

SISTERS

OF AFRICA 2026

15 - 17 SEPTEMBER
17 - 19 SEPTEMBER



Psalms 126:5-6 NLT

Those who
plant in tears

will harvest with
shouts of **JOY**



SISTERS OF AFRICA 2026

TUESDAY TO THURSDAY
CONFERENCE 1
15 - 17 SEPTEMBER

THURSDAY TO SATURDAY
CONFERENCE 2
17 - 19 SEPTEMBER
(AT CAPACITY)

YOUR HOSTS
WILMA OLIVIER
CLAIRE OLIVIER

INTERNATIONAL GUEST SPEAKERS
SHEILA GERALD (USA)
ONEKA McCLELLAN (USA)
JODI GERALD CAMERON (USA)

RESTORING JOY



www.rivers.church





Let us PRAY

Did you know that our prayers can move mountains? Before reading our 2026 Sisters of Africa magazine, please pray for us as we and our guest speakers prepare for the two conferences this year. We want to bathe Sisters of Africa in prayer and trust God for our best conferences yet. Please ask God for many salvations and for breakthrough in women's lives.

We will pray for every delegate who has registered and who is still to register, that the Lord will hear the cry of their hearts, whatever their needs will be. We will believe with you, and we ask you to believe with us, as we trust our Lord to answer our prayers. For those who may say, 'Lord, help my faith because my need is so great,' please know that He will.

Here is a scripture that will help encourage you, dear sister:

Matthew 17:20 (NIV) "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."



Come and CELEBRATE SISTERHOOD with us in September!

Hello God's Gorgeous Girls and welcome to your Sisters of Africa Women's Conference magazine. We are thrilled that it made its way to you! This magazine is also your conference invitation, so be sure to invite others. Our annual conference planning is well under way and all you have to do is make sure you are registered and then you will be able to come and take your seat. Why not register yourself and a friend so you can enjoy all that God will do for us gorgeous girls together. Should you be coming 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.

It is hard to believe that we are celebrating 26 years and as our journey continues to unfold, we are amazed at the goodness of our God. This year, it is my pleasure to announce that Ps Claire Olivier, my daughter-in-love, newly ordained Senior Pastor, is hosting with me as we are in a season of transition.

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 invite women of influence in the Kingdom to minister to us, and our team will also share practical and inspirational messages to build you up.

Our theme of Restoring Joy has been a blessing this year and we will continue to unpack biblical examples of how to restore joy.

Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV) "Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

Love and blessings,
Wilma Olivier
Conference Host

Conference INFORMATION

We are so excited for our 2026 Sisters of Africa and Kids Africa Conferences! This year we have two back-on-back conferences once again, with Conference One running from Tuesday, 15th September until Thursday, 17th September; and Conference Two running from Thursday afternoon, 17th September until Saturday, 19th September. Please note that while Conference Two is already at full capacity, we still have space for you in Conference One.

We look forward to our time together and to hearing from our guest speakers. We are excited to welcome Jodi Gerald Cameron, who will be speaking at our conferences for the first time. We're also excited to hear from two friends of Rivers Church, Sheila Gerald and Oneka McClellan, plus our conference hosts, Wilma Olivier and Claire Olivier.

If you have any questions regarding this year's conferences, check out our FAQs below, and if there is anything else you're not sure about, please email conferences@rivers.church.

HOW DO I REGISTER?

You can register online at www.rivers.church/soa26/, on the Rivers App, or at an Information Counter at any of our Rivers Church campuses.

HOW WILL I KNOW THAT I AM REGISTERED?

If you have registered already, you would have received a confirmation email by now. If not, please email our conference team on conferences@rivers.church or visit an Info Counter at your Rivers Church campus.

CAN I BRING MY BABY TO CONFERENCE?

Absolutely! We have fully equipped Parents Rooms available for moms with babies. We also have allocated seats in the main auditorium for moms with infants, with easy access to the Parents Rooms.

IS THERE AN AGE LIMIT?

Sisters of Africa Conference is open to women from age 13/14, while Kids Africa Conference is tailored for kids aged 12 months to Grade 7.

WILL KIDS AFRICA CONFERENCE BE RUNNING DURING BOTH SISTERS OF AFRICA CONFERENCES?

Kids Africa Conference will only run during Conference Two, from Thursday, 17th September to Saturday, 19th September.

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

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

CAN I REGISTER FOR SPECIFIC DAYS OR SESSIONS ONLY?

No. Your conference registration covers all conference sessions and you are welcome to attend sessions according to your availability.

IS THERE FOOD ON-SITE?

As part of your conference fee, we will be offering a snack pack and lunch pack. Vegetarian options will be available. There will also be a variety of food options available to purchase on-site at the Rivers Coffee Shop and at various food vendors.

WHAT WILL THE WEATHER BE LIKE?

September is the beginning of our Spring time. Joburg temperatures may range from 9-24 degrees Celsius, with possible rain showers. Indoors, all venues are air-conditioned, so be sure to bring a warm top.

IS THERE WHEELCHAIR ACCESS OR ELDERLY ASSISTANCE?

Wheelchair access is available. Should you require any further assistance, please let us know in advance by emailing conferences@rivers.church by Thursday, 6th August 2026 so that we are aware of your needs and can best assist you.

CAN I TAKE SOMEONE'S SEAT IF THEY DO NOT ATTEND THAT DAY?

No. The conference registration is not transferable once check-in has taken place. You will not be able to gain access to the conference venue on another person's registration. Should you choose to attend the conference after check-in has taken place, you would need to purchase a new registration.

CAN I BUY SOMEONE'S TICKET IF THEY ARE NOT ATTENDING ANYMORE? WHAT IS THE PROCESS?

Should you want to take over someone else's registration, you are welcome to contact the person directly. The conference team does not facilitate this process on your behalf. The original registration holder must email the conference team at conferences@rivers.church for the transfer to be processed, to ensure a smooth check-in process and parking allocation.



RESTORING JOY

THE JOY OF THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH
NEHEMIAH 8:10 NIV

KIDS AFRICA Conference 2026

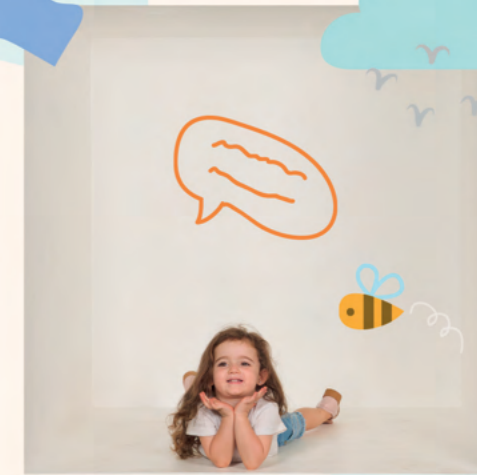
We are so excited for Kids Africa Conference taking place from the 17th to the 19th of September 2026.

What is Kids Africa Conference? Kids Africa is our annual conference, tailored for children aged 12 months to Grade 7 (age 13). It runs alongside Sisters of Africa Conference Two, and is an opportunity for your children to have their own conference experience.

Your children will have fun learning about restoring joy through age appropriate and impactful ministry. We have an action-packed programme which includes the Word, worship, prayer, games, arts and crafts, time with their friends and so much more. Each child will have an opportunity to learn about God and grow in their faith! Your children will be cared for by our team of incredible volunteers and will be provided with a light meal/snacks throughout conference.

Make sure to register your children early so that they don't miss out on this fun, faith filled kids conference! We look forward to welcoming them to Kids Africa 2026.

Moms, remember that there will be no Kids Africa during Sisters of Africa Conference One, running from the 15th to the 17th of September 2026.





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I have
**REJOICED
IN YOUR
LAWS**

as much as in riches

Psalm 119:14 NLT









A cheerful look brings

JOY

to the heart

Proverbs 15:30 NLT





RESTORE TO ME THE



JOY OF YOUR SALVATION

Wilma Olivier

As I look back now after 52 years, there will be many times that we need to pray and ask the Lord to restore to us the joy of our salvation. Life gets busy and it takes turns sometimes for the worst and sometimes for the better as we will go through many seasons in our lifetime. Seasons of disappointment, fear, pain, heartache, illness and loss can affect this joy of the Lord. If we want to have joy restored, it means that we can lose our joy.

I have also learnt that if the joy of our salvation is restored, then every other part of our lives will be joyful also.

There are various reasons besides the difficult seasons why we need to have the joy of our salvation restored. We can grow cold in the things of God. Our hearts can turn again towards the world and the values of the world. Some may meet a man who does not share their biblical values, and they choose the man and eventually give up on God. I have seen this time and time again. We also struggle with guilt, shame or the weight of past sins.

This can lead to us neglecting the reading of the Bible, praying and depending on God. We stop going to church and having fellowship with godly friends and before we know it, we have turned our backs on Jesus and given up serving Him. But one of the most common reasons for losing the joy of our salvation is when we sin against God.

Can you remember the day you received Jesus as your Lord and Saviour? And if you are still thinking about receiving Him into your life, I pray you will do so soon because it is the most important decision we will ever make. I remember the evening my husband and I gave our hearts to Jesus and invited Him to come into our lives. I did not understand everything about salvation and serving God that night, but I understood from the message that the pastor preached, that I was a lost sinner and that Jesus died for my sins on the cross because He loved the people of this world and wanted to save their souls from destruction. I felt like I mattered, I felt included and loved. Something that has never left me. My heart was filled with joy unspeakable, and we both rushed to my mother's place because our 6 month old baby boy was being taken care of by her while we went to church. When we got to her place, I could not stop sharing about what had just taken place to the point that my mom was concerned that we had joined a cult. I laughed and cried at the same time. She eventually realised that something wonderful had taken place and that there was no doubt that something happened to fill me with so much joy. It is what the Bible calls the joy of our salvation. This was not happiness, this was joy, a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Now, we know that we will never stop sinning because even Jesus taught us to pray daily that the Lord should forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. We should also pray daily that we will not fall into temptation. *Matthew 6:12-13 (TLB)* "And forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. Don't bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One. Amen."

We can also grieve the Holy Spirit when we sin. Meaning we bring sorrow to God by our sinfulness and wrong attitudes. *Ephesians 4:30-32 (NIV)* "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

The good news is, that the Holy Spirit does not leave us when we sin. We need the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sin. The Holy Spirit is part of restoring the joy of our salvation. The best example of restoring joy is found in Psalm 51.

Remember David when he sinned against God with Bathsheba? (2 Samuel 11) He blew it. We also learn that the problem with sin is, it usually starts with one indiscretion and then it gets out of hand with lies and a web of sin. David schemed to cover his sin, because when he found out that Bathsheba fell pregnant, David devised a plan to have Uriah, her husband killed. He had hoped that Uriah would sleep with her first, but that did not happen. David was then confronted by the prophet Nathan who pointed out to him that he had severely sinned against God. David confessed and repented of his sins. David then did what he did so well. He wrote a psalm and we can learn so much from this psalm which is also a prayer.

Now we all sin and fall short, and this is not perhaps the kind of sin you or I may fall into, but the point is, that we can be close to God and gradually lose our way and lose our joy in Him either by our actions or our neglect of God.

Psalm 51:1-19 (NIV): "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar."

Here are a few truths we can learn from David:

Joy is a spiritual part of being child of God

When we look at the life of David, he served the Lord with joy. He knew that joy was more than a feeling. He knew the difference between happiness and joy. Joy is spiritual. We read in Galatians 5 that joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. David was known to be a man after God's own heart. That means he understood the majesty of God. He understood the character and nature of God and what God desired from him and knew full well what pleased God. He wrote songs of joy. *Psalm 16:11 (NLT2)* "You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever." *Psalm 28:7 (NLT2)* "The LORD is my strength and shield. I trust him with all my heart. He

helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving." And then finally when he came to this terrible season in his life and repented, he cried out to God and wrote: *Psalm 51:11, 12 (NIV)* "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." More than anything, David wanted the joy of his salvation restored.

Losing our joy turns to a state of mourning

David was in a deep state of regret and mourning. He lost more than his joy. He lost peace and fellowship with God. He cut himself off from God. That is what happens when we sin, we cut ourselves off from the Lord. But here again, was it not David who wrote Ps 30? *Psalm 30:11 (NLT2)* "You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy." What we learn from David's loss of joy is that God is the only one we can turn to and He is the only one who can restore our joy.

David knew what to do and repented of his sin

The Bible is full of the word repent. To repent is to have a sense of deep regret and remorse for words or actions, coupled with a turning away from that behaviour and going in the right direction to wholeness. The word repent is mentioned 42 times in the O.T. and 64 times in the N.T. If I think of the night that I gave my heart to Jesus and repented of my sin, that is when His joy filled and flooded my heart.

Receive God's forgiveness and mercy

2 Samuel 12:13 (NLT2) "Then David confessed to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' Nathan replied, 'Yes, but the LORD has forgiven you, and you won't die for this sin.'" David also understood this well when he wrote in: *Psalm 32:1-2 (NLT2)* "Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!" God will forgive

us, but, sadly, there will be times when we have to face the consequences of our sin. Sin is a serious thing. It is the biggest problem in this world. There will always be consequences, but even then, God will give us grace and strength. David was told that sadly the child conceived from his adultery will die. But then God in his grace allowed David to marry the widow Bathsheba, and their next child was Solomon who became king after David.

Do you need to have the joy of your salvation restored? When last did you cry out to the Lord in desperation like David did?

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you.

Psalm 51: 10-13 (NIV)

Pray it now, let nothing stop you and let the joy of God's salvation be restored to you. Amen.

Ps Wilma is the Founding Pastor of Rivers Church, alongside her husband, Ps André, after being Senior Pastors since 1992. They have grown the church from just 70 people into a multi-campus church of thousands. She has a passion to build into women's lives and grew a successful women's ministry called Sisters. She is also the founder and host of the annual Sisters of Africa Women's Conference, through which she mentors, motivates and mobilises women from all walks of life to be all they can be for the cause of Christ. Ps Wilma is the author of Small Beginnings, Life as a Chocolate Cake, and Keep Hope Alive.

Psalm 51:12 NIV

RESTORE to me
THE JOY of your
salvation and grant me a
willing spirit to sustain me



YOUR TIME IS NOW

*Excerpt from **Born Royal** by Ps Oneka McClellan*

I remember when I became a mom. I remember what I thought it would look like. I remember all the things I saw in magazines (there was no Instagram at the time), and I remember seeing moms fit back in their jeans two days to two weeks after giving birth. I remember everyone telling me how incredible it would be and all the love I would have and how I would fall more in love with my husband. And all those things are true.

