



SISTERS

OF AFRICA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE
22-24 SEPTEMBER 2022









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**WITH GUEST SPEAKERS
HOLLY WAGNER
DAWNCHERÉ WILKERSON
AND YOUR HOST
WILMA OLIVIER**

HOPES AND DREAMS



welcome

Hello, God's gorgeous girls! We are excited to be hosting our Sisters of Africa Conference in the building this year. It has been a long two plus years and we pray the South African government will allow bigger gatherings again. Our hopes are high and we are praying that in September we will be able to host you as we celebrate our twenty-second year. As believers, we need to have a vision and make plans and commit them to the Lord. We have HOPES AND DREAMS. May you be encouraged by what we read in Psalm 20.

"The LORD will answer you in times of trouble. The name of the God of Jacob will protect you. He will send you help from his holy place and support you from Zion. He will remember all your grain offerings and look with favor on your burnt offerings. Selah He will give you your heart's desire and carry out all your plans. We will joyfully sing about your victory. We will wave our flags in the name of our God. The LORD will fulfill all your requests." Psalm 20:1-5 (GW)

So, we are trusting our good Father to see our requests fulfilled, and may He carry out our plans. I am sure you feel the same way about your personal plans this year. Perhaps like I did last year, you are planning your daughter or son's wedding or something special. We have to plan and trust God and lay our plans before Him by faith.

Due to the restricted numbers, it seemed a good idea to host one conference on two locations to enable another 500 women to attend. Plus, we will be offering an online option too. This is not the first time we have used two venues, so we are confident that no matter which venue you choose, you will not be missing out on any part of Conference. Please note that Kids Africa Conference running simultaneously with Sisters of Africa, will be in person and not online.

So, as you read your personal invitation in the form of this magazine, grab a coffee or tea and enjoy, but most importantly, register and be part of all we have in mind for you this year. Please also invite family, friends and colleagues. Our guest speakers are both from the USA and you may be familiar with them as they have been with us before: Ps Holly Wagner from Los Angeles, California and Ps DawnChéré Wilkerson from Miami, Florida.

Please pray for us as we plan, and we will pray for you as you make your way to us or join us online. May your plans succeed and may you and your family be of good health. The Lord bless you and keep you.

Kind regards,
Wilma Olivier



RIVERS.

CHURCH

Cnr South and Middle Roads,
Sandton, South Africa
Tel: +27 11 523 7000
Email: contactus@rivers.church

EDITOR IN CHIEF

Wilma Olivier

CREATIVE DIRECTOR

Simónne Nina Rankin

COPY EDITOR

Mmoneng Gwebu

PHOTOGRAPHY

Talia Pather
Keenan Constance

MAKE UP

Heather Barger
Whitney de Klerk

PRODUCTION

Whitney Constance
Naomi Martin

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2 P's
A POD





MEMORIES OF 2021



frequently asked questions

We are so excited to finally have our Sisters of Africa and Kids Africa Conferences back in-person after two years! This year we have three conference options: in-person on our Sandton and Kyalami campuses, as well as online.

We look forward to our time together with guest speakers Ps Holly Wagner and Ps DawnChéré Wilkerson, plus our conference host, Ps Wilma Olivier. Conference starts on Thursday, 22nd September until Saturday, 24th September.

We know you may have lots of questions regarding this year's conferences, 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, the Rivers App or at an Info Counter on any of our Rivers Church campuses.

HOW WILL I KNOW I AM REGISTERED?

Once your registration has been processed, you will receive a confirmation email or SMS before the conference. For our online conference, you will receive a link closer to the conference. This link will allow you access to the conference sessions.

WHAT DO I NEED TO STREAM THE ONLINE CONFERENCE?

You will require an electronic device such as a smartphone, tablet, compatible laptop or Smart TV, with an Internet connection, as well as sufficient data. Please note that conference times are based on CAT.

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 3 to Grade 7.

WILL KIDS AFRICA CONFERENCE ALSO BE AVAILABLE ONLINE?

This year Kids Africa will be in-person only, across our Sandton and Kyalami campuses.

CAN I BRING MY BABY?

Fully equipped Parents Rooms will be available for moms with babies. We also have allocated seats in the main auditorium for moms with infants, with easy access to Parents Rooms.

CAN I REGISTER MY CHILD FOR KIDS AFRICA CONFERENCE IF I WILL NOT BE ATTENDING SISTERS OF AFRICA CONFERENCE?

No. You will need to be registered for Sisters of Africa Conference on the same campus as your child and you will need to be on campus for the duration of conference.

CAN I ATTEND SOME SESSIONS ON OUR SANDTON CAMPUS AND SOME ON OUR KYALAMI CAMPUS?

You may only attend conference on the campus that you are registered for.

CAN I REGISTER FOR SPECIFIC DAYS OR SESSIONS ONLY?

Your registration covers you for all conference sessions, for either in-person or online, and you can choose the sessions that work for your schedule.

WILL WE BE REQUIRED TO WEAR MASKS?

This will be dependent on government regulations at the time, as well as our discretion as a church, depending on the season we will find ourselves in over conference time.

IS THERE FOOD ONSITE?

As part of your conference fee we will be offering a snack pack on Friday and a lunch pack on Saturday. Vegetarian options will be available. There will also be a variety of food options available to purchase onsite.

IS THERE WHEELCHAIR ACCESS OR ELDERLY ASSISTANCE?

Wheelchair access is available and should you require any assistance, please email the church office in advance at conferences@rivers.church

WHAT WILL THE WEATHER BE LIKE?

It will be springtime and the temperatures will range from 9-23 degrees Celsius. All venues are air-conditioned, so be sure to bring a jersey.







We cannot wait for our Kids Africa Conference 2022! Our kids have missed out on our in-person conference for two years, so we are excited to be rolling this out for them in-person on our Sandton and Kyalami campuses. We know how this conference impacts the kids every year and how much fun they have digging into God's Word.



Your kids will have an incredible time in the house, learning about God in a relevant way, enjoying creative arts and colourful crafts, engaging games, fun with their favourite characters and so much more.

This year, Kids Africa will not be available online, so parents of all kids aged 3 to Grade 7, be sure to register your kids on either our Sandton or Kyalami campus so that they don't miss out. We can't wait to welcome them at Kids Africa Conference 2022!





HOPES AND DREAMS

IN A POD



Hope Floats

Holly Wagner

These last few years have been hard for most of us. From pandemic issues, to relationship failures, to the failure of leaders we trusted, to nations going to war. It seemed as if the storms were relentless, one after another, after another.

I am an extrovert, an over-the-top, probably-annoying extrovert. Friendships and my marriage are essential to me, and these past few years I experienced a couple of knee-buckling, backstabbing betrayals. First I was shocked, then I wanted to hurt back; then I just cried for days. Sorrow and disappointment reigned in my soul. Eventually I got to the truth of forgiveness. I felt God whisper to me that I was not only to forgive but actually act toward them as if they were already forgiven. I know this is God's way, His

truth, but the fact is, forgiving is very hard to do. I was hanging onto hope.

Philip and I have worked together for over thirty-five years. We live together, work together and play together. Lots of together. Our personalities and leadership styles are very different, which has served us well over the years of building the church. I am strong where he is not; he is strong where I am not. But this year, we just got on each other's nerves. As storm after storm crashed against our life, we forgot we were on the same team. We teach about marriage, we have written books about marriage, and yet often we neglected to do what we know to do. We worked and are working through these challenges. I had to remind myself to hold onto hope.



The storms and battles aren't over; there are some waves currently crashing against my heart and my life. I just wanted you to know that, so you would know that you are not alone.

In the middle of a storm, most of us want to panic. We are wrecked with worry and weighted down with hopelessness. I'm sorry if you are in the midst of a storm right now and no one is comforting or listening to you. I pray that someone comes along who can sympathize and give you a hug.

However, a time must come when hope again rules your heart, if you ever want to get out of the storm. Only we can control our own attitudes. Our circumstances do not determine our attitude; neither do other people. So many times these past few years I wanted to blame others for how bad I was feeling, but at the end of the day, I had to take control over my own emotions. I have to own my own thoughts, decisions and feelings. When I own my own part, what I can control, I take back power from those I want to blame and shame. We read many times in the Psalms that when David was at a low point, he basically told his soul (his mind, will, and emotions) to rejoice. We do have authority over our emotions. And right now, if you feel as if your emotions are running away with you – get them back! Too many of us make decisions based on how we are feeling.

I have heard that man can live about forty days without food, three days without water, eight minutes without air...but only one second without

hope. When hopelessness fills your heart, death begins to take over – death to your dreams, to a relationship worth saving, to the idea that things will get better. The power of hope flowing through your body can be your most important asset. Hope is not a luxury; it is essential. Hope changes everything. If we are going to make it through this season, we must build hope again in our hearts.

Hope is for all of us, not just those “glass half full” people. Hope is not wishing, it is not “positive thinking”. The biblical definition implies a sure expectation that God will do what He promised.

Hope is like floaties. Have you seen children in a pool wearing those little flotation armbands in order to keep their heads above the water? Hope is like that. It keeps you floating until you get to solid ground.

I have a friend who suffers from an eating disorder. Many people told her that she would always struggle with it. They told her that she might get help for a moment, but that the disorder would be a continual battle for her. She was floundering in this storm. When I spoke with her last week, I assured her that there would come a day in which this issue would no longer be her struggle. She could get free. I told her stories of many women who have wrestled with this challenge and are now free. They did the work of dealing with issues in their soul and let the Holy Spirit bring transformation, and they are now completely on the other side of it. Healed. I reminded her that the same God who started to

“Have you seen children in a pool wearing those little flotation armbands in order to keep their heads above the water? Hope is like that. It keeps you floating until you get to solid ground.”

work in her would finish it. I reminded her of her value. My words of encouragement and hope in a sense—and more important, God’s words—put floaties on her.

Sometimes I find it hard to watch the news. So much tragedy and so much heartbreak. Because of social media, we are immediately aware of political unrest, natural disasters, and crime. World peace seems impossible. It is difficult to have hope amidst all these national and global problems, and then there are the thousands of smaller but very personal calamities.

You lose your job.
Your name is now on divorce papers.
You can’t seem to kick this addiction.
Your child continues to struggle at school.
You get a scary diagnosis from your doctor.
How is hope possible amidst the big scale losses and the personal tragedies? I heard pastor John Ortberg remind us with this verse from the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁹⁻²¹ I’ll never forget the trouble, the utter lostness, the taste of ashes, the poison I’ve swallowed. I remember it all—oh, how well I remember—the feeling of hitting the bottom. But there’s one other thing I remember, and remembering, I keep a grip on hope:

²²⁻²⁴ God’s loyal love couldn’t have run out, his merciful love couldn’t have dried up. They’re created new every morning. How great your faithfulness! I’m sticking with God (I say it over and over). He’s all I’ve got left.

Lamentations 3:19-24 (MSG)

Keep a tight grip on hope. Again, hope is more than optimism, it is a knowing, a sure expectation. A few years ago, Philip and I toured the ancient catacombs of Rome where thousands of early Christians were buried. As an expression of their faith, different Christian symbols were carved into the marble tombstones: among them were a fish, a shepherd, and an anchor. Maybe the anchor was because of this verse in Hebrews:

“You know how people will sometimes say, “Don’t get your hopes up.” Well... that is stupid! Get your hope up! Way up!! ”

But we have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.

Hebrews 6:19a (NIV)

What hope is the author talking about? Maybe that God finishes what He starts. Or that He will never leave you.

Our God is the God of valleys and storms. Never lose sight of that! Let that be the foundation of your hope. Wouldn't it be great if life were one mountaintop experience after another? Mountaintop, mountaintop, mountaintop—Heaven. It is easy to believe God is on our side when so much good stuff is going on in our lives. It is easy to have hope when we are on the mountaintop. But the truth is, every mountain has a valley. And I have learned that fruit does not grow on the mountaintops, fruit grows in the valleys. The fruit of our lives – love, joy, kindness, gentleness, patience – grows in the valleys of life. The apostle Paul also tells us that we can glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance and perseverance produces character and character produces hope. Then he reminds us that “hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” (Romans 5:3-5 NIV)

I don't know what challenge, trial, or storm you are facing. I don't know where it falls on a scale from one to ten. Maybe you are in the midst of utter devastation. I am sorry. If I were standing next to you, I would hug you and let you cry on my shoulder. Eventually, however, I would encourage you to let hope be your anchor.

If you are in a storm, why not have an “I’m Looking for Hope” party? Sometimes we isolate when we go through the tough stuff. I’m suggesting that you throw a party instead. Send out those e-vites! Say, “I’m going through the worst month of my life (I’ve gotten a bad doctor’s report...I lost my job...or whatever), and I would like you to come over and help me find hope again. You bring the ice cream.” I’m not suggesting that you act as if you are not having a hard time or that you pretend everything is all right. I am just suggesting that if we are to survive the storm, we will need to keep hope alive. I am suggesting that in spite of the hard time you are going through, you look for something good. And sometimes we need others’ help to find it. The dinners with friends and conversations around the table have helped me navigate so many hard times, and in many cases snapped me out of the downward spiral my emotions were taking.

You know how people will sometimes say, “Don’t get your hopes up.” Well...that is stupid! Get your hope up! Way up!! Don’t stop hoping!







God can do anything, you know— far more than you could ever
imagine or guess or request
in your
wildest dreams!

Ephesians 3:20 MSG



Waiting

on hopes & dreams

DawnChéré Wilkerson

This Fall we gather for Sisters Conference 2022. We have been waiting and it's finally here! As long as the wait has felt, it has prepared us for this moment and God's timing is perfect.

