

SLIGHTERS

OF AFRICA

7-9 SEPTEMBER 2023



John 8:12 – When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” | **Philippians 2:15 – You will shine like stars among them in the world.** | Ecclesiastes 11:7 – Sunshine is sweet; it is good to see the light of day. | **Psalm 19:4-6 – God has made a home in the heavens for the sun. It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race. The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end. Nothing can hide from its heat.** | Genesis 1:4 – God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. | **John 1:5 – The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.** | 2 Samuel 22:29 – You, Lord, are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light. | **Job 25:3 – Can his forces be numbered? On whom does his light not rise?** | Psalm 19:8 – The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes. | Psalm 27:1 | The Lord is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? | **Psalm 36:9: In your light we see light.** | **Psalm 104:2 – The Lord wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent.** | Psalm 119:105 – Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. | **Proverbs 4:18 – The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.** | Ecclesiastes 2:13 – I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. | **Isaiah 9:2 – The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.** | Isaiah 60:1 | Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. | **Isaiah 60:20 – Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end.** | Micah 7:8 – Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light. | **Romans 13:12 – Let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.** | Ephesians 5:8,13 – For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light... But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. | **1 Thessalonians 5:5 – You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.** | 1 John 1:5 – God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. | **Revelation 22:5 – There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.** | Exodus 13:21 – By day the Lord went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. | **Psalm 18:28 – You, Lord, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.** | Psalm 112:4 – Even in darkness light dawns for the upright | **Psalm 139:12 – Even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.** | Proverbs 4:18 – The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. | **Isaiah 5:20 – Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.** | 2 Corinthians 4:6 – For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. | **1 Peter 2:9 –But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** | John 8:12 – When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” | **Philippians 2:15 – You will shine like stars among them in the world.** | Ecclesiastes 11:7 – Sunshine is sweet; it is good to see the light of day. | **Psalm 19:4-6 – God has made a home in the heavens for the sun. It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding. It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race. The sun rises at one end of the heavens and follows its course to the other end. Nothing can hide from its heat.** | Genesis 1:4 – God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. | **John 1:5 – The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.** | 2 Samuel 22:29 – You, Lord, are my lamp; the Lord turns my darkness into light. | **Job 25:3 – Can his forces be numbered? 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SISTERS

OF AFRICA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE
7-9 SEPTEMBER 2023

ONEKA MCCLELLAN
LISA BEVERE
MICHELLE MCKINNEY HAMMOND

AND YOUR HOST,
WILMA OLIVIER

Light up
your
life

Hello *Beautiful*



... and welcome to your Sisters of Africa Women's Conference magazine. We are thrilled that it made its way to you! Our annual conference planning is well under way. All you have to do is make sure you are registered and then you will be able to come and take your seat. Better still, register yourself and a friend so you can enjoy all that God will do for us gorgeous girls together. However, should you come alone, we will make sure that you will not be alone for long as we are always on the lookout to connect and make new friends.

As I am typing this welcome message to you, I have to mention that we are already sitting on 2,000 plus registrations, so you have to move fast to get your seats, ladies! We are rebuilding after COVID, so we will offer one conference this year. One big favour I want to ask of you is if you would travel with friends in one car. I can hear the car park team say, 'AMEN!' It will help us immensely with congestion and speed up the traffic. We want to accommodate you as best we can.

It is hard to believe that we are celebrating twenty three years and it is wonderful to see how our journey has unfolded. We will continue to place value on women and aim to stir their hearts, to be the hands and feet of Jesus on the earth to make our world a better place. We will also continue to bring life-changing ministry and watch how women grow their capacity to be more and do more in God's Kingdom.

I want to remind you that this is a conference for women of all ages, from teens to grandmothers. Plus, don't forget our Kids Africa Conference which runs simultaneously on the same property. We are expecting you all to come and be part of this amazing event. We have always said we are better together. May you make Sisters of Africa your conference of choice this year and celebrate with thousands of beautiful sisters as we light up our lives in the presence of our Heavenly Father. God is calling women in troops to make a difference in our world! That is you and I.

NOW GATHER yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; a state of siege has been placed against us (Micah 5:1 AMP).

To minister powerfully this year, we are welcoming Oneka McClellan from Texas USA, for the first time. We also welcome back long-time friends Lisa Bevere from Colorado, USA and Michelle McKinney Hammond from Accra, Ghana. Ministry will be rich as always and we believe the Presence of God will be tangible in the room. As you can tell, we are making every effort to bless you, not to mention the treats, food and a lot of feminine fun.

Well girls, sit back and enjoy your magazine specially prepared for you. Then let us see you in September as we gather in troops! Our lives will never be the same.

Kind regards,
Wilma Olivier, Conference Host

Wilma has a specific passion to build into women's lives. She heads up a successful women's ministry called Sisters, and hosts the annual Sisters of Africa Women's Conference through which she aims to mentor, motivate and mobilise women to be all they can be for the cause of Christ. She is also the author of 3 books; Small Beginnings, Life as a Chocolate Cake and Keep Hope Alive. She has been married to Ps André and for over 50 years and have three children and four grandchildren.

Arise, shine, for your light Isaiah 60:1 NIV has come.

a c k n o w l e d g e m e n t s

On behalf of Ps Wilma, it takes a village to raise a child, and the Sisters magazine is like a child to us, in its 14th year!

Thank you to Mmoneng Gwebu for curating and editing the articles, working with our writers and helping organise so much of the shoot, and her team of proofreaders (Melanie, Sisonke, Adrienne, Ps Claire, Katelyn and Jen).

Our photographers: Talia Pather, Djiko Demba, Keenan Constance and Natasha Andreoni. Much appreciation for Simon and the Rivers Media department, Natasha and the Events Team for all our sets, Ps Paulette, and Phillip for being my production guy. To Claudio Andreoni for making everything happen on the KZN side. To our lovely makeup artists, Heather Barger and Whitney de Klerk from 27 Red Skincare and Cosmetics, who took so much time out of their week to assist us.

Talia Pather for assisting me with design, amongst many other things. Ps Chris, Naomi and the Rivers Marketing department for admin and getting the magazine printed and into our hands.

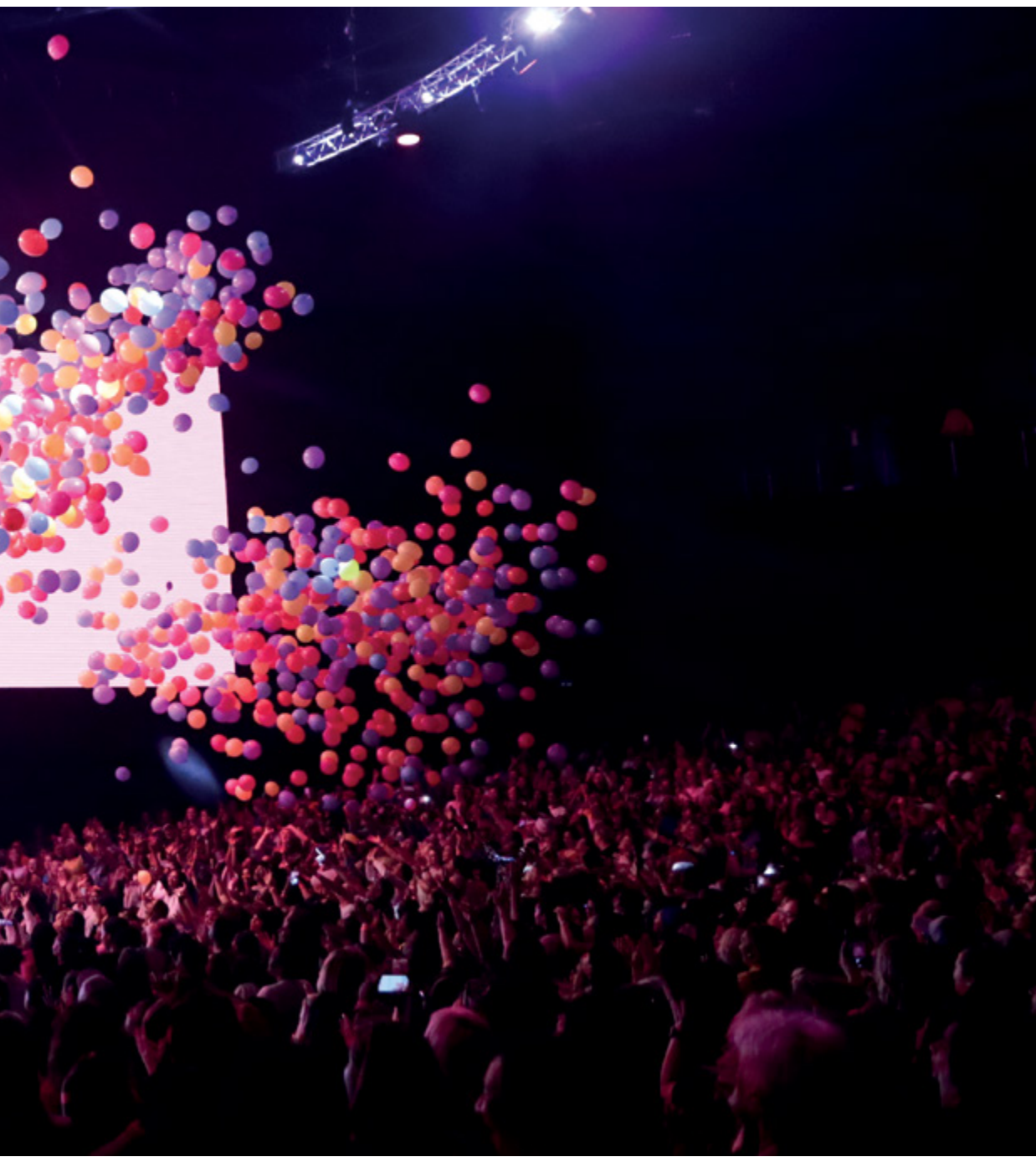
Zenzi, Stephnie and Jenavee, thanks for two full days of shooting, waiting around and outfit changes. Thank you to all our writers and kiddie models (and their parents).

Much love,
Simi Rankin (Art Director)





2022 MEMORIES













KIDS AFRICA



We cannot wait for our Kids Africa Conference 2023! We know how it impacts the kids' lives and how much fun they have digging into God's Word in a fun and creative way. The kids will have an incredible time learning about God in a relevant way, enjoying creative arts, colourful crafts, engaging games, fun with their favourite characters and so much more. So, parents of all kids aged 1 to Grade 7, register your kids so they don't miss out. It won't be the same without them.

I am
the
light
of the
world.



The person who follows me
will never live in darkness
but will have
the
light
that
gives life.

John 8:12 NCV







You
wrap
yourself in
light
as if it
were a robe.

PsaJm 104:2 NIRV



Oneka McClellan

We
are
Sister
hood

In a world where we cannot even turn on the TV without a display of hurtful words and actions from women we respect, it is time for a fresh voice and a new anthem to arise.

Our society is groaning to see its daughters rise up in great strength to shout the fame of Jesus and follow His example for loving one another with compassion and grace.

Heaven is calling us to live in a way that the women around us feel loved, valued and believed in.

Almost every woman has a story of a broken friendship, whether it be from the playground or the boardroom. Almost every woman has slipped into the trap of tearing another woman down instead of speaking words of life and encouragement over her. WE ARE SISTERHOOD is not just a catch phrase. It is a movement of everyday girls who are passionate about bringing Heaven to Earth. I am SISTERHOOD. You are SISTERHOOD. And together WE ARE SISTERHOOD. We are committed to lean-in, strengthen and uplift girls of all ages both locally and to the ends of the earth. We will not stop fighting this uphill battle of declaring that every single woman is loved, valued and beautiful. This fight starts with each one of us.

“Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; a state of siege has been placed against us.” (Micah 5:1). This “siege against us” could not hold more true than today. From horrific bullying in schools to the crimes committed against women both locally and across the world, we are certainly experiencing a battle. But the plan of the enemy has been exposed and we will rise up as God's daughters. We will join forces together to create a new anthem and start a ripple effect that can't be stopped.

Hebrews 12:1 talks about being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Let's be determined to be just that: a great cloud of witnesses cheering each other on as we all run this race toward Jesus. We have each been hand-selected and chosen by God to be alive at this very moment in history. We were born for such a time as this. Instead of competing with each other, we are committing to cheer each other on and build each other up. What would our world look like if every woman realised her worth and recognised the same limitless value in each and every one of God's daughters? What would it look like to have a company of daughters all fanning the flame of

encouragement and life in one another? How powerful could this world be if girls in junior high school took a stand when a classmate was being bullied? What would our world look like if college girls loved and accepted each other, if both stay-at-home moms and working moms saw the strength that each brings to the table? What if we turned the tides and became passionate about praying for each other like never before?

The day is today and the time is now. The movement starts with us: God's daughters. Let's set our faces like flint, let's turn our hearts towards heaven and in one united voice let's declare that WE ARE SISTERHOOD! We Will Bring Heaven to Earth! We will rise up. Both when it's easy and when it's uncomfortable. We will stand on the shoulders of the men and women who have gone before us and we will be dedicated to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. We are committed to lifting up the name of Jesus, lifting up one another and inviting every woman to join in on this journey.

Heaven is calling us to live in a way that the women around us feel loved, valued and believed in. And I know we will see the impact of our collective yes now and in generations to come.

