onto Hope

*40 days of God's encouragement
through art and reflections*

Amy Boucher Pye and Leo Boucher

Praise for *Holding Onto Hope*

‘In this beautiful pairing of words and art, Amy Boucher Pye and her father, Leo Boucher, invite us into a journey of hope by meditating on the steadfast faithfulness of a kind and trustworthy God. Amy’s insightful reflections on scripture and poignant prayers bring the word to life, while Leo’s gentle paintings provide visual opportunities to savour the goodness of God’s care for us. In a time when so many are weary and heavy-laden, *Holding Onto Hope* bids us to come, rest and be renewed in the Lord’s love.’

Sharon Garlough Brown, author, spiritual director, speaker and cofounder of Abiding Way Ministries

‘This new devotional, although small in size, contains deep riches. Amy marries personal anecdotes and stories from inspiring historical figures with insights from biblical texts to provide daily food for thought – finishing each day with a prayer and often with a suggestion for further reflection. Accompanied by her dad’s vibrant and emotive paintings... there is great treasure to be found in this book, which would make a lovely gift for anyone – including yourself!’

Claire Musters, author, speaker, editor and host of the *Woman Alive* book club

‘I know how difficult it can be to hold onto hope. At times it feels like a very slippery rope. The paradox, however, is that we are being held as much as we are holding. Amy’s carefully crafted devotions and deeply relevant prayers, together with her father’s simple yet illuminating artwork, provide us with the assurance we need in our distress. They help us to reach out to the God who is already reaching out to us. Here is a beautiful resource to enrich our times of reflection and longing for God, rekindling hope within us.’

Tony Horsfall, author, retreat leader and mentor

‘Amy Boucher Pye and her father, Leo Boucher, have collaborated again to create a stunning book of imagery and word in *Holding Onto Hope*. Using only 40 devotionals to journey us through Genesis to Revelation takes a fair amount of creativity, mixed with courage, but the father/daughter partnership do this seamlessly. As you embark on this journey you will discover hope being renewed and released while interacting with the questions, prayers and paintings. By the end of *Holding Onto Hope* I was reminded that the picture of our lives, throughout all our seasons, has always been painted with a brush of hope when held in the hand of a loving heavenly Father.’

Jen Baker, speaker, author and mentor

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Reflections by
Amy Boucher Pye

Illustrations by
Leo Boucher



Ministries

15 The Chambers, Vineyard
Abingdon OX14 3FE
brf.org.uk

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The author asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work

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To our family:
Beth and Paul,
beloved daughter and son, sister and brother,
and to our relations,
the Boucher/Furr, Mohni, Olson and Pye families,
with love and hope.



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Introduction

Scripture pulses with images, which God uses to convey to us hope, faith, love and joy. My dad and I welcome you to this 40-day journey into biblical pictures that will strengthen your faith and enliven your hope in God. When we feel lost and unmoored, we can build our trust in God by spending time with these powerful metaphors that convey the truth of who he is and how he has made us. These images help us to take what might feel abstract and hidden, and make it concrete and relatable so that we can better comprehend and worship God.

We've divided this book into six parts, the first one longer than the others in case you want to engage with this book during the season of Lent. In this case, part 1 covers the period from Ash Wednesday through the first full week, and we don't cover Sundays, assuming you'll have times of peace and communion with your church family then. Of course, you're not limited to using this book during Lent. After all, in a world of strife, acrimony, disease and natural disasters, we all need an infusion of hope.

At the end of the book, we've included some questions for individual reflection or group discussion, and there you'll also find a guide to *visio divina*, how to pray with the help of a painting.

What's involved in this journey? In parts 1 and 2 we look at images from creation that convey God's special grace and love to those he's made. We see in part 1 how all creation praises God – from the flowers of the field to the streams in the desert and the trees clapping their hands. In part 2 we stay with the creation theme, exploring the agricultural pattern of sowing, planting and harvesting. We then pivot in the rest of the book as we explore God's promises to us. In part 3 we look at his invitations, such as how he writes eternity onto our hearts and, indeed, how he gives us a new heart. We then explore in part 4 compelling images of God as our help and refuge, including God being our shade and rear guard. In part 5 we see how God changes his people – he clothes us, he renews our minds and he strengthens us. Finally, in part 6 we focus on our new life in Christ through such pictures as new wineskins, the imperishable seed and the glorious city to come.

All of the images and reflections point us back to the freeing and joyous message of God's grace and love. He wants us to immerse ourselves in these metaphors, that we would be able to engage with the mystery of the incomprehensible God making himself known. He delights when we delve into his word in this way.

A note on the resources I've used when writing the reflections. I'm a bit of a magpie when it comes to researching the biblical texts. I like to read various commentaries as I learn about the scripture passage, and no doubt I gain from their wisdom. Where I restate the ideas of Bible commentators directly I add a note, but often my reflections will bear the imprint of their thoughts in ways that I'm unable to easily

reference. Among others, I appreciate the ‘The Bible Speaks Today’ series published by IVP, the ‘For Everyone Bible Studies’ published by SPCK, ‘The NIV Application Commentaries published by Zondervan, the online resources of David Guzik’s Enduring Word commentary and the Precept Austin resources.

My dad and I would like to thank the team at BRF, particularly Karen Laister, Olivia Warburton, Becca Turnbull, Rose Edwards and Eley McAinsh. In terms of writing feedback, thank you to Amy Young for her insightful encouragement and to Tanya Marlow for helping me to overhaul the text in more than one place. We’re so grateful, too, to our family on both sides of the Atlantic for cheering us on.