Today I am thinking back on a personal memory - the morning our miracle boy arrived. After twelve years of marriage, eight years of trying to start a family and nine months of watching my stomach slowly grow, it was finally time to meet our guy. Because of a prior injury, we had scheduled a C-section, so we were packed and prepared for our date with destiny. Early that morning my parents jumped in the car with us to drive to the hospital. The empty car seat between us signaled that the next time we would get in the car our lives would be much different. My brothers and sister met us in the hospital lobby and we giddily made our way to the maternity ward. Rich and I met with the head nurse to register and receive our bracelets. As I wondered where we would be led next I heard the words, "Please take your seat in the waiting room until it's time." We walked into the small space where all of our friends and family were sitting as well as many other strangers waiting for news of their own loved ones in delivery. I chuckled as I slowly eased my swollen body into a plastic chair and thought, "Well, here we go again". I wasn't angry, disappointed or impatient. It was the best moment of my life thus far. I was simply once again surprised as my expectations didn't line up with reality. This pregnant woman was ready to GO! But it was not time to walk. It was time to wait.

As I look back on my son's birth that morning, the waiting room was one of my favorite parts of the day. After eight years of being in the waiting room of life, asking God when I would get to walk

out of this season and through a new door, I had learned to not underestimate the wait. Delays hold destiny. And it was only right that I get one more opportunity to wait that miraculous morning.

Now, I realize that not all waiting rooms are anticipating the birth of new life. I have sat in other waiting rooms throughout the years to receive heart breaking news and be told of devastating loss. But the waiting room I am speaking to is the season of waiting for the next step of our purpose to unfold. We have all experienced this room in different ways.

EVERYONE IS WAITING FOR SOMETHING.

Waiting for graduation, waiting to meet that special someone, to begin the new job, to take that trip, to see family meet Jesus, to have a child, to get that raise, for healing, to reach that health goal, to win that competition, to complete that course... the list goes on and on.

At VOUS we have a gathering of women called VOUS Girl. It's a sisterhood of strength for every season and it's not centered around belaboring what we're waiting on but finding joy in WHO we are waiting with. Jesus breathes real purpose into even the toughest moments in life. He places us in a community that reminds us our wait is not a waste. Together as we trust God, our wait is strengthening our walk. We often say "Home is always a journey". It's a reminder to us that our sisterhood is not based on perfection but what we learn as we make progress. God is shaping us as we patiently trust and surrender.

Community has the power to change the perspective of even the toughest waiting seasons.

The goal of our gatherings is not to sugar-coat current situations but to speak to the deepest longing of our souls with the promises of God. That's what we need! Far too many have walked away and given up on the call of God on their lives over the last two years because they were focused on the wait instead of who they were waiting with! You'll never walk alone. Don't give up, there's purpose in the waiting room! If you're leading but feeling the pressure to graduate from your current waiting room, let me encourage you that there may be more in your current season than you realize.

Here are a few things I have learned in the waiting room of life:

1. IT'S ALWAYS PACKED

If you feel like you are the only one waiting, you probably have your eyes closed and your ears covered. As you sift through this season of trusting God, there are people all around you in the same season. And as you look around, relationships are the gold you will find. GOLD. Some are waiting for purpose and direction, others await relational healing, emotional restoration or the salvation of a loved one. Could our wait be more than just about ourselves? Could our delay serve the purpose of awakening us to the countless others who surround us in need. Our communities and churches are full of people waiting!

Through sisterhood we want women to know they are not alone in this journey! We all have a shared experience of TRUSTING God in the wait! Being honest about what we're trusting God for with others creates lines of authentic communication that ultimately rolls up in prayers to God for one another. This is what sisterhood is about!

Boy was that room at the hospital packed as I waited for my name to be called! It wasn't just friends and family, there were many complete strangers. But they wouldn't stay strangers for long...

2. IT'S GREAT FOR CONVERSATION

You see, this is where the country, Louisiana girl in me kicks into high gear. Sure it's 8am, sure we're tired, sure I've got nerves working overtime as I approach the unknown. Buuuuut... we are all

here in this waiting room together. So, we might as well get to know each other, right? You see, conversations turn cold waiting rooms into cozy living rooms where you aren't waiting, you're actually living. Conversations turn strangers into community. Conversations take your mind off of yourself and open your heart to the plight of someone else's journey.

I followed my parents' lead that day, as we started to get to know the other families next to us. We shared our stories, laughed together and even took family photos for one another. And then our family began sharing memories as the wait extended. When I was little my Mom wrote a song that says "Let's make a memory while we wait!" It's a profound thought that waiting holds moments you will hold for a lifetime. When you believe that truth, the space to wait takes on a life of its own.

Conversations lead to real life change. I love sisterhood because our goal is not to just have a large gathering but to move people forward in their journey of purpose. There are some things you don't need to wait on at all! Our goal is to open their eyes to purpose in the here and now. Our prayer is that women choose Jesus and get involved in building His Church!

3. IT'S A GREAT PLACE TO CELEBRATE OTHERS

My husband knows how to make moments. I am the one in the relationship always concerned that we'll disrupt those around us. He, on the other hand, is the one who cranks up the music and says, "Let's dance!" And that is exactly what we did that morning, in the waiting room. Our phones became turntables and the entire family jumped up and started to dance! Who says the waiting room of your life has to be dead and boring? The waiting room is what you make it.

If we open up our eyes to the people around us and build relationships as we wait, then we can celebrate their wins as if they are our own! Sisterhood is a community of celebration, NOT comparison. Instead of being jealous when someone else has their name called, you can cheer them on because you know their story. Celebration of others destroys jealousy, just like prayer destroys

“Sisterhood is a
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bitterness. Before I ever got to celebrate the birth of my son, I celebrated countless friends as their families grew. That morning in the waiting room I was able to celebrate with several other families first. And when it was my turn, I had a whole room, many of the people I didn't know hours before, celebrating with me!

As I walked out the doors holding Rich's hand, I was thankful for the wait. Finally, I was walking instead of waiting!!

COULD THE WAIT MAKE THE WALK EVEN RICHER?

The wait gave me time to empathize with others, reflect, pray, connect and enlarge our circle of support. It allowed me to realize my story is only a tiny part of the life story God is telling through history. And all of our stories are connected.

Eight years of waiting offered me countless opportunities. Opportunities to isolate or communicate. Opportunities to doubt or trust. Opportunities to run away or rest in the finished work of Jesus. I wouldn't take one day of the journey back. It took me a long time but I finally came to a place where I realized that if I never received a miracle, there is a constant supply of peace and joy just for me right here in this waiting room.

I couldn't have done it without the right community surrounding me with faith, pointing my eyes toward Jesus and speaking life over me.

My prayer for Rivers Church is that women in the wait realize their destinies are not late, they have not been forgotten and God is intimately involved in their story. The story is already in motion. Right here, right as you wait.

Psalms 112:7 (NIV) says: "She will have no fear of bad news; her heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord." And that is the true miracle of it all. Jesus is enough. You can take him at His word. He brings life in the waiting! So party on! Your hopes and dreams depend on it!





HOPES AND DREAMS





What to do when facing obstacles on your way to your dreams

Ps Wilma Olivier

This is going to be a year of many colours. The Pandemic brought no colour to our lives. It has been dark, bleak and colourless. We as women are very moved by colours and atmosphere. We are wired that way. God created us to be romantic. In Song of Songs we read about beautiful romantic and colourful settings, not boring and plain. There are colours and textures written about. It speaks of curtains, of perfume and jewellery. It speaks of purple upholstered seats and apples. Also of scarlet ribbons and pomegranates. Wow, such pops of colour!

As I was meditating on Joseph and his coat, I wondered if Jacob was inspired by the rainbow God placed in the sky as a promise and a covenant God made during the time of Noah. We read about it in Genesis 9. The coat of many colours may have been embroidered with the promises of God over Joseph's life. Interesting how his brothers took his coat off him and tore it to shreds. That is what the enemy wants to do to us.

What I can see is that a coat of colours given to a child is a coat of love. I wondered if Jacob knew that Joseph was a son of promise. The promise that their line would not be destroyed because of Joseph.

Scholars point out that because Joseph was the first born son of his chosen wife Rachel, Jacob was marking Joseph as the heir of the patriarchal blessing. The coat set him apart.

I need to mention that God has no favourites. We are all His favourites. We are set apart for greatness. We have all received a coat, a mantle if you like, just like the Prodigal when he came home. Wear your coat with confidence and be aware that people will hate you.

It seems like a coat of many colours, whether you are rich or poor, given as a symbol of love, will create controversy. For Joseph, his father was rich. But I read the story of Dolly Parton. Her mother was poor. Dolly Parton wrote a song about the patchwork coat her poor mother made for her to keep her warm in the winter. Her classmates mocked her for it, but Dolly wore it proudly. She called it her "Coat of Many Colours." It is wonderful to see that Dolly rose from such poverty to become famous. I read recently that she is providing books for all the schoolchildren of her native Sevier County in Tennessee, free of charge.

When we hear the word 'dreams' a number of things come to mind. We speak of our dream job, our dream house, our dream wedding or our dream holiday. There is a difference between dreams and visions. Visions come when we are awake. Visions also come in the form of prophecy.

There are times God will speak to us in the dreams of the night, as with Joseph, but it is rare. Joseph only ever had two dreams and both meant almost the same thing. Dreams of the day are our personal goals to improve and to reach high in life. They could be God-given, but not always. Joseph's dreams were God-given for a specific purpose that would be revealed much later:

Genesis 37:3-11 (NKJV): 'Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him. Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers; and they hated him even more. So he said to them, "Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf." And his brothers said to him, "Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words. Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me." So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?" And his brothers envied him, but his father kept the matter in mind.'

The story goes on to say that they stripped his coat to shreds and applied animal's blood to make it look like he was killed by an animal. Joseph was sold to Ishmaelites as a slave, bought by an Egyptian, Potiphar the captain of Pharaoh. Then

one day Mrs Potiphar tried to take Joseph to bed and he ran out of the house with her clutching his now different robe and she lied to her husband that Joseph tried to rape her! This landed him in prison for a long time.

It was in prison that he started interpreting dreams and interpreted a very important dream of Pharaoh's about seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph that he made him the Governor of Egypt and in charge of the food supply. In a nutshell, Joseph's brothers came to Egypt to buy food and grain and bowed before Joseph as they did not recognise him.

Thus his dreams came true after more than twenty years and eventually they were all reconciled and saved from the famine. What a beautiful but painful story in the Word and with a wonderful outcome and victory for Joseph and his family. His dreams unfolded over years but all the while, he knew God would fulfil those dreams. It drove him to become the person he became. Have you ever had a dream from God fulfilled?

I dreamt I had a little girl with spiky dark hair sitting in her cot with a pink dress. I dreamt this while I was pregnant with our second son, Adrian. So I was convinced that I was having a girl. I longed for that dream to become a reality. Finally, eleven years later, I had that little girl and I knew God gave me that dream.

DON'T LET ANYONE KILL YOUR DREAMS

Let me encourage you to hold onto your dreams. Even people with God dreams go through hard times. Don't be surprised when on your way to your dreams being fulfilled, you suffer hardships. Joseph went through hell. His own brothers wanted to kill him. People with no dreams, hate dreamers in their space. They will call you names and mock you.

Genesis 37:19-20 (MSG): 'The brothers were saying, "Here comes that dreamer. Let's kill him and throw him into one of these old cisterns; we can say that a vicious animal ate him up. We'll see what his dreams amount to.'"



They sold Joseph as a slave and lied about him. Time and time again he had to live with hopes awakened and then hopes dashed. In prison he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. He asked the cupbearer to remember him and put in a good word for him, but he forgot about Joseph. Joseph's suffering helped to make a man out of him.

Psalm 105:18 (LSV): 'They have afflicted his feet with chains, iron has entered his soul...'

Perhaps people made promises to you and forgot about you. God did not forget Joseph and He will not forget you. Depend on God because He is dependable. Patience is the key. Ps André and I on our way to our dream of a large church, suffered many hardships. Even my dream of having a little girl was not easy, as I fell pregnant with another boy, Nathan, but midterm I had a miscarriage. Five years later I had my little girl with her spiky hair and pink dress. An eleven year wait all in all.

LEARN TO HANG ONTO YOUR DREAM

Don't give up. Keep trusting and believing. If only Abraham and Sarah had hung onto their dream of having a son all the way through, they would not have had the struggles and issues they faced. When we hang onto our dream, we won't make Ishmaels along the way. We won't say, "Let's help God a little with this dream and do our own thing." People may mock you and laugh at you but be like Joseph, trust like Joseph who went from prisoner to Governor in one day! Persist and pursue your dream like the persistent widow in Luke 18. Don't give up.

LEARN FROM JOSEPH'S DISCIPLINE ON THE WAY TO HIS DREAM

Joseph proved himself as a good steward. He worked with excellence, and took no shortcuts. As he humbled himself, God promoted him. He was promoted in Potiphar's house to head servant, faithfully doing his work waiting for the day that his prophetic dreams would become a reality. The key to our promotion is within us. When Mrs Potiphar decided to commit adultery with Joseph, he did not go along with it. He could have said to himself, 'I have not had female company for a long

time. No mother or sister. I am sure God would understand.' His spiritual discipline and purity came to the fore in what he said to her.

Genesis 39:6-9 (NLT2): 'So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn't worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat! Joseph was a very handsome and well-built young man, and Potiphar's wife soon began to look at him lustfully. "Come and sleep with me," she demanded. But Joseph refused. "Look," he told her, "my master trusts me with everything in his entire household. No one here has more authority than I do. He has held back nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How could I do such a wicked thing? It would be a great sin against God!"