Oneka McClellan, alongside her husband Earl, launched and has led Shoreline City Church for six years with campuses in Dallas and Antigua, Guatemala. With a passion for Sisterhood, she has challenged the way women think about themselves and others by pioneering a 'Value Revolution' that has now spanned the globe through a variety of creative initiatives. Behind the scenes, she can be found loving her three kids – Parker, Grayson and Elle – and cheering on her husband of over twenty years.



Lisa Bevere

Light up your Life

To become daughters of light, we must walk in the light. When we are afraid of exposure, it's because we have something to hide. Sit with this truth for a moment.

Lovely one, until we come out of hiding, it's easier to choose our darkness and despise the light for its exposing tendencies. But the only way to tackle our fear of being called out is to invite the light into every area of our lives. That's when freedom begins.





When we decide to hate everything that shadows the soul by embracing the light, we will work to remove the darkness it reveals. Let's visit the story of the woman caught in adultery found in John 8. It's a familiar story, but perhaps we can see it in a different light.

Jesus begins His day teaching at the temple. As He is speaking to those who had gathered, He is interrupted by the religious leaders dragging a disheveled woman who is desperately attempting to hide her nakedness. It is obvious she was hurled from a bed of shame. They cast her to the ground and say to Jesus, *"Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"* (John 8:4-5)

What would Jesus say to such a woman? Her future hangs on His response. At first, He neither looks at her nor answers them. He bends down and writes in the dust. Then He speaks to the accusers, challenging the one without sin to cast the first stone. And one by one they back off and leave... until only Jesus and the woman remain. Jesus then straightens up and asks her if there was anyone left to accuse her. *"She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.'"* (John 8:11)

These are the words our Lord speaks to obviously guilty women. In a moment, this woman is no longer a daughter of death and darkness but of life and light. Notice, Jesus did not stop with the mercy of forgiveness: *"Neither do I condemn you"*—He added in repentance and grace: *"Go, and from now on sin no more."* Clearly Jesus didn't endorse her lifestyle of adultery. He didn't say, "Don't worry about it, baby girl. All your future sins are forgiven," (even though they were). He didn't say, "I understand you have needs." He said, "Leave your life of shadow and walk in my light."

The light always shows a better way. After this encounter, Jesus shared, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life."* (John 8:12) As followers of Christ, we have the light of life because the source of light Himself leads us on a path of truth.

Let's further explore what it means to walk in the light. To do so, I want to briefly highlight three areas: 1) living circumspectly, 2) daily confession, and 3) practicing congruency.

Living circumspectly helps us live with a greater awareness of our behavior. The book of Ephesians notes: *"But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light... See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise."* (Ephesians 5:13, 15)

If we have any sort of self-awareness, most of us would never claim to be without sin. But this can happen without us realising it. When we justify, blame, or make excuses for our behavior, we in essence claim to be faultless. The truth is, we are not truly repentant until we take responsibility for our actions, which begins with confession.

Finally, I want to emphasize the importance of practicing congruency. Living congruent with light requires integrity. I love this word. Most people limit its meaning to moral uprightness. But it's so much more than this. Integrity also means "the state of being whole and undivided." It comes from the word integrate, where every part of our lives is connected (integrated). To possess integrity is to be whole and complete, congruent with the light and life we possess. If we walk with integrity, our lives won't be faultless, they'll be blameless—above reproach.

To live circumspectly means to live with the realisation that the whole of our lives is connected and the time will come when an event from our past will catch up to us in our future. The root of the word *circum* means "to go around" or "to encircle." To "spec" means "to see or to look at something", much like a builder "specs" a home so potential customers may examine his skill before they purchase it. Likewise, we are charged to live our lives weighing our decisions and actions from every angle and point of view. We need to take a walk around our decisions and be certain we like the way they look from every angle.

When we say or do sinful things in secret, it is not God who embarrasses us; we embarrass ourselves. It is like planting seeds in secret and becoming angry with God when a plant appears. God's Word tells us, "*For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light.*" (Luke 8:17)

Let's now turn our attention to daily confession. The apostle James wrote, "*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*" (James 5:16a) By humbling ourselves through confessing our sin and praying with our fellow sisters in Christ, we position ourselves for healing. Healing flows into the dark recesses of our hearts when we bring sin into an open and safe environment. Confession sheds light on areas of sin and shame, and in this atmosphere of light, prayer begins the healing and restoration.

Another reason confession is a powerful practice is that it gives us accountability. With confession comes responsibility. The Word tells us: "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend.*" (Proverbs 27:6) When I confess, I don't need sympathy; I need someone to wound me with the truth. And after praying together, I feel a load of shame lift off my shoulders.

Lovely one, it's time to light up your life! This is an invitation for those of us who have known regret to shine the light of truth on darkened paths so others will not lose their way when they walk them. Our lives, both past and present, should be a warning to others who are considering pathways of compromise, idolatry, and promiscuity: Steer clear. The price is too high and the interest compounds with time. And to those who have chosen the path of light, blessing, and obedience, may this serve to guard you and strengthen your resolve.

Let's be those who thoughtfully and intentionally invite others to leave the darkness of their past and to follow Jesus into His light.

Lisa Bevere has spent four decades empowering women of all ages to find their identity and purpose. She is a New York Times bestselling author and internationally known minister. Her books, which include Without Rival, Godmothers, Girls with Swords, Lioness Arising, Strong, and her recent devo Fiercely Loved, are in the hands of millions worldwide. Lisa and her husband, John, co-founded Messenger International, an organisation committed to developing uncompromising followers of Christ who transform their world. Messenger International has given away over 56 million resources in 123 languages.



Michelle McKinney Hammond

Let
it
Shine!

*And the Light shineth in
darkness, and the darkness
comprehended it not.*

(John 1:5 KJV)

"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...
...let it shine, let it shine, let it shine..."

Oh, how I used to sing this song at the top of my lungs at Vacation Bible School as a kid. There was something exhilarating about the thought that if I let my light shine, I could light up a room, and make my presence known. "Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine." Hmm, no matter where I went, my light was going to be seen. I was gonna light up a room. My light was going to change the atmosphere from darkness to one of illumination!

The thought of it made me happy and made me feel significant, like I could change the world. You see it was a special light, “Jesus gave it to me, I’m gonna let it shine...” This was innocence at its best.

I think back on those days with great nostalgia. It was a gentler, purer time, at least from where I sit. It’s been said that every generation sees the times they are living in as worse than the last. Empires have risen and fallen before when darkness overtook the populace, shifting morals and ethics to an all-time low, like the Roman Empire. Many are bemused by the state of the world today, citing it as a dark time. However, I am not without hope. I know there is nothing new under the sun. What has been will be again. For the believer, the default button can be to clutch our chests, sigh, and say, “Jesus is coming back soon, I know!” This always makes me chuckle as I muse on the thought that the Thessalonians in the Bible also

Son. Again, it’s not what you say, it’s what you do, what your lifestyle says. A light doesn’t say anything, it simply is. It is its nature to shine. To be simply what it is unapologetically. The word tells us that many “*prefer the darkness because their deeds are evil* (John 3:19).” The initial shock to the eyes when someone flips the switch and the light comes on in all its brilliant glory can cause some to draw back, to squint, to shield their eyes as they hide from the truth the light brings. The glare is uncomfortable, even disconcerting.

Like Jesus, the light of the world, entering the earth realm, the darkness could not comprehend His light, neither understand it nor overtake it. Jesus understood His assignment and in the face of resistance and rebellion, He let His light shine. Even announced it, “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never live in darkness. They will have the light that gives life.*” (John 8:12) Now the challenge is whether we will accept

Living in the light demands that we shine that light to illuminate the path for others

thought Jesus was coming back. They even quit their jobs to wait for His return. I too believe Jesus is coming back, but I believe even more than ever that we are to be on our jobs until then. “Occupy until I come,” He said.

When I meditate on that instruction the weight of it hits me. Wherever you are, at home, school, your place of business, your community, your country. Don’t just be there. Fill the space you are in, take your position, and literally take control of enemy territory. When countries occupy another country, they make their presence felt. The inhabitants of that place feel their presence and it is undeniable. It’s not what is said, it’s their posture, their uniform, their countenance, their stance. Those sent to hold it down are clear on their mission: to establish their kingdom as the ruling kingdom. This is also our mission.

In today’s cancel culture, many are reluctant to comment or speak up on things that are not in alignment with Biblical standards. Like Moses covering his face after being in the presence of God, many are hiding their light, preferring anonymity over being ridiculed, harassed, or rejected. Just because someone can’t stand the glare of your light, don’t hide it—that is your cue to shine brighter than ever. You see this “light” is not so little after all. Not when its source is the

the assignment. “*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.*” (Matthew 5:14)

Have you gone into hiding, into silent compromise, or are you occupying and shining? Let’s face it, it’s brutal out there! Say the wrong thing to the wrong person and get rebuked or canceled. It’s getting harder and harder to repeat the words of Apostle Paul, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...*” (Romans 1:16) Knowing what you possess is key to not bowing to the pressure and influences around you. Knowing what wielding that power means is an even greater reason to shine your light. Your light is a lifesaving device! Paul was more intent on saving souls than their response to his words. I remember my mother telling me as a child, “You don’t have to like me now, you’ll like me later.” Truer words could not be spoken. I hated being disciplined at the time, but those corrections saved my life! God’s light is life. It may hurt your eyes, but it will save your soul. This is the message we must carry boldly and unapologetically with grace. Grace doesn’t make excuses. It extends truth, mercy and life.

The best way we can do this is by modeling what we are inviting others to partake in. For those looking for light at the

end of the tunnel, we must shine without casting shadows. Where people are looking for authenticity and “real Christians” our light must be brighter than ever, not diffused with questionable behavior and confusing confessions. We are instructed to, “*Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you will be blameless and pure, children of God without any fault. But you are living with evil people all around you, who have lost their sense of what is right. Among those people you shine like lights in a dark world.*” (Philippians 2:15) The Message paraphrase says, “*Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God,*” winning many to Christ by sharing Him as often as we can and using words only when necessary. As living epistles, your actions will speak louder than words. In a world where many despise the truth yet seek authenticity, it is critical that we live an uncompromised life.

Living in the light demands that we shine that light to illuminate the path for others to see the goodness of God and the grace extended to them through Jesus Christ. “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*” (Matthew 5:16) This is not merely a command, it is a privilege that has been entrusted to us. One we should embody boldly as we shine like diamonds in the hand of God.

Michelle McKinney Hammond has authored over 40 books (selling over two million copies worldwide), including best-selling titles The Diva Principle and Secrets of an Irresistible Woman. A gifted songwriter/vocalist, Michelle has recorded four solo CDs. She is the former Emmy Award-winning co-host of the television talk show Aspiring Women. She is the president of US based, Michelle McKinney Hammond (MMH) Ministries and DivaCor LLC. Michelle presently resides in Ghana, West Africa, traveling the globe from her home base.



A person wearing a black dress with a white patterned skirt is standing on the right side of the frame. Next to them is a long, glowing orange light fixture that runs diagonally across the image. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Sunshine
is sweet;
it is good to
see
the light
of day.

Ecclesiastes 11:7 NCV



Ps Wilma Olivier

Walking in the Light

As God's beautiful daughters, He wants us to come out of darkness and walk in His wonderful light. What that means, is that we walk in fellowship with Him and our brothers and sisters in Christ.





But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:7 NIV).

Light represents all the good things in life that God has prepared for us. The darkness represents everything that is shady and the opposite of the good God intended for us to live by. I have learnt that walking in the light is walking in openness and honesty, two components needed for our relationship with God and others.

Think of your relationships. Your husband and you will have a sound marriage if there is openness and honesty. If there are secrets and dishonesty, the marriage will be in the dark. I don't know about you, but I don't like being kept in the dark when it comes to our finances, or anything, for that matter.

Right from the beginning of time, God wanted light to triumph over the darkness.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness (Genesis 1:1-4 NIV).

When we walk in the light, our lives become free and good.

When we walk in the light, our conscience is always clear.

When we walk in the light, we have fellowship God and with others. Then as soon as we see something that could come between us, we choose God's Word over potential darkness, to let the light shine in and make things right again.

I have a few thoughts about light that I hope will encourage you.

God is light

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5 NIV).

He is not a light or some kind of light among many lights.

He is the only light.

It is only on day four that He created the sun, moon and stars (Genesis 1:14-19).

What that tells us is that before there were natural lights in the sky, there was God who was light. As light itself and the source of light, He had only to speak and light came into being. There is no other light for He alone is light.

Jesus is the light

Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life" (John 8:12 NLT2).

It stands to reason that if God the Father is light, then His Son would also be light. In fact, Jesus came to bring light. We read that the light shone in the darkness and the darkness did not comprehend it. It did not understand it. When we walk in the light we are walking with Jesus, as the light that brings confusion to the darkness out there.

Jesus is the light of the world and then He turns to us who serve Him and says:

We are light

You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden (Matthew 5:14 NLT2) .

We all learned in school that the moon has no light of its own – the sun gives it light. We have no light of our own – God gives us light. So we should be walking in His light.

When we are born again, when we repent and give our lives to Christ, our lives light up. What a privilege to carry the same title as Jesus, 'Light of the world'! It is quite a daunting thought, because we now have a greater responsibility to be functioning as light. We have to shine our light just as we used to sing in Sunday School, 'This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine...'

