

SISTERS

OF AFRICA

15-18 SEPTEMBER 2021

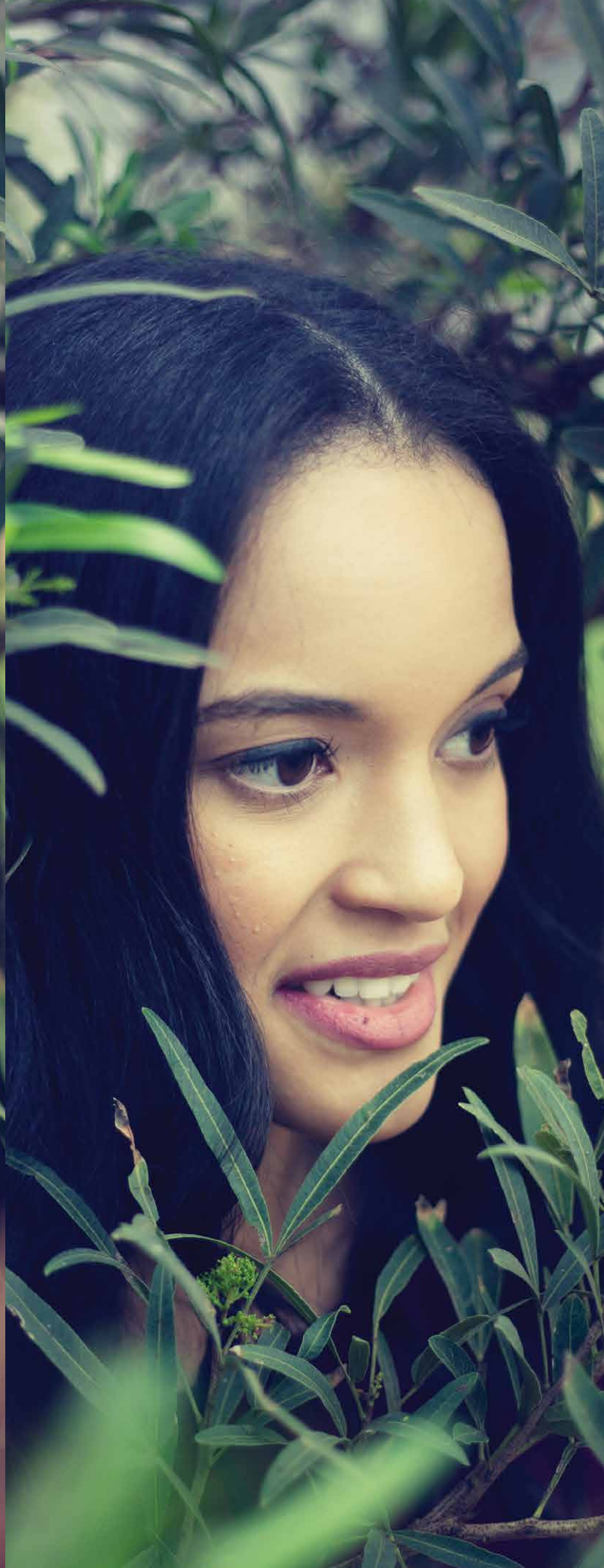
RESET
RECHARGE
REFRESH





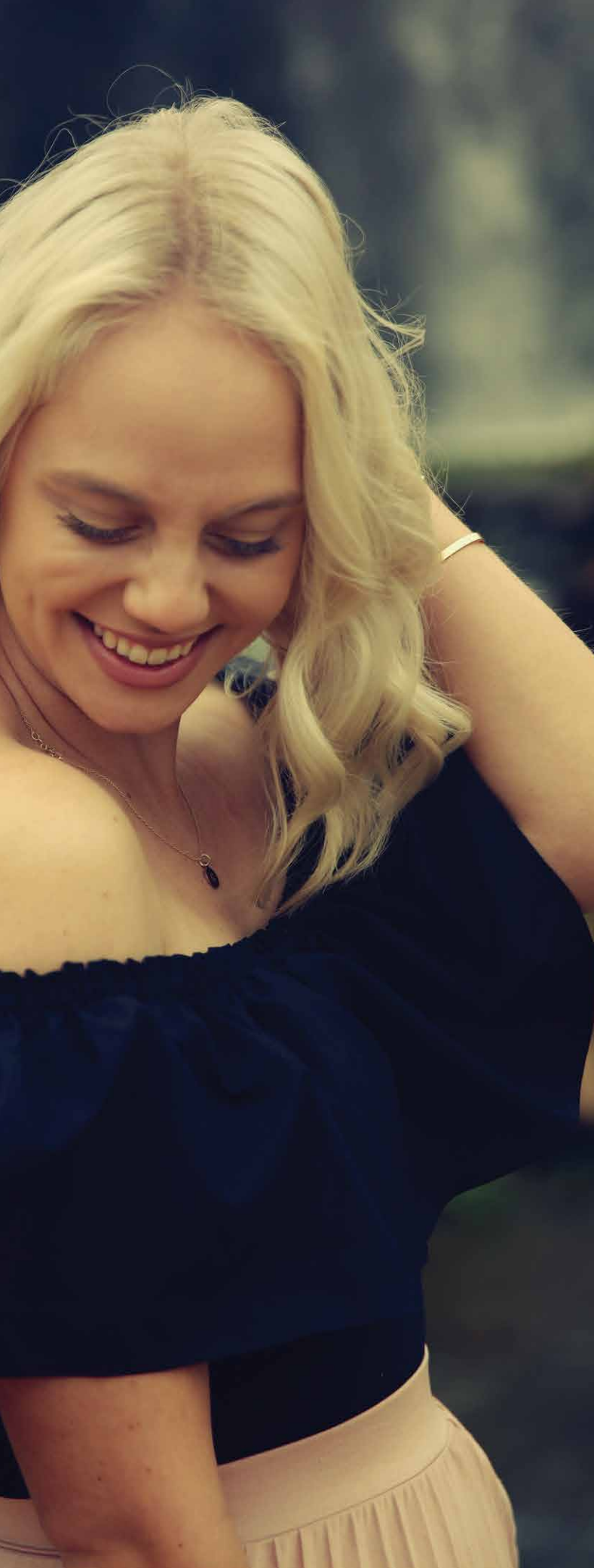


reset





recharge





refresh

SISTERS

OF AFRICA

15-18 SEPTEMBER 2021



WE'RE COMING TO YOU IN YOUR HOME
ONLINE

WITH GUEST SPEAKERS

SHERYL BRADY

MERCY LOKULUTU

CHARLOTTE GAMBILL

AND YOUR HOST

WILMA OLIVIER



welcome

Welcome to your Sisters of Africa magazine for 2021. It is hard to believe what circumstances we find ourselves in, but God is carrying us and we must believe that there are better days before us. God is in our today and tomorrow.

Jude 1:1-2 (NCV) To all who have been called by God. God the Father loves you, and you have been kept safe in Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace, and love be yours richly.

If you have been through loss and hardship, we are so sorry about that. We have read so many prayer requests and stories of what people faced and went through, and our hearts go out to you. We as a sisterhood will keep on praying and trusting for your protection and wellbeing.

We need to keep hoping and believing that life will return to normal, although I am sure we have a lot of adjusting to do, and perhaps for many, life will not be as it was. All this isolation has also been so difficult as we believe in gathering and we believe in community.

That is why we decided not to postpone the conference again but to go ahead and bring you the best that is in our hand under these circumstances and to meet the needs of women and build them up in their faith. We have lovingly put this magazine together for you and trust that the articles and quotes will encourage you and also give you information regarding our online Sisters of Africa Conference, plus our online Kids Africa Conference for your children.

I am sure you will understand that our speakers will not be able to travel to us, but they have all agreed to be online with us and to share great messages that will no doubt be uplifting and inspirational. We are working and planning to have an amazing online conference for both you and your children.

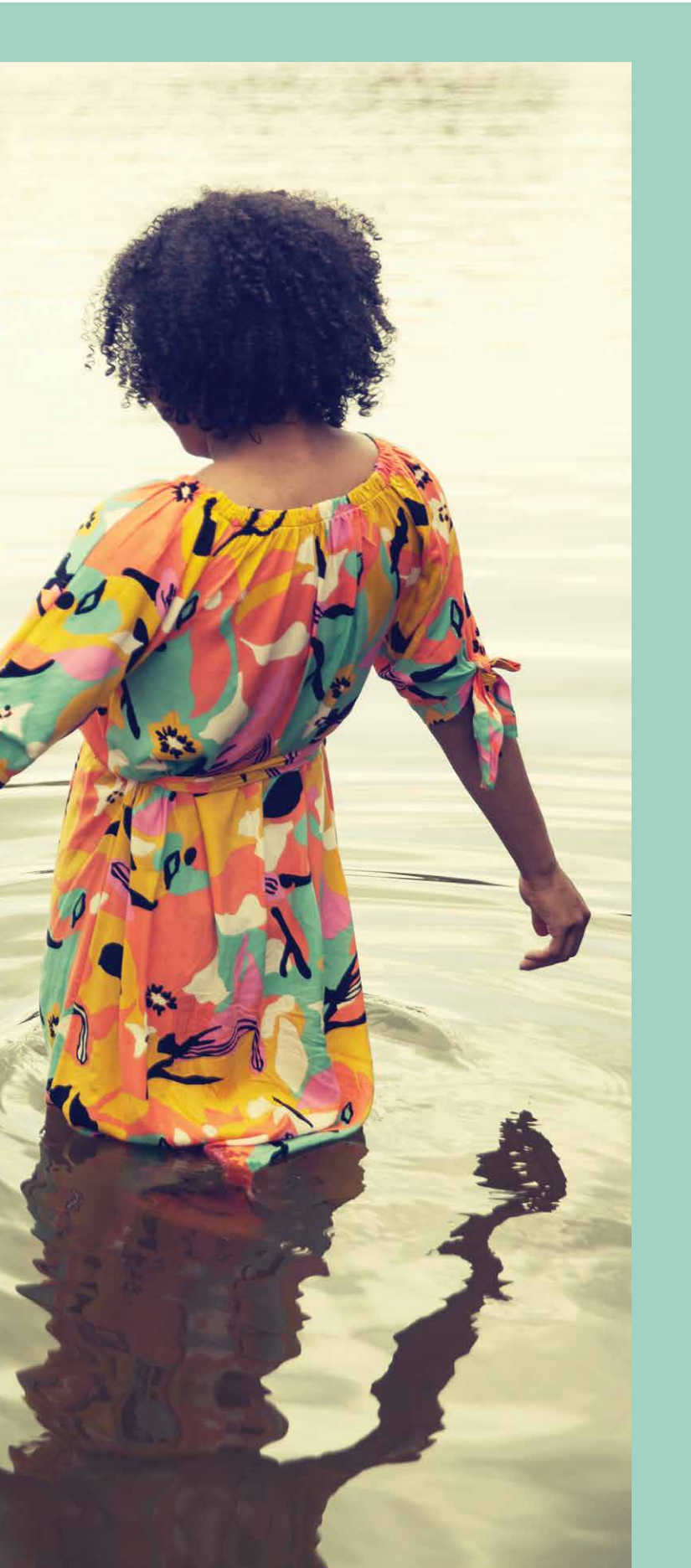
Check out the new dates and all the information you will need on the Information Page to help you plan. Sit back, relax and be inspired and encouraged as you read through the pages of your Invitation Magazine. Tune in online and celebrate womanhood with us in September!

Much love,
Wilma Olivier (Your Host)









RIVERS.