Here's a truth: No one can stop your destiny except you. When a dream is put in you and it does not have moral and ethical dimensions, it is not of God. It must line up with the Word. A Christian we knew, said God told him in a dream to divorce his wife and marry another man's wife. No, we cannot blame God for our own wrong desires and dreams.'

LEARN THAT PEOPLE WITH DREAMS ARE ABLE TO FORGIVE

When we were in business we had a shop of fine manufactured shoes, bags and belts. One day a guy from a similar new shop in the Golden Acre Shopping Centre, walked in and told Ps André, "I am going to close you down. You will be out of business soon." Well, we were tithers and givers and God blessed our business as a result. Suffice to say, his business closed down. We were going strong. Our business was established in 1976 and we sold it and it is still going strong. We forgave that man for his foolishness.

Matthew 18:21-22 (NLT2): 'Then Peter came to him and asked, "Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!"'



You have to be able to forgive. Joseph forgave his brothers. He saw a larger purpose for his dream. He laid aside revenge. Ultimately his love for them covered their sin.

Genesis 50:20-21 (NLT2): 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children.' So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.'

Life will be harsh especially now. Problems, Pressures, People would want to steal your dreams. God is looking for people of faith and big dreams.

God is looking for people who will believe him for the impossible because dreamers think differently to other people.

God is looking for people who know and understand His nature.

God is looking for people with dreams who will not give up because they are trusting Him and His promises. Let me encourage you to hold onto your dreams.

Be one of those people in 2022.

miss



Dream
no small
dreams

for they have no power to
move the hearts of men.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe





A RESILIENT JOY

Alanda van Staden

Being stuck in unknown places is probably the most dreadful and scariest feeling in the world. Contracting the Delta variant of the COVID-19 virus in June of 2021 felt like that for me in so many ways and in the middle of it all, it just felt like another nail in the coffin.

I truly believed that 2021 would be *MY YEAR* where everything would fall into place after having had a terrible 2020 – the year I lost my brother and the year they found my acoustic neuroma, a tumour in my inner ear which was, thankfully, benign. But because of this tumour, I lost my hearing on one side. I pushed through all of this, the hard lockdown and the rest of that year trying to be my hap-

py self, no matter the trials and tribulations. I also believed that nothing else could go wrong because of the hard year I had experienced.

However, landing up in ICU in June 2021 with COVID Pneumonia, constantly being scared and not sure if I would ever see my loved ones again slowly but surely stole my joy. I tried to not give up, and every morning I had to remind myself all over again that this was just temporary and that God had a bright future ahead for me. When patients around me passed away, I had to find the strength again and again to keep fighting and praying. I kept telling myself that if I cried I would not only lose the battle but I would lose the last bit of hope



I had left. For this reason I only *allowed* myself to cry twice during the twenty four days I spent in hospital. A copy of the Sisters of Africa Magazine was delivered to me in hospital while I was in High Care. I devoured every article and picture, and it gave me hope! My doctor commended me every day for trying to smile even when I didn't feel like it.

I never could have imagined the long road of healing that lay ahead after leaving the hospital, but I got out! Even though I was still weak and struggling to walk, I got out! Even though I was still on oxygen and struggled for months to breathe, I got out! Even though I was still suffering from long COVID months afterwards, I got out! Even though I lost my hair because of being in hospital for so long and being on so many different medications, I got out!

God healed me more and more every day. He didn't only heal me physically but spiritually as well. My walk with God has grown in leaps and bounds. The value of warriors praying for me will never go unseen again. Knowing people are really praying for you when they say they are is probably the most wonderful gift in life.

So now, 2022, 2023 and 2024 will *DEFINITELY BE MY YEARS!* I refuse to lose hope and I choose to be happy and show my joy and God's love to all around me. God saved me during the toughest season of my life for a reason and I will keep fighting to honour His name in all my dreams and with all I do. I have left the trauma behind me and I am striving to be a better me every day.

I still pray Joshua 1:9 (NIV) daily: "*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.*"



THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

Bianca Isaac

On the 7/7/07, I was involved in a car accident that changed the course of my life. A taxi shot through a red light and collided into my family and me. I sustained extensive injuries to my skull and face, fractured the L3 disc on my vertebra and experienced intense abdominal bleeding. I was bed bound for five months with a tailor-made body brace. It was also in that accident that I lost my beloved grandmother. I was in my honours year and every ounce of my ambition felt shattered. Two of my biggest questions post-accident were: would I walk again with no complications and would I successfully be able to carry a child?

What ensued was years of challenging health complications. I began a career in the Public Relations sector in 2008 and a year later I began to experience unbearable upper body pain. By 2012, I quit a lucrative career with the hope that a six-month sabbatical would assist me to find medical answers. Within those six months, I sought help from several specialists and all unanimously advised me not to return to the industry. This was not the news I wanted to hear.



Through much fasting and prayer, it seemed apparent that God wanted me to exit the world of rigid, linear ambition and turn a very specific gift into a career. In parallel with my searching, Pastor André conducted a series on dreams. His resounding message was that if you have a dream, you have purpose, and purpose trumps barriers to success. This thinking helped me understand that the litmus test of humanity is how you choose to stretch yourself.

I researched two industries which I've always been drawn to: Dramatic Arts and Psychology. Wits University offered a Master's in a pioneering field called 'drama therapy'. The next ten years were a roller coaster of studying whilst arduously searching for medical answers for my health challenges.

In 2018, I admitted myself into a rehab to professionally wean off chronic medication in lieu of my deep desire to have a child. I managed to quit 80% of my medication and was given the green light to proceed, albeit not without caution. My health and age posed significant challenges. At the onset of lockdown 2020, my husband and I decided to start a family. We prepared for a lengthy experience but shortly after deciding, we were surprised with a positive result. However, the romanticised, fairytale version of pregnancy was not my experience. I had several moments of joy, but it was mostly met with severe illness and health challenges.

On the 25th of March 2021, I gave birth to McKenzie Mila Isaac, our healthy miracle weighing 2.76kg, born with a smile and eyes wide open. In that moment of euphoria, I knew God had always been in control. McKenzie was born one year after our

national lockdown began, and without trivializing the enormous loss which billions of people have suffered, for us it seemed as if God had slowed the world down for us to surrender to Him.

It is apparent now that God was shaping my future from the day the taxi collided into us. What looked like the shattering of a young girl's dreams was actually a plot-twist in my larger story of hope. I received financial merit awards in my Honours and Master's years, and this year I will launch my clinical Drama Therapy practice using dramatic exercise as a tool for psychological therapy. I have experienced the unique benefit of using personal experiences to shape my craft.

God calls us to act in accordance to His will and to be relentless in our pursuits, investing in our dreams through action, dying to self, remaining close to His Word, serving in His church and believing in His promises. I practiced each of these and still believed year after year that every detour was and is in line with God's timing.

I turned thirty six in January 2022, which seems late to be pioneering a new career and mothering a one-year-old. There were numerous moments when fear, doubt and trepidation lead to me questioning the journey. My story is not one which outlines that "everything will be okay", but one which solidifies that, through our narratives of struggle, victory, tears and laughter, we find the richest part of our humanity. It is a narrative of finding water in the desert.

I recall this quote from Bob Goff: "The way we deal with uncertainty says a lot about whether Jesus is ahead of us leading, or behind us just carrying our stuff". Irrespective of the darkness, may we always allow Him to lead.





There is hope for a
tree when it is cut
down. It will sprout
again. Its shoots will
not stop sprouting.

Job 14:7 GW



A LIFE AND HOPE RESTORED BY HIS GRACE

Lisa Fraser

It was Monday the 5th of April 2021 and a glorious morning in the alluring Waterberg in Limpopo. It was just two days after celebrating my fifty-first birthday, and knowing that we might soon emigrate to Ireland for a new adventure and leave this wonderful continent of Africa, my daughters and I set off on a horseback ride into the nature reserve to experience “walking” with giraffes and other wildlife.

During the outride I needed to change horses, but little did I know that this would change my life forever. The second horse decided to bolt uncontrollably and eventually I was thrown off. My head hit a rock, causing a severe concussion which was ultimately diagnosed as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Because of the extent of my injuries, I had to be airlifted back to Johannesburg from Polokwane.

For the first week in ICU and High Care, I drifted in and out of consciousness with vague memory

flashes. My sight was impaired as everything was in pyramid vision, where I saw people in multiples and diagonally. Eventually I was transferred to the general ward but still under twenty-four-hour monitoring. From there I was moved to a specialised rehabilitation centre in Sandton. My days were filled with multiple sessions with the neuropsychologist, physiotherapist, as well as speech and occupational therapists. I struggled learning to walk again, to regain full functionality of my sight, to read and to write again. COVID made things even more difficult as the facility was locked down, preventing me from seeing my family.

Part of my TBI was the impact damage to key parts of my brain, being the frontal and temporal lobes. This resulted in daily struggles with, amongst other things, short-term memory loss, anxiety and ultimately depression, to the point of suicidal thoughts, for which I was admitted to a wellness rehabilitation centre in October of last year. This was extremely traumatic for both me and my family.

During those dark days I felt all alone but I needed to realise that I was not actually alone, for GOD was always with me. When I felt lost and with no purpose in life, God sent me a friend to remind me of my love for Him. She reminded me how I had inspired her to walk with Jesus and how my love for Him had led me to start studying Theology prior to my accident. God sent people to encourage me and I was also able to tell others of God's love for them – from a nurse who had lost her sister moments before her marriage and was still angered at God, to a fellow patient who was a young student who had not yet known that much about God.

During my recovery, when I felt helpless and deserted, my husband reached out to the Rivers Church leadership for encouragement and support, and the power of their prayers were felt constantly. I continue to heal from my injuries and it is a daily struggle, but every day I see God's hopes and dreams for my life. Just days after celebrating my fifty second birthday and one year on from my accident, I am in a good space. I am enjoying my life once again and all God has for me, from the little things like appreciating food, as my taste buds are being restored, to being able to enjoy art classes. I was also able to resume my studies recently and I have received good grades. So I sit here writing this article in total awe of all of God's miracles and providence in my life. Despite my challenges, I will continue to lean on His promises as reflected in His Word.

“For I know the plans I have for You,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”
Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

“...renew my life, for this was your promise...”
Psalm 119: 41 (TLB)

Our Lord God is omnipotent. I know that His grace has and will continue to bless me and my family despite any challenges that come our way. I know that God is the God of restoration and that He is busy restoring my life and using my experience for His glory and splendour! And by God's grace, my husband got a great job offer here in South Africa. So we get to remain in our beautiful country where we can continue enjoying our walks among the wildlife!





HOPES AND DREAMS RESTORED

Shikha Basdeo

Growing up I was an extrovert, always centre stage at every event. My academics were also good and I wanted to study Physiotherapy. At seventeen I already had my learner's license and had started driving, with the supervision of my older brother, of course. Life was going according to plan and I was on the road to achieving my goals!

In October 1996 during the third term holiday, my life completely changed. I was involved in a car accident with my brother and what I thought was going to be a well-deserved break before the Grade Eleven exams, ended up with me waking up in hospital. I had been unconscious for two weeks and woke up to find out that my brother had been killed in the accident. The pain and shock was overwhelming. It was like a nightmare. I had the worst three months of blackouts, operations and ICU stays. My face had to be completely reconstructed, my jaw reattached and my mouth wired together. The injuries included many broken bones, internal complications and six damaged nerves which left my right arm, diaphragm and lung paralysed. I was in turmoil and thought, "How could all this happen to me at seventeen? I still have my whole life ahead of me!"

With support from my mum and dad, I miraculously recovered and made it through matric. Since

I could only use one arm, I had to learn how to walk without falling because my balance was completely off. I had to also relearn simple tasks like eating and dressing myself; basically how to do everything with my left arm. My personality changed and I became very introverted. Everyone pitied me and it was really sad because many of my family members believed it was some sort of punishment from God. I would hear my very traditional Indian family say, "No one will want to marry her; she is disabled. How will she even manage to look after herself, let alone find a job? How will she drive?" And of course, "How will she have children?" All the pity and negative speak around me made it difficult for me to ignite any passion or even believe my dreams could come true.

My story had a turning point within the five years after my accident: I found Jesus and my hope was restored. I realised that God loved me and that I was created for a purpose and saved in the accident for something greater. It was a tough journey as my family never accepted that change but time and time again God has given me hope. I then met my husband who loved me as I was and continues to support me in the toughest times. On my wedding day my aunt told my mum how disappointed they were that I married a Christian man. But nothing and no one could take the hope in my heart

away. At one point I could not use both my hands and my husband took care of me in every way. I have two amazing boys and when they were babies it was a challenge, but I became an expert at changing diapers with one hand! So yes, I am married, I have two children, I can peel a potato, put on socks and look after myself. I can even drive!

Plugging myself into church and serving allowed me to regain confidence as I learnt to once more engage with people. I slowly became that extroverted person again.

Working with people has always been a dream for me. I've always loved helping people, speaking and teaching. Since I couldn't pursue Physiotherapy, I ended up in the technology field, and I always prayed and asked God to use me in my job. In the last five years I've gone from working in the background to speaking in front of people at work conferences and even running a program across five countries. I travelled over 25 000km over four months, spoke at 71 workshops and engaged with over 400 people. Even with 40% lung capacity I had the ability to speak and stand throughout the project, all of this despite the fact that in order to travel, I need special permission because of the metal in my face and spine, as well as a device in my chest.