God's Word is light

The Bible is our best tool, our torch to stay on the straight and narrow path. It is also like a GPS. It tells us where to go.

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

Light shows us the truth. God's Word is light and to walk in the light is to bring my life into alignment with the Word of God. The Word becomes my life. Nothing that I do is in conflict with the Word of God.

Darkness represents everything that is anti-God. The light that is God is the opposite of the darkness that is evil. The light of God is His holiness, righteousness and goodness, which is in contrast with the darkness of evil and sin. Light is part of the essence of God. He is completely holy.

What does it mean to walk in the darkness? The book of 1 John 2 gives us some really clear indications. It says that he who hates his brother is in the darkness and he who loves his brother abides in the light (1 John 2:9-11). Walking in the light means being a loving person and walking in the darkness means being a person of hate. How often do we see hatred displayed on social media or even on the road?

That is why we practice forgiveness. You may not like someone, but to hate someone is to place yourself on a path of darkness. The Word lights our path. It says forgive one another and love one another. And we obey.

When we walk in the light we have true fellowship with God and one another. Fellowship: friendship, companionship, camaraderie, communion, comradeship and partnership.

We cannot have friendship with God and the world. Many people may get angry with us when we say we are friends of God, not the world, and therefore we do not allow the world to shape us. We do not live according to the pattern of the world, but according to the pattern of the Word.

This is how the judgment works: the light has come into the world, but people love the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil. Those who do evil things hate the light and will not come to the light, because they do not want their evil deeds to be shown up. But those who do what is true come to the light in order that the light may show that what they did was in obedience to God (John 3:19-21 TEV) .

When I love the light, I seek for it to shine into every area of my life so that sin can be exposed. I become a child of the light. Where the light shines, new growth comes. Love, joy, kindness, long-suffering, and all the fruit of the Spirit grow in the light. I would rather walk in the light and be enlightened by the Word of God and by my relationship with Jesus. How about you?

I love the scripture that says we as God's children shine like stars in the universe. What a beautiful thought! We are light, and it is a privilege.

Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe (Philippians 2:14-15 NIV) .

Your word
is a
lamp
for
my feet,



ESUS



a light
on my
path.
PsaJm 119:105 NIV

walking in God's light through chemo

Ps Janet Ivey
Lead Pastor – Rivers Durban North

Three and a half years ago I started an unexpected journey with cancer and chemotherapy.

In November 2019, I finally went to the gynaecologist after realising for about two months that something wasn't right—my body wasn't behaving the way it used to. I wasn't in any pain and wondered whether I shouldn't just wait another two months for my regular check-up in January, because, let's face it, going to the gynae is not a fun thing to do!

However, I'm so glad I didn't wait any longer. In fact, I wish I hadn't waited two whole months before going in the first place! It turned out that I had a big mass growing in my uterus and a week later I had a total abdominal hysterectomy. The biopsy results showed that the mass was a very rare and aggressive cancer called Rhabdomyosarcoma.

By the grace of God, it was removed before it could spread to the rest of my body, something which rarely happens with this particular cancer. However, due to its aggressive nature, and to minimise the chances of a recurrence, I had to go for extensive chemotherapy from January 2020 right through to December.

Initially the whole situation felt like a dream. It felt completely unreal that I was the one speaking to oncologists, going for scans, applying to medical aid for special funding and getting a chemo port fitted into my chest. However, reality came crashing down very quickly with the first session of chemotherapy and all its side effects!

The first three months of chemo were incredibly difficult physically. My hair fell out, as well as my eyebrows and eyelashes. I had treatment weekly and every three weeks I received an extra-strong dose that would make me very sick. I had severe nausea and vomiting and my whole body ached as if I had a bad case of the flu. I frequently had to drink a vile tasting liquid nicknamed "Kidney Rescue" to help my body process all the chemicals. At the time I even wondered whether the "Kidney Rescue" was worse than the actual treatment! However, in spite of it, my face would still swell up for several days after each big treatment.

After every chemo session my husband, Dean, had to administer a series of injections to my stomach at home over five days. He did his best, but sometimes those injections hurt

a lot and I would bite his head off. He just took it in his stride—the man is a champion!

Chemotherapy is tough! Those first few months also took an emotional toll on me. The year of treatment seemed to stretch endlessly before me and I was filled with a constant sense of intense dread. I just wanted to run away as far as possible. I wasn't sure whether I had the strength, ability, or even the courage to see the year through. I felt panicky and helpless, trapped in my situation with no way of escape. Emotionally, I found myself in a very dark place.

But God very kindly shone the spotlight of His Word on my dark emotions. Just as Psalm 119:105 says, *"Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path."* As I was reading my Bible one day, it dawned on me that I had become fixated on my challenges; dwelling on them, making them bigger and bigger in my mind until they were all I could see. I had allowed fear and worry to grip my heart. I still had faith in God and trusted Him for my healing, but in the day-to-day challenges of going for chemo, trying to drink medication and dealing with side-effects, I had taken my eyes off Jesus. I had stopped walking in the light of God's grace and strength. Not because the light wasn't there—God had never left my side—but because I had been focusing on the darkness of my situation instead of focusing on Him.



In John 8:12 we read how Jesus told the people, *"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."*

I realised that it was time to make a deliberate decision

to actively walk in the light that Jesus provided, because even as a child of God, I could easily stray into emotional and mental darkness. God gently reminded me of Psalm 27:1, *"The LORD is my light and my salvation—so why should I be afraid? The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?"* God reminded me that He was still my help. He would see me through. He would give me the grace and the strength I needed for each day, but I had to turn to Him daily. I had to deliberately keep giving it all to Him and keep trusting Him.

One of the prayers I prayed during this time was, "Lord, I don't want to feel like this for

the duration of the treatment. I don't want to walk in constant dread of the next big session," and God graciously answered my prayer. When Jesus told His disciples that His yoke was light, He was primarily talking about how following Him was different from the religious burden that the Jewish leaders and the Law placed on them. But in my context, I knew Jesus took the burden of the treatment from me when I asked Him to. I could still feel the weight of it, but the unbearable burden—the feeling of dread—was gone.

Corrie ten Boom, the Dutch Holocaust survivor, said this: *“Worrying is carrying tomorrow’s load with today’s strength – carrying two days at once. It is moving into tomorrow ahead of time. Worrying doesn’t empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.”*


I had to keep on choosing to stop worrying (and thinking) about the next week or the next session. Instead I chose to just trust God and rely on Him for that day, every day. I was reminded of what Jesus said in Matthew 6:26-27: *“Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to Him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?”*

And then in verses 32-33, *“...your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need.”*

Today I am healthy and strong and incredibly grateful to God for every check-up and CT scan that shows I’m still cancer-free. My year of chemotherapy reminded me that God knows both what I need and when I need it. I can be confident that each day my good Heavenly Father will give me what I need for that specific day. Strength. Courage. Endurance. My job is to position myself daily in the light of His presence and His Word, to take His outstretched hand and to walk with Him every day on this journey of life.

Ps Janet Ivey, along with her husband, Ps Dean, is the lead pastor of Rivers Church Durban North. She is passionate about seeing people embrace God’s best for their lives, especially in marriage and parenting. They have been married since 2003 (twenty years!) and have four children, James, Daniel, Jude and Abigail.





From darkness to light

Ps Claire Olivier
Lead Pastor – Rivers Kyalami

Here in South Africa we know the power of light and dark all too well. We've grown used to hours spent in the dark as a result of load shedding. We've been living like this for so many years and I'm sure we can all agree that being powerless is a horrible way to live. The frustration of having no power to do everyday things is real—like cooking dinner; drying your hair (especially as the Winter chill sets in); trying to do your makeup in the 6am dim before call-time on Sundays; and perhaps worst of all, the inability to make that much-needed

morning coffee! As the problem persists, it can begin to feel like there's no end in sight. Thinking about this in light of our Sisters theme this year, I see a spiritual parallel.

We live in a dark world—chaos, confusion, conflict and a sense of powerlessness abounds—and just like with load shedding, it's easy to lose hope. Insecurity and fear can creep in because things often feel out of control.

Did you know that light deprivation is one of the most difficult psychological conditions a person can be forced to endure?

Putting a person in total darkness for a prolonged period of time is used as a form of military torture! Eventually the victim becomes so disoriented that they lose all sense of where they are and become incredibly fearful of what might be lurking in the dark. As this happens, all self-confidence goes and any strength and courage one might have is lost. A person's natural instinct to fight is paralysed by fear and they become desperate and terrified prey. In this state, the prisoner is extremely pliable and more than willing to submit. Of course, this is exactly what the enemy wants.

Our world has been subjected to a prolonged state of darkness and without the light of Jesus, we too become easy prey for the enemy—vulnerable, easily influenced, groping around trying to find our place in the world, looking to grab onto anything that might offer temporary relief. Eventually we're willing to do, say and be just about anything.

God didn't create us to live in the dark. We were created by the One who is light, to live in the light—HIS LIGHT!

1 John 1:5 NLT tells us that, "God is light and there is NO DARKNESS in Him." As followers of Christ, we have to learn to walk in the life-giving light He provides.

Before I gave my life to Christ, I spent many years living in the dark. I didn't know Jesus, the light of the world. I only knew what the world presented as light, which was ultimately an illusion. As a result I squandered much precious time

chasing empty thrills and false promises of happiness, healing, popularity and success.

I felt powerless to the circumstances life threw my way, until one day, God used great personal tragedy to show me a glimmer of the only true light that had the power to break through the darkness.

The God who commands, "Let there be LIGHT," is able to penetrate even the darkest of hearts. Because of Jesus, every one of us has access to this divine light. Its power provides peace, hope and the security of knowing that the Creator of the heavens is in control, always.

My husband, Adi, wrote a song some years ago that resonates so powerfully with my journey from darkness into light:

Tunnel

*There's a light at the
end of the tunnel
I know now
All that I need is a love
that won't die
I won't forget how he
saved me*

*Called me by name
It threw me to the ground*

*'Cause you never know when seeds you've sown will grow out
And roots they form will tear down these walls for good*

*There's a maze of regret in the darkest corners of my mind
Like a cemetery of wasted time
Scrawled into walls are directions
A code I can't explain*



*A hope that has a name
I'll wait but I'm ready to escape this well
Your light it shines on me and it shows the way*

There's a light at the end of the tunnel

I lived in that “tunnel” for far too long. At the time, I didn't know there was another way. When I think about the wasted time, it does indeed feel like a cemetery of years lost, time squandered, missed opportunities and a whole lot of mess I'm happy to leave behind forever. When we dwell on past mistakes it's easy to get overwhelmed with regret which in all honesty, serves no purpose.

The truth is that just like being in a maze, feeling completely lost and in the dark, there is always a way out.

I thank God that He is a Father who loved us first. He never hides from us. He never disappears into the shadows where we can't locate Him. He always allows Himself to be found, and His love and light always shine brightest when we feel lost, scared and powerless.

Sometimes it takes a tragedy or a life-altering event before we're desperate enough to seek Him, but our relationship with Him is far more important than our personal comfort. A greater tragedy would be to never know Him and to end up in darkness for all eternity, instead of living in the light of His presence forever.

If I can encourage you from my own journey, I would say wherever you are in life right now, please know that there is no darkness that His light cannot penetrate, there is no hurt that He cannot heal, and no brokenness that He cannot restore.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:5 NLT)

Ps Claire has been married to Ps Adi for twenty one years and is mom to two kids, eighteen-year-old Aiden and eleven-year-old, Chloé Rose. She served in various roles on Rivers staff since 2004, before moving to the coast to pioneer the Ballito campus with Ps Adi for five years. Currently lead pastor of the Kyalami Campus, Ps Claire is passionate about all people and loves to encourage women to get past pain and become all they can be for God's glory.



Handing over the light

Ps Natanya Fugard-Gous
Lead Pastor – Rivers Ballito

Our three kids each had a flair for the dramatic when they entered the world. Our youngest, Harland, was no different. His labour went from nought to “GET ME THE EPIDURAL!” in what felt like half a minute, and all of a sudden we were looking at the latest addition to our family. And absolutely, we were overwhelmed with joy, hope and expectation—all the wonderful things that you want to feel after meeting your child, but as my hubby left the hospital and drove home in the middle of the night, another emotion set in... fear. It wasn't the, “How are we going to do life with three kids?” kind of fear. It was a, “What are we going home to?” kind of fear.

Harley was born at the peak of the third COVID-19 wave at the beginning of 2021, with 22 000 new cases being reported that day. I was hearing more and more stories about how babies were being affected by the virus and I was afraid. We had been mercifully unaffected until then, but what if we were

next? Would our family be okay? How at risk were we? It was a tough first night grappling with these fears. The next morning I got a text from one of my sisters in our family group, and it was the lightbulb moment I needed that prompted a huge paradigm shift, not just for leaving the hospital, but for raising my kids in general. It was written by a pastor named Alex Cravens who I can't say I know much about, but I've included an excerpt from his Facebook post below, which I think is excellent:

Don't feel sorry for or fear for your kids because the world they are going to grow up in is not what it used to be. God created them and called them for the exact moment in time that they're in. Their life wasn't a coincidence or an accident.

Don't teach them to be fearful and disheartened by the state of the world but hopeful that they can do something about it.