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important info

We are excited for our first ever online Sisters of Africa! We are working hard to prepare an incredible conference with all the special moments and elements you've come to love over the years. We have tailored the conference so you don't need to take time off work but can enjoy evening sessions from **Wednesday to Friday (18:30-20:30)**, and then a special **Saturday morning session from 9am-11am**.

This year, Kids Africa Conference will be absolutely free, running from Thursday to Saturday, so your kids and little ones in your world will have an incredible time learning about God in a fun and relevant way!

We know you may have some questions regarding our new format, so check out our FAQs below, and if there is anything else you're not sure about, email **conferences@rivers.church**.

How do I register?

You can register online at **www.rivers.church**. You can also register at an Info Counter at one of our campuses.

How will I know I am registered?

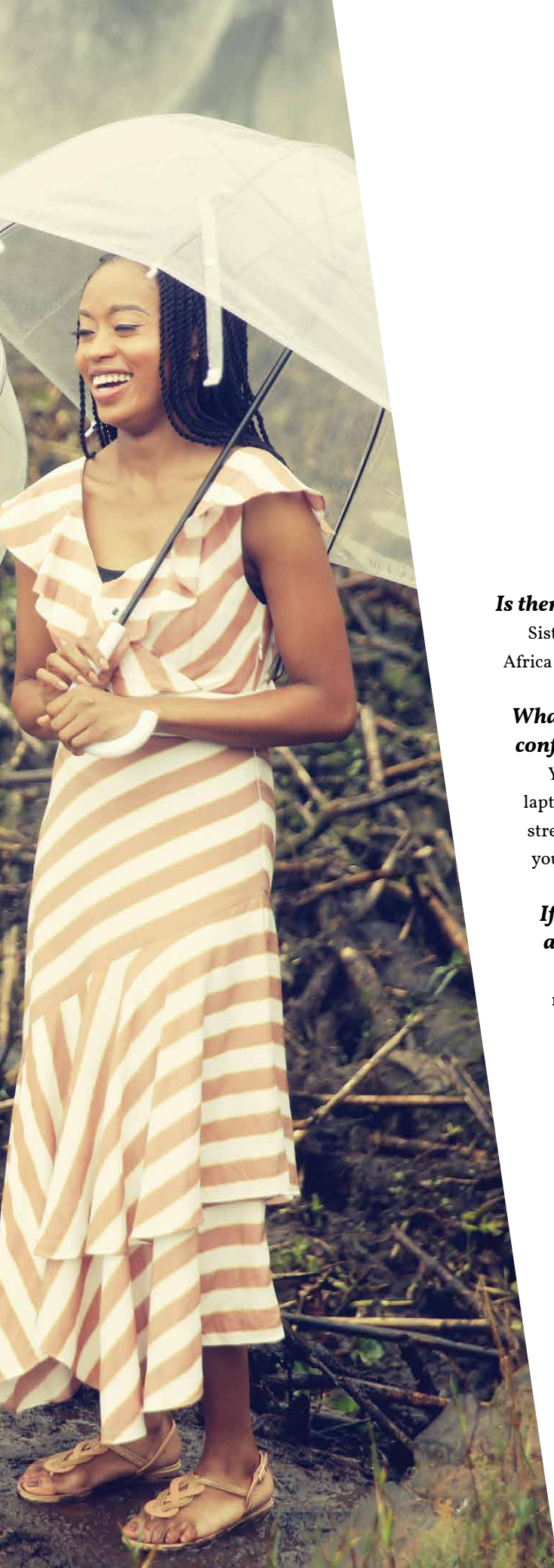
If you have registered for Sisters of Africa Conference, you will receive a link closer to the conference. This link will allow you access to the conference sessions and will be sent to the email address you provided us at registration.

Do I need to register my kids for Kids Africa Conference?

Kids Africa Conference will be free of charge and will be available on our website. Registration for kids is NOT required! So make sure you have another device to allow your little ones to enjoy conference with you.







Is there an age limit?

Sisters of Africa Conference is open to women of all ages, while Kids Africa Conference is tailored for kids aged 1 to Grade 6.

What are the technical requirements for me to stream conference?

You will require an electronic device such as a cell phone, tablet, laptop or Smart TV, with an internet connection. As the event will be live streamed, you will require sufficient data, so prepare in advance so that you don't miss out on a single moment of conference.

If I had registered for 2020, does my registration automatically get transferred to 2021?

Yes. If you had already registered for last year's conference, your registration will automatically be transferred to this year's conference, so you do not need to re-register. Just sit back and enjoy 2021!

What if I will be watching from outside of South Africa?

You can enjoy conference from anywhere in the world. Please note that conference times provided are based on CAT, so wherever you find yourself in the world, plan ahead as we can't wait to have you join us!

Can I register for specific days or sessions only?

We understand that as women we live very busy lives. We have tried to make conference as accessible to you as possible, so that you don't have to take time off work to attend. As in previous years, your conference registration allows you to enjoy the entire conference, but if you are not able to join in for a session or two, we will make the content available for a short time afterwards, so that you can still catch-up in time for the next session.



AFRICA KIDS AFRICA KIDS

Conference

2021 Online Conference

2021 Online





Every year we cannot wait for Kids Africa Conference, because we know how it impacts the kids and how much fun they have digging into God's Word. Though things look a little different this year, your kids are in for an exciting online conference that is totally free of charge! The kids will have an incredible time online learning about God in a relevant way, enjoying creative arts and colourful crafts, engaging games, fun with their favourite characters and so much more. So parents of all kids aged 1 to grade 6, help them to join us online through our Rivers Church website. We can't wait to welcome your kids at Kids Africa Conference 2021!



She is clothed in strength and dignity

Proverbs
31:25 NLT



the gift of *compassion*

Sheryl Brady

Now, anyone who really knows me knows I am a stabilizer. Whenever I see someone in a crisis, something rises up within me, and I want to do everything in my power to bring balance to the moment and, hopefully, usher in a sense of peace to the situation. Whether through word or deed, I'm in it with you. I do it because I remember what it's like to be in a crisis and in dire need of assurance that everything will turn out okay. And when God brings you through moments such as what we just went through in 2020, it unlocks a measure of compassion in you that will most likely be with you for the rest of your life.







In some ways, all of us have something in us that triggers our compassion. It kicks in, and we find ourselves donating to a complete stranger's GoFundMe page or babysitting for a single mother who just needs time to run some long-overdue errands. Maybe it's picking up groceries for an elderly neighbor, volunteering at a food bank, or simply offering emotional support to a friend who has lost a family member to COVID-19. Compassion is the very best part of us; however, the key to unlocking that compassion is often found by surviving our own rocky moments.

Have you ever noticed just how many miracles came on the heels of Jesus being "moved with compassion"? He forgave sin and iniquity because of his compassion. He fed the hungry, encouraged those who were sad, comforted the comfortless, and gave hope to the hopeless, all because of compassion. It was his compassion that made him gracious, long-suffering, plenteous in mercy and truth. He healed the sick, cleansed the leper, opened the eyes of the blind, and brought back to life those who were dead! And his compassion was the key to it all.

Whatever you do, whatever you face, whatever life may take you through, never allow it to bankrupt you of your compassion. Never allow it to make you cold and calloused to the point where you lose your ability to feel. Being able to survive the relentless storms in your own life and still be moved with compassion for others is one of the key qualities in a life well lived.

Jesus came to earth to live among mankind for thirty-three years so he could be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15 KJV). He was intentional about it. He went through abandonment, betrayal, mockery, rejection, lies, loss, poverty, pain, and everything else that you and I would ever experience so that, when we come to him for help, he would know what it feels like to be us! And because he knows, he is moved with compassion.

When that type of compassion kicks in, it can make all the difference between a person winning or losing; all the difference between crashing underneath the weight of hardship or carrying it like a champion. And the great thing is, the cycle continues. Just as Jesus' compassion changed everything for us, when we release true compassion to others, it can do for them what an anchor does for a ship: rock them steady in unsteady waters.

A pastor, lecturer and recording artist, Pastor Sheryl Brady has traveled extensively around the globe for more than 30 years. Pastor Brady serves as the pastor of The Potter's House of North Dallas, founded by Bishop T.D. and Mrs. Serita Jakes. The campus launched its worship services just prior to Easter 2010 and focuses on family-centric outreach programs highlighted by her passionate approach to worship and adherence to solid biblical principles. She is the author of the book entitled You Have It In You! Empowered To Do The Impossible. Pastor Brady and her husband, Bishop Joby Brady, have three daughters, Lana, Tina and Nina, and nine grandchildren.





The teachings
of the LORD are
perfect. They
renew the soul.
The testimony
of the LORD is
dependable. It
makes gullible
people wise.

Psalm 19:7 (GW)



matters of the *heart*

Mercy Lokulutu

One aspect of spending the majority of the last year looking at all the rooms in my home for extended periods of time, is that I had more time to examine and inspect all the different spaces and environments in our home. This in-depth examination inspired me to reorganize, refresh and renew rooms and spaces to make them cleaner, more efficient for our new normal of doing things from home and ultimately more hospitable for my family.

Many new systems of organization that were efficient when everyone was out of the home for school and work become obsolete and did not serve us well in this new chaotic season of everyone working and attending school from home... can I get an Amen! Each day, I found projects that had been laying idle because I now had time and capacity to embark upon them; decluttering junk drawers and spaces, updating and hanging new family pictures, starting an herb garden, sprucing up home décor and dreaming of creative ways to refresh the atmosphere in our home. I reorganized the books in our home library by color, found new ways to display artwork we had previously purchased in Dakar and Cape Town, and upcycled an alarming number of old toys and clothes.

If you know my personality, I have an 'all or nothing' kind of attitude towards most things and this was no different. I was all in and attacked my new projects like an Olympic trained athlete. In fact, my kids would wake up each day with consternation and wonder which of their belongings were purged in the wee hours while they slept. My husband was shocked at the sheer volume of items I had on his honey-do list and I would be remiss if I also did not mention that online shopping made our Amazon account exceedingly active during that time. Those familiar brown Amazon boxes arrived at our home with such regularity that I am now on a first name basis with my neighborhood Amazon driver; I consider him a close family friend!

As I was immersed in these house projects, I realized that environment matters, and not just what we see on the outside but how that affects what is



going on internally in our hearts. When given enough time and space to inspect, I found areas of the environment in my home that needed some attention and the same applies to our hearts. The environment we surround ourselves with affects our well-being significantly and if we don't take the time to assess, inspect and refresh what we are allowing in our environment, then we can find that there are some unwanted results. The psalmist pens it beautifully in Psalm 26:2 (NKJV): "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart." That word "examine" jumps off the page to me, as it speaks to investigating the condition of our heart, testing the intentions and emotions within with the purpose of making a judgment about it. Psalm 139:23-24 (NKJV) expounds upon this thought, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."

The goal of examining our heart and the environment within is for the Lord to show us if there are areas that need to be reset, renewed or refocused with the purpose of leading us in such a way that helps us be more like Him; this is good news! Here's the tension, we read good news about being restored and renewed but when we place it in the context of what we have all endured in the past year, it can feel somewhat facetious. The polarity of navigating celebrating life amidst so much devastation, protecting joy amidst so much pain, and holding onto peace amidst political, economic, financial and emotional upheaval is challenging to say the least.