During COVID we were very careful, especially because of the risks to my health. However, in June 2021 my husband, Deno, and I got COVID. We had severe symptoms and had to be on oxygen. After 2 weeks the worst had passed but the road to recovery meant being even more cautious about interacting with people. Fortunately, the online conference world allowed me to speak at 2 virtual events and I got to MC at a virtual conference. This year, I've been invited to speak at an in-person conference in the US in November. God never stopped listening to my dreams! Going through all these challenges has never stopped my heart from trusting and believing God for more and from living a full life. My plans may have changed, but my dreams have never been forgotten. So never give up. Trust God's plan for your life.







Be strong
and take
heart,
all you who
hope
in the Lord.

Psalms 31:24 NIV



FINDING A WAY TO KEEP HOPE ALIVE

Claudine Potgieter

At a young age, having just lost my dad and having to watch my mom and older siblings struggle to provide for us, I prayed that I would do well in school, complete a degree and find a good job. As a young adult, having to walk, catch a bus, train, or taxi (and occasionally hitch-hike with strangers), I prayed that I would one day buy my own car and have the freedom to go where I pleased. As an adult, I prayed, hoped, and dreamed of finding a godly husband who would believe in me, as well as a home to call my own, and dogs.

At the age of twenty one I completed my BSc in Biochemistry and Psychology. I went for an interview two days after my final exams and received a job offer in recruitment for the medical industry. While in varsity, I met Martin. We began as friends, and he waited until I completed my studies before he asked me out. We dated for five years before getting engaged in 2019. He was what I had prayed for, a man who valued me, shared my morals, values and beliefs, and I was excited about planning my wedding.

Then, 2020 came with COVID and lockdown restrictions, and like most, we had to put plans for our big wedding on hold. However, we decided to trust God and have a small Zoom wedding instead. The following year, just as we had planned our wedding reception AGAIN, we were hit with two shocks: firstly, the death of my father-in-law





and then the fourth COVID wave, all in the three weeks leading up to our wedding day! To make matters worse, the wedding venue refused to give us a refund. As heartbroken as we were, we once again found a way to win and made the day special by driving around (with me in my wedding dress) delivering the food we had prepared for our guests to their homes as well as handing out food to the needy. While all of this was happening, I was in the middle of exams as I was studying for a BCom in Marketing and Supply Chain.

Our lease was coming to an end at the end of 2020. I remember it was around Miracle Offering and I had prayed so hard that we would find a good home that was close to work. God came through. A week later, we put in an offer for a house and moved in a few months later.

At a young age, I was often told by my teachers that if I did not conform to what they thought was what a young lady should be, I would never amount to much. In 2021, I really felt the weight of that. I suffered from imposter syndrome, so during the Miracle Offering that year, I prayed for validation that I was making a difference in the world. Little did I know that two weeks later, out of a team of 200, I would receive the EMEA Regional Award for Professional of the Year 2021, an award I received for just being me!

So to sum up the last two years, despite COVID lockdowns and restrictions, I have gotten married, bought a house, got my dogs, bought a car, and completed a second degree! I also learnt a new skill – crocheting. I even started a small business out of it. At work, I have been put in charge of a whole continent, leading talent acquisition and recruitment for Africa.

I would like to say I did this on my own, but we all know I did not – it was GOD; it was having a group of sisters continuously guiding, supporting, pushing me and praying for me. All I had to do was trust in God's plan and keep hoping, dreaming and serving.





FAITH IN THE STORMS - A MOM'S JOURNEY

Bailey Merven

In 2017 we saw a fertility specialist after three years of trying for a baby. We were told that there was only a five percent chance of falling pregnant and an even lower chance of carrying full term or having a normal baby. I felt shattered and hopeless. The vision for church that year was *"Nothing is Impossible"* and I clung to those words to renew my hope. That year we had a guest pastor who laid hands on me and prayed so specifically to my condition, that I knew in that moment God had healed me. Four months later I fell pregnant and Leo Jude was born. My faith, and that of those who had journeyed with us, was elevated. We were blessed and God was glorified!

During that waiting season a new faith was built into me which prepared me for what was to come. At four months, Leo Jude was diagnosed with a condition called craniosynostosis. This is where the bones of the skull fuse prematurely and it has a negative impact on brain growth and overall development. During level four lockdown when he was nine months old, he went in for major reconstructive head surgery. I was terrified beyond words and heartbroken while he was in ICU, as

I couldn't be with him. It was the hardest thing I had ever been through. I cried, worshipped and prayed like never before. His surgery was a success and his six-week recovery went well. At the time, I couldn't go to work due to COVID restrictions and my husband had just started his own business. We were worried about finances, but God brought us through.

Throughout that period, we were so grateful to God for His hand over every aspect of our lives. We felt so loved by our pastors and friends who messaged and encouraged us through it. They helped me to keep my hope alive.

Fast forward two years and God blessed us with a second son, Sebastian Clay. At his six-week check-up our paediatrician picked up that something wasn't right and he too was diagnosed with the same condition. It's not a genetic condition and the surgeons told us that they had never seen or heard of siblings with it. My heart was shattered knowing what we needed to face again. His surgery went well but there were some complications, so our hospital stay was longer. I was grateful that



this time around due to less restrictions, I was able to stay with him. Being a mother of two, my heart was torn between being with him in hospital and wanting to be with our toddler at home, but God truly does comfort the broken-hearted. It never gets easier with your children but my reliance on God was amplified.

While in hospital and after we were discharged, the women in my world came alongside us and showed us God's love in action. I got food delivered to the hospital and meals were dropped off at home. They even brought snacks for Leo's lunchbox. They thought of everything! We continuously got messages from our friends and pastors throughout this time.

Through all these challenges two scriptures come to mind:

Romans 5:3-5 (NIV)

"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up..."

I know that God didn't cause these defects in my children. His goal isn't suffering but He will use it for His glory. Both our boys are now healthy and have healed beautifully. My faith and trust in God have been strengthened and I have learned that the only way to position myself for motherhood is on my knees before Him.

We were carried in prayer, burdened by people and loved in a way that speaks to the glory of God and His design for us to love each other. Although I never want to experience anything like this ever again, I know that God will always get us to the other side when our hope is fully in Him.



Having hope

will give you courage.

You will be protected
and will rest in safety.

Job 11:18 NLT





KIDSSZONE - A PLACE TO BELONG

Katelyn Khoza

My family and I came to Rivers fifteen years ago and I had never been in a children's church that was age-specific, so it was very strange to be in an environment where I was surrounded by kids my age. I was eight and now I am twenty three, so I guess you could say I know Kidszone pretty well!

Having a place where I could belong and have God made personal to me meant and still means so much to me. I went from being in Kidszone to serving in Kidszone, to joining staff in Kidszone, to meeting my now husband in Kidszone, who proposed to me in Kidszone!

Kidszone instilled values in me that I carry until today. I learned about God being a super strong God and knowing nothing is impossible with Him. I was a very shy and insecure child, but there were teachers who made an intentional effort to see me every week and know me, and to find out how my week was and how school was.

I remember one Kids Africa Conference when the lesson or theme was around being a Rock Star for God. So being shy, I of course did not want to go to a conference with lots of children I didn't really know and I especially did not want to be a Rock Star that everyone would be looking at, but I went to conference anyway and do not regret it at all! Kids Africa Conference encourages you to get out of your shell and to get to know God and others more. That specific conference taught me that the





kind of Rock Stars we need to be are those who know Christ, as we are encouraged in 1 Timothy 4:12 (NIV): *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers..."*

Over the last 15 years Kidszone has become more intentional in getting to know kids and understanding what phase they are in, which is why age-specific ministry is so important to me. I may be biased but honestly, I was a very shy child and even though I am still introverted, I have learned how to have the confidence that was encouraged through Kidszone. The church never felt too big for me to feel seen, and I never felt too small to be understood. Without Kidszone, I genuinely don't know where I would be and I am grateful my mom insisted that my shy self continue going, even though it scared me initially.

I grew up without a father, so understanding God as a father was a difficult task because we tend to understand heavenly concepts through our earthly relationships. I knew God as God, but God the Father was a foreign concept to me. Kidszone is the reason I was able to encounter God personally and grow to know Him as a father. I knew I wanted to serve in Kidszone because I knew the difference one intentional conversation made in my life and I wanted to make the same difference in a child's life in an ever-changing world.

I spent so much time in Kidszone and, being an introvert, I did not necessarily go out and chat to many people, so God sent my husband to me in Kidszone. I met Ayesha when I was nineteen years old and he came to Kidszone with the same intentions I had: to meet the children where they were at and to speak into their lives. We did not just see each other and have sparks fly, but we served alongside each other, and we got married this year in January after two years of dating.

Kidszone helped me understand the importance of having a relationship with God, building strong friendships and marrying someone with the same values, not necessarily the same interests. So bring your kids to Kidszone or come serve in Kidszone - you won't regret it!



MY FULL CIRCLE MOMENT

Kirsten Millar

The first memory that I can recall of Rivers Church is in 2001. I was in Grade One at the time and I remember running down the corridors of Kidszone, which was still held in a small house, feeling so loved and welcomed. I remember sitting in a circle in one of the garages that had been converted into a classroom and accepting Jesus into my heart. Kidzone was a happy place for me. It was a place I loved. When we had Kids Africa Conference, I didn't want to miss out. Our kids' ministry was not only fun, but it was a place I could learn about God and the stories in the Bible. This set the foundation for my faith.

Growing up in church has been such a blessing. It's shaped me into who I am today. A turning point in my faith journey came when I attended a Sisters of

Africa Conference. I was in my first year of high school, the time when I cared way too much about what everyone thought of me instead of what God thought. I remember walking into the auditorium and seeing that every chair had a name on it. I remember the feeling of seeing my name and being reminded that I mattered, that they knew who I was. At that conference I had the most incredible encounter with God, and I knew I mattered to Him and wanted to serve Him and His house in any way I could.

I spent the next fourteen years attending and serving in the Youth and Young Adults ministry. I stayed past the age limitations because I wanted to be part of something where young people could feel loved and encounter God the same way I had

experienced. I understood the value of being plugged into church at such a young age, and I am grateful for my parents' sacrifice of getting me to Youth every Friday night. These were the years in which I built a personal relationship with God, the years I met my best friends and the years my faith was tested. It was a time when I was stretched more than I thought I could handle but God provided me with a community to lean on when I felt like giving up.

I often wonder what my life would have looked like if I hadn't grown up in church. One thing is for sure, I wouldn't want it. There have been some hard moments, but I can't imagine doing them alone without God. I am thankful for my Christian foundation at Kidzone and Youth. It has kept bringing me back to church each week, and the days I didn't feel like going were the days I needed it most!

At the end of 2021 my season for serving in the Youth and Young Adults ministry came to an end. It was a difficult time when I needed change, but I didn't know what was next. A couple of weeks later, I heard the gentle whisper of God telling me it was time to go back to Kidzone. I was reluctant to start but knew I needed to trust God. I had to laugh at how God works sometimes. He knows just what we need even if we don't. At the beginning of 2022 I started serving in Kidzone and it has brought me so much joy that I didn't even realise I was missing.

I get to be part of kids' lives and to see their excitement as they learn about God. It reminds me that I was once there. I can't help but smile, knowing that I get to be back in the place where it all started. My full circle moment!





'MOMMY, I WANT TO GO BACK TO MY CHURCH!'

Lelethu Hala

I have been blessed enough to have grown up in the house of the Lord. My mom and I have been at Rivers since 2007. She always tells me that she found out about church in a Sandton Chronicle newspaper advert, which is hilarious! That's such a long time ago because I'm 19 now and can't remember the last time I looked at a newspaper. The story is that we were looking for a spiritual home and going between churches, including Rivers. One Sunday we went to another church and I went to their children's church and apparently, on our way back I said, "Mommy, I want to go back to my church!" So, we planted ourselves at Rivers Church.

I began going to Kidszone, sometimes by choice and at other times I just wanted to sleep in, but Mommy always made it a point for us to be at church on Sunday and to learn about God. It was there at Kidszone where I got the opportunity to

choose Jesus as my Saviour. When Sisters of Africa Conference came around each year, that meant Kids Africa Conference! I was so excited because I knew how much fun it would be. It was an awesome place to get to know God and build my faith.

At Kidszone, the foundation of my faith in God was being built, even if I could not see it yet. As I reflect to when I started high school, I was made to feel like the odd one out because I believed in God and had a relationship with Him. But I remembered my identity was in Christ, that I was set apart, which meant that at school I wasn't going to be like everyone else and that it was okay because I was on the right path.

Instead of seeking community in that environment, I started to find community and belonging at 'Slam', which is now Junior Youth. It was such an important time; it was where I began to solidify my



beliefs and convictions. God became a friend as I got into the Word in my own time. I began to build friendships with people of the same material, who I then journeyed with. I started to learn the heart of serving God in the house. During that time, God put leaders beside me and a group of sisters on the same journey, with whom I developed a sisterhood. I developed a new sense of confidence, my character strengthened and I stepped out of my comfort zone.

Even when I did not see it, God had been faithful to me through every season. When I doubted this truth during a difficult season when my dad passed away from COVID, I could not see how I would heal. But I put my trust in God and allowed Him to be who He has always been to me, a good father. How great and gracious is God to wait for us, His children, to return to Him, remember His Word, His promises and who we are because He sent Jesus to sacrifice Himself for us to have an opportunity to find salvation and companionship in the Lord!