But what I didn't know, what no one told me, was how sleep deprivation would turn into anxiety. No one told me that our firstborn would cry for no reason or that I would hear crying even when he wasn't. No one told me how hard my first day of solo parenting would be when my husband went back to work. No one told me how difficult breastfeeding could be or about the challenges of recovering from a C-section while also caring for one of the greatest gifts in my life. My reality was the opposite of the pictures I saw, the opposite of the stories I was told. I felt like a failure because my life wasn't matching up to the examples I saw in magazines.

So do you make it through the sleepless nights? You sure do. Do you eventually get your body back? It's totally possible in many cases. But is it still hard eighteen years in? Heck, yes. Is it the most rewarding delight and the joy of my heart? You'd better believe it. I say all of this not to scare you but to prepare you for when what you face is the opposite of what you feel prepared for. You'll be stronger on the other side. You'll be able to hold the hand of moms that come after you, and you'll wake up a new kind of fight and determination that you never knew you had.

For many of us, the tension we carry every day is deep and painful. Maybe we don't know what we'll encounter at home, at work, or at school from a roommate, friend, spouse, boyfriend, or colleague. We might feel confident and strong one day, while on other days we'll feel overwhelmed and think, I'm going to sink under all this pressure! Can you relate?

For some of us, this pressure manifests in our own minds, in our thoughts. Many of us battle negative thinking constantly, especially in today's world, in which we're bombarded by bad news—it comes at us from all sides. On the outside, we might look like we're doing just fine, but inside, our minds are waging war. In fact, we may feel the physical effects of all this negativity in our bodies, with our health taking a hit. One day we might receive a positive health report from the doctor, and we feel fantastic. But after a particularly stressful season, we might receive a very different report on our health. We all face struggles in different ways.

The Bible gives us story after story of how God showed up for people who felt unprepared.

When Joshua took over the leadership of Israel after Moses died, God told him, *"Be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go"* (Joshua 1:9).

To the Israelites taken captive and forced to live in the Babylonian Empire far from their homeland, who surely felt unprepared for and confused about their new life, God said, *"I know the plans I have for you. . . . They are plans for good and not for disaster, to*



give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen” (Jeremiah 29:11–12).

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, she felt confused and disturbed about how her life may be changing, but the angel had said, “*Don’t be afraid, Mary*” (Luke 1:30) and promised the Holy Spirit would come to her (*verse 35*).

And when Jesus ascended, leaving the disciples to carry out His work on earth with the Holy Spirit—and can you imagine the state of their emotions?—Jesus reassured them: “*Be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20).

I give the same message to you, reader: God is with you. God is with you.

He’s with you on your good days and your bad days. He’s with you when you have it all together and when you feel like you’re about to lose your mind.

Sometimes you just have to know that God is with you and that He is there to bring you peace, grace, strength, and hope. God also reminds you that no matter what battle you are currently facing or will face in the future, He sent His Son in the form of a baby, and this promise is just as relevant to your life today as it was yesterday.

I think sometimes we forget about the hope of the world: Jesus is here with us now.

The road wasn’t easy for Joshua, the Israelites, Mary, or the disciples, but what might have felt like the wrong time was truly the right time.

I love Galatians 4:4: “*When the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman.*” Look at that first part: “*When the right time came.*” When I read those words, I recalled the time many years ago when

God placed a dream in both my husband, Earl, and me to plant a church. While we were on staff at a church in Austin, a business leader came up to us and said, “I feel like you guys are supposed to go to this conference.” It was prophetic. He continued, “I just feel like I’m supposed to pay your way to go to London.” This offer was an out-of-the-blue blessing. My mother-in-law then paid for us to take our son, Parker, who was five years old at the time. So Earl and I packed our bags, bundled up our son, and caught a flight to London.

The first night we were there, Earl woke up in the middle of the night, having had a dream. He turned to me and said, “This sounds crazy, honestly, but I feel like we’re supposed to start a church.” “I’ve known that since I met you in college,” I responded. “I’m so glad you got that revelation.”

But we waited a few years before we moved on that dream to plant our church, Shoreline City Church. We could have gone to Dallas prematurely, but we waited and prayed and planned, then went at the appointed time. At just the right time, God assembled a team. At just the right time, He provided finances, volunteers, and more. At just the right time, He provided a movie theater when we needed a second building. At just the right time, He provided a cute little church on Town North when we needed a third building. And at just the right time, He provided our current building.

After experiencing every step in this miraculous journey, I can tell you with confidence that God is in control of every moment of your life. Every single thing that you’re waiting, trusting, and believing for—He’s already got it all worked out. And guess what? It’s going to turn out even better than you’re thinking or dreaming today.

Just because we felt ready didn’t mean we were ready. We wanted to get married a year before it was truly time. We wanted to launch our church a year or two before it was truly time. I’m so glad we had people who had gone before us praying for us and giving us wisdom. We thought we were ready, but in reality, we needed more time to prepare for what we were stepping into. Now eleven years into leading our church, I can truly say that slow-cooking our way to becoming pastors prepared us for all the curveballs we encountered in starting something from the ground up and leading our

church family through Covid—all while raising our own family.

How do we know if we’re ready? I’ve learned to trust I’m ready to move forward after praying and directly asking God if the timing is right, turning to Scripture and reviewing the promises in His Word, and consulting trusted mentors and friends. There is such wisdom in the advice of respected and trusted role models.

And what do we do if we jump too soon and find ourselves in over our heads? Ask for help, and remember that His grace is more than sufficient. He will always send you guidance when you ask for it.

So find rest in knowing that whether you feel prepared or unprepared, your heavenly Father has you and will never fail you.

So, when it comes to timing, we don’t need to force it. I’m so glad we didn’t rush the dream and move to Dallas two years earlier, because I wouldn’t have been ready. Starting a church is real—like, real. I didn’t know how much faith or strength or backbone I would need for the journey. I didn’t realize just how much time I would need to spend on my face crying out to God. So I’m glad we moved when it was God’s perfect time.

We’re called to give life to powerful things. You know it’s true, because God chose a woman to bring Jesus to this earth. He chose a woman because He knew that He could trust her to nurture this promise. What a calling. Yet so many of us women constantly deal with insecurity, doubt, fear, and backbiting. We experience bullying and judgment from other women and from our own internal critics every day. If women could simply remember what we’re capable of bringing forth into the world and recall that God picked a woman to bring the Son of God to the earth, I believe that realization would give us power and confidence.

If women remembered what we’re capable of bringing forth into the world, it would give us power and confidence. Sin came into this world through a woman in the Garden of Eden, but

Jesus, who saves us from sin, also came into this world through a woman. Meditate on that truth for a moment. I think about those who have made lots of mistakes, myself included. I think about those who feel discounted, forgotten, or as though they can’t be used by God. Maybe you think that, because of the choices you’ve made, God can’t work through you to touch someone else, change their life, or make a difference. You’d be wrong, my friend. I had you on my mind as I wrote this chapter.

Here’s the deal:
He can redeem your past
and use it for His glory.

You may be reading this and feeling guilty, thinking about how you messed up last night, but God can flip your situation and give you a fresh start right now. Any time, any place. You may be thinking, I’m going to give up on God. If He doesn’t show up, I’m just going to give up. Right now, I promise you, God can flip your situation around. He can change things before your eyes at exactly the right time. If you’re waiting for God to show up, for a sign from Him, these words are that sign!

Ps Oneka, alongside her husband Ps Earl, is the Lead Pastors of Shoreline City Church with campuses locally and globally. 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. She is also the author of, Born of A Woman and newly released Born Royal. Ps Oneka’s dynamic personality, creative vision, prophetic gift and compassion for the ‘one’ has propelled countless lives, marriages, teams and churches into their God-given destiny. Behind the scenes, she can be found loving her three kids – Parker, Grayson and Elle – and cheering on her husband of 29 years.



THE POWER OF A WOMAN

Sheila Gerald

I want to take you into a story in *2 Samuel 20*. I heard this story growing up and fell in love with it.

I'm not talking to just to women today. I hope to also ignite something in the men, into the youth, and the young men and women. I hope to put a word into your spirit to ignite and illuminate something within you, that you've got something to do. My mission statement – I wake up every morning and I live to ignite and illuminate purpose in the lives of others. On my bad days, when I'm grouchy and anxious, it's because I haven't ignited and illuminated purpose in somebody's life. I literally look people in the eye and try to inspire them and illuminate and ignite something within them.

So I want to talk to you today about the power of a woman. The story goes like this, from *2 Samuel 20:16* "Then a wise woman called from the city, 'Listen! Listen! Tell Joab, 'Come here, that I may speak to you.'"

Now, this city where she wanted to talk to Joab was about to be destroyed. It was about to be demolished. Joab had brought an army of men to the wall of the city. The walls of the city back in those days were not like the little gates or walls that we have around homes today. Some of them were even 30 feet wide. Joab showed up probably weeks before she decides to come to the top of the wall and call down for him. She couldn't go out the gates of the city because if she had, Joab's army would have shoved their way through and they would have destroyed the city right away. So the wise woman, who doesn't have a name in the Bible – but I'm sure she had a great name – goes to the wall and says, "Bring Joab over here! I want to talk

to him." Joab had been there pounding away, trying to hit the walls to get them to come down. Brick by brick he tried to get something to loosen up. He wanted to get into that city because there was a rebellious man who had risen up and gathered an army of men, and was trying to destroy King David and his army.

So she got out to the top of the wall and told them to bring Joab because she wanted to talk to him. So they brought Joab and it says in verse 17, "And he came near her, and the woman said, 'Are you Joab?'" He answered, "I am." Then she said to him, "Listen to the words of your servant." And he answered, "I am listening." That's a good man right there!

The wise woman collaborated with the men in her life

We have to collaborate with the men in our lives. Ladies, we're not here to compete, we're here to collaborate. Yes, we may not want to. I ask the Lord to shut my mouth at times and it's amazing what God can do. But men need women, and women need men. We're not the same. We're different.

Why is it that we sometimes make it our goal to try to conquer the man? We try to grasp anything we can to make him feel like we're the boss and he's not. And when we compete with them, we're chipping away just a little at a time, and before you know it, they're sitting on the couch or on their lazy boy seat, totally emasculated.

I'm telling you, it's not easy when you're a strong woman because I want my way a whole lot. So this is a sermon that I have to preach to myself. We've been married 45 years, so if I can learn to do some things, then I know you can too, and you can stay

together that long. Wives, sometimes we want to conquer but we need to be working together with the men because there's more strength when we're together.

So, the woman didn't threaten Joab. She didn't come to the wall and say, "Hey, listen, if you don't listen to me, I've got some other women and they're going to come and tear your head off!" She didn't do that. She came humbly and said, "Your servant. You serve King David. King David has asked you to come and get this rebellious man and kill him, and he is in our city. This is our city which we treasure, and we have children in here. On behalf of our city and our children whom we love, the people we love, the community we love, we want to do anything we can, so let's have this conversation. Can we talk about this, Joab?" So I love when he replied, "I'm listening."

So now men, there is something you have to understand, you have to be a man of action who is not passive to problems. Where the wise woman was trying to save the city, those men needed to realize that there was a problem and that they needed to rescue their city. They needed somebody to help them rescue that city. Sheba was not the one to rescue the city because he could not get a mighty army as big as King David's army. So somebody needed to stand up and say, "Hey, there's going to be so much blood and there won't even be a city left here. They're going to tear these walls down. We got to do something about it!"

The wise woman spoke up for her city

So the wise woman said in verse 18, "They used to say in former times, 'Let them but ask counsel at Abel,' and so they settled a matter." The city of Abel was known as the city to settle a matter. It was called the Mother City of Israel. You know how a child will come and say, "Mom, what do you think about this? What should I do about this?"

People used to come to the city of Abel and they would say, "We have this decision to make. What should we do?" This was a wise city where things could be taken care of, and where situations could be handled. And so she pleaded on their behalf.

She says to Joab in verse 19, "You seek to destroy a

city that is a mother in Israel. Why will you swallow up the heritage of the Lord?" So the wise woman spoke up for her city. "This is a great city. This is a place where answers are made for people. They get decisions made. There are things that happen in the city that don't happen in any other city in Israel. We've got to guard this city, Joab. There are amazing children that are growing up here. They are going to be statesmen. They are going to be stateswomen. They are going to be politicians for God. They are going to stand up for God. We've got to treasure this city." So she was an advocate for her city, a woman who was determined not to waste her power.

Sometimes as women we murmur and complain. Don't waste your power, women. We've got the power to lift, to encourage, to inspire. Look at it like this – and this is probably going to be a little deep for some of y'all – you know a power socket that you plug a cord into? Women, you are that socket. When your energy is drained by murmuring and complaining, people need to plug in and feel a life-giving spirit because if mama's not happy, no one's happy. You are the environment. You are the thermometer keeper. You've got to wake up and decide, "Today I'm going to have some energy. I'm going to have some power, so that when my kids plug into me, when my co-workers need something, I'm going to have what I need to give out." I tell you, that's the most important thing that I have tried to do in my home. I have done everything I can, and when I did not feel like having energy, I faithed it till I made it. Shine bright in the darkness. Don't bring gloom and doom.

Let me finish up with verses 20-21, "Joab answered, 'Far be it from me, far be it, that I should swallow up or destroy! That is not true. But a man of the hill country of Ephraim, called Sheba the son of Bichri, has lifted up his hand against King David. Give up him alone, and I will withdraw from the city.' And the woman said to Joab, 'Behold, his head shall be thrown to you over the wall.'"

The wise woman stood up against Sheba

She went back into the city of Abel, gathered some of the men and said to them, "Hey guys, I've got a deal. Get your swords out. We'll get Sheba taken care of. Let's get him drunk." That's why we tell you

to be careful with alcohol! The city she was living in was about to be destroyed and the wise woman was credited with ending the rebellion. It was a just a short time but all she needed was to collaborate, to stand up, to complete and not to compete. Then all of a sudden, the head comes over the wall! Joab blows the trumpet and says, "Let's go, victory is ours! Let's take the head back to King David."