How has your heart handled the last year? Chances are there has been a mix of grief, anger, joy, sadness, depression, anxiety, peace, worry, and disappointment in ways we could have never imagined. Honestly, words fail me when I try to articulate the effect last year has had on us; it's enough to make me weep as I type. But God. God alone is the one who holds our hearts; He is our living hope. He is our anchor in the midst of the storm, and He is our true north; the only constant in a world that is constantly in flux and ever changing. If you find your heart parched for hope, Jesus is the answer. If you are in need of healing, Jesus is the answer. If you are desperate for wisdom, Jesus is the answer. No matter what your problem, the solution is the same, it's Jesus. He is your prize and your very great reward!

So, dear one, how is your heart? If your heart was put on a spiritual examination table under the loving gaze of the Great Physician, what would the test result show? When was the last

time you took the time and space to examine and inspect what is in your heart? If you take on this challenge and examine your heart, I think you will be amazed at how much the environment you surround yourself with affects your heart. The degree to which the voices you listen to, the social media platforms you engage with, and the spaces you choose to stay in, will affect the condition of your heart.

Think about the importance of the environment this way, the same environment (hot water) that makes a carrot soft also makes an egg hard. The environment changes them permanently but does not retain the properties that make them unique. Think about a coffee bean, when it is placed in that same environment, hot water, something magical happens. That same environment transforms that bean and releases its robust flavor, richly composed texture, and full-bodied taste completely and fully. What made one object soft and another hard, brought out the absolute best in the coffee bean.

When I think about our hearts, we have been through some hot water environments lately; a drought of hope, the scorch of health scares and economic instability, heated debates about politics, racial tension, and searing division among even the body of Christ. If we are not careful, we can allow these environments to make us extremely sensitive and easily offended on one hand, or bitter and perpetually angry on the other hand. Neither of those states are God's best for our hearts but here is the good news, "The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail." (Isaiah 58:11 NIV)

This is the best-case scenario, that we allow the environment around us not to make us bitter or overly sensitive but rather to help us fulfill our destiny. In the middle of the heat, we can still rise to our full stature as daughters of the King, and declare the goodness of God. We can choose to examine our hearts, allow the Lord to test us, and come out victorious.

Mercy is originally from Nigeria and carries with her a rich cultural and spiritual heritage, as well as a passion to teach and preach the Bible. She was ordained at Celebration Church in Florida in 2002, and is committed to building the local church globally along with her husband Marcus, and their 3 wonderful children, Isaiah, Ava-Pauline and Zuri.

No one will
succeed by
strength
alone.

1 Samuel 2:9 (NLT)





beyond *peace*

Charlotte Gambill

In an effort to stay in control and keep our lives tidy, we often work hard to make sure nothing disturbs the peace we have established. We avoid the awkward conversation, as we don't want any conflict. We stay away from the situation that may mean we have to face things directly because our tidy lives often have a very fragile peace attached to them. To go deeper would be to take us beyond what our current peace can sustain. Just under the surface of our tidy is a level of messy that we know may cause unrest and so we resist the deeper clean for the sake of keeping the current order.

Many of us are familiar with the verse in Philippians 4 that speaks of the peace that transcends understanding, and yet we have never really discovered it because to do so would mean tidy giving way to messy. What does a peace that passes understanding look like and how do we move from a place of getting by, of holding on to routines for our security, to a peace that's beyond? I think a lot of times our peace is too fragile. It can easily be shattered or disturbed. It's like when you're relaxing in a swimming pool, just enjoying the peace and quiet and the sun and the water and then a child (or an over-enthusiastic adult!) shows up from nowhere and dive bombs into the pool. All of a sudden, the scene of tranquility has been disturbed by someone yelling, "Cannon ball!"

I think that's what an ok peace looks like. At any time, a break in our routine, a circumstance or a relational situation could





drop into the serenity and seriously disturb the peace we are trying to stay afloat in. Building our peace on our surroundings results in a peace that's circumstantial.

What about discovering the kind of peace that isn't just fine; it's fierce? The kind of peace that makes no sense because it passes understanding. The bad news doesn't change it; the unforeseen circumstances don't shatter it. This peace holds when others leave and it is not depleted when life's demands get greater. This peace is not an ok peace, it's a beyond type of peace.

Jesus modelled this kind of peace in the storm. The disciples were rowing the boat and He was sleeping; the storm came and the peaceful scene changed and so did the disciples' demeanor. Panic replaced peace and what was once steady was now seriously unstable. Yet the Prince of Peace was in the boat and He was sleeping because a peace that passes understanding chooses its response instead of reacting to everything around it. Jesus was demonstrating how strong peace can be. He slept in the storm because He knew the storm had no power over Him. He slept because He knew the wind and waves would die down. He slept in the storm because He wasn't surprised at its occurrence.

We need to discover this same peace. Why do we freak out when things go off plan, and when our tidy gets messed up? Why do we panic when the storm shows up? We need to learn how to remain calm and remove the shock factor by digging deeper and making our peace one that is weatherproof.

When I was in the USA recently, I was sitting outside on the front porch of a home watching everyone running around while I relaxed. When I enquired why people seemed to be clearing their front porch rather than reclining on them, I was informed that they were heeding a storm warning. They were planning now so they didn't panic later. Our peace needs to act in the same manner; instead of allowing it to constantly take a hit, we need to tie our peace down in advance so that when the storm comes we are prepared.

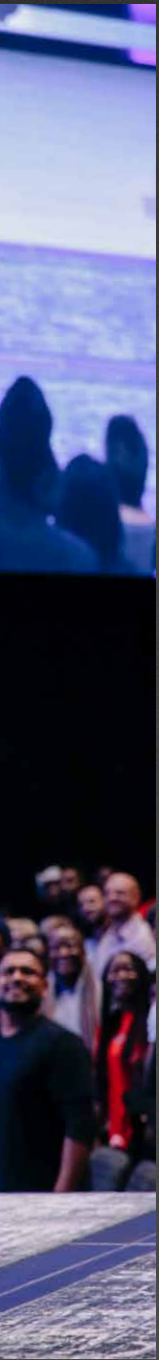
The disciples only needed to focus on who was in the boat instead of the wind and waves, and their peace would have remained. When you are constantly distracted, you are continually disturbing your peace, so it can't be based on what you can control, manage or comprehend. It has to go beyond. Your peace cannot be attached to your job, income, friends or health. The only way your peace moves beyond its fragile state is by being centred in Christ. It's a peace that says, "If it all fails, He doesn't. If they all leave, He won't. If it's all lost, He isn't." Jesus is in the boat in the good and bad weather, and He is at peace. You have to say, "I don't get it but I am not going to stress about it; I am going to replace my worry with His peace."

Don't give your peace away to people who will misuse it. Don't put your peace in possessions; they can't sustain it. Don't let your peace be fragile: anchor it into God. If our Saviour is the Prince of Peace, then we should not settle for anything less than the best. We don't have a restricted supply, it's available in abundant measure. Peace communicates with certainty, it does not allow doubt in the dialogue because doubt is a peace stealer. If you have a peace that is beyond then when doubt asks you to converse about all the things that could happen, peace changes the conversation. It doesn't talk about what could be, it talks about what has been. Peace speaks fluently about God's faithfulness and recalls quickly His goodness. Peace does not enter a pointless discussion; it saves its breath as it knows to swim in the struggle requires strength, and that strength is a peace that goes beyond. So stop saying, "I'm fine," if your mind is frantic and your peace is shattered into a thousand pieces. Fight for that peace that is promised, work on it until it is waterproof, and gain the kind of peace He said was yours for the taking, the peace that passes understanding.



With over 25 years in church leadership, Charlotte has committed her life to teach, train and invest in others with a passion to see each person connect with their God given purpose. Both locally and globally she has become a sought-after speaker and teacher. From training teams to helping bring strategic leadership and discipleship in a variety of church settings across the world.

Charlotte also serves alongside her husband Steve leading Life Church with five campuses across Europe. Her deepest joy in all of this is building her family first. Happily married to Steve for over 25 years, they have two teenage children: Hope Cherish and Noah Brave.







I will
refresh
the weary
and satisfy
the faint.

Jeremiah 31:25 (NIV)



reclaim

your
spirit

Ps Wilma Olivier,
Conference Host

During the early part of lockdown, I did not use my car for several weeks. I am sure many can relate. So by the time I took my car for a spin, the *charge your battery* signal and sound popped up constantly, and eventually I had to get my battery recharged. The reason for that was my car was inactive, unused and had stood dormant because I did not drive it enough. Short trips around my area were not enough to charge my car battery.

Our spiritual lives are the same. Power gets drained from us because like our vehicles, when our daily prayer life and devotion are inactive and not functioning, we go spiritually flat.

Not to bring condemnation, but if you do not make time to read the Bible and talk to God, your batteries will run flat. If you have unplugged from online church, your battery could be going flat. God is using online church all over the world because it is still proclaiming the Good News. Coupled with staying plugged into church, even with the way we are able to do church under restrictions, we can still do good deeds and care for the poor through the Rivers Foundation, or if you are from another church, through your foundation.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (TEV) Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good. Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.

Perhaps you are saying online church is not the same. I agree it is not the same, but it is better than nothing and it is a lifeline. Even during this difficult time, God wants His people to thrive, not just survive. So we will take church online. Although our church is open with limited numbers, the majority of people are watching online for now.

Jesus called us to be light in this dark world and if our lightbulb is not plugged into Jesus, our light will not shine. We need the power source in order to be that light. So if you have been unplugged or your battery has gone flat, it is time to recharge your spirit! We all need to recharge our spirits. Our inner man must be filled with God at all times.

There are many fun things that we can do to recharge our souls, and being girls, we love to do the manicures and pedicures either at home, or when it is safe, at a salon or spa. Self-care is very much about refilling our bodies, minds,

hearts and souls. As women, we give out in so many ways, but there comes a time for a treat or two.

So here's to all the mothers out there who home-schooled their children or who may still be doing that. God called you to extend yourself and you did it! Thank you for calming the fears of your children and encouraging them to trust God.

Here's to all of you who worked from home or started a new business. Here's to all the women who cleaned house, baked, cooked, washed and ironed, plus worked online. Here's to the doctors and healthcare workers who gave out as women and still took care of their families. Whatever it is you do, we celebrate you and thank God for you. Well done for the contribution that you made beyond what you thought was possible!

To all the new moms who had babies but could not have their own mom, older sister or aunt present to help and give support, well done to you! Perhaps you are feeling spent, and like me you feel like you need a proper holiday, we applaud you. I want to encourage you to recharge and take care of yourself.

Here are a few fun things to recharge your soul even in the middle of crazy. I am sure there are many more, but here are a few:

- Watch a movie and grab some popcorn.
- Take a long bubble bath.
- Read a good book (other than the Word but not in place of the Word).
- Get up early and enjoy the quiet. (Listen to the birds, it is good for the soul.)
- Listen to music.
- Take a coffee or tea break in your favourite spot at home or in your garden if you are blessed to have one.
- Order take away (healthy food) to take a break from cooking, especially when tired.
- Exercise is good for body and soul (even if you go for a long walk. It is a great de-stressing mechanism.)

1 Timothy 4:8 (AMP) For physical training is of some value (useful for a little), but godliness (spiritual training) is useful and of value in everything and in every way, for it holds promise for the present life and also for the life which is to come.

But strike a balance, don't only recharge your soul. Let's look now at how we can recharge our spirits.

Anonymous: We are spirit and have a body.

We recharge our spirits through:

1. The Holy Spirit's power

Acts 1:8 (AMP) But you shall receive power (ability, efficiency, and might) when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the ends (the very bounds) of the earth.

God is our source of power to live the Christian life, to walk in His purposes and to stay the path which is narrow. It is to have boldness and not be a secret Christian like those in countries where you are persecuted for your faith.