He knew Daniel could handle the lions' den.

He knew David could handle Goliath.

He knew Esther could handle Haman.

He knew Peter could handle persecution.

He knows that your child can handle whatever challenge they face in their life. He created them specifically for it!

Don't be scared for your children, but be honoured that God chose YOU to parent the generation that is facing the biggest challenges of our lifetime. Rise up to the challenge...

God isn't scratching His head wondering what He's going to do with this mess of a world. He has an army He's raising up to drive back the darkness and make Him known all over the earth.

Don't let your fear steal the greatness God placed in your children. I know it's hard to imagine them as anything besides our sweet little babies, and we just want to protect them from anything that could ever be hard on them, but they were born for such a time as this.

I wasn't leaving the sanitised safety of Morningside Mediclinic in Sandton (before we moved down to Ballito) for a world that God wasn't sure we could manage; I was stepping into a world with a child born for such a time as this. All of our kids are. This world that is filled with dynamics, challenges and opportunities that we never had and were never faced with when we grew up, is the world God needs our children for.

"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden." (Matthew 5:14 NLT)

Scripture has a way of showing us things we didn't see before. Perhaps this is a thought you've already had, but it was such a wonderful reminder to me. As much as I am called to

be a light in the world, with Christ in my heart, so are my kids. And as much as He strengthens and empowers and helps me, so will He do for them. They are the ones He has chosen to accomplish His will and they are the ones who will be the tools He uses. They are the ones who will be the light bearers in a dark world, and we get to light that torch within them, so best we rise up and ignite those lights within our kids!

This lightbulb moment for me reinforced three areas that

I believe make a significant difference in helping my children to be the light, and help to keep fear at bay when I feel unsure what the future holds.

Grow with them

We went to a market recently and there was a corded telephone for sale. Our eldest, Emerson, is eight. He asked about it and was shocked to find out it was a telephone. I felt slightly offended when he said it was "from the olden days." However, when it comes to navigating technology, he seems to know exactly what to do with it. With the rise of the digital world, our kids are growing up in a world that is far harder to predict and intuit, and they often

know how to speak this digital language better than we do. I'm realising I can't waste time worrying about what I don't know; I have to press in. As much as my kids will grow up in age by default, they will not grow in wisdom the same. I need to educate myself in the workings of this digital world so that I can help them navigate it too. I wonder, as much as we grow ourselves in work, studies and knowledge of current affairs, are we as intentional in our parenting and understanding of how to navigate this world, so we can train our kids? As they



grow, so must we, so that we can teach them how and where to shine their light.

Think with them

Something that doesn't come naturally is the ability to think critically and not to just accept every thought, because there are some dark ideas out there! When our kids come to us with problems, we try not to be too quick to solve them on their behalf. We want to teach them how to take the information that they are given and dissect it so that they can make wise decisions. Sometimes this is less about being a light and more about keeping darkness at bay. We help them to ask questions to develop their understanding, and some great conversations have followed. With so many people following the flow of culture and popular thinking, we need kids who are able to swim upstream and think for themselves.

Love God with them

A candle can't light a room if it doesn't have a flame. Our kids can't be lights in their world if the flame of faith isn't lit in their hearts, and this isn't something that they just pick up and run with. They will model the faith we show at home. So if we treat going to church, reading the Bible, and prayer as secondary, optional, even bothersome chores, they will grow up believing the same. But if we model prioritising God in our lives and actions, going to church regularly as something that we *get* to do, not *have* to do, and praying as a family as a joy and not a check-list item, then we position them to develop a faith of their own. We won't have to chase them for it—they will run with it themselves, because it's hard to put out a wildfire! That's what the flame of faith does in the lives of our kids. But we can't just tell them to love God; we have to love God with them.

The world we live in has changed from when we were kids, and there are many dark corners and unknowns. What a profound privilege it is that we get to raise the next generation for the purposes of God, and hand the torch to them to light up their world!

Ps Natanya Fugard-Gous has been part of the Rivers staff team for over fourteen years, where she was part of the Children's Church team on the Sandton campus. She and her husband, Ps Devon, along with their three kids, moved to Ballito eighteen months ago to head up the Rivers Ballito Campus. Her greatest joy is building the local church and raising her kids.





Then GOD said

Ps Dané Garner
Lead Pastor – Rivers Centurion

“Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”
(Genesis 1:3 NLT)

When I think of light, I think of God creating light when there was only darkness and chaos. I also think of how He brought light into my life during an extremely dark and chaotic season. I pray that my testimony will remind someone that there is always hope for a “then God said” moment.

This particular season started in 2018. This was the first Miracle Offering weekend that we wrote down “starting a family” as something we were trusting God for. I had just gone off contraceptives and we were excited about possibly starting the New Year with a baby on the way.

It was only mid-way through 2019 when we first realised that starting a family might not be as easy as we had thought. After trying to conceive naturally, knowing it can take a few months for a woman’s body to adjust after the contraceptive, I went to see my gynaecologist. I was diagnosed with Polycystic

Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) and my gynae suggested we start with our first fertility treatment for six months. I remember thinking that six months sounded like an eternity, and I was sure we wouldn’t need all those cycles before we fell pregnant.

By this time, we had come around to another Miracle Offering weekend and putting down “starting a family” yet again was heart-breaking. I couldn’t believe that a full year had passed, and we were no closer to having a baby, but we knew that we served a God who could do anything, and we held on to hope for our “Then God said” moment.

In 2020 we finished our first fertility cycles, none of which were successful, and moved on to our next fertility option. Again, we were coming up to another Miracle Offering weekend but because of COVID, we had a Thanksgiving weekend instead. I remember noting down everything we were thankful for amid an unprecedented, unexpected year, including God’s grace on our lives and our health, but we were still very aware of the fact that another year had passed, and we had not been able

to conceive. We reminded ourselves that if God could do it for Abraham and Sarah, He could do it for us. If He could do it for Hannah, He could do it for us. It was never too late for our “then God said” moment.

We were now entering our third year of trying and nothing had worked. My doctor referred us to a fertility specialist, who suspected I had endometriosis. In March 2022, on a Prayer Meeting night, I went into theatre and it was confirmed that I had stage three endometriosis. After removing what he could, the specialist told us that it typically grows back within five years after surgery and that the six months following the procedure would be the most optimal time to conceive. We immediately started our next step of fertility treatment, which included daily hormone injections, over and above other medication. During this time, the specialist noticed that my body was not ovulating. So not only did I have PCOS and stage three endometriosis, but I also had unexplained anovulation. Because of this, my body was not producing the right level of progesterone and my uterine lining wasn't thickening. This meant that implantation was going to be incredibly difficult and that our chance of ever falling pregnant naturally was zero percent. Zero.



It came around to our fourth Miracle Offering weekend of putting down “starting a family”, and this time we knew that it would take an absolute miracle. That year, we decided to

do something we had not done before. Over and above our Miracle Offering amount, we also emptied out our fertility savings to add to it. We knew that God could do so much more with what we had than we ever could. This would not “buy” us a miracle, but rather, it was about letting go of what we could control and asking God for His will to be done.

Later, we were told that we had one fertility treatment option left, Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection IVF (ICSI IVF). It was our last available avenue, and one round would cost us a minimum of R140 000. I remember feeling extremely deflated and overwhelmed by this news. We knew that if we were ever going to

fall pregnant, God had to intervene. Either He would bless us with the finances for IVF, which had roughly a 60% success rate for our specific situation, or He would miraculously help us conceive naturally, overcoming a medical diagnosis of zero percent.

Infertility was all-consuming. It was a constant rollercoaster of hope and heartbreak, but I couldn't imagine doing any of it without God and without a loving and supportive husband. I am grateful that even in the lowest, loneliest moments, Chase

was right there with me, ready to do whatever was needed and always encouraging me with God's promises, even though he was facing the same heartache. We knew that God is always good, that His plans for us are perfect, and that even when our season seemed dark, His light would bring us through. This is what got me through every Mother's Day not knowing if I would ever be a mother, every birthday knowing that another year had passed, and every pregnancy announcement on social media that brought me to tears. I held onto God and His promises—He had not forgotten us, He saw every tear, every low moment and every heartache. I held onto the fact that God had always been good to me, even if I didn't understand His "No" or "Not yet."

On the 24th of July 2022, Chase preached a message at our Sandton campus, and he told me afterwards how God had spoken to him while he was preaching. One of his sermon points regarding vision was "Date it, detail it, deadline it and devote it." He explained that while preaching about how people lose vision for their future, failing to intentionally set out what they want and work towards it, God showed him that that's what we were doing with our IVF round. The injections, medication, cycle monitoring and uncertainty were taking their toll on me. It was all so overwhelming that we avoided talking about our IVF round or setting a date for it altogether. So that afternoon, sitting at our dining room table, we talked it through and finally set the date for February 2023. This would give us seven months to have an emotional and physical break from everything and prepare for the intensity of IVF. So finally, we had a plan. We had dated it, detailed it, given it a deadline, and we were devoting it to God.

On the 25th of July 2022, a day after we had made this decision, I woke up with some out-of-the-norm symptoms and decided that I would take a pregnancy test that evening. I hated taking these as they always led to heartache, but I wanted

to get it out the way. Little did we know that on that Monday evening our lives would change forever. The pregnancy test was positive. Our first ever positive test! We were in complete shock! My body had never reached the point where implantation was even possible. We were so shocked that we drove straight to the hospital at nine o'clock that evening to do a blood test, and it was confirmed—a positive pregnancy test! A miracle!

Finley Isabel Garner was born exactly one month early on the 27th of February 2023. This was the month Chase and I had originally planned to do our IVF round. After a four-and-a-half-year journey, we were again reminded of God's faithfulness in every season.

Finley: Fair Warrior

Isabel: Pledged/Devoted to God

To every woman going through infertility today, I pray that you will continue to hold onto God and be reminded that He has not forgotten about you. He loves you, sees you and hears you. Even when this season feels unbearable and unending, remember that God can strengthen us and help us persevere. We live in a fallen world and must endure many challenges, but we are not alone. God is right there with us, ready to carry our burdens and bring His life changing light and power into our circumstances. Even in our darkest season, we can have hope for our "then God said" moment because our God is a God of the impossible.

Ps Dané is a wife to an incredible husband, mom to a perfect little miracle, and a lover of everything coffee and baking!



God
saw
that
the light
was
good,
and he separated
the light from
the darkness.

Genesis 1:4 NIV



Small lights of kindness



Nuska Zwane
Director – Rivers Foundation

Driven by love, empathy and a strong desire to end the suffering of the helpless and hopeless in our country, the Senior Pastors of Rivers Church established the Rivers Foundation in 2006. Their vision was to mobilise like-minded people to reach and support as many less fortunate communities as possible. Ps André and Ps Wilma invited members of Rivers Church, businesses, individuals and anyone who shared their burden for the poor, to roll up their sleeves and come alongside them to wage war against the poverty and injustice that plague our beautiful country, South Africa.

HIV/AIDS is one of the monsters and epidemics (going as far back as the 80s) that has resulted in many children losing either one or both parents. As a result, a number of these children have dropped out of school as they had no one to look after them or their siblings. Many children go to bed hungry and sadly, young girls become pregnant after falling prey to

“predators”. Similarly, some of the boys resort to petty crime to feed themselves and their siblings. Others get involved in substance abuse and lethal cheap drugs like nyaope (also known as wonga – a form of low grade heroin), in order to dull the unbearable day-to-day pain from the harsh reality of their lives. This drug is easily accessible in densely populated areas where there is a high unemployment rate and where people have little to no skills at all to sustain themselves. Sadly, crime is the order of the day in many of these areas.

In the midst of these disheartening circumstances, the Rivers Foundation has, over the years, changed the lives of many such people and has made a tangible difference. We have placed abandoned and homeless children in safe homes where they are showered with love. In return these children learn to love and trust, and they enjoy family life and newfound siblings. They go to school and participate in sport like any

other child. They are enabled to pursue their God-given gifts and purpose. They have a sense of BELONGING and they see LIGHT for the first time in their lives.

In addition, we identified schools from remote areas that received little or no help from the government or other NGOs. We launched a feeding scheme and established a team of committed volunteers from all walks of life to support this initiative. Our volunteers faithfully arrive early in the morning to prepare and deliver sandwiches to the schools which we have taken on as beneficiaries. Since we started the feeding programme, learners rarely miss school. Their concentration in class has improved greatly and this in turn has positively affected their academic life. What a difference a meal can make in a child's life!

In 2008 a new project was born when we were introduced to fifty Life College school girls from Soweto, a college that trains learners in life skills. The main challenge that these learners faced was missing school due to not having safe protection during their monthly cycle. To avoid accidents or embarrassing moments in class, the girls chose to stay at home during their monthlies. Some missed up to eight days of school every month, which badly affected their academic performance. The Rivers Foundation stepped in and committed to supporting the girls every month with sanitary pads.



The Life College founder, Pat Pillai, gave us feedback that since we started supporting these girls, they excelled academically because they were not missing school anymore. Ps Wilma was very excited when she heard the news and encouraged the Sisters ministry at Rivers Church to come on board and support the initiative. Consequently, our sanitary pad drive expanded to include essentials such as soap, deodorant and body lotion or Vaseline, which are now handed out to even more girls at our various beneficiary schools. The Sisters ministry has become one of our biggest funders, donating just short of three thousand toiletry packs to teen girls every single month. As we take on more schools, this number continues to grow.