I just want to challenge everyone, that's the power of a woman, but it's also the power of the church. That's what happens when we come together and collaborate – moms and dads, teenagers, young and old. Let's not compete against each other or compare ourselves to each other. It's time we prophesy like never before, and begin to look at those young girls and young men, and begin to tell them what we see in them. Begin to tell them what the future has in store for them. Begin to tell them what the church is built on. It's time that we become those strong walls, that we guard and protect our children, our church and our community, and become a light that shines so brightly that people wonder what it is and that it starts spreading over our communities.

Ps Sheila, alongside her husband, Ps Kevin, is the Founder and Lead Pastor of Champions Centre, one of the largest congregations in the Pacific Northwest. Known for partnering with a broad range of church leaders from various doctrinal and denominational backgrounds through the Team Church Network, Pastors Sheila and Kevin believe in building up the local church. Ps Sheila is passionate about illuminating and igniting purpose in the lives of others. She lives in the land of coffee, mountains, and rain, and loves being a mom and grandma.



JOY KNOWING GOD IS SOVEREIGN

Claire Olivier

This year I turn 50 and I have no idea how I got here. I think God dialled the clock forward without me realising, as I went about the busyness of life.

It really is true that life is fleeting. As Solomon likes to remind us in the Bible, life is “but a vapor.” This is what makes it so precious. As I get older, I am grateful for every moment I get to enjoy, especially with my husband and kids.

Life has ups and downs, seasons of excitement, moments of the mundane and times of tribulation, but one thing is certain – God is ever-present and always in control. There’s great joy in knowing that He is sovereign.

Come what may, nothing is a surprise to Him and He doesn’t miss a thing. *Psalm 139:16 NLT* says, “You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.” This truth is such a comfort. It helps me realise that our lives are not random. Tomorrow is not a case of luck of the draw, and we don’t need to live hoping for the best, but instead we should live expecting the best! In *Psalm 31:14-15 TLB*, David says, “But I

am trusting you, O Lord... You alone are my God; my times are in your hands.”

Come rain or shine, our Father in Heaven is the Creator of it all. He is sovereign and He is faithful in every circumstance of life.

Expecting the best doesn’t mean living with your head in the sand. The reality of this life is that none of us escape trials and sorrow. We live in a fallen world, with much pain, but weeping always gives way to joy eventually. How we handle trials in life has a lot to do with our perspective. In every sad or disappointing situation, there’s always a flipside. When you don’t get that job you’ve been praying and hoping for, have you considered that perhaps you didn’t get it because God knows something you don’t, and He is protecting you? All that glitters is not gold... oftentimes we can’t see past the glitter, but God does.

I came to understand the importance of perspective after going through a series of tragedies. After my dad died in a car crash when I was 22 years old, all I could see was my loss. The loss of my dad, the loss of my family home, the loss of my security, the loss of the one person who had always been the glue in our family, and the loss of my life as I’d always known it. I remember nursing the fact that I had become an orphan. I was a grownup orphan,



but I was one nonetheless and it was my scary, new reality.

The greatest loss of my life, however, led to the greatest gain of my life. In my grief, I found myself searching for God and I found Him. I lost my earthly father but found my heavenly Father. As I started walking with Jesus, I began to see things differently. Sometime after giving my life to Christ, I had a revelation about my dad's death. My dad had lived as an atheist all his life, until about two months before he died. I didn't know this until the pastor who conducted his memorial, told us during the service. I didn't give it much thought at the time, but later I realised that in His grace, God snatched my father into His arms, before he had a chance to change his mind.

That may seem like a pessimistic thought, but here's the thing – one month before my dad was killed in the car crash, he had married a woman who'd also died in the accident with him. This lady was his third wife, since my dad had lost my mom many years earlier in a car accident, and then he lost my stepmom to cancer. This lady was a Christian and as a result, my dad had been going to church with her. Sadly, she had many unresolved problems and unfortunately took out her pain on my dad. I only realised the extent of the hurt he'd gone through, after they'd died. We found letters she'd written about their life together, and I heard eyewitness accounts of incidents during which she'd been incredibly unkind to my dad, who was one of the kindest people I've ever known.

Knowing my dad, he would have remained married to this lady for the rest of his life, and likely the latter part of his life would have been even more painful than the former. That thought is unbearable. I believe that God rescued my father from a life that had already been painful enough. The prophet Isaiah explains this in *Isaiah 57:1-2 NLT*, "Good people pass away; the godly often die before their time. But no one seems to care or wonder why. No one seems to understand that God is protecting them from the evil to come. For those who follow godly paths will rest in peace when they die." I had never read nor heard of this scripture when I had this realisation about my dad's death, yet everything it says speaks into what happened. My dad was only 56 years old when he died, and he was as healthy and as fit as they come. The timing seemed so wrong!

But when I realised that my dad had been spared further pain, it made some sense of the seemingly senseless tragedy. Discovering these verses in the Bible so many years later was surreal.

My dad's death helped me understand God's sovereignty.

God knows what we don't
and He works all things
together for the good of
those who love Him.

We won't always see it or understand it, but we need to trust that this is true. Having this revelation didn't remove the gaping hole in my heart, or eradicate my pain, but it gave me a peace, even relief, that my dad was better off. I had a very different perspective from which to look at things. My dad went into the arms of Jesus at just the right time. Had he not died, perhaps his freshly found faith would have waned, as he did life with a lady who wasn't living out her Christian faith. Perhaps she would've left him and caused him more sorrow, after losing his first two wives. I don't have the answers, but I do have a strong sense that it would not have gone well for him. When I consider that, I would choose that he be with Jesus rather than suffer on this side of eternity any day!

Life is short and we don't know what's up ahead, so we should make the most of the victories, savour good times and cherish good people. Matthew Henry describes life well - he says,

"Is it summer? It will be winter. Is it winter? Stay a while, and it will be summer. Every purpose has its time. The clearest sky will be clouded... Joy succeeds sorrow; and the most clouded sky will clear up... The sun will burst from behind the cloud. Those things which to us seem most casual and contingent

are, in the counsel and foreknowledge of God, punctually determined, and the very hour of them is fixed, and can neither be anticipated nor adjourned a moment."

Matthew Henry

Frustratingly, we cannot anticipate the times and we cannot postpone them. We must accept them as they come, trusting that God, in His sovereignty, knows and understands what we don't. Situations and circumstances change, but God does not. This truth gives me great joy! David declares his faith beautifully in *Psalm 55:16-19;22-23 NIV*, "As for me, I call to God, and the Lord saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. He rescues me unharmed from the battle waged against me. God, who is enthroned from of old, who does not change. Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken... as for me, I trust in you."

Ps Claire is the Senior Pastor of Rivers Church, alongside her husband of 24 years, Ps Adi. She's been part of the Rivers staff team for over 20 years, during which time they pioneered the Rivers Ballito campus for over five years, before moving back to Joburg to pastor our Kyalami campus. In February 2026, they became the Senior Pastors of Rivers Church. Ps Claire and Ps Adi have two amazing kids – Aiden, 21 years old, one of our worship leaders, and Chloé Rose, 14 years old (a miracle baby) who loves to dance and serves in Kidszone. Ps Claire is passionate about marriage and children, being the first congregation we are called to steward, as well as helping women find healing, wholeness and purpose in Christ, having experienced much tragedy at a young age. She believes all God's children have innate value, unique gifts to use for His glory, and are called to build His house.



Always be full of joy
in the Lord

I say it again **REJOICE!**

Philippians 4:4 NLT





RESTORING JOY: IT'S TIME TO COUNT YOURSELF IN

Jodi Gerald Cameron

I remember actively avoiding the lunchroom during my senior year of high school because I never felt like I fully fit anywhere.

I didn't feel like I belonged at the athletes' table, even though I was one. I didn't quite fit at the smart table, even though I got good grades. I wasn't really part of the in-crowd, but I didn't feel like an outcast either.

Looking back, I think I subconsciously counted myself out before anyone else had the chance.

Maybe you know that feeling. Not necessarily in a lunchroom, but in life.

You can be surrounded by people and still wonder where you belong. You can sit in a room full of women and quietly feel unseen. You can look successful on paper and still feel uncertain in your heart. You can be showing up for everyone else, carrying responsibility, doing what needs to be done, and still feel like somewhere along the way, joy slipped through your fingers.

That's why the theme Restoring Joy matters so much.

Because joy is not reserved for women who seem to have it all together. Joy is part of the inheritance of the daughters of God.

When Joy Gets Buried

Many women are not lacking joy because they are doing something wrong. Sometimes joy simply gets buried under the weight of life.
Buried under disappointment.
Buried under comparison.

Buried under regret.
Buried under exhaustion.
Buried under wounds no one else can see.

Joy doesn't always disappear in one dramatic moment. Sometimes it fades quietly through the ordinary grind of life. Responsibilities increase. Expectations rise. Prayers seem unanswered. Dreams get delayed. We keep going, but something inside us starts to dim.

David prayed in *Psalms 51:12*, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation." I love that word: "restore." Restore means something can return. What feels lost can be found. What feels dim can shine again. What feels dormant can come alive again.

That is good news for every woman who feels like joy has been buried somewhere beneath the realities of life.

Stop Counting Yourself Out

One of the quickest ways to lose joy is to disqualify yourself in your own mind like I did when I avoided the lunchroom at school.

In a world where it is common to count yourself out, why not choose to count yourself in?

Instead of assuming you don't belong, count yourself in.

Instead of believing you missed your chance, count yourself in.

Instead of thinking your best days belong to someone younger, prettier, wealthier, stronger, or more talented—count yourself in.

The enemy loves to whisper lies like these:

Too old.
Too broken.
Too overlooked.
Too busy.
Too ordinary.
Too late.

But God has always loved using people others would overlook. In the Bible, Ruth was a widowed foreigner with no visible future, yet God wrote her into the lineage of Jesus. Esther was an orphan girl in a foreign land, yet God positioned her for influence. Mary was a young woman from an unremarkable town, yet Heaven entrusted her with extraordinary purpose.

The pattern of Scripture is clear: God does not consult human limitation before releasing divine purpose. Sometimes joy begins to return the moment we stop agreeing with lies that disqualify us.

Your Past Is Not Your Prison

Everyone has a past. Some pasts carry pain. Some carry shame. Some carry disappointment. Some carry scars that others cannot see.

We all have moments we wish we could redo. Seasons we do not fully understand. Chapters we would never have chosen. But your past does not have the authority to define your future.

The Apostle Paul had a past marked by violence, yet God transformed him into one of the strongest voices of the New Testament. Peter denied Jesus publicly, yet Jesus restored him publicly. The woman at the well had relational brokenness in her story, yet she became a bold witness in her city.

God does not merely tolerate redeemed people. He uses them for His glory. Too many women keep reliving what Jesus already paid for. Yes, learn from the past. Yes, heal from the past. Yes, grow through the past. But do not build your home in the pain or disappointment of the past. God is not asking you to pretend nothing happened. He is inviting you to believe it is not the end of the story. Joy can be restored and grow when we stop living backward.

Joy Lives in the Present

Everyone has a now. If you have breath in your lungs, you have purpose in your body. Today matters. This moment matters.

Sometimes we think joy will return when everything finally changes. When the prayer gets answered. When the relationship gets healed. When the pressure lifts. When the kids get easier. When the next season starts. But joy can return even before circumstances change.

Joy returns when we trust God right in the middle of today. Sometimes we get stuck waiting for clarity or waiting for the perfect plan. But many times joy returns not while we sit still, but while we move in faith. When we take the next right step and trust God again.

Joy steadies tired hearts. Joy gives courage to keep going. Joy lifts our eyes above what is temporary. Joy reminds us that God is still good, still present, and still working. Joy is not weakness. Joy is strength. In fact, *Nehemiah 8:10* says, *“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”*

Biblical joy is deeper than a passing feeling. It is anchored in the goodness of God and the hope we have in Jesus. It can live through tears, through waiting, and through hard seasons because it is built on something stronger than circumstances.

Your Future Still Has Promise

Everyone has a future. No one knows exactly how many years are ahead, but that should never stop us from believing God for good things ahead.

Some women quietly assume joy belonged to earlier seasons. But Scripture shows women flourishing in every season. Rebekah stepped into her future with courage in her younger years. Elizabeth carried promise in a mature season of life. Anna worshiped with purpose and expectation in her elder years. God is not limited by age. He delights to bring joy, calling, and fruitfulness in every season.

Your future is not disqualified because it might look different than you expect. Sometimes the sweetest joy is not found in the early chapters of life, but in the later ones where faith has been tested, refined, and proven. However, in reality, we can have joy in all of life's seasons!

Count Yourself In Again

Maybe today you feel tired. Maybe you feel overlooked. Maybe joy feels far away. Please hear this clearly: God has not forgotten you. He has not misplaced your purpose. He has not run out of good plans. He has not moved on from your story.

Joy may have been buried, but it is not dead. The same God who restores years, heals hearts, renews minds, and raises dry bones can restore joy in you. So count yourself in again.

- Count yourself in for healing.
- Count yourself in for laughter.
- Count yourself in for fresh purpose.
- Count yourself in for new strength.
- Count yourself in for this next season.
- Count yourself in for joy.

Because God already has.

“Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy.”
(*Psalm 126:5*)

Jodi Gerald Cameron is a dynamic speaker, pastor, and author who's passionate about equipping Christian families with biblical wisdom and practical tools for everyday life. As part of the teaching team at Champions Centre, she blends her values of excellence, integrity, and grit to help others grow in faith and leadership. With over 20 years of ministry experience, Jodi inspires families to live boldly and purposefully. She and her husband, Ryan, along with their two sons, have served the Champions Centre community for over two decades in the Pacific Northwest.



Psalm 34:8 NLT

Taste and see that
the Lord is good

OH, THE JOYS
OF THOSE
WHO TAKE
REFUGE
IN HIM



RESTORING JOY THROUGH RESTORING OUR IDENTITY

Ps Janet Ivey

We live in a world where many people have no joy. They are confused about who they are and often look to the famous for guidance. Unfortunately, these celebrities are also unhappy and desperately trying to find themselves. Actor, Kirk Cameron, said, “In a world of pretend and make believe, you’re trying to figure out who you are. Everyone in California is trying to find themselves. It’s the land of fruits and nuts! Hollywood California is exporting so many crazy ideas to all of the world, but what people need more than anything else, is the gospel.” Talk about the blind leading the blind! Sadly, even as followers of Jesus, we can allow the busyness and pressures of life to overwhelm us and cause us to forget the Gospel truth of who we really are. I have experienced this several times in my own life, and every time the result has been a distinct lack of joy and peace.