It is God's plan for us to be filled and empowered by His Holy Spirit, and we certainly need all the help we can get right now in this difficult season. God does not want us to survive, He wants us to thrive. It is just like charging our car battery again, so we can go the distance and have 'vooma' as we go!

Charles Spurgeon: Without the Spirit of God, we can do nothing. We are as ships without wind. We are useless.

Isaiah 40:31 (AMP) But those who wait for the Lord [who expect, look for, and hope in Him] shall change and renew their strength and power; they shall lift their wings and mount up [close to God] as eagles [mount up to the sun]; they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint or become tired.

The wonderful thing about being filled and empowered by the Holy Spirit is that we not only receive power to live the Christian life, but we then bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit as we engage others, even difficult family members.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT2) But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

I would say that the Holy Spirit is our number one way to recharge our spirits.





2. Live a life of worship and thanksgiving

We were created to worship God.

Psalm 100:2 (NIV) Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.

Jesus speaking to the woman at the well said to her:

John 4:23-24 (NIV) Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.

I have always believed that we don't only worship when we are at church. Corporate worship should overflow from our personal worship all through the week, whether it is worship at the kitchen sink or in the car. At the moment, we cannot all experience corporate worship even though we are blessed to live in a free country where Christianity and worship are permitted. But imagine living in a country where this is a crime!

I read the story on www.tyndale.com about Kim Eun Jin from North Korea.

The thirty-one-year-old was born in Pyongyang, North Korea, into a rarity—a Christian family. As a child in school, Kim was taught the official “truth” that there is no God and that people should worship the country's leaders. But growing up, she also heard that her hometown was once known as the “Jerusalem of the East” because of its great base of Christianity. On Saturday nights, her family continued the legacy. They gathered in the back of their tiny apartment and whispered their worship and Bible studies. “We often covered our heads to muffle the noise,” she says.

Kim's grandmother had converted before World War II and had kept a Chinese Bible. It was their most prized possession. Kim's mother translated it by hand into Korean. Those precious pages held the family together. Kim's father always reminded the family that they would pay a price one day for their Christianity. He often said, “Even if I face death I will follow Jesus.” Each morning, he would hug Kim and remind her to be careful that day.

These Christians don't have online church, the latest worship CDs or any contact with the Christian world, yet they recharge their spirits by worshipping God and risking their lives. We too must live a life of worship and thanksgiving, to recharge our spirits.

3. Don't live on bread alone

I am sure we all love bread, whether it is sourdough, gluten free or keto. Many of us took to baking bread during lockdown, but what's more important is to live on the Word. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 when tempted by the devil in the wilderness:

Matthew 4:4 (NIV) Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

At Sisters we are encouraging you to start a reading plan and read every day from the Bible. It does not matter how you do it, and don't let it be a grind. It is meant to help you grow and recharge your spiritual battery to keep going. I do the One Year Bible and there are days when I am out of sync, so I try and catch up. That usually is because I am preparing a message, so I am still in the Word. The Word is our lamp and light.

Psalms 119:105 (NIV) Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Without constant feeding on the Word of God, every Christian is capable of falling into the least temptation. It was the Word that Jesus knew and quoted that gave Him victory in the day of temptation. Temptation does come to everybody; it only becomes a sin if it overcomes us.

James 1:12-15 (NKJV) Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

Jesus, when He was tempted, overcame by speaking the Word. That is our weapon against this world and temptation, because the Word renews our minds, and then we can act on the Word in obedience.

4. Invest your time in personal prayer

Don't let a busy schedule crowd out prayer from your life. Don't wait until you're in trouble before you turn to God in prayer for deliverance. Don't wait until you have tried everything before you run to God for strength. When we do things in our own strength, we leave God out of the picture and our battery will eventually run flat.

1 Samuel 2:9 (NLT) No one will succeed by strength alone.

This is taken from Hannah's Song of Thanksgiving. Hannah was barren and went before God in the temple and petitioned God for a son. She knew what she was talking about.

5. Combine fasting with prayer

Fasting is not a way to bribe God. You do not need to forfeit food to get His attention, but fasting helps us focus on the Lord and it can intensify the power of prayer.

There are certain spiritual obstacles that need an extra push. When speaking of a demon that needed to be cast out, Jesus told His disciples:

Matthew 17:21 (NASB) But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.

If you are hitting a spiritual brick wall, it may be time for fasting. It is a sure way to recharge our spiritual batteries and lose a kilo or two (but that is not the main focus)!

In conclusion, discipline yourself to recharge your spiritual battery regularly. Avoid the temptation of burying yourself in activities so much that you don't create time for your personal spiritual nourishment and growth. Be deliberate and intentional about getting spiritually refreshed, renewed and revitalized. Balance spirit and soul.





The LORD,
your God, is in
your midst, a
warrior who
gives victory;
he will rejoice
over you with
gladness, he
will renew you
in his love; he
will exult over
you with loud
singing...

Zephaniah 3:17 (NRSV)



bravery

copied with fear and anxiety
when diagnosed with covid-19

Pearl Khumalo

Within 24 hours of being diagnosed with COVID-19 on the 12th of December 2020, with six members of my family, there was a shift from having hope, to fear and anxiety. This was a burden as I felt hopeless looking at my children and grandchildren. The passing of some of my relatives and other people I knew contributed tremendously to the doubt and anxiety I was feeling. Not knowing what the days ahead would look like, as well as my concern for the residents of the Old Age Home Care Centre that I work in also added to my anxiety, but by God's grace they were not affected.

No one and nothing can really prepare you on how to cope. Within two days my health deteriorated, with difficulty in breathing and the inability to eat and walk. This was overwhelming and for a change I could not take care of my family. As a professional nurse, this was causing an extra concern.

Coping

After a few days my faith started coming back, still coupled with severe fear and anxiety. I had to hold on to the promises of God.

Jeremiah 17:14 (NIV) Heal me, Lord and I will be healed, save me and I will be saved for you are the one I praise.

1 Peter 2:24 (NIV) "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."





I had tremendous support from my church family, and as much as my home is Ballito, I was amazed at the support that my family also received from Sandton. I am also grateful to Ps Adi and Ps Claire, and the hospitality team for the support. I am also grateful to the Sandton members who took time, even in the evenings, praying with my family and I. The love of God was at full display!

I would also like express my sincere gratitude to my Heavenly Father for the family that He blessed me with. All of them took turns in taking care of each other, with those who recovered earlier ensuring that they gave support to the others. The support was not only physical but in prayer as well. As a parent that is one thing that I was grateful for, to see them all lean on the promises of God.

Bravery

I can say I was not brave at all, but that all the above instilled and increased my level of hope and faith.

By the 15th of January we were declared clear of COVID-19 and this is not because we were special, but it was by God's mercy and grace. I know that He still has something that I need to accomplish for His glory since this is not the only time He has healed me. I am also a cancer survivor and it is also by His mercy and grace.

As much as there are still remnants of the effects of the virus, like painful muscles and joints, and getting easily fatigued, God has been good; my health and that of my family has been restored. Hallelujah!

I will keep declaring Joshua 24:15, "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."



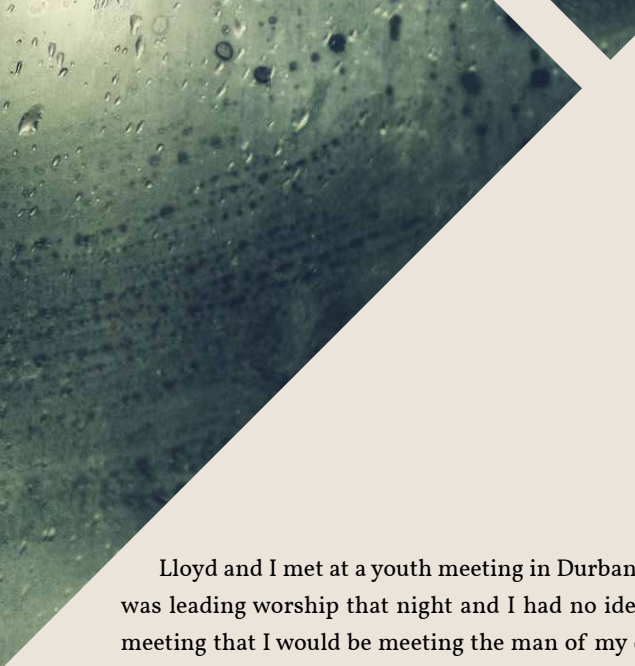






a match made in durban

Janice Cele



Lloyd and I met at a youth meeting in Durban in 2003. He was leading worship that night and I had no idea before the meeting that I would be meeting the man of my dreams! My checklist for a husband was one after God's own heart, who would put God first in everything; a man in ministry and one who would always lead me closer to God. One who loved music and of course, a husband with big guns! After the meeting, we chatted and had an instant connection. We realised that we both had a deep desire for God, worship and ministry, and an appreciation for music that turned our two minute "hello" into an hour of joy and laughter. But we did not exchange numbers on this night!

About three months later we bumped into each other again, also at a youth event. This time he asked, "Hey, how come I don't have your number?" In my mind I was like, "Yes! I have been waiting for this moment," but obviously I remained cool and calm. I couldn't wait to message or call him, but I waited for him to be the first. He messaged me that same evening and this is where our friendship started.

We were friends for two years before Lloyd eventually gained the courage to ask me out. I thought he was interesting and I was really into him but I had a fear; a racial fear. "What would people say?" I grew up in an Indian suburb where seeing an interracial relationship was a rare sight. People's judgement scared me. While we were dating, people would stare at us with eyes that despised and criticised our relationship. At the very beginning we would not even hold hands because people made us feel extremely uncomfortable and you could tell they had a racial issue with us without saying a word. This affected and tested our love, but despite it all we always put God at the centre of our relationship and trusted Him for our future.

I remember when I made up my mind to speak to my dad about Lloyd, it did not go very well. He was unhappy and spewed all kinds of ultimatums about disowning me. He was old school Indian and I was his youngest child, so he naturally

was very protective towards me. He told me that he was disappointed with me and asked me how serious I was about Lloyd. I responded that I could marry him. He told me that he would not attend my wedding or even walk me down the aisle.

This was the first time that I ever gained courage to speak my feelings to my dad. I asked him why he felt this way and his response was his concern of what others would think of me. I said, "If this is the decision you are making because you are unhappy with what your friends are going to think or say, rather than my happiness and a great future with an amazing husband, remember you are responsible for that decision. Do not make a decision that you will regret." He was shocked at my response and did not speak to me for two weeks. Eventually my dad could see that Lloyd was serious about me. Lloyd's family, on the other hand, was more open. I was the only girl he took home, so I guess his parents knew how serious he was.

We honoured my dad and he was a very big part of our wedding, despite our earlier challenges. When he walked me down the aisle it was highly emotional, and he also surprised me and gave a speech at my wedding. It was incredibly special and I could sense God restoring and uniting our families and cultures.

As time went by, we continued to fall deeper and deeper in love with each other. The more we placed our faith and marriage in God's hands, the more He revealed himself and guided us. Though the journey has not been easy, we have always chosen to place our burdens on God. Even when we reach that point of frustration where we feel like we want to throw in the towel, God always steps in as long as we allow Him to. We have learned to surrender our life, our marriage, our kids and basically everything to God. We pray together, we worship together, and we stick together no matter what life throws at us.

Rivers Church came into our lives at a very divine time. We had just lost our baby, Torah Afrika, who was stillborn at 35 weeks in 2014. The practical ministry of Pastor André, week after week, spoke directly into our situation and lifted our faith and eyes towards God. Pastor Wilma and her heart for women really played a pivotal role in helping me become a stronger wife and mom when I was dealing with depression and anxiety from the loss of our baby. The Sisters Ministry enabled me to form real, genuine bonds with women of integrity and value, who sincerely care about me. Attending these meetings has helped me find hope again. Our family is forever grateful that we have found our HOME!