Were it not for the foundation built in Kidszone, I would not have known that through my time of great grief, God would meet me where I was. I decided to stay and just sit in the house at Youth and Young Adults, even though my heart wasn't 100% in it because I was hurt and hopeless. But God began to restore me and heal my heart. I found my love for God and built my faith back up again. My hope and joy in the Lord were restored in that season. I no longer doubted that God was and still is good.

I'm so grateful that my mom decided to sow that seed and was dedicated to having me at Kidszone and Kids Africa all those years ago. It was through her faithfulness that I got to meet and know the Lord. My foundation was set on the Rock and I am still standing on His Word after the storm and living it out every day.



HOPE IN MY FATHER'S LOVE

Shannen Gouveia

I think as adults we easily forget or don't realise that children's lives can be really difficult. Even a child who is loved, cared for and has everything they need, still has so many things to contend with, especially in the world we live in. Children are trying to understand the injustices around them and navigate people's opinions. In a complex world, things don't always make sense to them.

As a little girl, I didn't have the smoothest of starts. My parents got divorced when I was quite young, and this left me feeling very insecure and uncertain about who I actually was. At times, I felt very lonely but I preferred to be unseen. I was happy to blend into the crowd and not stand out in any way. I struggled to make friends as I was extremely shy and reserved.

One of my mom's friends invited us to Rivers in 1998. I was just five years old, trying to navigate and process so much uncertainty and hurt. Kidszone offered me a safe place, a place where I was seen, valued and loved. I remember feeling so special because the teachers knew my name. They knew me. They knew Shannen.



At that stage, I didn't really have a relationship with my biological father. He had re-married and immigrated to Australia. Apart from a few phone calls every couple of months, I had no idea who he was. For that brief time I had no father and no idea of what a father was. This is a sad reality for many children today. It was at Kidszone that I met God, God the Father, God MY Father. I learnt that His love for me was immeasurable and that He was moved by my pain. I came to understand that I am never alone.

Throughout my years at Kidszone, God provided so much healing and hope, and I grew in confidence and quiet strength. I remember thinking to myself, "I want to play a part in providing this for someone one day. I want other children to feel the hope and love I have come to know," and that is exactly why I decided to serve in Kidszone as soon as I was old enough to. It is my greatest privilege to play a part in introducing God to every single child who walks through the doors of Kidszone, and to provide a place of safety, hope, healing, guidance and acceptance.

Childhood is the most vulnerable time of every person's life. It is the stage of life where the foundation of your identity is established, and as a Kidszone teacher I get to play a part in building that foundation by helping children discover and know that they are unique and loved unconditionally by God. I am so excited that I get to be part of a ministry that has such a profound impact, not only on children's lives now, but also on our future world! I am so humbled when I think of how God has entrusted us with these precious little people.

My life was greatly enriched by Kidszone in so many ways and to this day I am still living in God's fullness and blessing. In 2008 my now husband started serving in Kidszone and we now serve alongside one another on the Kyalami campus. God has also blessed my mom with an amazing husband and a father for my sister and me. I'm so grateful for that invite in 1998, for all the years I attended Kidszone, and for every Kidszone teacher who sowed into my life and encouraged and loved me.



BLOOMING IN GOD'S HOUSE

Francina Kanusu

My family and I started attending Rivers Church in 2004. It was quite an adjustment, seeing that our previous church was more laid back in many ways. I'll never forget our first time driving to Rivers, we were in search of a new home and sound teaching. Sunday morning came and we casually arrived at the gate thirty minutes into the service. My father rolled down his window to inform the parking volunteer that we were there to attend church. Respectfully, the gentleman told us that the gates were closed. I don't need to explain to any parent the disappointment of spending the morning feeding and dressing your family for church, only to find the gates closed. Needless to say, we vowed never to return! Little did we know, we had just received our first lesson in time management, against the culture we were accustomed to.

A few months later, we received another invitation from a family friend to attend Rivers and against our bruised egos, we decided to return. The rest is history!

I remember Kidszone back when the classes were still named after different sea creatures. I was always the quiet kid who was too shy to make friends. My elder sister and I stuck to each other like glue. Even in my awkwardness, church always felt like a place where people were more open and receptive.

My most vivid memories of connecting with the Word were in Slam (now Junior Youth). Our leaders organised interactive, entertaining nights that resonated with us in that season of our lives. Friday nights became something we looked forward to. Our leaders were great examples to us, faithful in their roles and genuine in their care for us.

Most young people develop a sense of self-identity in their teens, but I was born two weeks past my due date and I've been a "late bloomer" ever since, so it took me a little longer to find my sense of belonging. It was in 2016 when the Rivers internship opportunity came about that I said "Yes" to God, unbeknownst to me the life-changing journey that lay ahead.

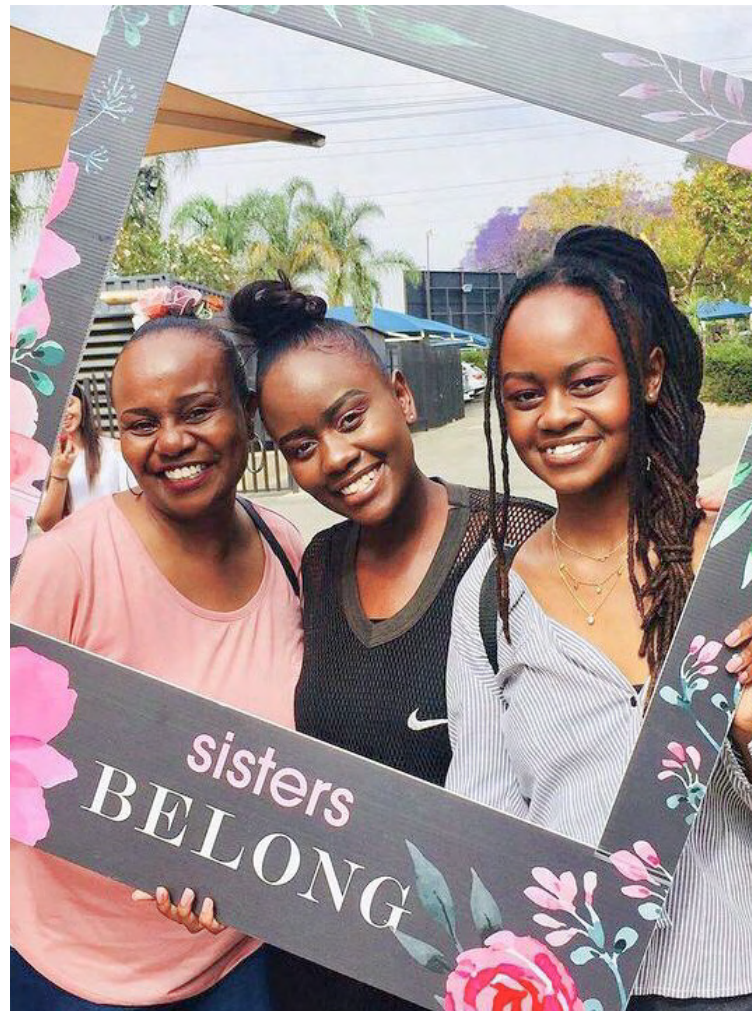


During that year I discovered my passion for people. I was able to build life-long friendships which I've maintained to this day and most importantly, I developed a personal relationship with God. Don't get me wrong, it was not only the internship that brought about such change, but it was being surrounded by like-minded people and God-centered leadership that brought about true transformation. I began serving in the same ministry that raised me, Kidszone, alongside the very leaders who taught me. They were my greatest role models and it was a great privilege to be able to come full circle! Kidszone became the home I never knew I needed.



Every week I have the privilege of serving the future generations the way I was so lovingly served. I'm always drawn to the quiet kids. I see myself in them, little souls who might be nervous about what the world has in store for them, not knowing that the seed of the Word that is planted in them every Sunday draws them closer to God and His plan for their lives.

Sometimes we assert high expectations on children; expecting them to fit in, make friends, love church, and with good intention. One thing I've discovered, being a child that has grown up in the House, is that love holds the most weight. Parents, show your children grace even when they "stray off-course" and above that, model the life you encourage them to lead. Your children will understand that your love is not conditional and this journey of faith is an important one, and worth doing together.





A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

Jessica Chetty

I have been planted in Rivers Church for twenty one years and it has felt like home from the very first day. For as long as I can remember, my four siblings and I spent more time at church than we had ever spent at home. At first, it was through our parents' commitment to plant themselves and begin serving the house. In the end it was our choice, as their continued sacrifice over the years really began to pay off. Being a parent now, I can't fathom my parents' joy, having watched us commit to the house out of our own willingness and desire from childhood until now. I so want that for my children too!

I remember so clearly how we had to commit our time, our treasure and our talent to the house alongside our parents. Back when the Sandton campus had six to eight services over the weekend, you bet we were in every single one of them! Without a doubt we knew it was never an option, but I believe I speak on behalf of my siblings when I say it never had to be forced upon us. We were individually sold out to the cause. It wasn't always easy, but we felt like we were a part of something more. Two things carried our family during that season of our lives – the unending grace of God and Joshua 24:15 (NKJV), "...as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

My church journey is so special to me and I value every single moment of it. I grew up in Kidszone and the very moment I was out of Kidszone, I began to serve there as a volunteer. I think I was twelve years old at the time. I loved it and felt the weight

of what it meant to be there. A year or two later I decided it was time to serve in our Junior Youth ministry, and then our Youth ministries, where I would spend the next few years of my life.

Everything was planned around my commitment at church, as it was my first priority. Everybody who knew me knew that I could always be found at church, so much so that I met my now husband at Youth when I was sixteen years old. We married eight years later. I love how God orchestrates every single detail of our lives! We served together from the time we were teenagers, all the way to getting married and then having our two children. I love our story because it began in church, where it will continue through the rest of our lives.

I am incredibly grateful to my parents' commitment and determination to have us grow up in the house, because I learnt some of my best traits and core values from being planted here from a young age. It truly changed the trajectory of my life. I never had the time or opportunity to get myself into unhealthy environments because I was so focused on my commitment at church.

"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6 (NKJV)

My children were both in church from the second week of their lives. We were intentional about having them in church consistently from day one. Church should be just as much a fundamental for parents, as it should be for our children. Kidszone is not a baby-sitting session while we are in main church. It is a children's ministry that is purposed and led by a team that has incredible stewardship, commitment and passion for our children. Children learn the fundamentals of faith from as small as eighteen months, at Kidzone. Can we for a moment comprehend what a great gift this is for them! Kidszone intentionally teaches everything from the importance of community, to love for our neighbour, the power of praise and worship, the principles of tithing, a passion for the Word and the discipline of consistent prayer. The team plays a huge role in helping parents guide, build and love their children into the purpose-filled life God created them for.



GROWING UP IN THE HOUSE

Ivana Bishop

My first time at Kidszone was in 2004, shortly after my family moved up to Johannesburg from Durban. It was a new city, full of promise, expectation and the unknown. Rivers, however, quickly became known as our home. From a young age my parents taught me of the importance of being in church and building a relationship with God.

During our time at Rivers, I started attending Kidszone. As I grew older, I began attending Slam, which is now known as Junior Youth. My parents used to drive me to church every Friday night once I started attending Youth. We travelled quite a distance since we lived far from church. Over the years, I attended Kids Africa Conferences, Youth Summer Camps and then Youth Conferences, and I formed relationships and friendships that helped me become who I am today.

Looking back, I am reminded of all the sacrifices my parents made so that I could be in church. I am so thankful to my parents for all that they have done and continue to do. Attending those ministries has had such a big impact on how I see the world, the church, God's people, and myself. Growing up in the church and under the Word of God has shaped me into the woman I am.

I remember when I first started attending, it felt very overwhelming. As a child, I was always rather shy and introverted, and to be honest, not much has changed in that regard. However, being at church and attending these ministries helped me come out of my shell. My parents served in the house and taught me what it means to serve the





house of God and His people, and I couldn't wait to start serving as well. When I was old enough, I also started serving. A few years ago, I began serving at Junior Youth, Youth on Fridays and Sisters once a month. It's so great to see my younger sisters also enjoying church and to see how much it has impacted their lives as well, going through the same ministries I did, knowing that their lives are being impacted and seeing how much they are growing under the Word.

After my father passed away, the church was a place of refuge for me and my family. It helped us process and learn how to go through what had happened and how to keep our eyes and lives fixed on Jesus. It was a challenging time and I didn't know what to do or how to deal with it. Being surrounded by my family, friends and "sisters" of the house was a blessing and made it easier for me to go through this, knowing I wasn't alone. Sitting under the teaching of our spiritual mother, Ps Wilma, has taught me a lot and has had such a big impact on my life.

I met my husband, Caleb, at church. We first met in Kidszone and went through youth together. We, like so many others, took different paths as we grew older, but as God intended, we found each other again, at church. My parents were the greatest example of how marriage should be. They always had Jesus at the centre of everything and lived their lives according to the Word of God. They taught us to do the same. My sisters and I have never forgotten all that we have been taught. My hope is that they too continue to grow in the house and be impacted in miraculous ways. My dream is that one day, when I have children of my own, they can experience the joys of being at church and wanting to know more about Jesus.





A dream doesn't
become reality
through magic;



it takes sweat,
determination
and hard work.

Colin Powell





Dreams
are the
seeds of
change.
Nothing
ever grows
without
a seed,

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark skin and curly hair, smiling warmly. She is positioned behind several vertical strands of blue, crinkled tinsel that partially obscure her face. In the background, a large, glowing circular light fixture is visible, creating a soft, bokeh effect. The overall mood is festive and hopeful.

and
nothing
ever
changes
without
a dream.