I remember being a young university student, living away from home for the first time. I had lots of time to do “fun” student stuff, but never any time for church or reading my Bible and spending time with God. Slowly but surely, I lost sight of who I really was, and joy leaked out of my life completely. I felt empty and depressed, and looked to psychologists to “fix me.” However, when I turned back to God as my First Love, true joy began to flood back into my life. No longer was I floundering, trying to figure out who I was, but I could look at myself through God’s eyes and build my identity on the foundation of who He said I was.

Here are some reminders about embracing our



identity in Christ to seeing our joy restored:

We are created in God’s image

From the moment of conception, we were wonderfully and beautifully designed and created in God’s image (*Genesis 1:27*). This is a glorious truth that we often gloss over, but that is first and foremost who we are! That means, regardless of who our parents are or how we were conceived, we have dignity and worth. God formed us and knit us together in our mother’s womb (*Psalms 139*). We are infinitely precious because we carry the image of God within our very being.

We are chosen and adopted by God

Ephesians 1:5 NLT says, “God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do,



and it gave Him great pleasure.” As Christians, our identity is defined by the fact that God Almighty valued us so much that He chose us to be part of His family. This was not because we are amazing in any way, but simply because He wanted to pour out His love on us!

Bruce Hurt, Bible commentator, was rejected by his father and his stepfather, and he said this, “My stepfather would not even call me by my given name but called me “That boy” to my mother. And now I read that the Almighty God has brought me into His family as His son. And I am absolutely overwhelmed at such grace and kindness.” In *1 John 3:1 NLT* we are reminded of our heavenly Father’s love for us, “*See how very much our Father loves us, for He calls us His children, and that is what we are!*”

We get to know ourselves better when we prioritise getting to know God better

As women, we can often fall into the “perfection trap” where we feel we must be perfect in order to be valued, accepted and loved. We expect ourselves to be perfect as moms or wives or career-women, and when we fall short, we brand ourselves as failures. I remember how much I felt like a failure as a young mom of twin toddlers. I spent my days up to my eyeballs in never-ending mountains of laundry and dirty dishes! I had no joy and felt like a complete failure because I defined myself by what I accomplished (or didn’t!) each day. During that very crazy, chaotic season, it was only when I prioritised time with God that joy flowed back into my life, because I remembered who I really was. The better I got to know God, the more His

truth became the foundation of my identity and the more I experienced joy being restored in my life! We are deeply loved and accepted as God’s daughters, not because of our performance, but because of the sacrifice of Jesus (*Romans 5:8*).

Just recently I prayed with some moms at school for a lady whose teenage son was having serious doubts about his faith in Jesus. One of the things we prayed for is that her son would keep reading his Bible every day and earnestly ask God to reveal Himself to him. As we continue to read our Bibles, day after day, asking God to reveal Himself to us and to build our faith, He will do so. The answer might not come straight away, but when we humbly ask God for help, He will always respond. “*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*” *Jeremiah 29:13 NIV*

You and I can only have a healthy identity and wholesome sense of self when our focus is not on ourselves but on God. Corrie Ten Boom once said, “If you look at the world, you’ll be distressed. If you look within, you’ll be depressed. If you look at God, you’ll be at rest.” As God’s girls, we can be joyful because our identity is found ultimately in who He says we are, and as we live our lives fully for Him, we’ll see both our identity and our joy restored.

Ps Janet Ivey, along with her husband, Ps Dean, is the Lead Pastor of Rivers Church, Durban North and Cornubia. She is passionate about seeing people embrace God’s best for their lives, especially in marriage and parenting. Ps Janet has been married for 23 years and is mother to four children.

RESTORING JOY THROUGH EXPECTATION

Ps Natanya Fugard-Gous



I started this morning with a whole bunch of expectations:

- I woke up expecting to feel refreshed. Instead, I felt like I had been run over by a small, cute, truck. The alarm went off and I hit snooze like a woman who believes in second chances.
- I expected a peaceful cup of coffee. What I got was a live-action documentary titled “Chaos in Pyjamas”: someone can’t find their shoes, someone else is emotionally devastated about toast, and my name is being called like I’m tech support.
- I expected my outfit to look elegant. It did not. Somewhere between the mirror and reality, betrayal occurred.
- I expected the scale to reward my self-control yesterday. Apparently, it’s holding onto grudges.
- I expected my husband to notice the effort—my hair, outfit, and general survival. He noticed... that the wi-fi was slow.
- I expected dinner to be enjoyed. It was reviewed like a cooking show: “interesting choice,” “not my favourite,” “what’s for dessert?”
- I expected bedtime to be smooth. It turned into negotiations, delays, and one final emotional plot twist.
- And as I set my alarm tonight, I comfort myself thinking that I expect tomorrow will be different.

We are all familiar with the feeling of unmet expectations – at home, in marriage, in friendship or even in church. We hope for something, but the outcome doesn’t match what we imagined. Some disappointments are minor; others are huge but live long enough with unmet expectations and the effects start to show, primarily in our joy.

Proverbs 13:12a TLB “Hope deferred makes the heart sick...” This verse speaks about a heart that no longer experiences hope or joy because there have been so many disappointed expectations. But thank the Lord that that’s not the end of the verse! *Proverbs 13:12a TLB “...but when dreams come true at last, there is life and joy.”* Dreams speak about expectation. God wants us to dream, to hope, to expect great things, because godly expectation always reignites joy. But we can have the wrong expectations, trying to find hope, fulfilment or wholeness in all the wrong things. You can look to your bank account, career, or relationships, only to find that they produce no lasting joy. This can cause us to lose hope. Temporal things don’t bring lasting joy but when our expectation is in God first, that will always produce joy. What about unrealistic expectations? These are expectations that have gone beyond what is reasonable and are no longer compatible with reality! Unrealistic expectations are often unspoken standards that create bitterness

and resentment, like expecting hubby to read your mind... We can also have unmet expectations. You can be doing all the right things – praying, hoping and trusting, then something happens that is out of your control, and what you were hoping for doesn’t come to life. This last one makes me think of a very special woman in scripture – the woman with the issue of blood, that we read about in Mark chapter five. She had the same issue for 12 years, trying everything in her power to find healing. She had suffered so much. Yet, when Jesus came to town, there was still expectation inside of her. She didn’t abandon her expectation of breakthrough. She teaches us how to walk the tension of learning how to keep going in the faith when reasonable expectations of life are not satisfied or fulfilled.

As I look back, I have had a few moments of major disappointment. When Dev and I had been dating for a year, he broke up with me... on Valentine’s Day! I really thought he was the one, and I couldn’t understand what was going on (I’m grateful the story had a happy ending!) Our first pregnancy was a miscarriage. Then, after welcoming two special kiddies into the world, another miscarriage during lockdown left our hearts very sore. I remember walking through the mall shortly after the miscarriage and it seemed that there were pregnant ladies or ladies with prams everywhere! Of course, there were no more than usual. I was so keenly aware of my loss and my desire that it was all I saw. I had to lift my perspective from my lack to God’s goodness. And today we get to enjoy the incredible blessing of a handsome, full-of-love and full-of-mischief third child! I now understand that God used the circumstances each time. I now understand that God used the circumstances each time. When Dev and I broke up, I learnt to entrust my future to God, to find wholeness in Him and I grew. So when we got back together, we were both much more whole. With each miscarriage, we drew nearer and stronger together. In every season, the persistent idea that it’s not the end, that there’s something more, that God knows what’s going on, kept us hopeful and kept us joyful.

God loves to give us the desires of our hearts (*Psalm 37:4*), but it starts with us delighting ourselves in Him. That means finding our hope, wholeness and fulfilment in Him. It’s finding satisfaction in who He is and how He works. Sometimes in our expectations there is a blind spot. So our



expectations need to be evaluated. Have you ever considered that there could be a flaw in what you expect? I think that’s why King David prayed: *Psalm 139:23–24 NIV “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”* Unexamined expectations are likely to become unrealistic expectations. Unrealistic expectations are likely to become unrealised expectations. And this turns into a cycle leading to disillusionment.

I have also learnt that expectations must be chosen and fought for. If you expect that you won’t have to choose the right attitude or fight to keep your expectations, that’s an unrealistic expectation. In the loneliness of being single after breaking up with Dev, and in the doubts after the miscarriages, when the future felt so uncertain and where fears were so present, I had to fight to keep expectation up. That’s why I love the story of the woman with the issue of blood. To still have expectation after everything she had faced for twelve long years – that doesn’t come by default. She chose her expectation. She fought for it. Maybe you’re living in “hope deferred” and your heart feels sick. The answer is not to give up expectation for the future. There is life and joy to be found in godly expectation, knowing that with God the best is always yet to come.

Ps Natanya, together with her husband, Ps Devon, are the Lead Pastors of Rivers Church, Ballito. Ps Natanya is passionate about family, faith and building the local church. She has a heart for encouraging people in the discipleship journey. She has been married for 14 years and has three beautiful kids.

RESTORING JOY IN RELATIONSHIPS

Ps Dané Garner



What I love most about the theme of 'Restoring Joy' is being able to look back and see the many ways in which God has restored my life. I feel incredibly blessed to have experienced first-hand how He restores not only our joy, but also our hope, faith, peace and strength in every area of our lives.

From the age of four until twelve years later, my first stepfather sexually abused me. This was one of the hardest and probably the most damaging seasons of my life – a season that would have far-reaching

implications and an array of consequences for me to deal with. As a result of the abuse, I have had to bring many areas of my life to God for restoration, while continually trusting Him to restore my joy. Yet, in the same season, I also experienced God's faithfulness for the first time. I experienced His power to heal, renew and restore. It was a difficult season but also an incredible opportunity for God to display His glory as I allowed Him to transform my ashes into beauty.

One of the areas that I needed God to work in most, was in my relationships. My turbulent childhood had completely stripped away my self-esteem and self-worth, and as a teenager and young adult, this led me to make many unwise decisions. In *1 Corinthians 15:33 NIV* it says, "Bad company corrupts good character." This scripture perfectly sums up my early years as I found myself in an ungodly relationship, surrounded by worldly friends. Even though I had grown up in church, knowing right from wrong, hearing and knowing this very scripture, I still ended up in a place of emptiness. I was living with very little joy as I pursued what the world had to offer, desperately trying to recover what had been taken by my stepfather – my dignity, my confidence, my identity, my sense of belonging, and my joy. The problem was, I was searching for these things everywhere and in everyone other than in God.

I was living with half-hearted surrender and lukewarm convictions, holding onto people and relationships that were not good for me and would not lead to a life of purpose and fulfilment in God. I experienced something that seemed like joy, but deep down I knew it wasn't the joy that comes from the Lord. I was living a life I did not want and something had to change. "You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence..." *Psalm 16:11 NIV*. This is the joy I craved. The world offers only an imitation, a form



of joy but one that lacks foundation. What God offers us is genuine joy that comes only from Him and His presence.

After attending a church conference one year, I decided to start afresh and truly surrender my life to God. I wanted to glorify God with every area of my life and that included my relationships. I walked away from everything that did not glorify Him and started pursuing everything that did. I walked away from every friendship, including my relationship of nearly five years.

I started attending Rivers Church as a single student with no friends, knowing no one. My prayer was, "Lord, I've let go of everything and everyone I thought was good for me. Would You give me new, healthy, godly relationships." I could never have imagined that less than two years later, I would be walking down the aisle to marry a man who exceeded every prayer and heart's desire I had for a husband. At that moment, I realised that God had restored my joy in the area of my relationships. He had blessed me with a God-fearing husband, someone I could not only build a life with, but someone I could walk out a life of eternal value and purpose with.

Yet, God was not done. I still had a desire for a baby and a female best friend. For many years I had prayed, asking God to bless me with both, and trusted that at the right time He would answer, if I just continued to seek Him and surrender to Him. Today, I look back on all God has done in and for me, and my heart overflows with gratitude at the magnitude of His blessings. This year, my husband

and I celebrate our 10th wedding anniversary, as well as our daughter's third birthday. We also celebrate the incredible privilege of leading the Rivers Centurion campus together, for the past eight years. God has also given me the gift of true friendship. He has blessed me with a female best friend who rejoices when I rejoice and mourns when I mourn, who helps carry my burdens and encourages my spirit. She is my "Nathan" when I need it most. She is the kind of friend that *Proverbs 18:24* speaks of – one who sticks closer than a brother.

My early years may have been filled with brokenness and emptiness but today I stand in awe of how God has well and truly restored my joy! There is a scripture that Ps Wilma often quotes that so beautifully describes my journey, "God sets the lonely in families..." *Psalm 68:6 NIV*.

We can trust God to restore joy in our relationships, to bring healing where there's brokenness and fullness where there is lack. The very area that may feel empty can become the place where His faithfulness becomes most evident. One thing I can say with certainty is that over the years, God has done beyond what I expected every time and if He did it for me, He can do it for you!

Ps Dané Garner, along with her husband, Ps Chase, is the Lead Pastor of Rivers Church, Centurion. They have been married for 10 years and recently celebrated their miracle baby, Finley's, third birthday. Ps Dané is passionate about building God's church and loves all things chocolate!



Those who look to
him for help will be

RADIANT WITH JOY

no shadow of shame
will darken their faces

Psalms 34:5 NLT

FINDING JOY IN THE MIDST OF UNCERTAINTY

ZenziMabuza



As I sit and write this, I realise that it has been exactly three years since one of the most defining and challenging seasons of my life began. A season that tested not only my career, but my identity, my strength, and my faith. In April 2023, I was in a very senior role, one I had worked tirelessly towards over many years. It was more than just a job; it had become a part of how I defined myself. My sense of achievement, purpose, and even security was deeply tied to that position. Then, in what felt like a sudden and overwhelming shift, I was faced with a significant professional challenge that ultimately led to me transitioning out of that role. I didn't fully understand it then, but looking back now, I see that this was not just a career disruption, but the beginning of a deeply spiritual journey.