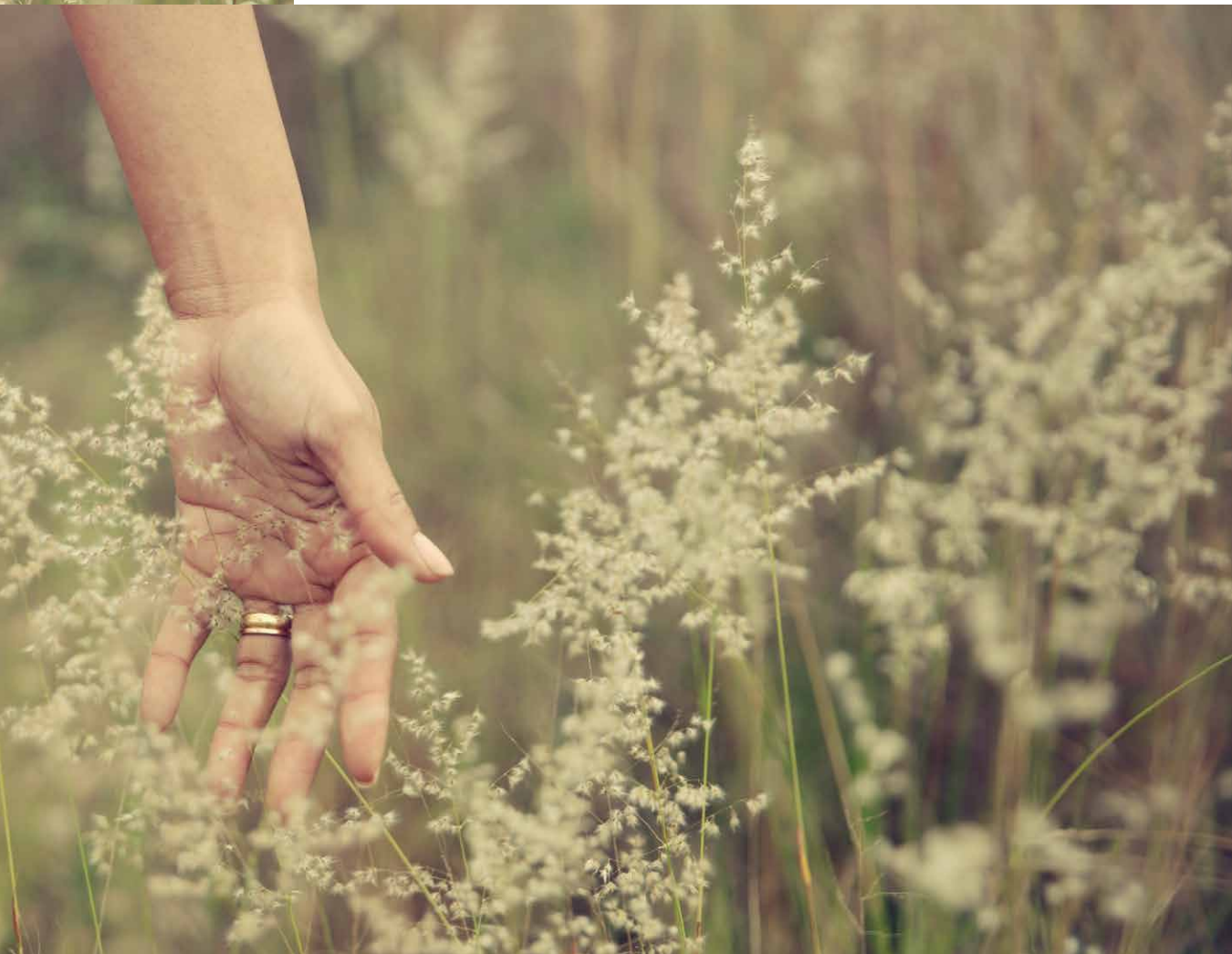


Therefore in fairness

renew

my life, for this was your promise—
yes, Lord, to save me! Now spare
me by your kindness and your love.

Psalm 119:41 (TLB)





navigating changes, fears and family in a pandemic

Naomi Cherti

It all started with the stress and anxiety of, “Do I go to work or not?” as I work for a specialist physician. Yes, she is an essential worker but I have no medical qualifications, therefore I am not an essential worker. Or am I? By 27 March 2020 it was clear I would be working from home, and if necessary, I was given documentation allowing me to travel to the practice.

I spent a lot of time praying for patients I had never met before, but also for all our regular patients who required their check-ups but could not come in. Most importantly, I prayed for my son and daughter who faced an incredibly challenging time in their lives due to online schooling. My son has learning challenges and I was stressed about how he would cope. My daughter took strain and became very isolated and withdrawn. My husband also needed a lot of prayer as he does not cope well in confined spaces.

It was difficult at first, especially with us not being able to attend church, which was very much our happy place. But I continued praying for my family and keeping my faith strong by staying plugged in to each campus every Sunday.

Once we moved to level 4 lockdown I returned to work full-time, praying continuously due to the risk of being exposed. Despite that, I felt safe enough as the hospital protocols were strict, and our consultations were kept to a minimum.

As things started to settle, we got the news that my husband, Frank’s, retired factory foreman was admitted to hospital due to a fall, and required a total hip replacement. Sometime after that, our son returned to face-to-face school. He proved that there was no reason to be concerned as he really flourished! But we soon received news that his teacher tested positive. Fortunately, the school principal was on top of things and took the necessary precautions to avoid further infections. My daughter also returned to school, although very anxious initially, but she settled in well.

Then bang, the pandemic hit too close to home! My husband’s manager tested positive for COVID. Panic and stress set in again. After a few days, he was admitted and then moved to ICU. Eventually, he was put onto a ventilator. His wife was also admitted but later discharged. Sadly, he passed on.



During this time, the retired factory foreman tested positive while still in hospital recovering from his hip replacement, and 10 days after the manager passed, so did the factory foreman. It was very overwhelming, especially for my husband.

I found myself spending a lot more time talking to God, asking Him why all this was happening, almost losing faith but fighting to stay strong and to keep hope alive.

During all that was happening, Frank's mom was admitted with COVID pneumonia. This was very challenging for us as a family. Over an eight week period we got told on three different occasions that she would not pull through. The prayers, tears, stress and family politics were all taking strain on each of us. It was hard but we all pulled through, grateful for the church and connect groups who were beyond supportive both in prayer and daily check-ins.

Mom was finally discharged, and despite a small setback requiring re-admission and two weeks in a rehabilitation centre, she is now doing very well. Despite the doctor's report that she would never be able to eat normally again, that she would never be able to bath, walk or do anything for herself, she is astounding us all by doing all of that and still cooking!

In January this year, three days after I returned to work, Frank and I both tested positive and were forced into isolation. This meant the kids would miss the first few days of school. Frank was not doing well and it was extremely stressful especially when his oxygen saturation started dropping. Eight days later, after a really bad night, we both went to the emergency department. I was discharged after a drip, but Frank's worst nightmare came true; he needed admission. Thanks to prayer and intervention, he agreed, and after five days on oxygen and a further two days off, he was discharged. Although he still struggles to work a full day as a result of the COVID, he is now finally well again.

In all this, I just want to encourage you to never give up hope, keep your faith and send in your prayer requests to church.









for such a
time as
this

Dr Yvette Lazarus

I was five years old when I prayed and asked Jesus what I was meant to do with my life. A while later I watched a movie on the bubonic plague and knew, “This is it!” I wanted to be a doctor and help people.

From that moment, my life was focused on realising my dream. I worked hard and spent 17 years at medical school until I reached my final achievement as a Specialist Physician and super specialist Rheumatologist. I was at the place in my life that I had always dreamt of; married to my wonderful Wesley with a 2-year-old girl, Isabella Grace, and working in my dream job. Until March 2020.

COVID-19 was scary and unprecedented, and a new condition that doctors had to spend hours training on. There was so much fear. I remember before the first case in SA, my hospital manager asked who would assist in the COVID-19 ward, ICU and casualty. We had six doctors, including myself, who volunteered to treat Coronavirus patients.

I came home and told my husband, daughter and mum that I had volunteered. They unanimously supported me, even though the risks for me and them were high. They knew that if I sacrificed of myself, the Lord would take care of me. Wesley and I even updated our wills and ensured we had adequate plans for my daughter's care, if necessary.

The thought of bringing the virus home to my family and infecting my older parents flooded my mind, but I had to remember the reason I became a doctor, and the movie with the bubonic plague. This was what I was born to do. I really felt like I had been trained and placed in a time like this, and that God would want me to be His hands and feet to help His people during this devastating time.

Working in the COVID-19 ward was more challenging than I had ever envisaged. I was still working ten 24-hour shifts per month (my normal hours pre-COVID-19) covering the emergency department, but these calls were markedly busier. I found myself driving to and from the hospital multiple times in the late hours of the night. I would be so tired by 2am that putting on PPE or bathing before I got back into bed at 4am was neglected, this even though my baby and husband slept in the same bed.

During the waves, I barely slept at night with the constant phone calls and anxiety. I worked such extended hours during the day that I missed my daughter and husband's birthdays, Christmas and New Year's Day celebrations.

Heart sore moments of my day included calling family members after my rounds to let them know that we were doing everything we could, but that it was now beyond medical science, or that their family member has passed away. I often tell patients that only God knows the date and time when we will be born and when we will die, and that our lives are in His hands.

It was extremely lonely for patients as they weren't allowed external visitors. The healthcare workers tried their best to keep patients' moods up and encouraged them to persevere, as a huge part of the battle is emotional. Still, many patients and their family members became agitated and frustrated with the seemingly "slow" progress of recovery and took their frustration out on the nurses and doctors who were already overworked and overwhelmed.


There were also doctors and nurses getting COVID-19, so the workload would increase during those 2 weeks until the person was back at work. It got so bad that some days I thought, "At least if I got COVID-19, I would get ten days off work!" Very sad times indeed. Many doctors needed alcohol or anxiety meds, others experienced marital problems and others needed counselling during this time.

I am now almost 40 years old and we had to wait upon God's timing for my daughter Isabella, who is now three years old. We were also trusting God for a son, and I fell pregnant at the end of October 2020. So I worked the entire wave whilst pregnant, fatigued, walking from ward to ward, up and down stairs and being on my feet 8-10 hours per day with some days being 24-hour shifts. At home, I was still involved in cleaning, cooking and taking care of my three-year-old daughter. All thanks to Jesus for my good supportive husband.


So, what kept me "partially" sane and rational? My complete trust, faith and reliance on God's strength and peace. I would listen to my favourite songs (with lyrics like "I'm no longer a slave to fear" and "I will live, I will not die"), on repeat. My husband, daughter and I would pray every night for my patients.

Retrospectively, I see how God used this tough period for His glory and how it formed part of my testimony. Even though I had seen hundreds of COVID-19 consultations and spent hours in the COVID-19 ward, I didn't get infected. I was also blessed enough to be quoted in the Forbes Africa magazine, interviewed on CNBC Africa, been a panelist at the Forbes Africa Phillips Health Summit, featured in an article by the Human Story Board and invited to speak to my childhood church on God's protection and blessings, all during COVID-19.