In addition to the toiletry packs, the Sisters at Rivers Church have donated beautiful ball gowns which the school girls use for their Matric Farewells. The Sisters have also donated jewellery and shoes, as well as clothing for the girls to use when going for work interviews. To every woman who has contributed to our various projects, the beneficiary girls may have never met you in person, but they “know” you through your very kind deeds. One might think that these are “*Small Acts of Kindness*” but the toiletries and clothing are making a great impact in the lives of our teen girls. Thank you, thank you Sisters! Siyabonga!



God always directs us to help people find a way to win in their own circumstances, and we identified people who demonstrated a burning desire to turn their situations around. This led to us launching our Skills Development programme nine years ago, to equip and empower people to sustain themselves. We initially rented a place in Hillbrow, which was easily accessible to locals and those traveling to town by taxi. In 2014 we welcomed and trained a number of people in our new Skills Development Centre. This new facility was even bigger, giving us the opportunity to expand our programme. We have since trained people in skills such as upholstery, sewing, knitting, waterless car wash techniques, basic financial literacy, beauty and spa treatments, creating chairs from used tyres and making bags from recycled denim clothing, to name a few. We also trained our gogos to crochet, knit and make floor mats from recycled materials. Today, a number of people who were part of our skills training are now running their own small businesses.

Always looking for a way to contribute to our communities, the Rivers Foundation took the opportunity to take part in the 947 Cycle Challenge six years ago. Represented by a handful of cyclists, we were able to raise funds and awareness for our different causes. This team has since grown to almost thirty cyclists and continues to grow each year. Through our cycling team, the Rivers Foundation adopted a young man who had previously been heavily involved in cheap drugs and petty crime. Our support enabled him to start a new life, a drug-free, crime-free life. He has won several awards from the cycle challenges and his life has completely turned around. He has given his life to the Lord and his story is a great motivation to the youth, whom he trains to fix and ride bikes.

The Rivers Foundation has expanded across the country over the years as Rivers Church has planted churches in Durban North, Ballito, Kyalami and Centurion. Each campus looks at the needs around them and offers a helping hand. One of the Foundation's highlights is our Durban North project, when we built our first brick and mortar crèche in the Molweni community in KwaZulu-Natal, in 2019. The children (zero to five years old) were initially housed in a metal sheet structure which was unsafe and unbearable in harsh weather conditions. This crèche now has two fully furnished classrooms, a kitchen and toilet facilities, and is a learning haven for thirty-six children, offering age-appropriate education. The teachers also receive training on how best to use learning materials.





There was great excitement when we built the second Molweni Crèche. It was handed over to the teachers and community on the 9th of September 2022. The new building is a duplicate of the first one and houses thirty-three kids between the ages of one to four years. These young learners are set apart from those from under-developed crèches. When they reach the age of six, they are ready to go to grade school because of the good foundation they have received at their crèche. We are planning to build more crèches in our communities.



These are just some of the projects we have undertaken over the years and we could never have done this on our own. Through your generosity, we continue to feed the hungry and support communities in need, and we would like to inspire everyone reading this article to look for opportunities in their world to bless others and help the less fortunate. Start somewhere and grow from there. God loves a cheerful giver. God's Word teaches us to be models of good works and to teach with integrity, dignity, seriousness, purity, reverence and incorruptibility. These biblical values and principles have shaped and grown the Rivers Foundation and our track record has resulted in many corporates and businesses trusting and choosing us as their preferred partner.

We have been fortunate to have met individuals and organisations who will not settle but who are willing to fight fiercely to improve their lives. They are our daily motivation. For them, we wake up very early in the morning and do what we do to continue to light up people's lives! On behalf of the founders of the Rivers Foundation, we would like to thank everyone who lends a hand and gives of their time, talent and treasure to support this ministry.

"Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness and the darkness around you will be bright as noon." (Isaiah 58:10 NLT)



Nuska Zwane is the Director of the Rivers Foundation and has played a key role since its inception in 2006. She is a mom and a grand-mom of two, and is affectionately known as "Mama Nuska" by the hundreds of "children" God has blessed her with in the course of her work at the Rivers Foundation and Rivers Church. She felt the call of God while running her IT business, and nothing gives her greater joy than serving the purposes of God.



You
will

shine

like

stars

Philippians 2:15 GW

among
them

in the
world

Greater than my chains
Higher than these walls
Or anything I've faced
You're bigger than it all
Greater than the dark
It flees from who You are
Greater than the storms
That rage within my heart.

Greater than the stars
Held high within their place
Higher than the mountains
Stronger than the waves
Yesterday today
Your word will never change
My rock and my redeemer
The One who made a way.

Greater than my past
Than my biggest mistakes
Stronger than my fears
Your love it never fails
Greater than disease
Stronger than the grave
High above it all
Forever You will reign.

Greater than it all

greater
than
the dark,
it flees
from
who **You**
are



A close-up photograph of a woman with reddish-brown hair looking upwards. Her face is partially illuminated by a bright light source, creating a strong highlight on her nose and cheek. In the background, several hands are raised in the air, suggesting a concert or a public event. The overall atmosphere is one of awe and excitement.

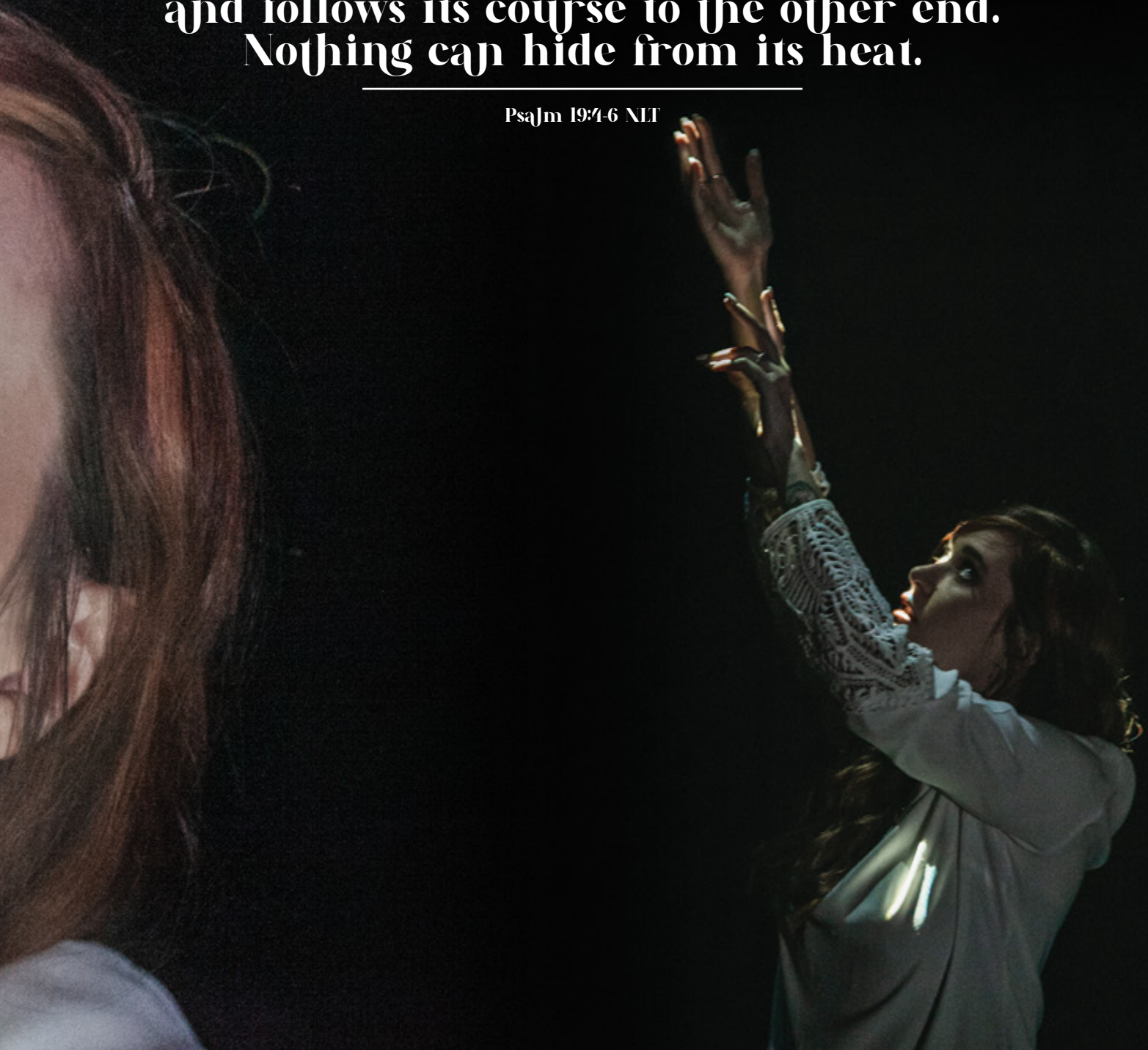
radiant

**God has made a home in
the heavens for the sun.**

**It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom
after his wedding. It rejoices like a great
athlete eager to run the race.**

**The sun rises at one end of the heavens
and follows its course to the other end.
Nothing can hide from its heat.**

Psalms 19:4-6 NLT





Waiting for the storms to pass will rob you of the privilege to live your life to the fullest. When storms hit us, we must not wait but dance through them and ride them as they come, aches and all. We ride, we soar, we serve and we keep our eyes on the light – our Saviour, Jesus.

In February 2013 I attended the “Lioness Arising” course shortly after I became a partner at Rivers Church. Ps Wilma facilitated this course to ladies at Rivers Church. It was at one of these meetings that I met Mum Nuska, who invited me to join the team that served at the Rivers Foundation. I immediately joined the volunteer team to make sandwiches, which are distributed to school children in disadvantaged communities. I loved serving in the house of God and to date I am still serving at the Rivers Foundation and making sandwiches for the children. I also joined the Sisters pampering team and truly enjoyed it.

Patience

Suddenly, BOOM! The storms of life hit when I least expected it.

One morning in September 2022, just after the Sisters of Africa Conference post COVID-19 lockdown, as I was doing what I love, serving in the house of the Lord, and having just returned from my youngest son's graduation, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. This was a great shock to me. The last thing on my mind was finding out that I had cancer! I broke the news to my husband and he was completely shattered to hear this. Then I shared the news with my two boys and the rest of my extended family. We all went through different emotions of anger, disbelief, sadness – you name it.

I was then reminded that I am a child of God, and I went on my knees and declared that I am a "Warrior Chick" and that cancer won't take over my life. I gathered prayer warriors from all over the world. They were more devastated about the news than I was. They prayed and cried with me, but we believed God for a miracle. Some of them flew in to be with me and pray with me. Some local sisters also came to see me, especially when I really felt down. My church family and my blood family kept praying for me and I felt lifted up.

I was assured by Psalm 27:5, *"For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock."* Now, with a promise like that I was not afraid anymore. I encouraged my prayer warriors and prepared myself mentally for my operation. Even though I was going to lose part of my body, I was not going to lose my faith in the Lord.

There was a sense of urgency in the doctor's diagnosis and she explained my treatment plan, which included four chemo therapies and twenty five radiation treatments. I thought to myself, "I haven't even done the operation, nor has the news of my diagnosis sunk in, and now I am already listening to post operation details." It was a lot to take in but I was also ready for what lay ahead, as I knew my help would be coming from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth (Psalm 121).

I resolved not to let this devastating news pin me down. The Rivers Foundation had been my home and platform to serve others, and I was determined that no challenge or storm would stop me from serving. I felt I would be letting the team down if I didn't go to prepare the sandwiches in the mornings, and I thought about that child who would not be having a meal because of my absence. Needless to say, I served through it all with little or no side effects of the chemo. I was reminded that when you serve others, you remove the focus from yourself

and make others the centre of your attention. I also continued to serve in the Sisters pampering ministry and loving on the ladies, especially those who were attending Sisters for the first time.

I was discharged from hospital a few days before the next Sisters Night and I thought to myself, "What can stop me from coming to church and worshipping the Lord with other sisters despite what I was going through?" I checked with my doctors if it was ok for me to go to church. They were not worried but cautioned me to be careful and to find someone to drive me as it was early days. I was chauffeur driven to Sisters Night and was excited to be in the house of the Lord with the sisters! The Word was what I was hungry for – thank you Lord! Seeing other sisters worshipping made me feel that I did not make a mistake by attending the meeting that night. Psalm 27:4 says, *"One thing I ask of the Lord. This is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and seek him in his temple."* Thank you, Lord, for this reminder. I was in the house of the Lord. I felt lifted up. I worshipped and cried to my Father. I shed tears of joy. I was delighted in the Lord and He gave me the desires of my heart (Psalm 37:4). Even through chemo and radiation, I continued serving the house as it was MY desire to serve Him.

Psalm 27:2 reminds us, *"When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall."* The enemy is defeated. I have seen him stumble and fall right in front of my eyes as he thought I was besieged by him, but no weapon formed against me shall prosper (Isaiah 54:7). I thank God for His protection on my life. The enemy might have attacked my flesh, but my faith has remained strong. I am now cancer free and use my testimony to encourage others to start serving no matter what they are going through, and to show them that God can use us as the light for others during their dark season.