What makes that time even more profound is that in the same month, I was asked by church to be part of the Sisters of Africa Magazine shoot. The theme that year was "Light Up Your Life." I remember showing up for the shoot feeling like there was not much light in me. Outwardly, I smiled for the camera, stood in the light, and contributed to the message my Senior Pastors were trying to share with thousands of women who would get their hands on the magazine. Inwardly, I was carrying uncertainty, fear, a sense of loss, and I felt like a shadow of myself. Yet, even in that moment, God was present and He was at work behind the scenes. Shortly after that, I decided to take a sabbatical from work and what was meant to be an eight-month break turned into fifteen months. I thought the time away would bring immediate clarity and healing but the journey back to wholeness was

slower and more layered than I expected. I travelled for a few months which gave me space to breathe, but the real work began when I returned – when I had to sit and reflect, rebuild, and rediscover who I was outside of a title. Emotionally, mentally, and even physically, it was not an easy road. There were moments of doubt and uncertainty about my future but through it all, one thing remained constant: my decision to keep Jesus at the centre. *Jeremiah 29:11 NIV* became an anchor for me during this time, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

There were days when I did not feel that hope for my future but I chose to believe for it anyway, even when my circumstances didn't yet reflect it.

One of the greatest gifts during that season was the people God placed around me. My family and friends covered me in prayer, stood by me, and reminded me of who I was when I struggled to see it myself. Their faith carried me on the days mine felt weak. I was also blessed with an incredible Executive Coach, a strong woman of God who helped me ground myself again. Through her guidance, I began to reshape my perspective on my career, rediscover my strengths, and reconnect my purpose with my faith.

And then there was my church home. I was part of the Stage Team and serving became an anchor. It gave me a sense of belonging and connection, and even when I felt like I was operating on autopilot, I continued to show up. Beyond my role on the team, I had a heart for people, especially new members joining the team. I made it a point to reach out, connect, and support them, not just in terms of serving, but personally too. And something beautiful happened in that process. The more I poured into others, the less I fixated on my own challenges. It reminds me of *Acts 20:35 NIV*, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Through serving and being present for others, new friendships were formed, genuine, life-giving connections that became part of God's way of restoring my joy.

Romans 8:38–39 NIV encourages us, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future... will be able to separate us from the love of God." Nothing separates us from God. Not disappointment. Not



uncertainty. Not even the seasons when we feel lost. If anything, those are the very seasons when He draws closest. Looking back, I can see that God never left me. Even in the silence, the confusion, and the loss, He was working. My joy was not restored overnight. God restored it piece by piece, in the most unexpected ways. Through stillness. Through people. Through purpose. Through surrender. And sometimes, through simply choosing to show up again and again until the light began to feel real again.

In time, I found my way back into the corporate world in a role within the energy sector, a role that is meaningful and aligns with who I am becoming. But the restoration of joy did not only come from returning to work. It came from knowing that my identity is not defined by a title but from experiencing God's faithfulness in uncertainty.

If you are in a season where joy feels distant, I want to encourage you that God is not done with your story. What feels like an ending may well be the beginning of restoration. Hold on to His promises. Stay rooted in Him. Lean into your community. Keep serving. Keep believing. Joy will come again and when it does, you will realise that it was not lost, it was being restored all along.

Zenzi has served in the Stage Team at Rivers Church for 20 years and is still going strong! She is a passport-ready travel addict, she is F1 and soccer mad, and she is at peace in a boxing ring. She is a Commercial and Asset Executive with a love of adventure and a good laugh.



Psalm 40:16 GW

Let all who seek you rejoice
and be glad because of you.
Let those who love your
salvation continually say,

THE LORD
IS GREAT

RESTORING JOY

FINDING LIGHT AGAIN AFTER LIFE'S DEEPEST LOSS



Cleopatra Candice Munsamy

uncertainty and emotional struggle. And just as I began to rebuild and find stability, tragedy struck again – I lost both my parents. This forced me to grow up quickly but also to lean on God in ways I never imagined.

In adulthood, I found love, built a family, and experienced the joy of motherhood. But life took another devastating turn when, in a moment that changed everything, I lost both of my children, Katelyn Cassadie (seven) and Kal-El (five). No words can describe that kind of pain – a grief that shakes your foundation, leaving you standing in a place where nothing feels certain anymore. Yet even there, God met me.

After profound loss, joy can feel distant, almost inappropriate, as though it belongs to another version of your life, one that no longer exists. In those early days of grief, simply getting through the day felt like an accomplishment. The silence in my home was overwhelming. The memories felt both comforting and crushing. But I came to understand that healing does not begin with strength. It begins with surrender. I had to allow myself to grieve fully – to feel the pain, rather than suppress it. There is no true healing in avoidance. Real healing begins when we bring our brokenness honestly before God. Even when my prayers were filled with anger, confusion, and sorrow, God remained present.

The journey back to joy began with small, intentional steps. Getting out of bed. Opening the curtains. Noticing the sky. These moments seemed insignificant at first but over time, they became sacred reminders that life was still moving and that I still had purpose. Each day carried a quiet invitation: begin again.

Life has a way of unfolding unexpectedly. Some seasons bring laughter, love, and fulfilment, while others bring deep pain, loss, and unanswered questions. Yet, in the midst of life's darkest moments, there remains a powerful truth: joy can be restored.

From a young age, I encountered hardship that shaped my understanding of life. I experienced loss within my family and walked through seasons of



One of the most transformative moments in my healing came when a friend connected me with someone who had also experienced the loss of children. I had been longing to speak with someone who understood my pain, someone who had survived it and found a way forward. During our conversation, she asked me a question that shifted everything, "Have you stopped talking to God?"

I admitted that my prayers were filled with anger. She did not dismiss my feelings but offered a simple challenge that became a turning point in my healing, "Spend one week thanking God daily for something, no matter how small." That first day, I thanked God for the sky. The next day, for waking up beside my husband. Slowly, gratitude began to soften the edges of my pain.

Gratitude became a doorway through which joy slowly re-entered my life, quietly and unexpectedly. It came in laughter shared with loved ones; on peaceful mornings; in moments of connection and love. I began to notice beauty again in the ordinary moments I once overlooked. Gratitude shifted my focus from what I had lost, to what remained. It reminded me that even in brokenness, there was still evidence of God's goodness. Joy was not to be found in perfect circumstances, but rather in God; the kind of joy that is steady and sustains you even when life feels uncertain.

One of the hardest parts of healing is giving yourself permission to feel joy again. Sometimes, we hold onto grief tightly because we fear that letting go, even slightly, means forgetting. But choosing joy does not dishonour what those whom we have lost. It honours the life we still have. Joy and sorrow can exist together, and over time, joy begins to grow stronger. Healing is not about ignoring pain; it is about allowing hope to co-exist with it.

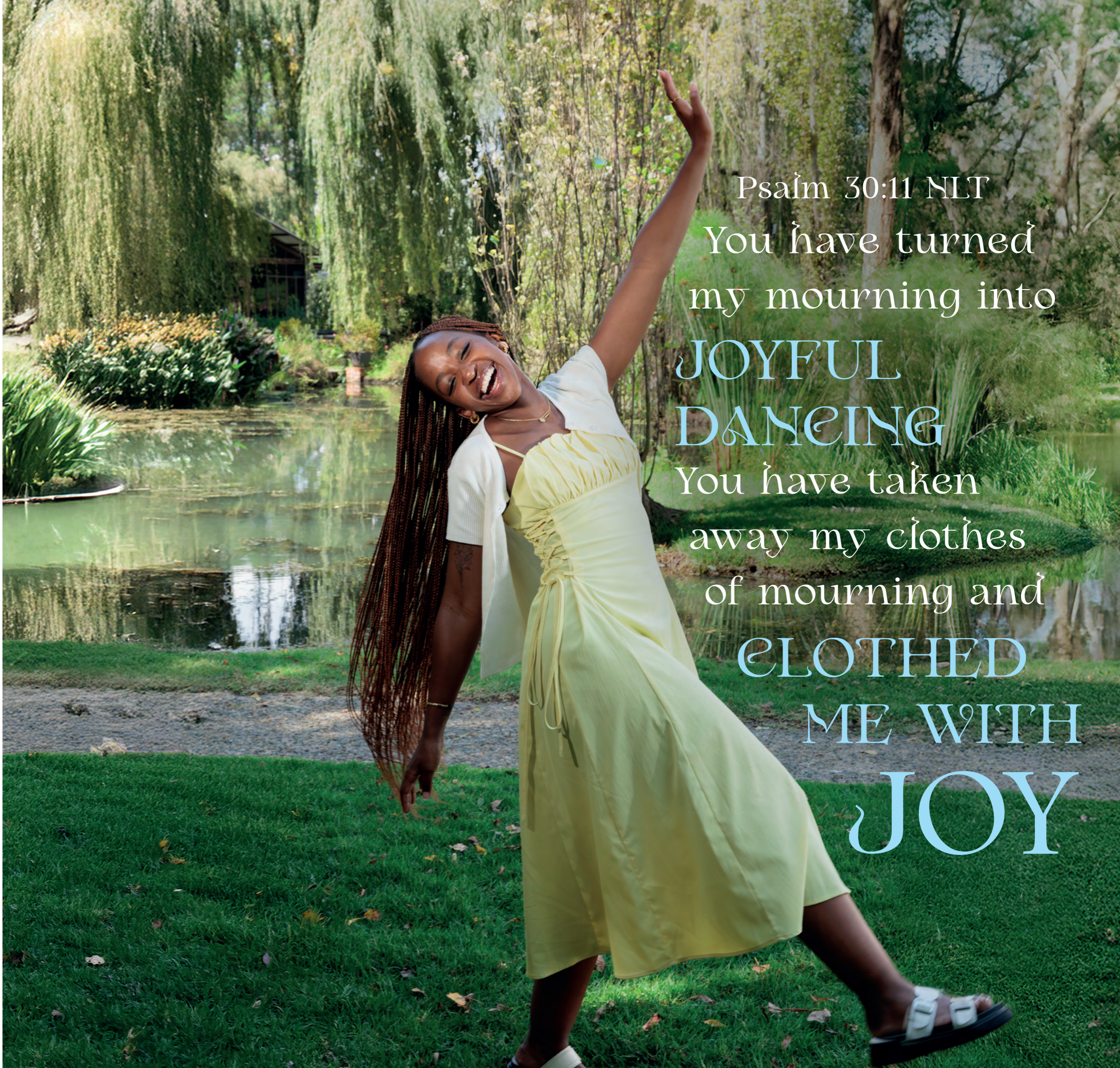
Life after loss will never look the same and that is okay. God does not promise to restore everything exactly as it was, but He does promise to restore us. In time, my husband and I found the courage to hope again. Despite medical concerns and our own fears, we were blessed with children once more. Our sons, Seth and Cole, brought laughter back into our home, filling spaces that once echoed silence. They did not replace what we had lost, but they became part of our healing – a reminder that life can grow even after devastation. These new beginnings were not without fear, but they were filled with purpose. Through them, I saw God's faithfulness in a new way.

Today, eight years after losing my babies, I see joy differently. Joy is not something we chase; it is something God restores. Sometimes it comes slowly. Sometimes it looks different. But it does come. Hope becomes our foundation. Trust shows us the way forward. And joy follows in time. If you are going through a hard season, know this: you

are not alone. God sees you. God loves you. And He is with you. Take life one day at a time. Start small. Allow yourself to grieve. Give yourself time to heal. And when you are ready, allow yourself to feel joy again.

In grief, God has been my comfort. In joy, He has been my song. In uncertainty, He has been my anchor. My hope rests not in this world, but in God's promise that one day every tear will be wiped away and all brokenness will be healed (*Revelation 21:4*). My past does not define me. What God is doing in me, does. Hold onto God. Just as He restored my joy, He will restore yours, too.

Cleopatra Candice Munsamy is a wife, mother, sister, and woman of faith on a journey of healing after profound loss. Through her story, she hopes to inspire others to rediscover hope, purpose, and restored joy in God.



Psalm 30:11 NLT
You have turned
my mourning into
**JOYFUL
DANCING**
You have taken
away my clothes
of mourning and
**CLOTHED
ME WITH
JOY**

A TESTIMONY OF FAITH, SERVICE AND RESTORATION

BongiweKhuzwayo

In 2007 I relocated from Durban to Centurion, a move that would mark the beginning of a transformative season in my life. That is the year I joined Rivers Church and gave my life to Christ. I soon began serving at our Sandton Campus, joining the choir, where I faithfully served for over 14 years. After the COVID-19 pandemic, I moved to our Kyalami Campus, continuing my journey of service. Through this planting in God's house, I have experienced the truth of *Psalm 92:13 NKJV* that says, "Those who are planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God." My life has indeed flourished, not only spiritually but also within my family.

Many of my family members, including my siblings and my mother—on both our Durban North and Centurion campuses—have joined the church and actively serve. My children have grown up in this church environment, grounded in the Word and surrounded by a community of believers. Today, my eldest child serves in Kidszone at our Kyalami Campus. This is a testament to God's generational faithfulness in *Proverbs 22:6 NKJV* that we should, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." I am grateful to see this promise unfolding before my eyes. Seeing my loved ones walk in faith and serve God has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my journey.

Professionally, I am a qualified nurse and I specialise in advanced wound care and ostomy care. What I do is not merely a job—it is a calling. The nature of my work requires a deep level of sensitivity, care, compassion, skill, and dedication, as it impacts not only patients but also their families and the communities around them. Every day, I am reminded of *Colossians 3:23 NIV* that, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for



the Lord, not for human masters." I firmly believe that God places us in specific positions for a purpose and I see His hand at work, using me as a vessel to bring healing, comfort, and hope to those in need.

The years 2016 to 2017 marked one of the most challenging seasons of my life. I was diagnosed with an autoimmune condition that left me unable to walk without assistance. During this period, I

also lost my job. The treatment I required was costly and not covered by medical aid, and gradually, my financial resources—including my pension fund—were depleted. It was a humbling and deeply exhausting time, yet, even in that valley, God was present. In the midst of my struggle, He opened a door for me to attend Bible College, drawing me closer to Him in ways I had never experienced before. What seemed like a season of loss became a season of spiritual growth and intimacy with God. After 18 months, my health was fully restored! This healing was a powerful reminder of *Jeremiah 30:17* where God promises to restore us to health and heal our wounds.

Although the journey to employment thereafter was filled with discouragement and moments of being labelled "overqualified," I was never alone. My family and my sisters at church stood firmly by my side. Their love and encouragement reflected the truth of *Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 NIV* that, "Two are better than one... If either of them falls down, one can help the other up." Through their support and God's unfailing presence, I found the strength to persevere.

In time, God restored not only my health but also my joy and purpose. In an extraordinary turn of events, I was blessed with a job without even attending an interview. This was a clear demonstration of God's divine favour. That season of my life affirmed that God is a restorer, a rebuild, and a renewer (*Joel 2:25*). What was lost was not only returned but was multiplied in ways I could never have imagined! I strongly believe that serving and being planted in God's house positioned me for His divine use.