I am extremely thankful to have the most supportive and wonderful Rivers Church family who prayed for me, kept in touch, sent my family dinners and donated masks. I would encourage everyone to stay as close to God as possible during this time, even more than pre-COVID-19. Life is so unpredictable, but I realise the absolute peace of knowing that my life is not random and not by chance, but it is carefully orchestrated and overseen by my God who gives me the peace of mind, strength and courage to continue every day. I know that whatever happens, I will overcome successfully!



But those who hope in the LORD will
renew
their strength.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a red short-sleeved top and a dark skirt with a red floral pattern, stands in shallow water. Her head is tilted back, and her hair is blowing in the wind. The background is a calm body of water with a line of trees in the distance.

They will soar on
wings like eagles;
they will run and
not grow weary,
they will walk and
not be faint.

Isaiah 40:31 (NIV)

women bringing *hope* in africa

Marinette van Coller,
Hope Church

Before my husband, Paul, and I re-planted Hope Church George in 2012, we were missionaries for 10 years with The Zambia Project. Living in rural Zambia as a missionary changed my life completely!

It feels like yesterday that God called us to pioneer and lead this life-giving church planting movement called The Zambia Project in April 2003. We were newly married and only 27 years old!

We love seeing our projects like our Water Wells, Orphan Village, Hope Art Africa and Bible Translation continue to grow, but seeing Hope Church Mongu flourish with 116 churches under its care brings us the most joy! We love spreading the Gospel amongst people who have never heard the Good News and teaching them how to plant their HOPE in heaven to make sure they keep hope alive! The work in Zambia is expanding faster than ever before and the people's needs are more urgent than ever.

My passion is seeing the local church grow! The past 8 years of pastoring Hope Church George alongside my husband has been incredible as we continue to lead Hope Church Mongu and the Zambia Project!







I absolutely love that as a woman in leadership I am able to influence and inspire other women of all ages to follow Jesus wholeheartedly! Few things give me more joy than seeing women discover their purpose, taking their place in God's Kingdom and stepping into the fullness of what God has for them!

I love to gather women at our church for our Sisterhood events! Sisterhood is all about Jesus and making this world a better place! Some of our Sisterhood projects include ReFashion where people donate gently-used clothing that we sell, and the profits are invested into an awesome organization in George called George Child and Family Welfare. Through our 'Keep a Girl in School' project we provide sanitary pads for girls in our community who have to stay home every month when they get their period, simply because they don't have sanitary pads. My favourite project is our Hope Art Africa project where we uplift impoverished women and care for orphaned and vulnerable children. Since moving back to South Africa, I started Hope Art Africa here too! We now have women in Zambia and in South Africa working together with a united purpose, to help care for children in need.

Hope Art Africa started with one word from God. In 2009, after speaking to God about how we can help more orphans

in rural Zambia, God gave me a word: "Art". Hope Art soon started that July when I gathered a group of impoverished Zambian widows who all shared a desire to make a difference in the lives of orphaned and vulnerable children. We used what we had, recycled paper, and the ladies started making paper bead jewellery.

The Hope Art ladies are able to rise above the challenges they face and 100% of our profits are invested in caring for children in need. Our most popular and my favourite products are our custom-made bracelets. You can choose any colour, word, logo or even Bible verse for your bracelets – the possibilities are endless. We receive many orders for church events and corporate gifts. To date, Hope Art has invested over R 4 000 000 in caring for children in need. This is a testimony of God's love for orphans and widows!

Most of the Hope Art ladies are the sole providers for their families, and now, through earning an income, their lives have changed dramatically with a new sense of self-worth and purpose. These beautiful African women went from impoverished to empowered through Hope Art. Hope Art is truly guilt-free shopping. Visit hopeartafrica.com to place your order.

stories from the women of hope art

Chilombo Chinga

"I am Chilombo, I am 61 years old and am a widow. I grew up in an extremely poor family and was unable to attend school. It is a real privilege to be able to send my children to school with the income I earn through Hope Art, not to mention the joy of providing food for them!"



Irene Kawele

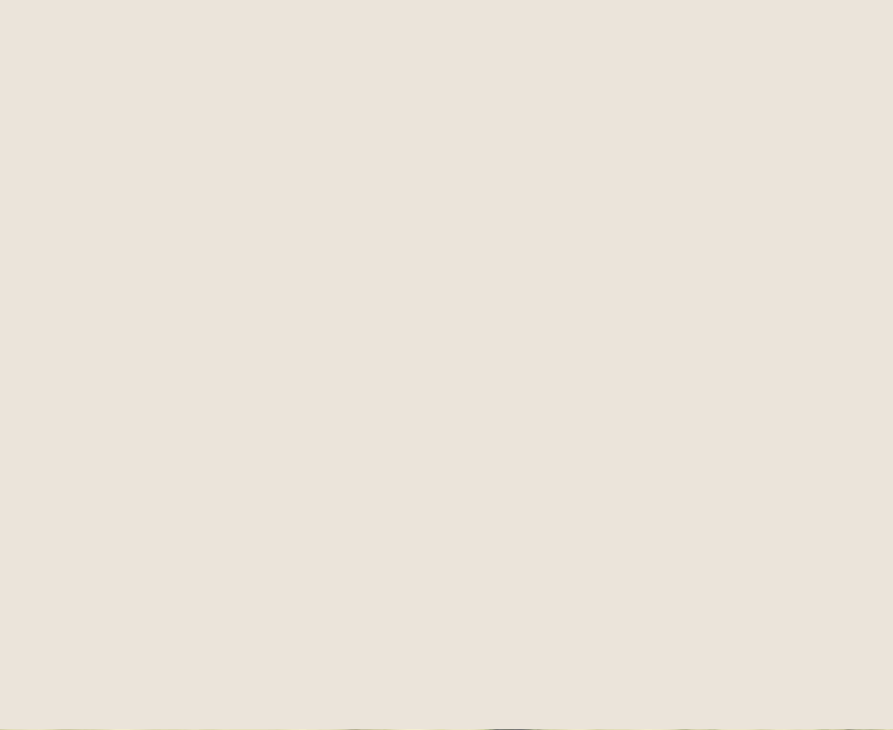
"My name is Irene and I am 62 years old. Prior to my involvement with Hope Art I had no income and I struggled daily to support the 8 orphans left in my care by family members. It was very difficult for me when they cried for food and I wasn't able to provide. I am so grateful that now with the money I earn through Hope Art, I am able to care for and educate these children and look after my own health."

Brenda Plaatjies

"I am Brenda and I am 26 years old. My parents were very sick while I was growing up & I had to care and provide for them since I was a child. By the time I was 20 they had both passed away and I had a child of my own. Hope Art has helped me provide for my family!"









playing our part to *help others*

Nuska Zwane, Director of The Rivers Foundation

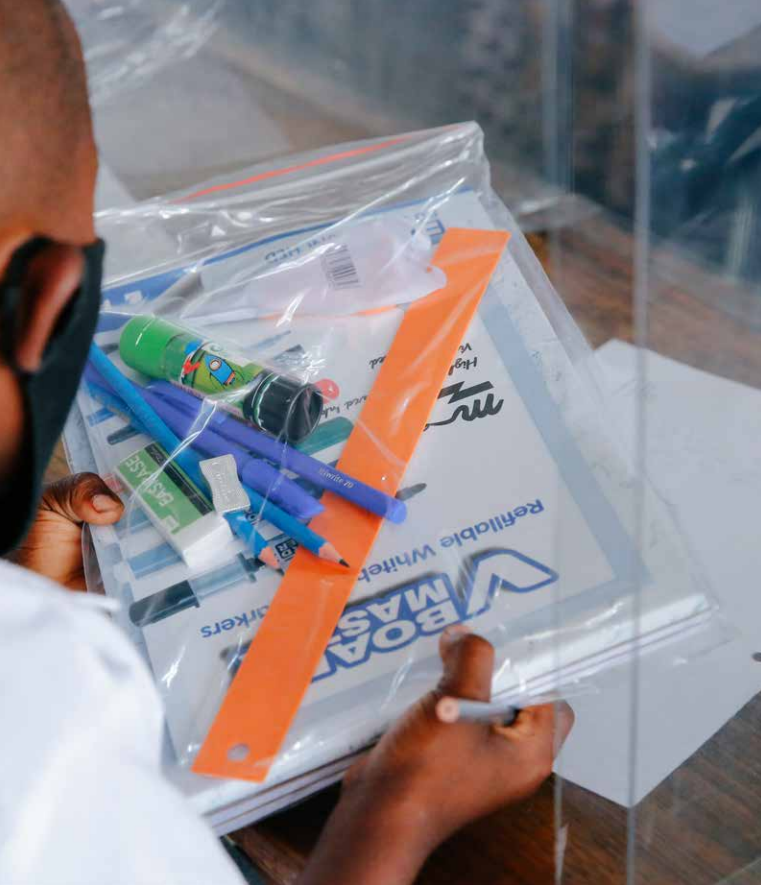
A year ago the entire world was placed on lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone was affected and there was no place to escape to. People lost their loved ones, jobs, businesses, homes and cars.

For most people, lockdown created unprecedented amounts of anxiety as they could no longer afford basics like food, water, electricity, rent or bond repayments. Many ended up in hospital from stress related illnesses. Gogos, single mums, and men alike were struggling to put food on the table to feed their loved ones. It was a seemingly hopeless situation that could not be ignored.









As the Rivers Church family, we heard about the plight and the cries of our brothers and sisters who were critically and severely affected by the lockdown. We joined hands to support our surrounding communities through the Rivers Foundation, the social outreach arm of our church.

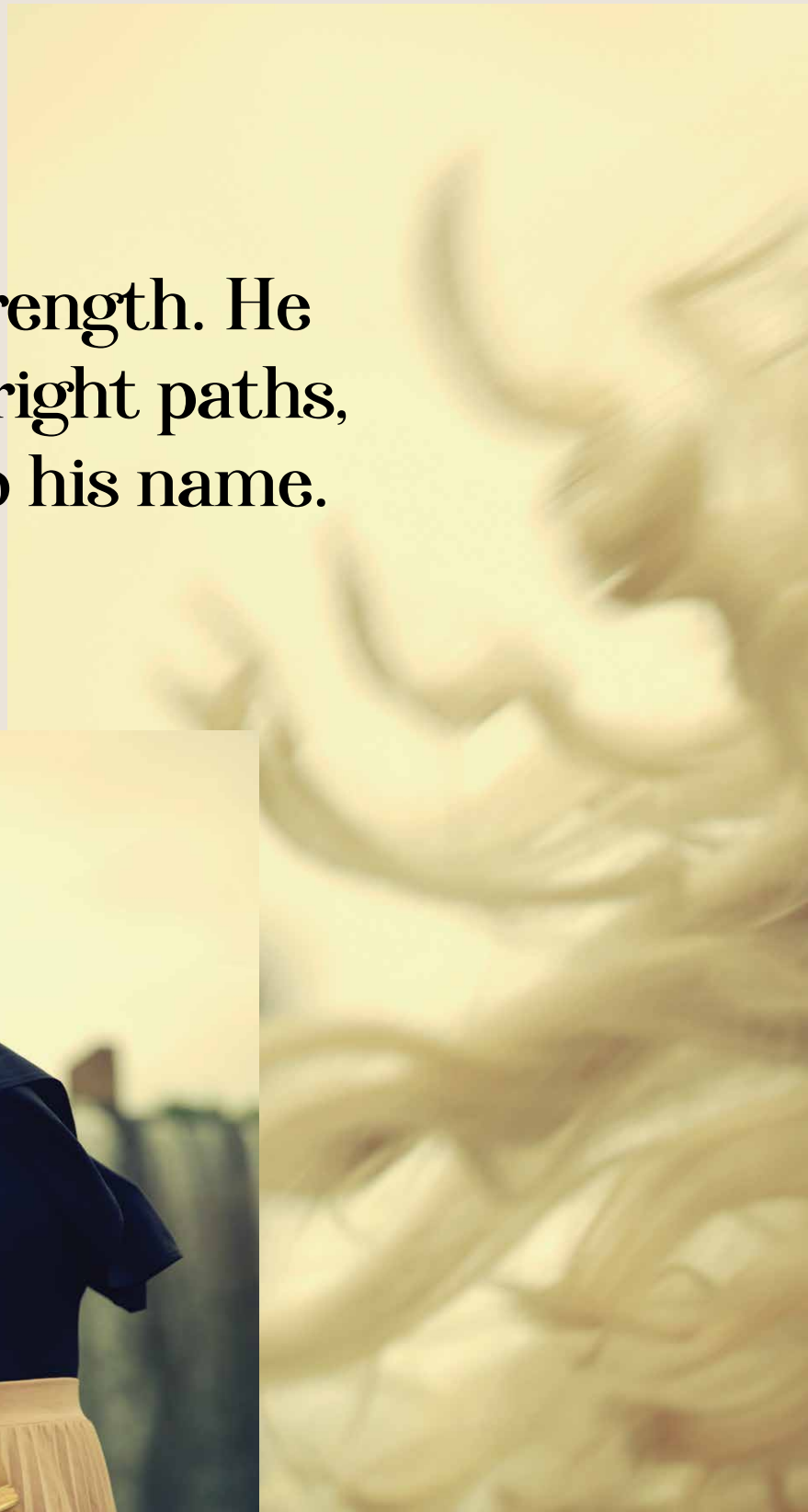
We are grateful to God and to all who supported us, as we were able to donate a total of 3 066 146 meals in 2020. But the need continues, especially at schools, and so far we have donated 594 977 meals in 2021 to the various schools we support, as well as communities in need around Gauteng and KZN.