I am encouraged by Psalm 27:1, *"The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?"* This scripture has given me strength and confidence, knowing that through it all, God is on my side and is looking after me, so I have no fear of the future. God IS my LIGHT and my salvation!

Patience Chabvonga is a Warrior Chick who loves the Lord! She is a wife and mother of two boys. She loves hosting and interior decorating, bowling, horses and rugby!

Martie



On March 26th 1994, I got married to my best friend and soulmate, Neil, after five years of dating. Both Neil and I were raised in Christian families and gave our lives to Christ during our high school years. However, as life went on, we forgot about God's goodness and guidance, and the importance of having a spiritual compass in our lives.

In 1997 when our son, Sean, was two years old, Neil was head-hunted and we moved from Cape Town to Johannesburg. In November 1998 our daughter, Andrea, was born and two years later we welcomed our third child, Suanne.

Three weeks after Suanne's birth, Neil decided to start his own consulting business. We had financial success and we bought our first house in Johannesburg in 2002. We searched for a church to attend but never found one that felt like home, so we stopped going to church and spent our Sundays doing outdoor activities and other leisurely pursuits. We renovated our home, spent money freely, and regularly went on holidays and weekend getaways. At the time, we felt like we were living life to the full.

When the recession hit in 2008/2009, my family and I faced a major setback. Neil's largest client, which was our primary source of income, informed us that they would no longer be using his services. This left us with virtually no income and in survival mode. The financial stress took a toll on our marriage and family, and we eventually decided to enrol our children back in mainstream school after home-schooling them due to educational and financial challenges. We could only find one school in our area that had space available for all three children, and it was at this school that Sean made a new friend who invited him to what was then called Soul'd Out (Rivers Youth). Based on Sean's experience at Rivers Church, we decided to check out the church. During our first service in January 2011, it immediately felt like home to us, or at least to me. Two weeks later, I recommitted my life to Jesus and I started volunteering shortly afterwards. Prior to attending Rivers, I had no idea how big the void inside me had been. Looking back now, it's clear that despite the challenges we faced, God had always been watching over us.

I had gone for an interview with a multinational company in August 2010 and later that day, I was informed that I got the job, and I started working there two days later. It was later revealed to me that the company had a strict BEE policy, yet they chose to employ me. Still, the continued financial stress had an extremely negative effect on our marriage. Even though we were trying to rebuild, we lost our house in 2014 and had to start renting a place. But we were still together as a family and had a roof over our heads.

Neil used to have regular socials and Friday afternoon lunches with his work department at a local pub. His colleagues lived in our area, so we started a lift club which helped us financially as we only had one car. However, the afternoon lunches turned into evening socials and I began to notice Neil's distracted behaviour towards me. Although I didn't mind not being intimate with him anymore, the stressful times were emotionally draining. Unfortunately, I didn't realise that we were about to go down a very dark road.

I became aware that Neil was continuously talking to a female colleague outside of work hours and developing an emotional attachment to her. As a result, we grew further apart. Between 2014 and 2017, he brought up the idea of moving out and even getting divorced, a few times.

In October 2016, I launched my own business and became pre-occupied with making it a success. However, I failed to notice that Neil was becoming more and more emotionally distant from me and growing increasingly attached to someone else. We attempted marriage counselling a few times but it didn't help much, as Neil didn't see any issue with spending time with the person who was the reason for our counselling sessions.

I knew that I would not be able to afford living on my own, so I held on and every time he brought up the topic of divorce, I fought against it. My prayer throughout all of this was that *"anything hidden should be revealed"* (Luke 8:17), as that was the only way I believed I could make sense of whatever we were going through.

On the night of the 23rd of March 2017, three days before our twenty-third wedding anniversary, I woke up in the middle of the night for no apparent reason. I was wide awake. I felt led to go through Neil's phone and laptop and discovered more conversations and emails with this person, whom I was told previously was no longer a factor, and I had believed him. My heart broke again. I felt like I had hit rock bottom, a deep dark place. The only thing I could do was cry out to God and surrender my all. I prayed and told God that I could not carry on like this. I didn't know how but I knew that God would make a way. I dried my tears, went to make coffee and woke Neil up at around 04:30. I told him that I couldn't continue anymore with the way things were going and that I wanted a divorce.

We had planned to go away that weekend for our anniversary, which happened to be on the same weekend as Men's Conference. Our plan was to leave after I served at conference, but Neil wanted to skip the conference and spend time with me instead. Hurt and angered, I was adamant that he needed God more than he needed me and I demanded

that he attend the conference and cancel our weekend away. I was done with him and with our marriage. My heart had been broken too many times.

On the Friday night of Men's Conference, I remember standing at the till in the Rivers Coffee Shop. Neil gave me a peck on my cheek before going in to find a seat. I felt the Holy Spirit say to me, *"Everything is going to be all right."* Well, let me tell you, when the men came out after the first two sessions, Neil came to where I was serving, hugged me, kissed me on the cheek and said, *"I know what I have to do!"*

Neil and I started focusing on rebuilding our relationship and marriage by setting boundaries and letting go of certain friendships. With God's help, we were able to transform a dark and lifeless situation into something bright and full of life in just three days. Now, we are happier than we have ever been in the twenty-three years prior to 2017, and we know that God is with us, guiding, protecting, and loving us even with the mistakes we made. We are grateful for our renewed relationship and excited to celebrate our thirtieth wedding anniversary in March 2024!

Looking back, I see how God has blessed us in so many ways. We bought our own house in 2021, after renting for seven years. Our children's school led us to Soul:d Out at Rivers Church, where we found our spiritual home and restored our marriage. I got a job at a company with a strict BEE policy just two days after my interview, during a time when being unemployed was a struggle for us. Despite a bad health diagnosis, God answered our prayers, and I experienced little to no pain after my surgeries, which surprised my doctors.

On the other side of our struggles is where God needed us to get to, so that He could be glorified as He made us strong, raised us up and restored our relationship with each other, with Jesus at the centre of our lives and relationship. We now trust in God and know that, "I (we) can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (us)" (Philippians 4:13).

Martie Cronje is a wife, mom of three and grandmother of one, and has been volunteering at the Rivers Coffee Shop since 2012. She is a qualified business coach and in 2022 was instrumental in the launch of the Virtual Assistants Institute of South Africa. When she needs a break from work, she makes handmade sewn and embroidered products and more recently started playing with resin.





Candice

In my forty years of life, I have experienced more pain, suffering and joy than most, and just when I thought everything was fine, the cycle started all over again. But let me start at the beginning, since I am jumping ahead!

I come from a rainbow nation. My mother was coloured, my father was Indian, and my grandparents were Indian, Xhosa, White and Coloured. It's safe to call me a true South African! I grew up in a conservative Indian area and lived with my mum, dad, older brother and grandfather.

Childhood

When I was six years old, my grandfather became very affectionate and touchy towards me and warned me that if I said anything, the family would break up. During a sex education lesson at school, I was taught about the 'no touch' policy, so I told my grandfather that what he was doing to me was wrong. In shock, he begged me not to say anything. Yes, I was a victim of molestation, but I didn't let that define me or give me a victim mentality. When my sister was born four years later, I never allowed my grandfather to be alone with her. I became my sister's keeper. After some time, he passed away and I was relieved.

Pre-teens

As we were driving home from church one Sunday morning, I heard a loud bang! My body flew from side to side in the vehicle and I awoke on the road, feeling the hot tar on my skin. Our van was severely smashed and my mother was lying on the ground, surrounded by medics. A helicopter landed and then I blacked out...

I lost my mum in that accident. Surprisingly, my sister escaped with no scratches because my mum had shielded her from the impact. Losing my mother, especially at that age, was difficult. She hadn't yet bought me bras and I hadn't yet started my menstrual cycle. It was embarrassing to bring these things up with my dad and I wasn't sure how he would respond. However, he is my hero! After school one day, he filled my drawers with sports bras and my toiletry cabinet with sanitary pads so that I was prepared when the time came. He kept an eye on that cupboard and made sure it was always stocked. That's what a good father does. He knows what you need and provides it without you asking!

Teens

Dad often went cycling—he loved keeping fit. One day a nervous learner driver drove into him. After being in a coma for ten days, he died, leaving us orphans. A family friend fostered my little sister, while my brother took responsibility for me. We barely had enough money for food and electricity each month, but our neighbours, community and family friends were amazing, inviting us over for supper and helping wherever they could. If it weren't for my brother, I wouldn't be here today and I am forever grateful for his sacrifice.

Young Adulthood

When I was twenty-one, I started dating a very good friend who I met in church. I had known him for a long time and after dating for three months, we fell in love and got married. I thank God for Deven every day. Marriage is not always easy, but the love we have for God and our never-give-up spirit, transcends all difficulties.

Two years after I got married, my brother was killed in a car accident. Death was at my door once again, but I knew death wasn't the end. My hubby was a great support and I journeyed forward, knowing that I would see my brother again, as per God's promises.

Adulthood

A decade later, after praying and trusting God for a long time, we had two beautiful children: Katelyn Cassadie—my beautiful princess, strong-willed, well-mannered and my buttercup, and Kal-EI Eesa Deven—my sweetheart, the most loving little guy, the family clown at times and my superman. We loved spending time together as a family, and parenting was our priority. We were present for everything. I was even on the school parent association.

As my thirty-fifth birthday was approaching, I was fearful of dying, just like my mother had died at thirty-five. So I started teaching my daughter how to cook, wash dishes and take care of her brother. My birthday month arrived and I was still alive and feeling great. We had planned a beach holiday that December, so I lost all my baby weight to fit into my swimwear and felt my best ever.

Driving home from gym one day, I turned onto my street and there was a loud bang! My car spun and I blacked out.

I awoke to white smoke from the airbag and people looking into my car, saying, "She has kids." After struggling with my seat belt, I managed to jump into the back. My hand quickly went to my son's chest as I screamed, prayed and felt his heartbeat, but he was unconscious. Then Kate looked at me. She couldn't talk. She just stared and I kept telling her she was fine. Keeping both hands on their chests, I kept praying. A doctor stopped to help and checked Kate's pulse. Her heart was slowing down. Paramedics later arrived and immediately worked on her.

On that day, the 17th of December 2018, my Katelyn Cassadie, only seven years old, died in front of me. As I stood next to her lifeless body at the hospital, a girlfriend came to comfort me and to her surprise, I told her, "Kate is safe. God's got her!" In our household, whenever the kids were scared, my husband and I always reassured them that they were okay and that Mum and Dad have got them. It gave them surety that they were safe.

Following that, we immediately rushed to Kal, who was at another hospital. We were taken into a family room where we were surrounded by friends, family and church members and then went in to see Kal. To our horror, we were told that he was brain dead and his organs would soon shut down. My son Kal-El died on the 19th of December 2018 at the age of five.

Our fourteenth wedding anniversary was on the 21st of December and the funeral for our two kids was on the 22nd of December 2018.

The support from friends, family and the Rivers family and Senior Pastors was God-sent and we wouldn't have made it without them.

Christmas came around and it was important that we attended church as we always did. As soon as I walked in, I felt at home and I felt God speak to me through the song Hindsight: He isn't finished yet; He did it before and He can do it again! I knew healing still needed to take place, but that God had something great in store for me.

There is no greater honour and blessing than being a parent but in order to prevent his heart from being torn out again, my hubby wasn't in favour of having more children. However, we reached an understanding and went to see our gynaecologist, but he told us we couldn't have any more children. Still, when God puts something on your heart, it will be fulfilled. One year later, on the 20th of December 2019, our Seth Kallyn was born. Adam and Eve had a third son, Seth, after Cain had killed Abel. In Genesis 4:26, Eve said, "God has given me another child in place of Abel," suggesting that having Seth filled the void. That was fitting for us. Then Cole (victory to the people) Kallyn followed two years later. They gave us a reason to smile again, to have joy in our home and a reason to keep moving forward, knowing that God's got us!

Having faced so many battles, you may ask yourself how I still serve God and what advice I can give to those still fighting. Having learnt the truth, I know Jesus died for me and rose again. I know heaven and hell exist and that death does not mean the end of life. I carry and bear children, but they are not mine. They belong to the Lord and it is my responsibility to teach and raise them.

Yes, I have been through a lot, but I am still here because I have more to do. My life's purpose is to glorify God and bring His LIGHT to others. It doesn't matter where you are, broken, shattered, in pain or asking, "God, why me?" This is just a season and it will pass. It's up to you to pick yourself up and put one foot forward, leaving the rest to God because God's got you, just like He's got me!

Cleopatra Candice Munsamy loves God and is dedicated to serving His kingdom. She is an adoring wife of nineteen years, a mother of four, a sister, and a daughter. Over the past fourteen years, she has been in Corporate Finance at one of South Africa's top universities. Along with building good, strong Godly relationships and living fully, Candice is passionate about parenthood and loves her family dearly.





I saw
that
wisdom
is better than folly.



just as

light
is
better
than darkness.

Ecclesiastes 2:13 NIV

Yolanda



It all started in the windy month of August 1979, when on the evening of the 21st I was born into a happy and loving Christian household, completing our family of four. I had a great childhood. I grew up before cellphones – a time when we played outside for hours, made (and tasted, in my case) mud cookies, rode our bikes until the first flicker of the streetlights signaled home time, and when every teenager wanted a bedroom above the garage. It was a time when we got dressed in our Sunday best for church and when the old ladies loved their hats.