I remember during one prayer meeting, I noticed a fellow sister with a severely swollen hand wrapped in a bandage. I felt deeply troubled and could not ignore the prompting in my spirit. After the service, I approached her, and from that moment, God placed it on my heart to walk a journey with her. *Galatians 6:2* instructs us to carry each other's burdens, so I prayed with her, encouraged her, and stood with her during moments when she was filled with doubt and felt like giving up. It was not an easy journey but we trusted in God's faithfulness. Through prayer, faith, and perseverance, her hand was completely restored! This was a powerful reminder that the same God who healed me, is able to heal others. During my own illness, my church family walked alongside me, supporting and uplifting me, and God used that experience to equip me to support my sister in Christ. This is the beauty of God's work—He never wastes our pain (*2 Corinthians 1:4*).

My journey has not been easy but I have come to understand that everything we go through is for God's glory and honour. As *Romans 8:28* assures us, "...in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." Today, I stand as a testament to God's grace, faithfulness, and power. My life reflects His ability to heal, restore, and use ordinary people for extraordinary purposes.

Bongi is a mom of two and is a faithful sister in the house, serving in the Hospitality Team at Rivers Church, Kyalami. She is a qualified nurse and has a heart for people, over and above her professional capacity.



A photograph of three young women standing in a lush garden, laughing and holding hands. The woman on the left has blonde hair and is wearing a pink lace vest over a white top and a floral skirt. The woman in the middle has dark hair in braids and is wearing a light green dress with a floral pattern. The woman on the right has dark hair and is wearing a white dress with a blue floral pattern. They are standing in front of a large green plant with white and pink flowers. The background is filled with green foliage.

Nehemiah 8:10 NLT

Don't be dejected and sad, for

THE JOY
OF THE LORD
IS YOUR
STRENGTH

THE JOY OF TEACHING CHILDREN

GladysThokozileMohale



I graduated from the Soweto College of Education in 1987, and started my teaching career at Pholosho Senior Primary in Alexandra Township. That was the beginning of a wonderful, joyful, thirty-year journey of teaching children!

The late 80s and early 90s were a tumultuous time in the country, and teaching was extremely challenging for learners and teachers alike, especially in Alex. Political parties were fighting and there was a lot of gang violence. People were being killed and I would often walk past dead bodies on the streets. Learners were also exposed to this as they walked to school. It was terrible. Conditions within the schools were also not easy as there was a lack of resources, and even back

then, overcrowding was a problem. I remember at one point teaching a class of 70 learners. Despite these challenges, there was still a lot of good. Alex was a bustling mix of cultures and languages, and there was never a dull day in our classrooms. Our learners were extremely talented and made the most of what they had. My love for teaching went beyond the classroom and from my very first year as a teacher, I got involved in various cultural and sporting extramural activities. These became the tools through which I could impact the learners' lives, over and above the set curriculum.

Even in those difficult conditions, God's hand was on us. We were shown favour by some high-profile people who took an interest in our learners. Our school was invited by Ali Bacher, a legend in the South African cricket world, to go to Wanderers Stadium for cricket coaching. We also got a sponsor to coach indoor squash and tennis. I also coached Netball and was chosen as one of two teachers to take learners from different primary schools in Alex to compete in a tournament in Durban every year during the June holidays. We travelled by bus and were accommodated at colleges while the students were at home during the holidays. It was an absolute highlight for the kids, as many of them would never have had the opportunity to travel outside of their hometown. It gave me such joy to see them happy. I loved getting cards from them, thanking me for the impact I had on their lives. Interestingly, the teacher who accompanied us was from Dr Knak Primary School. Little did I know that years later, Rivers Church would take a bus full of volunteers to Dr Knak Primary to do a refurb there, painting, cleaning and gardening. Rivers Church had long been uplifting the community, years before the Rivers Foundation was registered!

In 1994 I was appointed as Head of Department at Sefikeng Primary School which is located within the Leeukop Prison, in the Paulshof area. Even



there, the learners under my leadership excelled in music, public speaking, poetry, traditional dance and sport. Then in 2006 I went back to Alexandra to teach at Ithute Primary, where I was the Head of the Foundation Phase. God wanted me back in Alex, and as tough as it was, we survived under the conditions, until I retired in 2017. Throughout my career I was privileged to teach kids as young as Grade 1, all the way to Grade 8. My last two years of teaching were greatly impacted when I joined Rivers Church 12 years ago. I had seen Ps André on Life By Design and decided to find the church. When I did, I became a partner, got baptised, and started serving in the Hospitality Team. The teachings at Rivers, and the culture of excellence, made a huge difference on how I approached teaching.

Over the past 12 years, my church family has journeyed with me, through the loss of my brother during Covid, and my own health challenges. I was diagnosed with cancer a month after my brother died. By God's grace I came through that and have been in remission! I also went through an emergency operation due to renal destruction and fibroids a few years ago. It was a very serious case and I nearly died but God saved my life. Last year I had a hip replacement and was hospitalised for almost two months. The recovery journey was not easy. From being a very active person, I found myself in a place where I could not even walk. I was once the teacher, but I had to become the learner, learning how to walk again through rehab. During that time, my grandsons were a lifeline, taking me to the hospital, visiting me when I was admitted, and later driving me to church when I was unable to drive. God saved my life for a purpose and I don't miss the opportunity to be in church, even when it's difficult. Even though I have retired as a

teacher, I still enjoy teaching, albeit in a different sense. I have been hands-on with my grandchildren and my niece's grandchildren, teaching them Maths and Science. I also put one of my grandsons through varsity and he has graduated with two IT qualifications.

I also enjoyed the opportunity of serving with the Hospitality Team, many of whom were much younger than me. It gives me great joy today when my learners still recognise me and appreciate the impact I had on them all those years ago. One of my former learners became a professional cricket player and went on to play overseas. He had a street in Alex named after him. Others went on to play football for Sundowns and Cosmo City. I see some on TV, acting in popular local dramas, and part of music bands. Some of my learners became teachers, and one of them teaches at Pholosh, where I started my career.

After a teaching career spanning three decades, I can say with absolute certainty that for me, teaching has been a calling. Working with children, whether in the classroom or out on the sports field, knowing that I played a part in shaping their early years, has been one of the greatest joys of my life. I became a mother figure to many of my learners. I have had the incredible privilege of shaping young people's lives and despite the challenges, God was with me throughout and He has blessed me with the greatest gift – the joy of teaching children!

Ma Gladys, as she is affectionately known, is a retired teacher who continues to take young people under her wing. She is passionate about education and loves being in the house of God.

THE PROMISE BEYOND THE PAIN

Vanessa Ramkissoon



My husband and I had been together for 26 years, married for 21 years. I met him when I was just 20 years old, and from that moment on we built a life side by side. We did everything together and supported each other through every season. He wasn't just my husband, he was my best friend, my partner, and my constant. Our home was filled with love, laughter and shared dreams. He adored our daughters – they were his everything. He poured his heart into our family and was intentional about loving us well. One of the most beautiful parts of our journey together

was watching him grow spiritually. When we came to church he gave his life to God and it changed everything. He got baptised, served faithfully, and committed himself to living a life that honoured God.

Then, on 2nd February 2025, my life changed forever. I lost my husband suddenly – in a single moment everything I knew and depended on was gone. My daughters were at school that day – one in matric and the other in Grade 10 – completely unaware that their world was about to be turned upside down. It felt like a black cloud descended over our lives. The grief was overwhelming. There are no words that can truly describe the emptiness, the shock, and the deep pain of losing someone who was such an integral part of our lives. Our world was shattered.

But even in that darkness, God showed up. During that time we received incredible comfort and support from our church family at Rivers, Durban North. The pastoral team prayed with us and stood with us every step of the way. Members of the church reached out and even people we didn't know personally came forward to support us. It was a powerful reminder that we are never alone in the Body of Christ. In moments when I felt like I couldn't go on, God gave me strength. Not all at once, but daily – sometimes moment by moment. His presence became my anchor and I learned what it truly means to lean on Him. *Psalm 34:18* says that God is close to the broken-hearted and I experienced that closeness in a very real way.

During this difficult season, I made a decision that didn't make sense at the time. I chose to leave my job. It seemed like a risky and even irrational choice, especially after such a loss, but deep in my heart I felt God leading me, and I chose to trust Him. A month later God provided me with a new



job – one that was exactly what I needed for that season. It gave me flexibility and support, and an environment that allowed me to be present for my daughters and to continue healing. It was a clear reminder that when we put God at the centre of our lives, He provides for us in ways we could never plan for ourselves.

My daughters and I decided early on that we would continue to stay close to God. We kept serving, we stayed connected to church, and we surrounded ourselves with people who would encourage us in our faith. We missed Anesh every day but we chose not to turn away from God in our pain and grief. Instead, we drew closer to Him. I have also seen God's hand in our children's lives. My eldest daughter, Kiara, completed her matric last year and is now studying towards a BCompt in Accounting Science. It is only through God's strength that she was able to persevere, focus, and move forward despite the loss we faced.

Grief is not a straight path. There are good days and difficult days. There are moments when the loss feels as fresh as the day it happened. Healing doesn't mean forgetting. It means learning to live with the loss while still holding onto hope. As Christians, we believe that this world is not our final home. There is a promise that goes beyond the pain of this life—a promise of eternity with our Saviour. Knowing that Anesh is with God brings me immense peace and comfort. It doesn't take away the pain of missing him, but it gives meaning to the sorrow. It reminds me that one day we will be reunited.

At Anesh's funeral a colleague of his who attended the funeral was so moved by the service that she

got saved and started to attend Rivers together with her family. God can use even a funeral for His purposes!

I often reflect on the life we shared and feel overwhelming gratitude. Instead of focusing on the loss, I choose to thank God for the gift of his life. Not everyone gets to experience a love like that, and I will always treasure the memories we created. This journey has not been easy, and we are still healing but we are not walking it alone. God has been with us every step of the way—guiding us, strengthening us, and providing for us. When you make God the centre of your life, He sustains you through every season—even the most painful ones. His strength becomes your strength. His peace carries you when everything else feels uncertain.

Psalm 68:5 NIV "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling." There is a special comfort in knowing that God cares deeply for widows and families who are grieving. His Word promises that He will take care of us, and I have seen that promise fulfilled.

To anyone who may be walking a similar path, you are not alone. Your pain is seen, your tears are known, and God is near. Even when it feels like the darkness is overwhelming, His light is still present. Hold onto Him. Trust Him, even when it's hard. Allow Him to carry you through. Our story is not over. Even in loss, God is still writing something beautiful. And for that, I am deeply grateful.

Vanessa was married to Anesh for 21 years and she has two daughters. She is part of the volunteer army at Rivers Church, Durban North and serves on the Welcome Team.

The life of the
godly is full of
LIGHT AND

Proverbs 13:9 NLT

JOY



BEATING BREAST CANCER

Stephinah Mokonyama



I come from a lineage of premature death due to cancer. My mother passed on from breast cancer, even after chemotherapy and a double mastectomy. The thought of ever going through what I witnessed her go through used to bring chills to my body.

In 2023, I felt a hard ‘ball’ in my breast and immediately thought about my mother’s death. “Could this be my fate as well?” I asked myself. I decided to go to the clinic at the beginning of June to have the lump checked. Pastors Adi and Claire encouraged me not to panic and reminded me that fear does not come from God and that I should not lose heart because God is always in control. That gave me the courage to step out in faith and go to the clinic.

A friend of mine accompanied me and when we got there, I was transferred to Edenvale Hospital. From there, I was transferred to Charlotte Maxeke Hospital in Johannesburg, where I was told that they were fully booked until August. But God opened a door for me. The doctor asked them to squeeze me in and I was given a slot for a mammogram. I knew right then that this was the hand of our miracle working God! The mammogram confirmed my worst fear – I had breast cancer, and I was forced to face it head on.

I started chemo in July 2023 and the pain from the chemo was excruciating. I could not bear the infliction and there were times I almost gave up. I don’t know what to compare the pain to, but it was so bad that I had sleepless nights and cried many tears as I endured it. The name of the therapy is Doxorubicin, famously known as the “Red Devil.” This drug is aggressive and most notably used for

breast cancer and other aggressive types of cancer. Chemo has many side effects and for me, it led to the loss of my hair, weight, and even a tooth.

James 5:17 (NIV) says, “The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.” After the second dose of chemotherapy, I attended a Prayer Meeting at church. During prayer, I felt a strange heat in my body, and I could not understand what was going on. Afterwards, I discovered that the tumour was gone. Shortly before the Prayer Meeting my boss had asked to feel the lump, and she was able to confirm that it had been there and was now gone! She witnessed the beginning of my miracle. I strongly believe that God was putting together a series of evidence to bear testimony to my miracle.

When I visited the hospital, I excitedly shared the news with the doctor and for some reason, he was not impressed when I kept on proclaiming that God had healed me. He asked if I was implying that they were not doing their job since I was giving the credit to God. I was examined and they confirmed that indeed, the lump was gone. However, they advised me to at least take six more dosages of the “Red Devil” as the cancer I had was aggressive and advanced. They wanted to ensure that there would be no future resurfacing of this deadly disease.

The Word of God reminds us that even the lions get hungry, but the children of God will never lack a good thing (*Psalm 34:10*). This was my experience. Chrisoula, one of my fellow Kidszone volunteers, played an important role in my healing journey, as she often brought me meals. For transportation, Pauline, another church sister, tirelessly took me to the hospital for treatments. I really felt like I was nursed by kings and queens!

My last day of chemo was mid-January 2024 and not long after that, I attended a Prayer Meeting at church. My arm was wrapped in a loose bandage as I had developed a wound which I had been told was a common result of the treatment. That evening, Ausi Bongsi another sister from church, took an interest in my bandaged arm. She had felt prompted to ask about it and though I was hesitant, I allowed her to look at the wound. She immediately recognised that it was very bad and she explained that it had resulted from the chemotherapy being injected into the flesh on my arm and wrist, and not into my veins. I thought

chemo was the worst pain I could ever experience, but when the wound did not heal and got worse, the pain was far worse than the “Red Devil.” As it turned out, Ausi Bongsi is a wound care specialist nurse. She patiently cared for me, treating my wound every week for months. She accompanied me to the hospital and even paid for my treatment, until the wound closed and healed. At one point the doctors wanted to operate, but by God’s grace, I was healed without an operation.