Debby Boone

WHAT IS YOUR DREAM?

Priscilla David

My love for cooking started at the age of ten when I used to watch my mum and grandma cook, while my dad helped out. Growing up we were seven siblings and life was tough. We would cook on a coal or paraffin stove, which was all we could afford. Even though we had a big family, we still shared our food with extended family, and neighbours.

My dad worked as a chef at a restaurant in Pine-town, and I would often help him cook for our local church. One Sunday, one of the pastors took my hands and while praying over them, said to my dad, "Jonnie, your daughter's hands will be a blessing to many when she cooks." Those words never left me. In fact, they made me want to cook even better!

After my dad lost his job at the restaurant, my parents worked hard to earn a living. I joined my mum in preparing meals, which Dad would then sell. One day he asked me, "Prissy, what is your dream? Where do you see yourself ten years from now?" I said, "Dad, you tell me yours." He responded, "I see both you and I opening a takeaway restaurant in a garden setting, or a little shop selling food but most of all, spreading the gospel to win souls." I literally had goose bumps as I confirmed, "Dad, that's exactly what my dream is!"



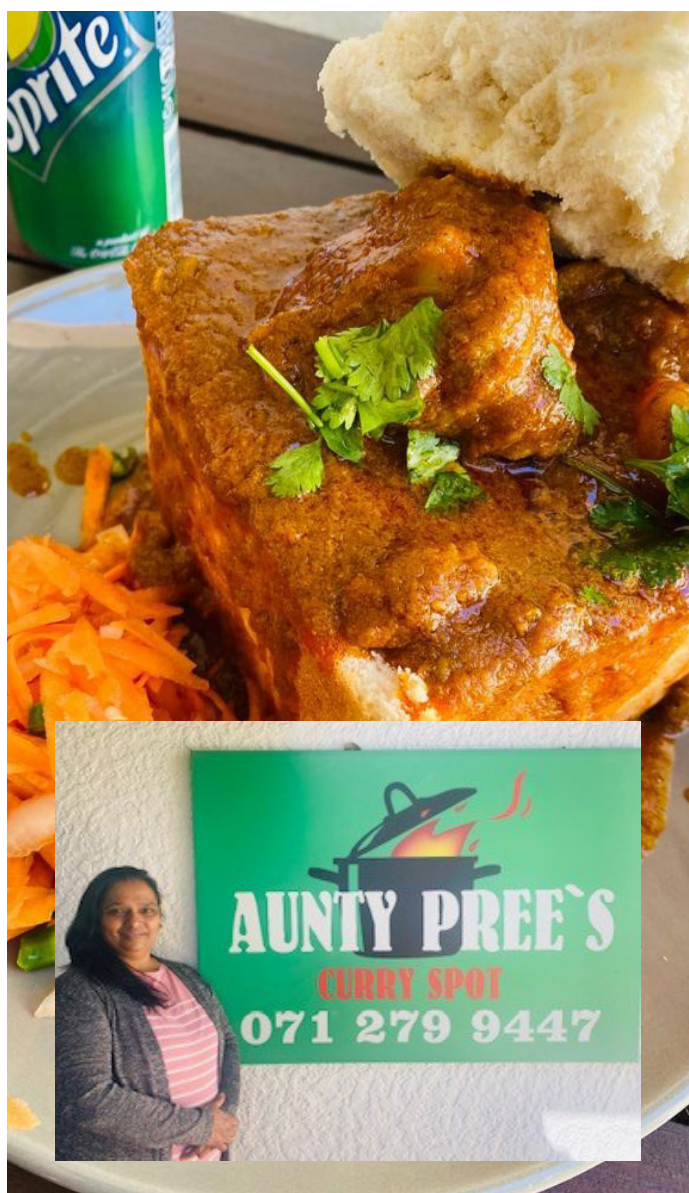


Dad and I had such fun working together. He started the Barnabas Ministry, where he would hand out a little note with a scripture and a motivational word to encourage customers and give them hope. Two years later I lost my dad to cancer. He was sixty two years old. My world fell apart. I could not believe that I had lost my mentor, my hero, the one person who truly believed in my dreams and hopes. I missed him so much and it took me a year to get back into catering.

In 2013 my husband got a job opportunity in Johannesburg, so we relocated, not knowing anyone up here. Then in 2015 my eldest son invited us to Rivers Church. My very first Sunday at Rivers felt like I had come home. We partnered in our third week and I started to volunteer in the catering team. I would leave home at 05:30 on a Sunday morning to serve. It was the hardest during winter because it would be so dark but I persisted, knowing that something was being birthed through my serving. The team often asked me when I was going to open my own business, and my dad's dream and mine started to come alive. That hope to open my shop was still burning inside of me.

In September 2019 I was offered a little shop to rent in a garden setting. With the help of my family, I opened *Aunty Pree's Curry Spot* in Northriding. People loved the fact that the food was cooked by a "Durban Aunty" who knew her spices well! Similar to my dad, I too would often encourage and pray for my customers.

Then came Covid in 2020 and we had to close the shop but I kept trusting the Lord. When we were finally able to open for deliveries, I was able to share the little I had with those in the community who had lost their jobs. All I can do is thank God for keeping our hope alive during that season. Today, my dream has become a reality and my little shop has grown beyond my expectations. My family and I continue to serve God because we know that's where our joy comes from, and it has opened doors to our hopes and dreams!





MY HOPES AND DREAMS

Zamani Nkondo

Rejection, shut doors and disappointment can truly make it difficult to dream for more. Dreaming can feel like a useless task to undertake.

I remember failing my Chartered Accountancy board exams. I thought it was the end of my career. The shame was heavy to bear. When I was evicted from my first business office in front of my staff, the sound of the door being shut sounded so final. When I lost my car due to failure to pay my instalments, I thought I would never recover from that loss. Every shut door, every “No!!” or “You can’t,” grew louder and louder, but my maternal grandma’s last words to me were, “We are born to praise and worship God through the good and bad.” Those words I have held onto.

When I was born, my dad (a pharmacist) took me to his pharmacy in a baby carrier and bragged to his clients about his baby girl. That is where the magical story began. I started working in his very first pharmacy in Gazankulu, now known as Giyani, at the tender age of eight. My job was to pack customers’ goods into packets. I did this for pocket money and took my job very seriously. I watched closely as



my father patiently and kindly spoke to his staff. I also loved to gather the children in my street at my house and play teacher with a black board. I wanted to be a teacher! The seeds were planted.

There is a famous saying that the first five years in anything are the hardest. I couldn't agree more! In 2009 I opened my own accounting business, which struggled profusely. For the first five years of its existence I wanted to give up, but I kept at it. My father kept asking me to join his group of pharmacies. I tried it for a year and left to continue my own business interests.

It was hard being in business and having a young family to look after. My husband was also in business and we held on to each other to survive and to raise our girls. I decided to open my cake business in 2013, with my husband's encouragement and support. When the Covid pandemic hit in 2020, it left me sure of one thing – God's faithfulness. I clung to God as I temporarily closed my cake business. I pushed through, diligently seeking God, serving my family and reducing my workload to accommodate my family's needs. We lacked nothing and God came through for us.

Early that same year I had a dream to do something for female entrepreneurs, which would stimulate growth and provide mentorship. I wanted to launch it through my accounting business so that we could offer free information and consultation to empower female entrepreneurs. I didn't know how I was going to make it happen but it got me

very excited! In August 2020 I launched "GMZFS Women in Business" and brought together businesswomen from different industries. This platform allowed these women to promote each other's businesses and support one another. The net result has been a growing platform currently in three different towns. Connections have been made, business deals closed and sisterhood preserved. To be the host of this platform has stretched me in ways I never thought possible. I see the eight year old teacher in me, and my dream to live a purpose driven life has been ignited.

In October 2020 my dad contracted COVID and landed in hospital due to his diabetes. It was a scary experience and I found myself in his CEO chair making decisions and keeping the doors of eight pharmacies open. In this chair, purpose was ignited and I was able to clearly see the difference I could make. When he came out of hospital, I praised God! I energetically took up the role to be a CEO in training and never looked back. I made it my goal to understand the basics of retail business by being on the ground with staff. I also humbled myself to learn from my father as quickly as I could. In March 2022 my business skills were stretched even further through the opening of our ninth store in Rivonia, Sandton.

I dream for more. The journey has just begun. I see how God has wiped past tears and given me a new hope. My dreams are built on gratitude for all that He has done.



BEYOND MY HOPES AND DREAMS

Stephnie Horsfall

“You will never amount to anything with those subjects.”

“You are wasting your time and money pursuing silly things.”

“You will always struggle if you continue with this.”

As a young lady I used to take words like that as a welcomed challenge. They drove me harder in the pursuit of personal development and, to my shame, to ease my pride and prove them wrong. I grew up believing I can do and be anything if I applied myself. In school I used to be the “artsy girl”. I did anything and everything creative, from singing, playing instruments, songwriting, to drawing, dancing and acting. When Grade Ten drew near, I had no trouble choosing my subjects: Drama, Fine Arts and Design. Why would I do anything different? As you can see from the opening line, it wasn’t a shared opinion. Nevertheless, I continued with this dream of pursuing creativity with the hopes of one day using it to help people.

High school is not an easy place for many people. I didn’t dislike my schooling. I had many friends and a lot to do but looking back, it was a very difficult place to navigate identity. Despite the turbulent

teenage emotions, the internal battles of the mind, anxiety and external pressures, my matric marks empowered me to get accepted into three different varsities. One even offered a scholarship. It felt good to show off my accomplishments and let the naysayers know they weren’t going to stop me. I did a Visual and Performing Arts Degree at Wits that allowed me to really explore different aspects of creativity like theatre, design, writing, psychology, multimedia, graphic design, animation, games etc) and not just focus on one art discipline.

All of this didn’t help me much, though. I was missing something. There was a dark side to my pursuit: it was a coping mechanism for the turbulent world within me. I threw myself into work (varsity and MANY different side jobs) so that I didn’t need to deal with the harsh reality of life. I lost myself completely, until I was a student by day and strip club DJ by night. I found myself in many other places that I shouldn’t have been. I didn’t know what I was missing, or should I say WHO I was missing, until God saved me. He showed me who I was and undid a lot of the damage I caused to myself, my relationships and my spirit. As He was humbling and rebuilding me in my final year of varsity, I got the opportunity to do gamification for a Financial

Investments company. Gamification is fairly new and has to do with applying game mechanics to everyday activities. This exceeded my every expectation and was beyond what I could have imagined for myself.

This was God moving in my life. He saved me from myself, from anxiety, from darkness and depression. He saved me by pursuing me and providing for me in the most spectacular ways. He has given me opportunities and a life I never thought I would have. I now do so much more in my day to day life, serving Him wherever I am. Since getting the gamification opportunity, God has grown me and shaped me by placing me in different roles and using many different people.

My dreams are small compared to His. My hopes cannot even fathom the depth of His love. God is not done with me yet. He is still working and I am excited to see where His hopes and dreams for my life will lead. I am expectant to see what I will look like when He has finished His good work in me. He is my partner in reaching beyond my hopes and dreams.

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Romans 15:13 (NIV)









SUNFLOWERS AT MIDDAY

Kawesha Miti

There was only one thing I could think of right before the start of lockdown in March 2020: *“I need a desk! How on earth am I going to work from home?”* Even pre-COVID, I never made use of work-from-home days. In fact, I disliked the idea altogether. Now I was expected to not only work from home but to stay at home! As I rushed through the mall, looking for a store that was still open to purchase a work desk and chair, it did not occur to me that things would get worse before they got better.

Two weeks later, as the country tuned into the presidential address with the hope that the lockdown would be lifted, the dreaded announcement came that it would be extended. I sat alone in my rented apartment in Pretoria and tears ran down my face. I could not bear the thought of not seeing my family and friends, not

going to church, or walking freely outside. The only thing I could do to distract myself from the fear of the unknown, was to sit at my desk and work. From there on my days were pretty much the same. I woke up, sat at my desk and worked. I would peer out the window and watch the sun rise and set. I saw the changing colours of the earth as the seasons passed, right from my desk. Daily, the possibilities of achieving anything seemed to dwindle. I had so many dreams but this did not seem like a time where dreams could come true; dreams of owning a home, dreams of traveling, of accomplishing an extreme fitness challenge, of visiting my family that reside in a different country or even seeing my friends who lived in a different city.

Well, the world kept turning, and as one restriction after the next was lifted, I felt a glimmer of hope. I was finally able to see my family, and in 2022 I

decided it was time to pack my bags and once again pursue my travel dreams, starting locally. I took a quiet trip to the Western Cape and reflected on the two years gone by. Little did I know that in this time of reflection, God would open my eyes to so much more through one special encounter on this escapade – Alyson.

Alyson was a young lady whom I met at a day's excursion around Franschhoek. She was like a sunflower at midday, both in her beauty and her determination to face the brighter side of life. Where I had spent two years dreaming of travel plans, Alyson had spent a lifetime. This was her very first vacation. Her physical limitations, such as Nystagmus, affect her hand-eye coordination, balance and depth perception. This has prevented her from leaving familiar surroundings but not from experiencing joy and keeping a sense of adventure. Seeing her enjoy things for the first time made me think of the things I take for granted. A glimpse of the moon in the blue sky, tidal waves crashing to shore and even the way that trees swoosh by a moving vehicle, evoked such awe and excitement. Alyson chooses to grasp each moment with jubilation. This positive outlook was a breath of fresh air and a welcomed reminder to always live life with thankfulness.