Through the love and support of our church family and donors, the Rivers Foundation has been able to donate a total of 3 661 123 meals during this season of lack, bringing hope and love to these communities.



He renews my strength. He
guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.

Psalms 23:3 (NLT2)



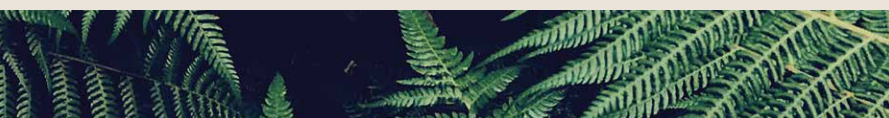




i had covid
but it
***did not
have me!***

Kershinee Nicodemus

After five months since the passing of my sister, we received some happy news from my nephew that he was getting married and would love to have us at his wedding. Considering the COVID-19 restrictions to limited guests, and the small family we are, we decided to attend as well as make a trip to the beach while being there.



On returning from KZN, my family and I had each felt some slight flu symptoms – some different and some similar. We had enjoyed a long and fun day at the beach and therefore I assumed it was just a result of too much time in the sea water. The following morning my husband had much more serious symptoms and we then consulted our doctor. Sadly, we all tested positive for COVID-19.

This was quite alarming, considering my elderly mum with pre-existing medical conditions is living with us. Truth be told, the first day back home was absolute mayhem as we were all trying to figure out where and how we could have contracted the virus. Who to tell? What to do next? Do we all isolate in our bedrooms? Who was going to do what? AND IT'S ALMOST CHRISTMAS!

I took a deep breath, having an "AHA" moment, and spoke these words to myself, "Kersh, you may have COVID but COVID does not have you!" I reminded myself that our thoughts influence our feelings, choices and actions. I chose prayer over the panic.

"A mom's got to do what a mom's got to do," right? Well, that side of me kicked in. I contacted our doctor and began administering all the medication that was needed for my family. Something happened within me. I felt energized and was on the go, nursing, cooking, cleaning and literally feeling strong and well, which I believe was the power of prayer to our God who hears us. Thankfully, a few days before testing positive for COVID, our business had closed for our annual shutdown and I was grateful indeed, as there would have been much more to be concerned about.

Each day was different for my family. I could see my daughters struggling with fever and body aches. My mum became really weak with a loss of appetite, whilst my husband was not doing great in that first week. He battled with constant coughing, shortness of breath, fever and serious headaches, all at once. After driving him to hospital for an X-ray, the doctor prescribed even more medication. There were sleepless nights for sure but I had to choose faith over fear!

Victory begins in the mind and we needed to fuel our faith, for fear exaggerates things. When you constantly get negative input, fear arises. So as a family we made a decision to stop following or listening to any negativity but to rather worship over worry. Each of us had a phone or some device, so there was no excuse to not keep the worship on, which helped us declare God's healing on us. When you are feeling depleted or you cannot pray, worship, worship, worship!

"For only in the act of praise and worship, can a person learn to believe in the goodness and greatness of God." C.S. Lewis

We continued to pray and believe God for complete healing, and each day we got better and brighter. In the second week we heard of a few close family members who also tested positive for COVID-19 and we were able to pray and encourage them too.

2 Corinthians 1:4 says, "He comforts us when we are in trouble, so that we can share this same comfort with others in trouble."

I am thankful for our incredible doctor who walked this journey with us. I am also grateful to have had someone dear to us who could assist with the necessary errands. Our fridge was stocked with fruit, veggies and Christmas pudding. We even had four "Santa Friends" who found out we had COVID and dropped off Christmas pressies outside our door. We celebrated the birth of Jesus at home and the greatest gift we received that Christmas was complete healing from COVID-19!

The joy of the Lord was our strength. We had to be intentional about choosing joy, giving thanks in all circumstances and having gratitude for each moment we were together.


Ephesians 6:11 reminds us to put on the full armour of God. None of us are exempt from challenges in life, be it an illness, financial crisis, job loss, health issues or even losing loved ones.

I have learned that we truly grow through what we go through.

Choosing FAITH over FEAR, WORSHIP over WORRY and PRAYER over PANIC has helped my family and I navigate this season of COVID-19.





A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a small, dark plant stem. The hand is positioned in the lower right foreground, with a gold ring visible on the ring finger. The background is a dense, out-of-focus field of green leaves and branches, creating a natural, textured backdrop. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting the textures of the skin, the plant, and the foliage.

Create in me a pure
heart, O God, and
renew a steadfast
spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10 (NIV)



redefining success in *uncertainty*

Dr Bianca Lewarne

On 31 March 2020 I opened my diary to find it completely blank for the first time in my career. I managed to find a few surgical masks in my cupboard. (We've only really used these in theatre, and I hadn't been there since my community service). All our medical suppliers were out of stock, and we managed to find a friend of a friend who was bringing them in from China. After paying 10 times their normal cost, I was grateful to have some PPE!

As a family we had made the decision that my calling as a doctor meant facing the risk and being there to help my patients who needed me. With screening for potential cases and all the precautions advised by the authorities, we did our best to protect ourselves, and I continued to serve at my post. I had to manage each patient who came in as though they could have COVID. What used to be a simple head cold or sore throat was no longer just that.

In the midst of so much unknown, I came home each day, decontaminated, and wondered if I should still hug my husband and children. I wondered if I should sleep in a separate room or even stay somewhere else. But for how long? With much prayer and deliberation we decided to be

together, to take every precaution we could, and to trust God to protect me and us as a family. We completely isolated from our extended family and friends. While my practice had become very quiet, I treated the few critical patients that came in each day, doing our best to ensure a safe environment.

Each day was an exercise of faith, wisdom and resisting fear. I had to navigate a new digital dimension to patient care, which at first glance seemed like an obvious safe solution, but was accompanied by the pressure of assessing patients without a physical examination. My prayer for God to help me not miss anything became more fervent. I tried to keep up to date with all the emerging information about the pandemic and about the symptoms and treatment of COVID, so I could answer my patients' questions and advise the most current treatment protocols (which seemed to be changing every few days). It was the first time I had practiced medicine amidst such uncertainty.

As a family we prayed for people's safety in this COVID pandemic, which in essence meant there would be fewer sick people to come and visit the practice. Unfortunately, many sick patients felt too afraid to see a doctor, so we prayed that



these patients would have the wisdom to seek medical care. Soon I faced the tension of being grateful for the wellness of my patients, but also the threat of financial strain on the practice.

We had to redefine what we considered success, and although the business was not flourishing, our success in this season was actually survival and having a plan to recover.

We held onto God's promise in Romans 8:28, "...that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose..."

A year later, I can absolutely attest to the provision and protection of God over myself and my family! To this day my family and I have not contracted COVID. My practice is still running and I have the privilege of helping people every day.

For many of us the season has revealed what we truly believe. It's not over yet and we're still trusting for protection and favour, but our hope is in the Lord who will renew our strength! (Isaiah 40:31)









but, *God!*

Bridget Nortje



COVID-19 – this didn't mean much to us as South Africans when we were enjoying our Christmas season with loved ones in December 2019. Flash forward a few months, and it suddenly became very real. Many of us were affected personally by this invisible plague, which had very visible ramifications. I'm sure we can all attest to being affected by COVID-19 in one way or another and unfortunately, I was no exception.

My boss was dubbed as "Patient 61" and was one of the first travellers to bring COVID-19 to South Africa. Back then, COVID-19 was not on the news because there were no confirmed cases in South Africa, so we merrily sat in a two-and-a-half-hour meeting, mask free, chatting about business as usual. A few days later, I saw a call from my boss coming through to my cellphone on a Saturday – I already knew what was coming: they had tested positive for COVID-19.

At the time it was all very new, and the National Institute for Communicable Diseases advised me to go into an immediate two-week isolation and to get tested. My husband and I went off to Mediclinic Morningside and we were immediately covered in PPE and taken to an isolation unit. I remember sending pictures to my friends, laughing at what we looked like sitting there in the ER.

Then the panic set in. This was the Saturday afternoon after Men's Conference had just ended. My husband had been in contact with plenty of men while serving in the production team and I had been working with the children in Kidszone, unaware that my boss was unwell or that any of this had been going on. I remember crying and pleading with God that our results would be negative for the sake of those who we had come into contact with. The results were negative, and I remember thinking that this seemed near impossible because of my direct and prolonged contact with my boss. Then I remembered a phrase that I love to say: "But, God!"

A few months later, we had our second run-in with COVID-19. My husband had returned to work during Lockdown Level 3 and came home one day unable to smell anything. We knew exactly what that meant – and off for our next lot of testing we went! A few days later, my husband tested positive for COVID-19 and I had to remain in isolation with him. I had originally tested too soon and got a false-negative, so I thought I was in the clear but unfortunately, I started getting sicker and sicker. I continued to work from home, until I was eventually rushed to the ER because I was struggling to breathe. This was where our second "But, God!" moment occurred.

The doctor took a blood sample from my arteries to check how serious the situation was, and because of my pre-existing medical conditions that placed me at high-risk, a specialist cardiologist was asked to come and see me urgently. He told me that based on my blood work and oxygen levels, I should be far sicker than how I was presenting, and he couldn't believe it. He felt comfortable enough that it was safer for me to return home with medication to allow a better oxygen flow in my blood, than for me to be admitted into the COVID-19 ward.

My final COVID-19 run-in happened this year, after having to go to hospital for a procedure with my gastroenterologist. I had hesitations about going in to hospital during this time, but eventually settled on the fact that the benefits outweighed the risks. I came home from my procedure feeling a little groggy, but otherwise well. Unfortunately, a few days later I got incredibly ill with a high fever that wouldn't come down. This time around, my faith was a little shaken and I was scared. My mind was trying to take me to the worst-case scenario, "But, God." He showed up again like He always does. The fever broke and I was completely well a week or so later.