I will forever be grateful to everyone whom God touched to help my family and I during this season. My heartfelt thanks to Pastors Adi and Claire who have taken me under their wing as my pastors and my employers. For two years I was weak and could not cope with work, but they extended grace and generosity, and ensured that I had healthy meals



and got plenty of rest. They assisted me with taking care of my granddaughter, Mofenyi, who was so scared – she thought I was going to heaven – and they even made her birthdays extra special!

I am thankful for the love and immense support from my connect group and Kidszone team. They constantly checked up on me, prayed for me and helped me practically. They ensured that even in my hardship, I experienced the love of God in action. I am truly blessed to have a wonderful church family.

All glory to God in heaven who says in His Word, “I will heal you and you will be healed” (*Jeremiah 30:17*). He is the God who heals ALL our diseases. There is absolutely nothing too difficult for Jehovah Rapha. He has been my present help in my times of trouble (*Psalms 46:1*) and has been continuously quick to perform His Word (*Jeremiah 1:12*). I thank God for sending me helpers to meet me at different points of dire need. Even my bills at the hospital were covered by selfless brethren. Coming from a lineage of premature death due to cancer, I thank God for supernatural intervention as I am a cancer survivor and the cycle has been broken! I did not die. I saw the goodness of God in the land of the living (*Psalms 27:13*!).

Stephinah is a mother of two handsome sons, a beautiful daughter, and grandma to three adorable grandchildren.



A PROMISE FULFILLED

Alrena Moodley

There are many explanations for the prequel of a story in which a person embarks on a journey riddled with poor choices that lead to gut-wrenching devastation. On closer inspection, and almost always in retrospect, these explanations may be narrowed down to particular childhood incidents. However, a deeper understanding unfortunately does not allow us to eradicate the events of our past. We choose to overcome, a choice which presents a formidable battle without the Lord.

As a young girl, I dreamed of having an independent life, running my own business, and living in my own apartment, but not independent of a beautiful story-book marriage with someone who would love me and care deeply for me.

I was almost 15, living away from home with my aunt, when I fell in love with a teacher – 14 years older. I wrote letters to my friends about being on “cloud-nine” but in reality, this man was a predator and I was not the only young girl imprisoned in his den of deceit. I found myself in a constant battle between wanting to be loved and wanting to be free, while my joy rapidly depleted. When my parents eventually discovered the relationship, he proposed. I was only 16, but as weak as my young mind was, I knew that this relationship was emotionally abusive and being free of it would save my life. I remember praying for God’s help, despite a lack of relationship with Him. A few months later, after the tragic loss of a friend, I realised the brevity of life and found the courage to end the relationship. Joy was nowhere in sight.

At 18, I began a relationship with someone 12 years older. Everything seemed perfect and I began picturing a new future – I was so wrong! Within that year I received a call from a friend which



shattered those dreams – he had just married someone else and I was actually “the other woman!” I felt so betrayed, so hurt. The embarrassment and shame were all too much for my already tender heart, and it began to solidify the notion that I was not worthy of love. Joy seemed even further away. At this stage, I had already met Mrs Brown, my dad’s client. She had taken it upon herself to talk to me about Jesus, the end of the world, and eternity. I remember her odd question, “If you are Christian, what kind of Christian are you?” At a conference that she took me to is where I truly gave my heart to Jesus and where the fond memory of Mrs Brown burrowed itself into my heart forever.

Faced with the devastation of this second betrayal, I looked to the Lord differently as a believer, with assurance that He would hear my cry and help me pick up the pieces. I remember hearing His voice as I crossed the street one day, telling me to leave town, so I did. Me moving to Johannesburg at 19 was hard for my parents, but I needed a fresh start. I immediately plugged myself into church and found a job. My responsibilities grew at church; I became a youth leader, taught at Sunday School, volunteered in other ministries and began studying at Bible College.

Nearing 21, I met someone at a youth meeting who seemed to meet all my criteria, including serving in the house. I convinced myself he was from the Lord, despite signs to the contrary. People would warn me about him, but desperately wanting to believe that I had somehow been found worthy of love, I foolishly dismissed them.

One night, my aunt and uncle who were Senior Pastors of our church, were invited to an engagement party by a fellow pastor. The engagement happened to be my boyfriend's... to someone else! The pain was paralyzing. How could there be hope? How could there be love? And after years of torment and pain, how could there ever be joy?

I cried to the Lord for forgiveness for not trusting Him. I committed to fully trust Him, asking that He literally drop someone out of the sky for me, so that there would be no doubt. I plunged myself back into church life and as my spirit grew willing, my heart grew receptive to the joy of the Lord.

Two years later, the Lord gave me a dream of my husband and I standing on a mountain, overlooking an orchard ready for harvest. I was reading Myles Munroe's "Potential" series at the time, so the orchard was significant to me. My husband in the dream had two specific qualities which were easily identifiable when I finally met him.

My brothers had the same circle of friends as Andrew. They both thought him perfect for me because he spoke about Jesus all the time. They introduced us and we chatted for months about everything. One day, Andrew bumped into me at the shopping centre and decided to accompany me instead of going to work! While driving around

talking, I discovered the two things about him that God had told me in my dream. At that moment, I knew that this was the man God had sent for me – the Lord's idea of dropping someone out the sky! Our first date was at the end of November 1999 and we only saw each other again a month later. It was New Year's Eve when we decided to officially date. Three days later, sitting across a restaurant table, Andrew took my hand and asked, "Remember all those times I told you we were destined to be together? How does that look to you now?" That was his marriage proposal! By 12th January we had met each other's families and were married in December 2000.

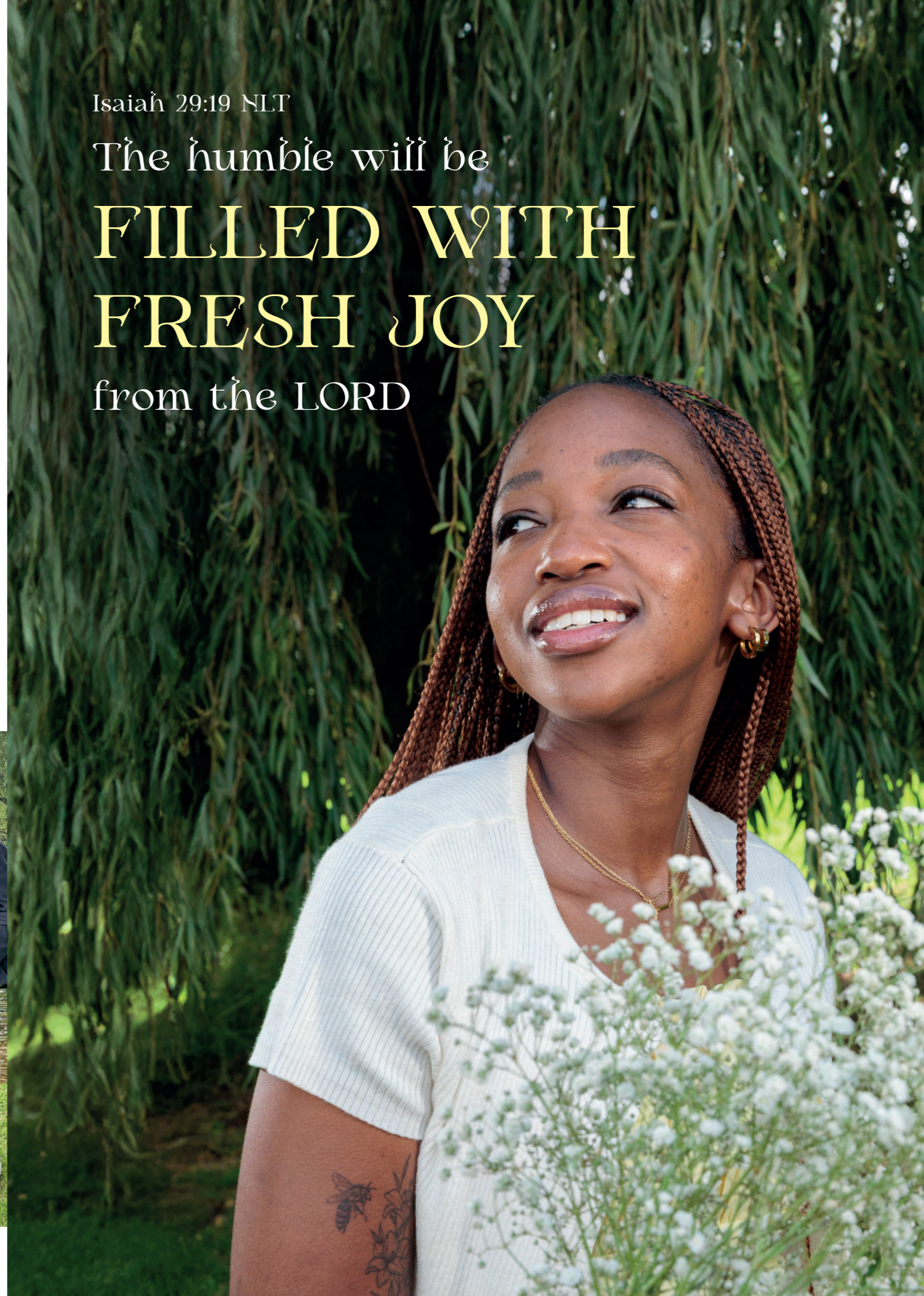
Andrew is not only dashing handsome, but is well-grounded in God's Word, devoted to the Kingdom and never misses an opportunity to help people. He cherishes everything about me and makes it his priority to love and honour me. We have three beautiful boys together who are also kind, helpful and love the Lord. Andrew was God's promise for me. This year we will be married for 26 years, and those dark joyless days are a distant memory.

Alrena is a follower of Jesus who finds joy in nature and has a love for reading timeless classics. She is a proud mum of three beautiful boys, has been married for 25 years and is grateful for the journey.



Isaiah 29:19 NLT

The humble will be
**FILLED WITH
FRESH JOY**
from the LORD



PUSELETSO'S STORY

Puseletso Mafuna

I experienced a life-threatening moment that brought me face-to-face with my own fragility. In that difficult time, when fear and uncertainty surrounded me, I encountered God's presence in a way I had never known before. What could have ended in tragedy, became a powerful testimony of His mercy, grace, and divine intervention.

In March 2022, at 24 weeks pregnant, my life changed suddenly and drastically. After what had been a normal pregnancy, I was diagnosed with severe preeclampsia and HELLP syndrome, a condition that led to a life-threatening crisis and heartbreaking loss of our baby girl, Bogolo, meaning "God's greatness." In that critical moment, I lost consciousness and what followed was beyond human control. I had to undergo an emergency C-section, followed by a craniotomy brain surgery a day later due to a subarachnoid haemorrhage (brain aneurysm), which caused me to have a stroke. According to my Neurosurgeon, I was not even stable enough to be operated on. It was a touch-and-go situation and the outcome of the surgery was very uncertain. I was in ICU with multiple organ failure. My kidneys were shutting down and I had to be on dialysis for a few days while my baby was also fighting to stay alive in the NICU, at just 490g. She lived for 52 days and then went to be with Lord at 980g.

During this time, we were truly grateful for the presence of our church community at Rivers. They came through for us and helped us send our baby off in dignity and unity. The support we received from our pastors was also heartfelt throughout. I was able to have a pastoral counselling session with Ps Claire after being discharged from the psychiatric hospital. Having a village surround you in faith, in love and in humility can really save your life spiritually.

Even while heavily grieving, God's hand was upon me. He preserved my life when it could easily have been lost. I was seen back-to-back by a couple of specialists because my condition was



critical. I was seen by a Gynaecologist, a Physician, a Neurosurgeon, a Clinical psychologist, a Physiotherapist and a Cardiologist simultaneously every day in ICU.

The journey during, and after, this encounter was not easy at all. It required a lot of strength, faith, and being intentional about my recovery and healing. Through lots of psychiatric therapy and physiotherapy, a supportive husband, close friends and family, prayers, and God's grace, I began to rebuild. My family visited and prayed in my room, creating a powerful atmosphere of faith

around me. Though our hearts carried deep grief, I encountered God's mercy in a profound way – He sustained me, carried me, and brought me back to life again.

The second pregnancy with Bokgoni was also not an easy one because fear and anxiety still crept in. I was declared high risk, so my doctors monitored me closely through constant check-ups. I knew that this pregnancy was not just a second chance but a restoration of joy for my family and I, because the pain I went through was for a purpose no one knew nor expected. Healing is a constant process and I had to trust that God would see to completion the good work He had faithfully started. God is in the business of doing miracles and He will use people to prevail His purpose.

With great joy, we are now restored with a happy and healthy daughter, Bokgoni, meaning "GOD IS ABLE." I carried Bokgoni almost full term and delivered her at 37 weeks by an elective C-section. She was strong and healthy at 3,4kg and when we laid eyes on her it felt like a kiss from heaven! My husband and I felt seen, heard and favoured by God once more.

Coming out of that experience, I know without a doubt that I am alive because of God's divine intervention. He gave me another chance at life, not by accident, but with purpose. My faith has been strengthened and I am reminded that God is both a protector and a restorer. Today, I stand as a witness that His power is real, His love is unfailing, and His plans for us are greater than we can imagine. This journey has deepened my relationship with



Him and renewed my commitment to live a life that glorifies His name. So, I want to encourage you to hold on, whatever the near-death experience is that you may encounter. God will restore everything you lose in the process. It might not be in the same form, but He will surely have the sun rise again for you. The responsibility you have is to just trust in Him. Allow your joy to be restored by God, and not the world. Stay in His presence and cement your faith in Him because He does NOT go against His Word. He is faithful, even in our darkest moments.

Puseletso is a devoted mom and wife, and a faith-driven young woman who serves in the Welcome Team at Rivers Church, Kyalami. She is passionate about cooking, girlhood, singing and public speaking. Professionally, she is a corporate procurement specialist who applies integrity, diligence and excellence into her work. She is committed to growing in faith and living a purpose-driven life that inspires others.





With joy you will
drink deeply from the
**FOUNTAIN OF
SALVATION**

Isaiah 12:3 NLT

A LIFETIME OF JOY, FORGIVENESS AND PURPOSE

Lynne Yates



I was born in Pietersburg (Polokwane) in 1945 and raised by my grandmother. She took me with her to the Anglican Church and ensured that I prayed every night. She laid a strong Christian foundation early in my life and planted seeds of faith in my young heart that would later blossom into joy and restoration in my life.