Though we cannot ignore that Covid has brought loss, sorrow and fear, it is important to realise that God has still been working in our lives and we must keep on dreaming and rejoicing in His presence. Despite having buried some of the dreams that I deemed impossible, a brief conversation with my siblings was the catalyst into starting the homeowner journey. With remote working I could now look at buying property in areas closer to church and enjoy the life I had before I relocated for work.

So now I sit at my desk peering out a different window, one that God has blessed me with in a home I can call my own, not to escape the fear but I look out with a new perspective. I wake up with gratitude for what God has blessed me with in these last two years. And I live with hope and expectation for greater things to come. I choose to turn to the Son regardless of the season. Like Sunflowers at Midday.





DREAM AGAIN

Tania Habimana

The earliest childhood memory I have regarding my future is that I wanted to be a TV presenter, to be precise, 'an MTV Music Awards presenter'. From around the age of six, you'd find me interviewing my dolls, recording myself on my father's video recorder and overwriting my parents' cassettes with my home-made radio shows. I somehow always felt that my voice was important.

I'm a first-generation Europe-born Rwandan, and coming to my teenage years, I discovered the business world and consequently, my entrepreneurial spirit blossomed. Putting aside my dreams for TV, I sailed off to business school and started a multi-disciplinary career that took me across the world, including South Africa where I led the expansion of a European menswear company into sub-Saharan Africa.

Whilst working in Europe, my desire to work in Africa kept growing; I wanted to play a part in building the continent I come from. At twenty-four years, I was enthusiastic and driven but also ignorant. I set out to do business from Lagos, Nigeria, to Nairobi, Kenya. However, it was more difficult than I had anticipated. A year later, I found myself back in London working as a part-time waitress. Running and growing a business hadn't been so easy!

Somehow in my struggles, confusion and failures, my childhood dream was revived. I conceptualised a TV show that would show the reality of doing business in Africa, influenced by my failed business expansion experience. The show would portray untold stories of everyday business heroes, the ones creating jobs, changing communities and building industries. So I ventured out determined to make this happen—in my strength.

I worked evenings as a part-time waitress because I wanted to keep my days open to organize meetings with potential sponsors and producers. It wasn't easy, but I could see my dream so vividly that I



knew it would be worth it someday. I lived with my cousin in a twelve square metre apartment; there was a mezzanine bed, a shower and a kitchen—and really, that’s all we needed. During this season, I realized God was working on my character. He humbled me and took me to where my heart was ready to hear Him.

It was at this point that I returned to South Africa. I started attending Rivers and eventually gave my life to Christ, and everything changed. God laid a foundation in my life; He gave me a spiritual home and friends that would become family, and I witnessed the fruits of being anchored.

Though the TV show was still in my heart, we didn’t find a sponsor for it but a whole new business was birthed. In attempting to bring the TV show to life, I realised that what I really care about is seeing African businesses thrive and playing a role in that, whether by telling their stories or actively participating in them.

The year 2020 was tough, and 2021 wasn’t any different. The pandemic was a strange and unprecedented time with uncertainties. During this period I pursued the TV show one last time. I reached out to a station but let go of my own concept and idea of how it should be done. I told them I just really wanted to use my voice, talent and what I felt was my gift, for others. I was even willing to go back to university.

My last effort was to no avail, so I let it go. However, I took a look around me at the blessing of life, the amazing friends God had given me, my church home, Kidszone, where I served every Sunday and witnessed children brought up in faith, and my business. I felt deep contentment, and if TV was not going to be in the works I would let it go, and I did. Exactly fifteen months after that last attempt, I received a call from the same station inviting me to apply for a job as an anchor. Fourteen days later, I received the contract, and seven days afterwards, I had my live on-air debut as a TV presenter!

Sisters, this testimony is an invitation to dream again. I have learnt that dreams do come from God, but like Joseph in the Bible, the route to getting there may not be the one we imagined or even the most pleasurable one. We need to bring ourselves to a place where God can speak dreams into our hearts again.



SURRENDERING LIFE'S COOKIE JAR

Wendy Gengan

Ever had a cookie jar in front of you with the most delicious cookies and never wanted them, UNTIL you were told you cannot have them? Well, that was me when I was told early in our marriage that I won't conceive naturally due to stage four endometriosis, making it close to impossible! I honestly didn't think this would be my reality. Heartache and overwhelming emotion set in as I watched people around me start families. Those close to us prayed with us and encouraged us. I feel fortunate that my parents demonstrated their faith and grounded me in God's word from a young age so naturally, my husband and I planted ourselves in a church and started serving. It was there that God used a community of people to love us and remind us of His promises.

After several treatments and fertility procedures (nearly five years later), we were beyond ourselves to find out that we had conceived naturally! I will eternally be grateful for the outcome of this part of my story, but the lesson will always remain the highlight. Many months before we found out I was pregnant, my husband and I made a choice to lay this dream before the Lord. If God would have it that we never had kids, we had to trust Him and we both agreed it was His will we desired. Difficult was an understatement, but there was something about this act of surrendering to God that made it bearable. We committed to keep serving in church, travelling, trying new things, enjoying life and giving all the love we had to kids in our circle.



Fast forward, here I am doing life with my husband who is amazing, and our little village, Jennah (eleven), Connor (ten) and Myles (four). I am at home full time and I count it a huge blessing. We surrendered the thing we wanted most to Jesus, and He honoured it! Being home full time is wonderful and came about five years ago, when my husband and I felt strongly that our daily lifestyle was not what we had envisioned for ourselves or our kids. We fully understood that there was nothing wrong with us both working but we could see unhealthy patterns develop, and our children were being neglected. We knew we had to make a change, so I took a sabbatical from work. It was not a quick decision (taking almost two years) and it came with huge sacrifice. Leaving a fifteen-year career in the banking industry, with huge potential, was a leap of faith, but I knew in my heart it was the right thing for our family. If you're a mother, whether you are working or not, you are a full-time mum. I am grateful for my journey of being home full time and embracing my vocation in this season.

Ever since I was a little girl, I always had great expectations and desires for my future. Being a pastor's kid, I grew up in church and gave my heart to Jesus at the age of thirteen. I knew then that God would take care of me just like a father would his daughter. Many things in my life didn't go the way I planned, and many things probably won't in the future, but I'll keep dreaming big and trusting Him. Because I know the nature of the Father I gave my life to twenty five years ago, I have confidence that HIS ways are perfect. Life isn't without its challenges, of course, but I'm rather pleased that I don't have to make my own way because there is someone far greater watching over me. I am reminded that surrendering our ambitions, hopes and dreams to Jesus doesn't mean giving up on them, it just means trusting HIS plans more than our own, and knowing that miracles happen when we give it all to Jesus.

"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails." Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)



Hope deferred makes the heart sick;

but when
dreams
come true
at last,

there is
life
• and
joy.

Proverbs 13:12 TLB



FROM A BIRD'S EYE VIEW

Nakita Ng'ang'a



Google defines hope as a feeling of expectation and desire for a particular thing to happen. Apostle Paul in Hebrews 11:1, shares that hope forms part of the three key ingredients of faith, the others being confidence and assurance.

I am a student pilot at Lanseria Flight Centre in Midrand. Growing up, my hope and dream was always to join my parents in the aviation industry. My mom owns and runs a travel agency, while my dad was in the Aviation Trade Association. I always thought that planes were a thrilling and captivating invention. So, after high school, it didn't take a lot of thinking as I had nothing else in mind besides the long-term dream that God had placed in my heart since my childhood.

The decision to train as a pilot was the easy part. The paradox is that I actually had a fear of turbulence, and I didn't like heights or maths. In fact, one windy evening while flying into OR Tambo International Airport, we had such a bumpy landing that it almost shattered my dream. After many a night of prayer and retrospection, I got the courage to get into the cockpit as a student pilot.

I started my training in February 2021 and I was so nervous because up until then, I would only speak of flying planes, but now the time had come for me to actually fly a plane. The training is expensive and takes a lot of sacrifice. Scholarships are no longer readily available chiefly due to the effects of the Covid pandemic on the industry. My first couple of months were very challenging as there were a lot of early mornings and late nights, and the workload was almost overwhelming. I was angry and upset at myself because I felt like I was in way over my head, trying to achieve an impossible goal. Things like learning how to land a plane, how to recover when falling from the sky and what to do if the engine fails, were frustrating in those first few lessons. Eventually I had to allow myself to be a beginner, because no one starts off being excellent.



Out of this season of uncertainty, I realised that undertaking this training, and indeed pursuing a career as a commercial airline pilot, would help me walk in my purpose. I would be inspiring and sharing hope to other young women, without having to give speeches! According to the International Society of Women Airline Pilots, only five percent of the world's commercial pilots are women. Despite the industry being predominantly male, I have never felt out of place or felt the need to prove myself. I take wisdom from Pastor Wilma who has taught us that we are all uniquely gifted and empowered. In my world, I like to translate this simply as women are just as capable as men! I love being part of the small percentage.

I'm currently working towards my private pilot's license and I know I'm still a considerable distance away from being your captain, but I trust that God will not only get me through it but lift me up when I feel like I can't make it. Jeremiah 29:11 tells me that God has good plans for me. This reminds me that I can trust Him despite any adversity.

Flight school has grown me in other spheres of my life too. It has built my faith and now I don't need reminders to pray before I undertake any activity. It is second nature before any flight or even undertaking ground school classes. I prefer to know that God is in full control and all I need to do is manage how hard I work. In its own way, being a pilot allows me to SEEK GOD FIRST. From the pilot's seat I can see beyond first class, observing the world from a bird's eye view. I enjoy perceiving God's marvelous creation of different clouds, the stars at night, basically a different artwork almost every day! That's a gift I can keep enjoying for the rest of my life.



SURRENDERED DREAMS

Nicole Santana

"Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay."
Ruth 1:16 (NIV)

Ever since I was a little girl, I always dreamed of getting married, having a beautiful wedding, finding a loving husband, being the perfect wife and mother, and living together in our dream home. You know, the way things are meant to be, just like in fairy tales.

How blessed I was to find my prince thirteen years ago and to finally tie the knot in 2019. Before taking our vows, we decided that we wanted to be on the right path with God and to put Him first in our marriage. We completed the premarital course, got baptised, partnered with Rivers Church, and started serving.

This dream was well on its way to becoming MY reality. I thought I had it all figured out, that my plan was foolproof. We'd move into our new little castle, start a family and live happily ever after. Things

didn't exactly work out as planned. My husband, being in the engineering field, has been required to work away from home for extended periods of time. For the last five years, we have probably been apart longer than we've been together.

In the beginning, it was smooth sailing; we'd miss one another and get all giddy and excited when it was a "home time weekend". Hard lockdown literally felt like our second honeymoon, where we got to spend a whole three weeks together. It was like an endless sleepover with your favourite person. Although we were grateful that we both had jobs, it became so difficult to always be apart. That honeymoon feeling started to fade and worries and concerns started creeping in as we had to face times apart again. Everything felt like a chore: cooking for one, watching a new series by yourself, making decisions on your own. My heart would literally break every time my husband had to leave for work. This dream started feeling more like a nightmare.

Through these trying times we stayed faithful to one another and to the Lord. We continued to pray that these long trips away from home would soon be a thing of the past and that my husband would find a job where he wouldn't need to travel as much. We tried to keep our dream alive by spending as much time together as we possibly could when he was home: working on our house, cooking and eating our favourite meals together, buying one another silly little gifts and most importantly, speaking openly and honestly about how we were feeling, what we wanted for our future and how we planned on reaching our goals both individually and as a couple. However discouraging this season was, we NEVER lost hope, not in God's love for us, not in one another, and not in our dreams.

1 Peter 5:7 (NIV) says, "Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." We prayed for the Lord's guidance and cast our burdens onto Him, knowing that He would sustain us. We realised that this was simply a short chapter in our story and that we were being moulded and prepared for bigger and better things. This chapter taught us that the Lord is in control and that we need only to trust Him. It taught us to be patient and grateful for everything we had. Most importantly, it showed us that our love for God and one another was even greater than we had ever imagined.

Don't ever give up on your dreams, even though they may seem impossible. They will not always materialise as or when we would like, but trust in God's timing. By His grace, we've finished that chapter in our story and started a brand new one. My husband is now permanently positioned in Johannesburg! We are living our dream, our happily ever after, not because of fairy tale magic but because of the love of God. And just when we thought it couldn't get any better, another dream is on the horizon: we've finally been able to start a family! There are still so many chapters and dreams to get through, and we will continue to trust God with each one.

This is just the beginning of OUR story, of OUR dream!



DREAMS IN THE DESERT

Sanchia Pillay

"I will make rivers flow on the dry hills and springs flow through the valleys. I will change the desert into a lake of water and the dry land into fountains of water." Isaiah 41:18 (NCV)

In February 2016, it was this scripture that led me to Rivers Church. Three years had passed since I had given my heart to Christ. It started with a vehicle accident and a God experience that piqued my interest, and accepting a friend's invitation to visit her church a few weeks later. I was Hindu and engaged at the time, but as my connection with Christ deepened, it became evident it was time to part ways. There I was about to end a relationship of four years because I was building a relationship with this God I had only known for six months!

In September 2016, a co-worker purchased a batch of Sisters of Africa Conference tickets and gave one to me, unaware I was visiting Rivers. During the conference, I'll never forget how all the women stood up and prayed for DawnChéré Wilkerson, who was trusting God in a promise of having a baby in one hand and a Bible in the other. That day, I prayed to God to send me a godly mate.