We trust and hope that as you read the reflections and enjoy the artwork, you’ll receive a deep infusion of God’s never-ending hope.

Amy Boucher Pye





Part 1

All the earth praises God

Delight with us in images from creation that express the glories of God. All creation pulses with love for God, displaying his handiwork. Here we see trees clapping their hands and God making a way in the wilderness. New life bursts into bloom from the living water that God sends to refresh his earth and his people.





The land is satisfied

An insight from a woman living in an urban jungle has stayed with me – that even if we have no outward beauty to feast our eyes on, we can look up to the birds and pause as we listen to their melodious tunes.¹ This notion helped me especially during the various lockdowns of the coronavirus pandemic, when I found myself yearning for the beauty of the countryside.

This act of receiving from creation, even if no pastoral landscape delights us, can help as we cling to hope in times of trial and disappointment. One way to help us build our faith in God is to embrace the words and images of the Psalms, even when they contrast with what we experience in our daily lives.

For instance, take Psalm 104, which speaks of the creatures who have their thirst quenched by the ravines that flow through the mountains, the birds that nest by the waters, the grass that feeds the cattle, the plants for people to eat and the land being ‘satisfied by the fruit of his work’ (see Psalm 104:10–14). Those rich descriptions,

however, might not marry up with what our hearts bear; we might not feel fed by creation. Instead, we grapple with a seemingly distant God, or with dreams that we've had to release, or with the loss of a loved one through ill-health or death. The singing of birds across the land doesn't give us joy but brings a sense of poignant loss.

Finding hope in times such as these often involves our will. That is, we decide to hold onto God's promises even if the future appears bleak. We ponder the words of his Psalms, turning the images over in our minds and hearts. We ask God to help us to believe, and he responds. He may give us a flash of joy amid the pain. A moment of hope. A sense of his love and affirmation. Or even just a brief lifting of heaviness.

If that's what you need today, I pray that God will deliver it in abundance. That you too will be gladdened by God's goodness, your face shining with his love (see Psalm 104:15).

God of the rivers that water the earth, renew and refresh the arid places in my heart. I want to hold onto your promises, even when the landscape bears no loveliness. Show me your beauty, whether through a flowing river, a majestic mountain or your loving words, that I might believe. Amen.







A way in the wilderness

My legs wobbled as I searched for the next foothold amid the slippery rocks. Wiping off the sludge from my trousers, I braced myself for the next step. A few minutes later, I was delighted to come upon a brook (as pictured here). I exhaled, pausing to take in the gurgling sounds as I gazed on the shoots of life appearing next to the muddy remains of winter. ‘I am making a way in the wilderness,’ I reminded myself, thinking of God’s promises to his people.

I was out exploring early in the morning on the Lee Abbey estate in Devon, roaming the hills and walking near the sea before breakfast and the day’s activities. Feeling weary and weighed down by some hard things going on in my family, I stopped to delight in God’s goodness. I sensed his care for me and my loved ones, even as we were separated by many miles. In the quiet I reflected that he loved them more than I did and would care for them. I also sensed that he would be with me as I led the retreat, helping me to be fully present. In those moments, he was making a way in my wilderness.

The phrase ‘I am making a way in the wilderness’ was given to the prophet Isaiah, to speak to God’s people as they left Babylon for Jerusalem, an arduous journey of between 500 and 900 miles, which would take them at least four months. God said to his people: ‘Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland’ (Isaiah 43:18–19).

Their trudging in the unwelcoming terrain would have reminded them of their ancestors’ exodus to the promised land, led by Moses. But God tells them not to hanker after the ‘former things’ because he’s ‘doing a new thing’. It’s springing forth for them to notice – the way in the wilderness.²

When we feel like we can’t find a strong footing, or we’re discouraged about what lies ahead, we can trust that God won’t fail us. He’ll extend his everlasting arm underneath us as he leads the way. As we hope in him, he’ll increase our trust and faith in him.

God of those who wobble, steady me with your love. Help me, when I feel hopeless, to hope in you. Immerse me in your pool of love, the waters that never evaporate. Strengthen me as you make a way in the wilderness. Amen.





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Welcome to this 40-day journey into hope...

When we feel lost and unmoored, we can turn to God, who reveals himself through powerful metaphors that convey who he is and how he's made us. These images pulse with life, beauty and truth. We explore all creation praising God – the flowers of the field, streams in the desert and trees clapping their hands. Agricultural patterns of sowing, growing and harvesting produce a bounty of meaning for us to receive. Other images

include those of God as our help and refuge – our shade and rear guard – and of the change that happens as he clothes us, renews our minds and strengthens us.

As we immerse ourselves in these reflections and illustrations, may we come to know God more intimately and find hope in him.



Daughter and father team Amy Boucher Pye and Leo Boucher share their art and reflections from London and Minnesota. Amy is a writer, speaker and spiritual director and the author of a number of books including *7 Ways to Pray* (SPCK, 2021). Leo is a retired data systems analyst who paints in his art studio and volunteers with his church and other organisations. Find them at amyboucherpye.com.



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‘A stunning book of imagery and word.’

Jen Baker, speaker, author and mentor



Front: 'Our rear guard'; above: 'New heaven and new earth' © Leo Boucher; author and artist photos by Daniel Mick.