I continue to be reminded that even though it's awful to have gone through the above, there's always good to come from every trial. I now have an immune system that is far stronger than before, and I'm equipped to fight off COVID-19 in the future. This was also an opportunity for me to share my testimonies of continued protection with my unsaved colleagues, bringing it all back to God and His goodness.

Even though I've faced multiple health challenges, God has always been able to use them to show His glory. My weakness is made perfect in Him. I look back and feel privileged that I could be the one to testify to this truth: "But, God!"

love beyond borders

Stephanie Ratsiane

When and how did you and Kay meet?

We met through a mutual friend, Rethabile Mothobi, at her birthday braai in December 2016. He was one of the first people to greet me at the braai and kept me engaged throughout the day. Kay added me on Facebook that evening and even walked me to the car when saying goodbye. We started dating in February 2017, did the pre-marital course after 3 months and got engaged in October 2017.

What attracted you to him?

What attracted me to him was his outgoing spirit and people skills. He knows how to make anyone feel comfortable wherever he is. Also his smile! In our first month of getting to know each other, I also admired how he respected me as a woman and knew his boundaries.

You are from different parts of the world, so the fact that God brought you two together is a miracle in itself. How did you navigate the differences in your cultural and family backgrounds?

Funny enough, we have more similarities than one would expect. I come from a country called Suriname where we have a lot of traditional African customs, and my family has a multicultural background (Creole, West Indian, Portuguese, Jewish). This made it a bit easier for me to adapt, and luckily, my husband is also open to new adventures and cultural experiences. I have learned to prepare African food, so our menu at home is quite diverse.

Our family dynamics are different from one another, which was overwhelming in the beginning. I come from a close-knit family which is different from the African family where the social gap between generations is common. Being open about our childhood upbringings and experiences has helped us to navigate these obstacles.

How did your families react to the two of you wanting to get married to someone from a different country?

I am sure they were a bit worried as to how things would work between us in the beginning, but they did not reveal that through their behaviour. The fact that we were both open to learning about each other's culture made it easier for us and for our families to get on board. There was a sense of curiosity from both sides, especially leading up to the wedding.





How did the two families come together for the wedding? Obviously your two cultures would have their own way of doing things? How did you manage to accommodate both sides and make it work?

Coming together for the wedding was a beautiful experience. Both our families were excited and respected each other's customs. They were also understanding of the way we wanted to have things done, which helped us to take care of the finer details without causing unnecessary friction. We planned the white wedding ourselves and gave our parents and families the pleasure of planning the traditional wedding according to their own liking. I truly believe that a wedding is a way of bringing two families together and not just the couple, hence it was important for me to accommodate everyone and their input, whether big or small.

As Christians, what role has God play in your relationship and marriage?

Our faith has been a good foundation for our marriage and early relationship. Having a God-fearing husband was one of my prayer points, so finding someone who loves the Lord as much as I do has made it easier to navigate life. My relationship with God has also grown since I got married. You realize early in marriage that you cannot just rely on your parents and their interceding prayers any longer. You are now responsible for your own household and growing family.

How has being plugged into Rivers helped shape your relationship?

Being plugged into Rivers and serving together in Kidszone has been such a wonderful journey. We both love kids, and it is always interesting to hear our different experiences in class and how we plan on raising our kids in the future, as we learn so much every week. As a couple we can easily get into the rush of daily work and life but serving together on a Sunday has allowed us to both do something we love whilst spending time together in the presence of the Lord.

Would you like to tell the Sisters your big news?

Yes! We are excited to share the good news that God is growing our family. We are so blessed and cannot wait to welcome our little baby into the world soon! Now it is time for us to finally stand in the registration queue at Kidszone.







grace to sustain in the not-so-normal

Dr Zama Motlounq,
House of Destiny Family Church

Given many unknowns on COVID-19, the initial stages of the outbreak brought a lot of fear that gripped the nation. However, for the health workers, a significant mind-set shift was demanded. We did not have the luxury to drop our tools and go into hiding. We had to literally practise Nehemiah 4:17 ESV, "Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each laboured on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other." We had to keep ourselves safe but at the same time, save our patients.

My work as a pathologist does not involve face-to-face interaction with patients. However, now and then I have to go into the hospital theatre to evaluate and assess specimens. This meant that at some stage I had to step into this scary environment and offer my services.

I remember in the early stages, I would take long baths when coming from work as I didn't want to contaminate my house. I had to make sure that my family was kept safe. Driving to work was also not-so-normal anymore. One usually deals with traffic but this time one had to be ready to be interrogated by the soldiers or police force as to why one was on the road during a total lockdown. That alone brought its own dynamic.

Furthermore, online lectures for medical students had to continue. We had to upskill ourselves quickly with the online teachings. Our training pathologist doctors still needed to be taught. This meant face-to-face interaction which was also a challenge as a number of doctors were catching the virus themselves. Exams and graduations had to be deferred, which was a complete disruption to academic related activities.

On a personal level, I lost my younger sister in that season, which meant I had to play injured. We lost colleagues, people we had known for years. We had to craft ways of grieving as we kept moving. We had to bind each other's wounds. We started WhatsApp groups for "Hope-Connection". On these platforms we would check on each other and support one another as colleagues.

We were also required to upskill our knowledge base as the newer variants of COVID emerged. Everything was moving swiftly.

I learnt the practical expression of the Hippocratic Oath that we took at medical school on our graduation day. Somewhere it says, "I will remember that I am a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm." Indeed, the obligation was enormous and required a daily dosage of courage. Each day was uncertain but we had to cling to the promises of God.

As a child of God, I can attest to His faithfulness. His grace sustained my family and I during shaky seasons, including my husband's recovery from COVID-19. As we step into yet another season of uncertainty, I am much more anchored in the validity of God's Word. I am firmly persuaded that He who has begun a good work in me will keep it growing and complete it (Philippians 1:6).

To anyone who is alive in this season, remember that you didn't survive because of the strength of any medicine. You made it because God allowed it and His mighty hand preserved you from harm. You need to intentionally strive to fulfil your purpose on earth.

Psalm 44:3 (NIV) "It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them."

Dr Zama is an Anatomical Pathologist (Academic Hospital) and together with her husband Ps Musa Motloung, is the Founding Senior Pastor of House of Destiny Family Church in Woodmead, Sandton. They have led the church since its establishment in 2011. Dr Zama also runs the Destiny Sisters Ministry at the church.





am i truly essential?

Kayla Figueiredo

When lockdown was announced last March, I started questioning the career I had chosen. Was I truly essential? Did I really want to help people as a physiotherapist in the intensive care unit? Was it worth the risk? For the first time in my career, I was scared of going to work. I was scared of the unknown.

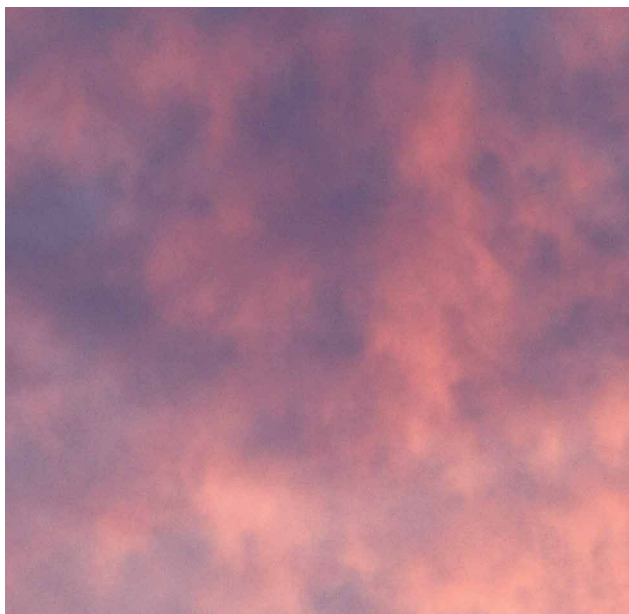
There seemed to be no hope.

There was a fear in all healthcare workers. A fear of how close we could get to patients. A fear of using all the resources available on the elderly, so there wouldn't be any left over for younger patients. A fear that our patients weren't going to see their families again. A fear that became a reality.

I remember breaking down after a 29-year-old patient wasn't given the opportunity to be on a ventilator because she had an existing lung problem. She left a 10-year-old daughter and a loving husband behind, who were not able to say goodbye to her. I was left heartbroken and confused. The experience threatened to numb my heart to all the death that was happening around me. The only thing I could hold onto was that she knew Jesus before leaving this earth.

"Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others." Jonathan Swift





This quote is so familiar to many of us ladies because of Sisters of Africa Conference a few years ago. By September of last year, many healthcare workers were seeing psychologists in order to handle the grief they had encountered. As heartbroken as I had been with each patient who didn't make it, I had a hope to hold onto.

I chose to believe that God was and will always be good.

I chose to believe that I could love God by doing my absolute best for my patients.

I chose to pray for my patients even under my breath, because no word would return void.

I chose to believe that God had good plans for my life and the lives of those I encountered.

I chose to believe that God would work all things for good, even when it looked different to what I wanted.

There is hope.

Recently, I had the opportunity to take a patient who had been admitted since January with COVID-19 pneumonia, outside for the first time in over THREE months. The excitement and the gratitude that this particular patient had is unlike anything I've experienced before. Despite multiple, severe setbacks, he was determined to get out of the hospital and see his family again. He had a hope for his future, his future outside of his hospital bed and with his family. He succeeded. He managed to go home on oxygen therapy and is now doing physiotherapy through telehealth sessions. God is so good!

The last year has filled us all with anxiety, isolation and pessimism instead of enabling us to actively fill our minds with God's truth. We run to Google with our worries instead of remembering the scriptures that we have memorised. We make decisions restricted by fear, instead of making decisions in hope.

We have the ability to change which lens we will look through in every single situation. It takes discipline and confidence in God to go against the grain while people are crumbling around us. We can choose to replace worry with God's Word and then take the risk to trust what God says. Let's decide to focus on the good future God has for us.

Let's choose today to believe what God's Word declares over what our thoughts are telling us and let's do the same tomorrow.



a true story

High on the moors in the Welsh highlands, two ministers on holiday met a young shepherd boy who had impaired hearing and was illiterate. He knew nothing about the Christian faith. They explained that Jesus wanted to be his shepherd, who would always look after him as he, the boy, looked after his sheep. They taught him to repeat the words, "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1), using the fingers and thumb of his right hand to help him remember, starting with his thumb and then a finger for each word. They told him to pause at the fourth word 'my', and remember, "this psalm was meant for me, so remember to say it every day of your life".

Some years later, one of them was passing through that same village and asked after the shepherd boy. The previous winter there had been terrible storms and the boy had died on the hills, buried in a snowdrift. The villager who was telling the story said, "There was one thing, however, that we didn't understand. When his body was discovered he was holding the fourth finger of his left hand." The minister remembered how he and a fellow minister taught the boy to remember the fourth word of the verse said 'my'. We need to remember that too. The Lord is MY Shepherd. Say it every day of your life.





A woman wearing a dark headscarf and a large, patterned sari in shades of yellow, orange, and red stands against a sunset background. The year '2022' is overlaid in a large, semi-transparent font that transitions from purple on the left to red on the right.

2022

HOPES AND DREAMS

CELEBRATING 22 YEARS OF SISTERS MINISTRY