As time passed, I partnered with Rivers and started serving in the catering ministry. One day, while I was dressed in an apron and a mop cap packing pies into the oven at the Rivers Café, a tall man who served there said with a smile, "Hello. Are you new?" He asked me that because unknown to me, I was packing the chicken pies on the third shelf, and as they were the fastest seller, they should be on the second shelf, making it quicker for him to serve during the rush! He later got my name through a friend and found me on social media. We went out for coffee two weeks later, and after dating for two years, he asked me to marry him.



Prayer answered!

We were in our love bubble, planning our wedding, when he began to experience stomach cramps. I made an appointment to see a gastroenterologist, and then the diagnosis came... cancer. Months passed and we continued with wedding preparations whilst trusting God for healing. I walked down the aisle in June 2019.

Three weeks after the wedding, he got ill and was admitted to hospital again. That night, the doctor told me that he would be gone in two months and that I should prepare myself. So, I took an unpaid three-month sabbatical to fight alongside him. God's goodness remained.

In hospital, I left his bedside for a moment to grab a coffee. While away, his heart stopped, and he was declared dead. When I returned, I just knelt at his bed and prayed in tongues for God not to take him without giving me the chance to say goodbye. God's goodness brought him back to me and although he was in a coma for the last twenty four hours of his life, I held his hand which still had the cross he was holding when he died, said goodbye, prayed and released him. God had heard my prayer. All the while, Sisters of Africa 2019 was going on.

A month after he passed, I was retrenched after returning to work, yet I pressed on, attended church, and served. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and the world went into lockdown.

I had sown a miracle offering in 2018 for a business idea, and in 2020 to support myself financially, I started Rebel Vitality. It began with fresh-pressed juice made from organic fruit and vegetables. While I focused on my business, God opened another door, and I found permanent employment in November 2020 after being at home for over a year.

During this season, God changed the desert into a lake of water, and He continues to show me His overwhelming faithfulness. He is the God of hopes and dreams and has birthed new dreams in me and re-ignited old ones. My hope remains in Him, faithfully waiting for my other dreams to come to pass.





But the eyes of the Lord
are on those who fear him,
on those whose
hope
Psalm 33:18 NIV is in his
unfailing love...



SPREADING HOPE IN TIMES OF NEED

Mosa Webster

It was the morning of Monday, the 12th of July 2021 when my husband, Garrett, called me to the window to witness dozens of people brazenly running up our street carrying trolleys, bags and shopping baskets filled with liquor, clothes, groceries, musical instruments and electronics. Our local shopping centre was being looted. At the same time, many were racing down the street towards the centre. We turned on the news to see that it was quickly spreading across the province of Kwazulu Natal. We watched in shock, confusion, and sadness. I was nine months pregnant and scared, but I needed to remain calm so as not to put stress on my body.

This was the start of what would be a devastating week of intense looting, public violence and arson. Riots spread like wildfire, lives were lost, businesses were burnt to the ground and trucks transporting goods were ransacked. We could not go to work, school or to the shops. Fear and anxiety swept across our province. This went on for seven days non-stop and as it continued to escalate, people quickly united their efforts to protect their communities from being invaded. Road blocks were set up and people of all ages and races gathered in shifts to keep watch throughout the night for weeks.

As the storm began to settle, a different kind of chaos ensued: petrol stations were flooded with cars and the few stores that could open were filled with panic buyers. People ventured out looking to





replenish groceries and basic necessities but many stores were closed due to being completely ransacked or burnt to the ground. In some areas people queued for up to eight hours to buy necessities.

The civil unrest impacted all of us despite race, religious belief or status. It was a trying time, but we saw the goodness of God. The Rivers Foundation partnered with numerous local churches, organizations and individuals to reach and assist as many communities across the greater Durban area as possible. Members of Rivers Church also generously contributed from what they had in their homes as well as financially. Together we donated bulk fresh produce and hundreds of food parcels. The Foundation was able to donate 10 200 loaves of bread, 4100 sanitary pads, 19 600 diapers, as well as baby formula, blankets, food parcels and fresh produce to the value of over R417 000.

It is a privilege to be part of the army of volunteers and the staff team in Durban North, supported by Rivers Sandton with donations of much needed items. We were able to assist thousands of people in over 20 communities in and around Durban, as far as Shakaskraal north of Durban and Amanzimtoti in the south.

Then, just when it seemed like life was settling down again, another catastrophe hit in April 2022: flooding across KZN! It was said to be the worst floods the province had ever seen, with tens of thousands left homeless, hundreds losing their lives, and businesses being dealt another blow. This time around I was pregnant with baby number two, and once again we quickly began working to gather much needed supplies, partnering with over thirty organisations in different communities to help people affected by the floods. We were able to distribute water, clothing, blankets, mattresses, perishable and non-perishable food items, toiletries, baby formula and nappies to the value of over R 500 000.

Every item handed out made a significant impact to every single beneficiary, because it met an immediate need and helped people get through the crisis. There was a beautiful spirit of unity and rebuilding and the Rivers Foundation was truly the hands and feet of Jesus, spreading hope in times of need.



So the poor have hope,
while those who are unfair are silenced.

Job 5:16 NCV





Since 2008, the Sisters ministry continues to support a number of schools from disadvantaged local communities in various ways, but one of our favourite projects is our toiletry pack drive. Every month we provide sanitary pads to the teenage girls in our schools. These girls previously missed many school days to avoid embarrassing accidents in class, as they could not afford to buy sanitary pads.

Our support has enabled these young ladies to confidently attend all classes every month and as a result, many of them have excelled academically! Thank you, Sisters, for your generous monthly contributions that have ensured our girls are given dignity during their monthlies and empowered them to get better grades, so that they can keep dreaming and hoping for a great future.

OREATILE SELETISHA

The Rivers Foundation is an organisation that has been wholly supportive towards St Ansgar's School for a very long time, such that it has become family. The Foundation has merged a fruitful relationship with our school and since then until this day, we walk the academic journey with the Rivers Foundation by our side. I have been blessed to witness their love and generosity first hand ever since I've been part of the school.

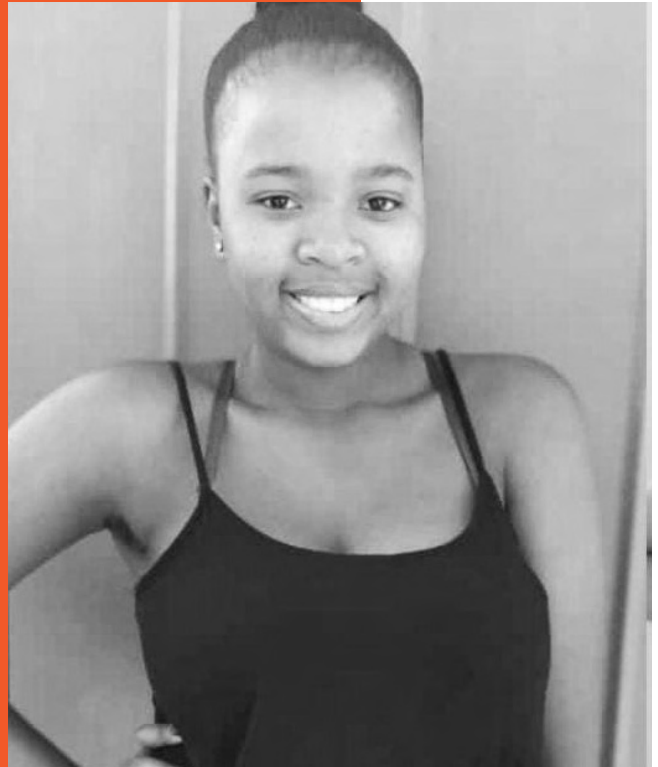


I am certain that every young lady at St Ansgar's can agree that the Foundation has been a great help in making sure that we are all well taken care of regarding the ladies department. We come from various backgrounds and from homes with different situations. Therefore, it might be a struggle for some families to be able to provide for toiletries and sanitary towels monthly. The Rivers Foundation has been consistent in maintaining the provision of these goodies for every young lady at our school. This has been tremendously helpful for all of our families. Thanks to the Foundation, no girl has to miss out on any classes. This has made sure that no one would ever have to feel left out or left behind, despite our individual backgrounds. We are all equally well taken care of which makes us feel equal. Every time we receive what I like to call the "ladies candies", it puts a smile on our faces!

On behalf of the young ladies at our school, I humbly say that we are grateful for the kindness that we receive from The Rivers Foundation. We appreciate their amazing work for our school and wish that they may continue to grace us as well as the rest of the world with their love.

It is truly a blessing to have people with genuine, beautiful hearts of gold who show courage, who care and spread so much love to others.

We thank you, Rivers Foundation!



ITUMELENG MAQUNGU

My name is Itumeleng Maqungu and I am eighteen years old, doing Grade Eleven at St Ansgar's. I am a new learner here and I am staying in Rhinos near Lanseria.

The first thing I have to say is this whole thing is new to me. At my previous school we got toiletries once a year, which was very hard for me and the other girls. It was hard surviving in that situation. My mom was not working. She lost her job because of the pandemic in 2020, so I had to come and live with my aunt in Rhinos. At first I hated the place but as time went by, I began to like the place and the school. It is a good school because the teachers really care for the learners. Every morning we get apples, bananas and pears. We also get toiletries once a month, which is a blessing to girls who cannot afford to buy toiletries every month. All thanks to The Rivers Foundation.

The Rivers Foundation was sent by God. You have no idea how you have helped girls in my school! May God give you strength and power to continue helping children out there. We really appreciate all the good work you have been doing.



MBALI MUTHA

I am writing to show gratitude to The Rivers Foundation for all the things they have done. On behalf of all the girls at my school, without the sanitary pads and toiletries, I don't know what would become of us. We really appreciate it from the bottom of our hearts. We hope you will continue to help us and others.

I personally don't come from a wealthy family, so getting such products helps me a lot. It takes the burden off my grandmother's shoulders, seeing that she has one less problem to worry about.

It is so embarrassing and shameful to have one's periods without sanitary pads. Getting these products helps me and takes the shame away. Therefore, through your charity, I know I've got nothing to worry about! I humbly plead that you continue to help others, not only our school.

And please bear in mind that you're not only doing us a favour, but you are helping the nation and restoring hope to young women. You are investing in the potential of multitudes, regardless of their background, who are seeds now but who will grow and become trees that will provide shade to the upcoming youth.



RHENDANI MAKHUBELA

I am Rhendani Makhubela from Chiawelo in Soweto. I attend school at Nghunghunyani High and I am eighteen years old. I am a beneficiary of The Rivers Foundation.

The Rivers Foundation is an organisation with a mission, and part of that is to support students. Every month they look after the girls at school and they support us by providing us with sanitary packs to ensure that we don't miss any time at school.

Due to this organisation's assistance, I have not been needing my parents to buy me all my toiletries. Therefore, I am very grateful for the help I receive from The Rivers Foundation. It has impacted my life where now I do not have to stress about how and where to make money so that I can be ready to deal with my monthly needs, since my parents couldn't afford them because of our financial instability. I do not struggle wondering when my period cycle may start unexpectedly at school, and that ensures that I am not distracted during school hours. I never face a situation where I cannot continue with my lessons or miss out on any important school activities.

I benefit a lot from this organisation, and am extremely grateful and happy because I know that The Rivers Foundation will always have my back!



God's gifts
put man's
best dreams
to shame.
Elizabeth Barrett Browning





My niece, Emily, developed preeclampsia in her last weeks of pregnancy. The doctors waited as long as they could, but decided it was best if Tripp were welcomed into the world sooner rather than later. Tripp's birth was God's poetry in motion, he arrived with a few side effects of the magnesium on his 5 pound 12 ounce body. Toxic magnesium levels. Relaxed smooth muscle activity. Reluctance to eat. Irregular heart rate. The nurses swept Tripp away to the neonatal intensive care unit soon after his first cry. While we prayed for him and his mom, Stu, his dad, stayed right there with him, exactly where Emily wanted him to be. At one point, his heart rate began to drop dangerously low to 100... 90... 80... 70. Stu held little Tripp's hand and began to speak. "We love you, Tripp. Daddy's right here with you. God's right here with you. I'll always be with you. I know this is a scary place, but this is the best place for you right now. I've got you. You get strong. Don't give up. I've got your hand. You're going to be okay. Mommy loves you. She can't come in here right now. She's got to get well too. But she loves you. Try to block out your surroundings and look at me. People everywhere are praying for you. Keep fighting, little man. You are God's miracle to us." As Stu spoke words of love and encouragement, Tripp's heart rate began to climb—70... 80... 90...

100... 120. In a few minutes the blood coursed through his veins at a quickened pace, pumped by two hearts joined by fingers of love.

I don't know where your heart is today. Perhaps like little Tripp's it's running a little sluggish. I'm not talking about your physical heart, but your spiritual heart, your emotional heart. Sluggish from sadness. Despondent from disappointment. Barely beating because of being beaten by life. Hopeless because life just isn't turning out the way you hoped it would and you're out of options. Here's what I want you to imagine. See yourself in Tripp. See your heavenly Father in Tripp's earthly father. God is talking to you. Reaching for your hand.

"I love you, daughter. I'm right here with you," God's saying to your heart. "I'll always be with you. I know this world is a scary place, but this is the best place for you right now. I've got you. You get strong. Don't give up. I've got your hand. You're going to be okay. Try to block out your surroundings and look at Me. People everywhere are praying for you. Keep fighting, little one. You are My miracle." Tripp left the NICU after seven days. Healthy and strong. Friend, you're going to make it too. Reject the lie if the enemy tells you anything different.







2023

light up your life