I grew up in the deep West, in the little suburb of Witpoortjie, where everything of importance was within walking distance from our house; the local shops, the VHS Blockbuster store of the day, school and church. My parents were very involved and planted in the local church. My dad was an elder and played the organ, and both he and my mom taught Sunday school classes. Attending church and having Bible study after dinner were non-negotiables in our house. I can't say that my brother and I were always enthusiastic about it, especially as we hit the teenage years, but we knew that any attempt to fake our way out of it would be futile. Little did I know that my parents were building the very foundation that would bring me back to the light twenty years later.

After matric, I had the amazing opportunity of a two year working holiday in England. Thereafter, I started my academic journey at University of Johannesburg (RAU at the time) and successfully obtained my Honours Degree in Marketing Communication in 2003. I considered myself pretty decent and morally conscience at the time, but I had no idea that I had already started playing with the little foxes of compromise and that darkness was slowly seeping in, infecting my soul with spiritual death.

I transitioned into my working career from an internship to full-time employment at one of the biggest advertising agencies at the time. Advertising was seen as the Rock Star of industries, and was known for the crazy parties, long client lunches and late nights of hard work (and drinks). The line between drunken behaviour and “just having some fun” at parties became increasingly blurry to me. The growing darkness in my soul started distorting my vision of good and evil, and having a “good time” seemed so innocent and deserved, even. Yet, it was this very thought pattern and behaviour that engineered the blueprint of my pit as I unknowingly continued to separate myself from God, one choice and one compromise at a time.

As the years went by, I became a career-driven woman. I discovered that I was quite academically inclined and always

seemed to have had the desire to change the world, but “Party” was my middle name, and it was rapidly building the foundation and walls of my pit. By then, my vision of God and living a moral life was so skewed that I still believed my party lifestyle and growing promiscuity were all just part of becoming an adult, and although I always thought I was perusing to meet a nice guy with whom monotony was key, it was nothing more than an illusion and I was really just giving my worth and value away.

By this time, I had become so dead in sin and so separated from God that I was completely numb, not only to the effect of my sinful behaviour, but to life. I found myself blinded by the enemy's story... a disfigured painting of a life full of fun, success, excitement and framed with everything the world can offer. By the time my dipped-in-ruin, rose-tinted glasses fell off, the true blackening depth of my pit was revealed, and it was decorated with depression and desolation, tiled with brokenness and shame, and riddled with, “How did I even get here? *How Did I Even Get Here?!*” But God!

My most defining dead-in-sin moment was when I found myself in a relationship with a married man at the end of 2015. My heart knew it was wrong, but I was so dead inside my soul that I was completely numb to it, and in fact, I even tried to pray it ‘right.’ Yeah, not my finest moment, for sure. But it was in December of the same year where God used this very darkest part of my pit, the relationship that was to be the final nail in my spiritual coffin, to call me Home.

God urged me to look up and in a split second, just like the sun piercing the darkness at dawn, I felt the warm light of the Son piercing the darkness of my soul. I unequivocally knew that this was Home and I wanted nothing more than to live where the Light is, but in my spiritual death and brokenness I had no idea how to even get up, never mind trying to find the way out. My pit didn't come with stairs and the enemy wasn't planning on letting go. But God loves us so much that He sent His only Son, and before I knew it, Jesus was right there with me at the bottom of my pit, at the epicenter of my brokenness, just loving me whole. His light started redecorating my soul, demanding the darkness to flee, and rewriting my story from the devastation of spiritual death to the most indescribable fire of life!

It was in my darkest moment, in the tension between thinking I grieved the Holy Spirit to the point of complete departure from my life, and God reminding me, “I will never leave nor forsake you,” (Deuteronomy 31:6) that my relentless seeking was ignited. I grabbed my Bible, some books and some Joyce Meyer and Louie Giglio DVDs to sit at the feet of Jesus. I soon





realised that it was time to get planted into the house of the Lord, and God led me to Rivers Church in February 2017. As soon as I stepped into the auditorium, I knew I was home and exactly where I belonged.

I would not be where I am today if it were not for the God-foundation my parents embedded in me from birth, and Rivers Church to unpack it. It was at Rivers where God really started scrubbing away the residue from the pit; forming in me a new creation through Jesus; refilling and baptising me with the Holy Spirit; helping me understand his Heart, His character and His Word; and most importantly, perhaps, the magnitude of what Jesus did for us on the cross – because not only did Jesus die for our sins and for our freedom, but also for our shame. I so clearly remember the moment this revelation hit my heart. I cried for days as I felt the heavy burden of my past and shame being lifted off my shoulders, irrevocably knowing that I was unconditionally loved and truly free, and that I will undoubtedly see Jesus face-to-face!

It was also at Rivers where I discovered that stay-on lipstick and waterproof mascara are some Sunday essentials. I had quite a few 'ugly cry' moments during worship as God started doing a work in me and I once scared my 'seat neighbour' with a chin full of bright pink lipstick during connection time. I still giggle thinking about.

But ultimately, it is at Rivers where I can testify that I once was dead... dead in my sin... dead in the things of the world. But now I'm alive, so alive in Jesus that I can hardly contain it, and there is just nothing better than this!! **#livingmybestlife**

Yolanda van Wyk is a business woman who is on fire for Jesus and has crazy faith! She loves books and has a passion for gaining knowledge. Her superpower is a combination of curiosity and wonder, and her most exhilarating Word from God is "Let's go change the world!" and that's exactly what she sets out to do!



Natasha

"For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light..." (Ephesians 5:8 NIV)

Have you ever experienced an inexplicable sense of joy, like a happy bubble inside of you without any physical reason to feel that way? Or have you ever felt a deep sense of clarity and peace while facing a challenging situation, even though

your circumstances didn't seem to justify it? That is exactly what Jesus did for me. However, it wasn't always like that.

I was not raised in a Christian household and during my childhood, I had no exposure to church. My family followed a different religion and as a result, I participated in all the rituals and made a constant effort to be accepted into that religion by being a good person and trying to do good to others. I sought to make greater sacrifices, fasted weekly and engaged in numerous prayers out of fear of displeasing God. I thought that doing those acts made me more spiritual and that they would prevent me from feeling empty. I did a lot of rituals but never understood why, and I never felt I gained anything from them. Fear and uncertainty about the future of my family and myself seemed to always creep up. I would often over analyse situations and catastrophise things. My mind was never at ease. I feared God but didn't hear the voice of God.

After meeting my husband, we occasionally visited various churches together. Although I went along, I did not feel particularly invested because I believed that it was too easy and thought that more acts were needed to get closer to God. I wondered what sacrifice the people at church were really making.

Everything changed when we visited Rivers Church. I felt a strong desire to attend every week because the teaching was practical. I noticed a distinct difference in the people I met – there was a 'fragrance' surrounding them that caught my attention, and I was struck by the remarkable levels of excellence displayed by Rivers. Sunday couldn't come around fast enough; I would wake up so eager to just get into church.

I still hadn't fully committed to Christianity in my first few months of attending, until I experienced an awakening during a message Ps André preached in 2008. I realised that I didn't need to make any sacrifices or perform any rituals to earn a relationship with God. I finally understood that I was not required to do anything to deserve God's love, but that it was a free gift given to a sinner like me. That broke me into absolute tears during the altar call. I heard the actual voice of God, and that had never happened to me before. I actually felt Him surround me, and yes, that had never happened to me before either. This was an encounter with the only living God; my Jesus. I felt loved and fell in love.

That day it dawned on me; Jesus was the sacrifice. He was the sacrifice on my behalf. Jesus went to the cross and paid the price for me without me giving anything up or bringing anything to Him, and certainly despite me not deserving it. I also realised that the true living God wanted to have a personal relationship

with me. I didn't need to offer anything, just my heart, and He did the rest. *"God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished"* (Romans 3:25 NIV).

I realised that my life now had true meaning and purpose! It was like a light had been switched on inside of me, illuminating every part of my being with a radiance that I had never known before. In that moment, I was enveloped in a love so pure and all-encompassing. I wanted all of Him. I got baptised, partnered, and started my journey of serving at church in Kidszone. The friendships and community that surrounded me made me feel like this truly was home and I belonged. I was different, and my family and work colleagues started to notice that I had a newfound love.

Has it been all unicorns and rainbows since then? Of course not! There have been a few bumps in the road. Life is not meant to be easy, but having Jesus to lean on means that you get the strength, wisdom and support you need to face your obstacles. *"In everything you do, put God first, and he will direct you and crown your efforts with success"* (Proverbs 3:6 TLB). There has been so much blessing, and so much grace and forgiveness that I often get emotional just thinking about how good God has been to me!

My decision to follow Jesus and to not give up praying for my family, set in motion my mom coming to church and getting baptised. This was an answered prayer that I had committed to God at Miracle Offering. Today I remain grateful for everything God has done for me and my family. I am not just an individual, but a part of something greater than myself, with a clear understanding of my purpose. I have been empowered to live a life of meaning and fulfilment. Whenever fear tries to creep into my day, I have two powerful tools in my arsenal. I either have a heart-to-heart conversation with Jesus or blast my favourite praise and worship tunes during the school run. These actions bring an immediate sense of calm to my being. I am humbled and grateful for the peace that surpasses all understanding, which came from taking one small step into the light of my faith. By embracing Jesus and His light, my soul was reignited with a clarity that brings new life and vitality to my days.

Natasha Reuben's personal ethos is "helping others." When not in the boardroom, she enjoys travelling with her husband of sixteen years and her twelve-year-old-son.



God
is
light 1 John 1:5 NIV
in him
there is
no darkness
at all.

Anusha



We often believe that we can control our future and the things around us in accordance with our desires. While we have the gift of choice, my life's narrative speaks of a different plot – one of deep surrender.

Nothing could have prepared me for the call that shattered my world on the 7th of March 2018. At thirty six years old, I became a widow. I could not understand how this could be happening to me. How would I pick up the pieces and move forward? I am often asked, "How did you do it?"

Honestly, I had no idea how to move forward but my number one concern was the wellbeing of my three girls. An important factor in our healing was keeping the routine of going to school and attending church. We had a community of friends and family who stood by us and are still a part of our lives, and I am so grateful for them. My mum-in-law and I stood together through our grief, like Ruth and Naomi, and we are still each other's support today. In that season of pressing and crushing, God created in me new wine. It gave me the courage for the journey ahead, with the understanding that it was not going to be easy, but that I needed to let God turn it. As I look back, I can see God's hand over our lives.

Our source of income is our family business and taking over the daily operations felt overwhelming at first. I kept thinking, "How am I going to do this?" Feeling unqualified for the task ahead, I did the only thing I knew how, I got on my knees and prayed. I fasted for twenty-one days as I committed the business and our lives to God, asking Him for wisdom.

Most days I forgot to eat and I was so busy taking care of everyone and everything that I did not sleep well and hardly rested. My health suffered. I was diagnosed with an overactive thyroid and was hospitalised for a week. I was taking twenty tablets a day and had to go in for a weekly blood test until my thyroid levels normalised, otherwise I might have ended up on chronic medication.

Stepping back into my home brought on another wave of grief. I felt like I was in a dark place. I found myself questioning everything. Although I had so many people around me at the time, 'ALONE' was the only word that resounded in my mind. It was suffocating and I felt powerless. As I crawled into bed and cried, I clearly remember these words, "Play worship music." I reached for my phone and a song I had never heard before

started playing. It was 'Just Be Held' by Casting Crowns and it became the anthem of my heart as every word spoke to me. Here are a few lines from the song:

*...Life hits you out of nowhere
And barely leaves you holding on
And when you're tired of fighting
Chained by your control
There's freedom in surrender
Lay it down and let it go
So, when you're on your knees
And answers seem so far away
You're not alone, stop holding on and just be held
Your world's not falling apart, it's falling into place
I'm on the throne, stop holding on and just be held
Just be held, just be held.*

Every word fuelled me with hope and strength. Every time I went down a road of despair and loneliness, God reminded me that I was never alone. I remember praying and asking God to heal me. I did not want to take those pills for my thyroid anymore. After a month of treatment, I decided to stop taking the meds and my thyroid levels have been normal ever since!

Life has been challenging and fear of the future has been overwhelming, but we have bravely faced each day. Teaching my girls that life must go on and that whatever we achieved was by hard work and God's grace, was very important to me. As a family, we talk about how we feel but we still remember to live in the present and look forward in hope to the future. We make time for fun activities and are intentional about the people we choose to do life with. I planned international trips with my girls, something which I had never done before. These trips allowed us to see new possibilities and believe in new beginnings. We bonded and grew stronger and I have seen God hold my precious girls together. But knowing that I now had to face this life alone, I needed to do things that screamed, "Fear doesn't live here," like skydiving for my fortieth birthday... while still deathly scared of heights!

We have navigated each season by staying close to God and plugged into church, giving of our time, talent and treasure. Volunteering and having godly friendships has been an essential part of our walk, and I am grateful for Sisters of Africa Conferences and Sisters Nights where the teachings inspire, motivate and challenge us. Ivana Joslyn, my eldest, has been happily married to Caleb for almost three years and they are expecting their first child. Danica Hope is sweet

sixteen and Emma Grace is ten. We would not have made it this far without God and we choose to live life to the full because we know Who holds our future.

Over the last four years, our family business has expanded, with branches in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Durban and the Eastern Cape. In addition, during the pandemic we secured three-year contracts with multiple companies and started trading internationally. Then in March 2023, in commemoration of International Women's Day, I was recognised by the Consulate General of India with an Award of Merit for Women in Business. I shared with them that it was by God's grace I was on that stage. God had given me a responsibility and He blessed me with the ability. I was reminded of Matthew 6:33 (NIV), *"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* I have this tattooed on my arm and I live by it. God has restored me and I am blown away by His love, mercy and grace over my life!

I have struggled and overcome. I have lost and won battles. Most of all, I have learned how to love myself and I can say that I have truly come to know Whose I am as I continue to journey and grow. I am a mother, a daughter, a sister, a friend, a lifelong student and a business owner. Each cap I wear, I wear with humility and all the strength I can muster. I am incredibly grateful for all the roles God has entrusted to me. My life has been shaped and changed by life's experiences and lessons. Some challenges were, admittedly, a product of my own choices, while others were circumstantial. But every experience was an opportunity for character building and I am grateful for it all. They have moulded me into who I am today.

This is my story of deep surrender and victory as I sought God's kingdom through adversity. I have come to learn that my valley is not my destination. Despite how helpless you may feel, your story (like mine) is not over – just leave the pen in the Master's hand as He rewrites your story. He is not done yet. Romans 8:28 says, *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* I am ready for what's next. In this season of my life, I am trusting God for that which seems impossible. "Widow" does not define me. I am a child of God. I am called. I am loved. I am chosen and set apart. I know who I am. I am excited for what lies ahead as I wait expectantly for all my hopes and dreams to come to life!

Anusha Gowriah is a mom, soon to be grandmom, businesswoman, lover of life and adventure, and a lifelong student. She loves to serve at church where she has been a partner at Rivers Church for nearly twenty years!







Melishinj

When I was a little girl, I was very sporty and loved the outdoors. I preferred shorts and takkies rather than dresses and fancy shoes. I played soccer with my brother, rode bikes and rolled in the sand. I was labelled a “tomboy” – a girl who enjoys things that society thinks are more suited to or typical of boys. At the time, I remember thinking that maybe I was meant to be a boy. The stereotypical girl was into dresses, playing with dolls and wearing make-up, and I did not fit that mould.

The thought that I was meant to be a boy became a belief and turned into a desire. I wanted to be a boy. I believed boys had been given the better end of the deal, and I had been short-changed. I didn't always want to play with tea sets and Barbie dolls. I preferred practising my karate moves on my brother and showing off my fighting skills. I dressed like a boy, I acted like a boy, and when I finished school, I joined the South African Horse Racing Academy, where I made history by qualifying as the first South African Indian female jockey. I was soaked in a male-dominated sport which fueled my desire to behave more like the guys around me.

At the academy, I was introduced to people from all walks of life, and I got involved in friendships that were very worldly. I was exposed to same-sex relationships, and they were presented as normal and okay. I was told it was okay to be attracted to both boys and girls, especially if you feel like you're a bit more boyish. I grew up in a Tamil home, so I knew nothing about the Bible and God's way of doing life. My parents were very conservative and raised us with good morals and values. However, I decided I could adapt my values along the way and live my life as I felt.

Even though I was exposed to worldly views at the racing academy, there was also a group of youth leaders who exposed me to church and introduced me to Jesus. I was seventeen years old when I gave my life to Christ. I fell in love with Him

instantly! I had heard about Jesus prior to this but never really encountered Him. The first time I would say “I met with the Lord” was on a Friday evening in the communal dormitory lounge at the racing academy when a youth group came to talk to us about Him. They did this regularly, but I was new and this was my ‘meet-cute’. A *meet-cute* is a scene in a movie where two people, who will later form a romantic relationship, meet for the first time. That evening was my first encounter with the Lord, and it led to an intimate relationship with Him. I had some incredible moments with Jesus in my dormitory – I worshipped Him, read the Bible and was on fire for Him, but like most of the relationships I had been in, the fire started to fizzle. I had no one to teach me how to do relationships right, I didn't attend church regularly and I didn't know what it meant to pursue Christ. My newfound love for the Lord slowly disappeared as I continued to live for myself.

I fumbled for a few years and found myself in a really dark place in my life. I made bad relationship and lifestyle choices, including sexual immorality, smoking and drinking. My darkest moment, which is honestly the biggest regret of my life, was falling pregnant outside of wedlock and choosing to have an abortion. This was my ultimate low! Just writing about it brings tears to my eyes as I remember the feelings of complete loss, loneliness, confusion, pain and guilt. I had no idea who I was or what my purpose was. I was a broken, lost young girl in a very dark world. I had the wrong voices speaking into my life, telling me I had made the right decision, promising me that everything would be alright, but it just wasn't... UNTIL the day my family received an invite from my uncle to come and visit a church called Rivers. That invite was the change agent in my life! It was like being handed a torch in the middle of a dark, dark place, and when I took that step and went to church, the torch was turned on! The moment I walked into Rivers Church, I saw the light and I felt the incredible presence of Jesus. I remember recommitting my life to the Lord at the beginning of the service during worship. I sobbed in repentance. The presence of the Lord was the light I needed. His LIGHT brought a sense of hope back into my life and renewed hope for my





future. His LIGHT revealed my mistakes and made me deal with them because it exposed the things I was trying to cover up in the dark. I decided then that I never wanted to be without His LIGHT again, and I planted myself at Rivers. I committed to volunteering, to keep growing in my understanding of the Bible, and learning how to live life right. In doing this, I found joy in being a girl. At every Sisters meeting, I was strengthened and empowered by the Word of God to embrace being a daughter of the King. I tried to swap out my takkies for heels but they didn't suit me, so I settled for boots! I realised that there was absolutely nothing wrong with being a sporty, strong, go-getter female – it didn't make me any less of a girl.

The moment I learnt that God does not make mistakes and that He created me on purpose for a purpose, I started growing and my life turned around. I started volunteering in Kidszone, joined a connect group and I made myself available to serve in church whenever I could. I decided to soak myself in anything and everything that would draw me closer to God. This, in turn, positioned me around other Christians, especially ladies, with whom I got to build friendships, and the more I built godly friendships, the more I realised we are all different and unique, made by God for His purposes. My circle of friends and the people speaking into my life changed. I found that walking this journey of salvation was done better with good, godly company. The new ladies in my life helped keep me accountable. They sharpened my understanding of the Word, encouraged me and corrected me when needed. This was the very thing I needed to grow as a Christian and what I still need to keep growing.

I met a wonderful guy in church who served in the coffee shop, and a few years later we got married. This year we celebrated eight years of marriage and we now have three healthy, happy children.

The Lord has transformed me from a little tomboy, a karate kid who rode horses, to a wife, mother and full-time daughter of the King! I literally see my life with Christ as a big love story: "I met You, I fell in love with You, and I was stupid and ignorant and walked away from You (had an affair with the world). Then You drew me back to You. I realised my mistakes and recommitted myself to You in marriage (the moment I planted myself in church), and I have been walking with You faithfully since then! Our relationship is a work in progress, like any marriage, but I'm all in and there's no turning back!"

Ps Melishini Kuppaswami is a happily married mother of three in full-time ministry at Rivers Durban North. She loves the outdoors, arts and crafts and creating fun memories with her family.

Sibongile



I came to know Christ and gave my life to Him in 2005, after attending Rivers Church only twice. I knew I had found a home where I belonged, during a time when I was desperate to find my identity. I grew up going to church but something just felt different when I experienced Rivers Church.

In 2007 I met a gentleman at my cousin's funeral. We started dating after a couple of coffees, dinners and hang outs with mutual crowds. He was always surprised at how I refused to waiver on my Sunday morning appointment at church, no matter how glamorous or fancy the activity he offered to replace church would be. My appointment in God's house, as I would call it, would even impact what time I went back home to be in bed on a Saturday evening.

One day, out of curiosity, he asked to join me at church. To his surprise, he enjoyed it, even though he was quite nervous and literally shaking as he walked through the doors of Rivers Church. You see, he never grew up in church. In fact, he was raised with the belief that church was a waste of time and just a money-making business. But my Sunday appointment in God's house soon became one of our weekend appointments, and we both really looked forward to it.

It didn't take us long to realise that we wanted to start a life together, so we often got into "life planning conversations". It made sense for us; we were friends, we enjoyed each other's company, we both got saved and we were sure of what we wanted. He wasted no time in asking my parents for my hand in marriage, following our traditional lobola custom. Despite the regular family politics and dynamics, it was an overall good process.

Shortly after paying lobola, after a visit to my gynae, I received some unfortunate news. I was told that due to the bad endometriosis I had recovered from, my fallopian tubes had been damaged and blocked, such that I would never be able to conceive a child naturally. A second opinion and further tests confirmed this. I was devastated! How was I going to have kids with IVF being so expensive and not even guaranteed, and what was my fiancé going to say? At the time I was close to someone who had been trying for ten years and their journey of infertility had been painful to witness. Be it as it may, I had to be honest with my future husband, and his response was not what I had expected. To my surprise, he was the light I needed at that very moment. He reminded me of God being a miracle worker and that the doctors' reports were not final – a message he had heard in church. His encouragement reminded me that God's light shines through any circumstance. What was even more encouraging was that God was using this man, who did not grow up in church and had only recently been saved, to remind me, who had grown up in church and had been saved

long before him, that I needed to look up to the light and not at the darkness of my circumstances.

About a month later, in church, all those struggling to have children were asked to lift their hands for prayer. I nudged my then fiancé so hard he nearly fell over and I said, "Don't lift your hand, please. We are not married yet, remember!" Well, he did not listen and proceeded to lift his hand anyway, because he knew my medical history. Before I knew it, Ps Wilma locked eyes with us, walked towards us and prayed over us. I obviously felt very awkward, thinking, "We are still to be married," but I received her prayer nonetheless.

Fast forward to today and I am happy to say that we have two living miracles, a girl and a boy, who were both conceived 100% naturally! Our marriage has been so blessed. This is evidence that indeed God has the final say.

In the last two and a half to three years, our marriage has been through a tough season with a number of issues from grief, to depression, addiction, anxiety and an intense amount of mental health challenges on both sides. I never imagined that I would ever struggle with mental health. It was always something someone over there would struggle with, not me or my family. There have been times when I wanted to throw in the towel. The weariness of the journey had taken such a toll on me physically that I had chronic headaches. I have had so many, "But God, why me?" moments and have often felt I have come to the end of myself, but then I look at my two miracle children and I'm reminded that this is not it, because God is still in it!

My children are living proof of God's light. They are walking miracles and reminders that the light keeps reappearing at the end of the tunnel, over and over again in any circumstance. I see a glimmer of hope in the sparkle of their eyes, especially during the most difficult moments in this season when their response has been a heartwarming, "Mama, let's pray."

God sends people our way to be the light when we are facing darkness, so that we can brighten each other up when we need it most. He has surrounded my family and I with so many people who have been an incredible reminder of His unconditional love, hope and support. Without them, our circumstances would be completely different. I would have given up. They have been God's light to me in my darkness.

The opposite of receiving God's light is flipping the script and being God's light right in the middle of your own circumstances. Continuing to volunteer at the Rivers Foundation over the years has allowed me to be His light in a small way. Serving has forced me to take my eyes off myself and my circumstances, and to focus on being the salt and light that God intended me

to be to others. It always leaves me feeling such a sense of purpose, way beyond my own life. I believe that everyone should serve, whether it is at your local church or in your community. Serving is a rewarding gift in itself.

Another reminder of God's light holding me up is the incredible amount of blessing in my career and business life. In the time that I had been extremely challenged in one of the most important areas of my life, God has blessed me beyond measure in my work and business opportunities. I have been promoted and seen increase and favour in so many aspects. Yes, like any human, it has sometimes caused me to ask, "How could this one part of my life be going so extremely well but this other one be so challenged?" I suppose this is the very thing that Jesus, the light of the world, spoke about when He said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NIV). It is really our choice to hold on to that and live it out with conviction.

I often ask myself how those who don't know Jesus do it. But for as long as they don't know Jesus, our work is not finished yet. We are to be light and fishers of men through our own example of the light in our lives that shines to attract others to Him, even if it is just one person. After all, He is the One who never leaves the one behind.

To my fellow Sisters of Africa, God needs you right where you are in this moment or season. Don't question. Just be still and listen. You are the very light He needs in this fallen world. It might look like just a little light, but He can make that little light go a very long way.

I may not know the outcome of every circumstance but I will continue to trust God and grab hold of the light He sends my way, knowing that Jesus, the light of the world, holds it all for me!

Sibongile Thekiso, known by most as Sibi or Sibs, is proudly and loudly a Jesus lover and child of God! She is a wife and a mum of two. She has been working in the marketing communications and banking industries for over sixteen years and is also part of the Rivers Church volunteer army.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a purple textured sweater, has her arms raised in a gesture of prayer or praise. She is looking upwards with a serene expression. In the foreground, the back of a small, fluffy brown dog is visible. The background is a bright, hazy sky with soft light rays.

The Lord
is my
light
Psalm 27:1 NIV and my
salvation
whom shall I fear?



2022



nurture

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RIVERS.

CHURCH

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