My mother passed away when I was eight years old and her death affected me deeply. It was a painful season and at such a young age, I struggled with the loss. But through those difficult early years, God was present.

I met my husband, Roy, in 1964. I was 19 and he was 22, and he would often come to the hotel where I worked as a receptionist. One day we struck up a conversation and a few days later, he invited me to a dance at the hotel. It was all very romantic and I still remember the dress I wore. We ended up getting married that same year, and enjoyed 59 years of marriage. We were blessed with two girls, Kim and Sandra, and our last-born was a boy, Tyrone.

The year 1970 was the turning point of my life. I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour, and God gave me a renewed sense of purpose. I began serving in our local church and my life was filled with faith, service, and a deep sense of joy that only God could give. Two years later, Roy also gave his life to the Lord at a crusade in Durban while we were on holiday. We raised our children in the house of the Lord and got plugged into church wherever we moved with work.

In 1980 I became extremely ill and Roy rushed me to Windhoek Hospital. We were living in Namibia at the time. I underwent gallbladder surgery and my condition was critical. Doctors were unsure whether I would survive. My sister flew in to be with me as I was not responding and could only stare at her through all the tubes I was plugged into. I remember hearing church bells ringing in the distance and that encouraged me to hang onto God. Even though I couldn't talk, I prayed inwardly, "Lord you are still with me!" By His grace,



I survived that ordeal. God restored my health and I was reminded that He was not finished with me yet.

We joined Rivers in 1992 after moving to Johannesburg and I got plugged in and started serving. In August of the same year, tragedy struck when my beloved sister, June, was shot dead by her husband. The loss was devastating and almost too much to bear. That night Roy and I were convicted by the scripture in Matthew 6:14-15 that speaks about forgiveness. We looked at each other and thought to ourselves, "If God forgave us, how can we not forgive?" In the midst of that deep pain, God spoke to our hearts and we chose to extend forgiveness that very night. We also honoured our promise to June by caring for her children until they completed school. One of her sons, Gavin, better known as Gavin "Magic" Johnson, became part of the Springboks rugby team that went on to win the Rugby World Cup in 1995. When June's husband was released from prison a few years later, Roy helped him find work.

We were heavily criticised by friends and family for forgiving June's husband but through our act of obedience, God slowly restored peace in our hearts and brought healing and reconciliation to our family. June's children came to forgive their father and gave their lives to the Lord. June's husband himself also gave his life to the Lord!

Pastor André, Pastor Wilma, and the Rivers family have walked every step of this journey with Roy and I for 34 years. Through every season of joy and sadness, they have shown love, care, and generosity that has overwhelmed us. When my beloved husband passed away in 2022, it was one of the most difficult seasons of my life. In my grief, the support of my church family was a constant reminder of God's restoring love and faithfulness.

God has blessed me with a beautiful family – three children, six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. Pastors André and Wilma married my daughter Sandy and her husband Mike, and they dedicated my grandchildren, Jared and Bodene, as well as my great-grandson, Mason. Seeing my family grow and walk in God's love has been a great blessing and a testimony of His faithfulness across generations.

Being plugged in at Rivers Church and serving God and His people has brought great joy and purpose into my life. I joined the church when there were just 70 people, when Pastors André and Wilma took over the church which was then called Sandton Assemblies of God. The name was later changed to Rivers of Joy and then to Rivers Church. I remember helping Ps Wilma with the women's ministry right in the beginning, giving handouts at the doors. I also did the floral arrangements for the main auditorium when the old building could

only seat up to 200 people. I joined Kidszone and was part of the team for 30 years, before I joined the Rivers Foundation. I was also privileged to be on staff for two years, which was a great blessing.

At age 81, I have come to realise that there is a reason I am here, and for as long as I am here, I will do whatever I can do to help people. I am also encouraged to spend more time with the Lord, on my knees. Looking back over my life, I can truly say that through every loss, every illness, every tragedy, and every blessing, God's faithfulness has never failed me. His love has carried me and He continues to restore my joy every day.

Lynne has been a partner at Rivers for 34 years and has served in Kidszone and recently joined the Rivers Foundation team. She is blessed to be a mom, grandma and great-grandma. Her life is a testimony of God's grace, forgiveness and restoration.



There is joy for those who
deal justly with others and always
DO WHAT IS RIGHT

Psalms 106:3 NLT

UNSPEAKABLE JOY

Rita Cook



My husband, Chris, and I decided we were ready to have a baby, but it took us a year to fall pregnant. In 2020, when I was 20 weeks pregnant, the COVID-19 lockdown hit. Due to the restrictions, my husband could no longer come with me to our gynae appointments, and we didn't know if he would be permitted to be there for the birth. My anxiety was at an all-time high. At my 36-week checkup, they found that my blood pressure was high and they were also concerned about my baby's health, so I was scheduled for a C-section at 38 weeks. I was heartsore and anxious as I had wanted to try for a natural birth, but I was also excited to meet my baby. The C-section was scheduled for a Monday but the weekend before, I went into early labour that lasted all weekend. I had two inductions and by the Monday I was physically and emotionally drained. I was rushed in for an emergency C-section and gave birth to our beautiful baby girl, Leila. Chris could not be

there the whole weekend, but we had some time together while I was in labour. My gynae also did us a special favour and allowed Chris to stay for two days after the birth.

My postpartum journey was hard. The pain was unbearable because of all my body had endured, and I was swallowed into a world of postpartum depression. I was so overwhelmed by the smallest things and at times I found myself in a very dark place. I felt alone and unworthy of being a mother. That season in my life was a long battle. *Psalm 94:19 NIV* "When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought me joy."

Fast forward to 2024, Chris and I decided that we were going to have our second baby. Fear and anxiety sunk in about whether I could do it again, but we knew this was God's plan. I fell pregnant within the first month! The panic and joy were all

mixed into one, but our loving Father had our baby girl and I in the palm of His hands. This time, I had a completely different pregnancy journey. I was healthy, baby was healthy and Chris could be part of every detail, from being at appointments, to being there at the birth.

As I began to experience joy again, I had a car accident at 16 weeks. The car was written off but I had complete peace and was filled with unspeakable joy to have walked away with very minor injuries and my unborn baby still healthy.

I was once again scheduled for a C-section, but I still wondered what it would have been like to have a natural birth, having your water break, feeling all the birthing stages, and not the forced ones I had endured with my first pregnancy. When you have these small desires and don't think too much of them, God sees them and He shows up in all the tiny details.

I was very relaxed throughout the pregnancy, even in the last stages. I hadn't even packed my bags or prepared a birthing plan. My therapist had said to me, "The plan is... there is no plan!" At my 36-week checkup, my gynae said baby was lying quite low and suggested I have two steroid injections over two days to prepare her lungs in case she came earlier. After the last injection, I went to the shops with hubby and our daughter to get some last-minute things. We were having baby at Life Fourways Hospital and we were around the corner at Cedar Square. Just as I entered a store, I felt something strange. It turns out that my mucus plug had come out. Chris suggested we go straight to the hospital but I insisted that I wanted to get my slippers. I was filled with joy and excitement, not fear. We eventually got to the hospital, slippers in tow, and as I stepped out of the car, my water broke! This time around, we were able to go into the ward as a family.

By then I was two centimetres dilated. Chris left to take Leila home and pack some bags. I went through labour on my own for about an hour, as no one checked in on me. It was just me and Jesus, experiencing the moment together. I was overcome with peace, strength, and unspeakable joy.

By the time I was rolled into theatre, I was in a lot of pain. I was prepped for surgery and given an



epidural. So, there I was in the theatre room, ready for my C-section, numb from the waist down, BUT God had a different plan. It turns out, I was fully dilated and the baby was already coming! So, I ended up giving birth to my second baby girl – naturally! It was a miracle and they were all completely stunned!

God's hand is always in the details, in the areas we feel anxious or overwhelmed about. He carefully weaved the smallest details into a beautiful story of redemption. He restored my joy. I had no postpartum depression and no anxiety, just peace and joy. The Lord laid the name Abigail on our hearts. It means "Father's joy" and she is such a joy, blessing everyone wherever we go with her smile and a wave. How good is our God! I am constantly in awe and wonder of who He is, and in our little Abbi, I see a daily reminder of His pure joy.

My hope and prayer for those reading this chapter out of my life is that it may bring joy to your heart and encourage you to hope and trust in the God of the details. I am still walking out my full healing journey from depression, but His ever growing JOY fills me daily. God will restore your joy in the areas of your life where it has been lost or stolen from you. Remember *Nehemiah 8:10 NIV*, "The joy of the LORD is your strength."

Rita is passionate about the things of God, striving to learn and grow according to His Word. She is the very proud wife of an incredible husband and they share two beautiful daughters, Leila and Abigail. Rivers Church is where they met and it is where their home is.

I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy

YES, YOUR JOY WILL OVERFLOW

John 15:11 NLT



THE RIVERS FOUNDATION

A LEGACY OF JOYFUL GIVING

Nuska Zwane, Director of the Rivers Foundation



Long before the launch of the Rivers Foundation, Rivers Church, then known as Rivers of Joy, was already actively involved in making a difference in the community and supporting the less fortunate in our country. This heart for people was birthed out of the vision

and compassion of our Founding Pastors, who saw the immense need in our country and decided to do something that would make a tangible difference. Through this article, we hope to take you down memory lane and highlight the contribution of Rivers Church's social arm over the last three decades.

Over the years, we as a church have partnered with various individuals and businesses to undertake projects that focused on uplifting underprivileged communities, particularly involving children. One of our early projects was a refurbishment of **Dr Knack Primary School** in Alexandra, where we did cleaning, painting and gardening to create a clean, fun learning environment for the children.

We also partnered with incredible people like **Lillian Krause**, in the early 2000s. She worked with the community of Finetown in the South of Johannesburg, fondly known as Kwa Majazane, where nearly 60% of residents were unemployed. We came alongside her, providing food parcels that were distributed to families in need, and established a community centre where children could be cared for while parents worked or searched for employment. We also assisted with skills training, setting up an IT centre, and even donated a vehicle. Lillian was the hands and feet in that community, but the contribution of Rivers Church enabled her to do far more than she could have done on her own.

Around 2004, Rivers Church partnered with **Ethembeni Children's Home**, founded by the Salvation Army. The home is located in Doornfontein in Johannesburg, an area deeply



affected by homelessness and drug addiction. Many children were born into extremely vulnerable circumstances, and some were abandoned under heartbreaking conditions. Thankfully, a number of these babies were rescued and taken to nearby police stations or brought to Ethembeni to be cared for. For years, Rivers Church supported the home with necessities such as nappies, clothing, soft toys, blankets and food items.

Then in 2006, 20 years ago, the Rivers Foundation was registered and the social arm of the church grew from strength to strength. I was privileged to join the Rivers Foundation in 2008 and could never have imagined the immense impact we would have.

In 2008, now under the banner of the Rivers Foundation, we undertook a full refurbishment of the Ethembeni building inside and out, which had been built in 1910 and was in a deteriorating condition. We painted and tiled the entire building, fixed the roof, and renovated the staff quarters and the children's rooms and play areas. We bought new supplies like bunk beds, prams and carry cots, and ensured that each child received their own teddy bear. What was once a building in decline, became a safe and nurturing environment for children and staff alike.

After supporting Ethembeni for a number of years, the home was able to secure additional donors and

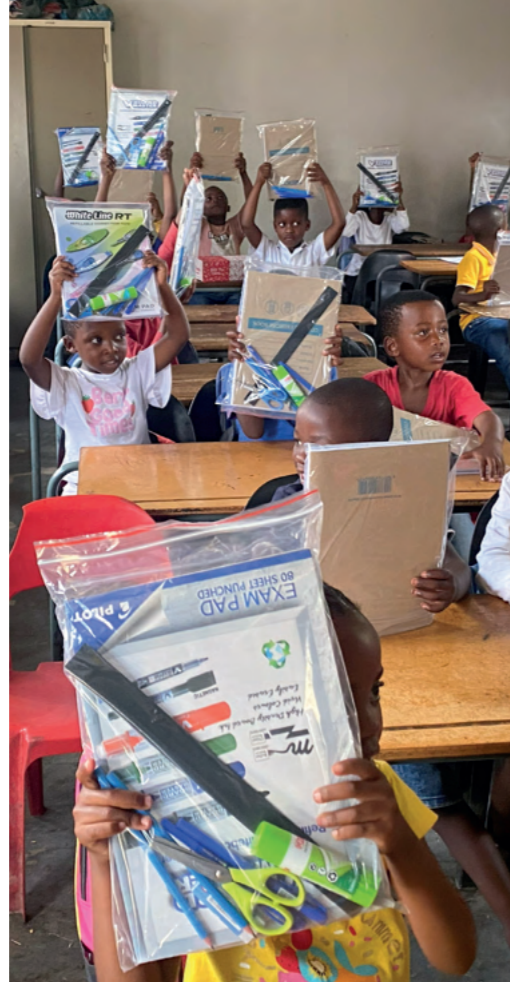


support, allowing us to extend our reach to other communities.

We then got involved with **Acres of Love** home, a one-of-a-kind organisation that provides family-based care for abandoned and orphaned children, creating loving homes and preparing the children for a better future. We started out partly funding a home in partnership with a church in the USA. Over time, as the Rivers Foundation grew and we were able to do more, we took over the full funding of that home and eventually grew to support nine homes on a monthly basis. We also support their Forever Home in Cape Town, where children with disabilities are cared for by dedicated house parents. Many of these children have gone on to graduate and become independent, thriving individuals.

We realised that often, children from poor and remote areas don't perform well at school due to being underfed. The need was huge and feeding the children became a priority. This led to us starting a feeding scheme that we extended to several schools over the years, such as St Angars School, Blaire Athol and various creches. We received reports from the schools that since the feeding scheme started, class attendance improved and the children started doing incredibly well at school!

We also undertook various skills development programmes to assist parents of these learners and others in different communities, who struggled to



find sustainable jobs due to unemployment and lack of skills. These include computer literacy, sewing, upholstery and many more.

In 2019, we were led back to Kwa Majazane, where we partnered with **Phakamani Primary School**, a Christian school serving the local community. Like many township schools, Phakamani operates with limited resources. However, the principal, Mam Masuku, and her team have consistently done so much with what they have, and we were inspired by their strong leadership and stewardship. This inspired us to support them and enable them to do even more.

We provide learners with freshly made sandwiches twice a day, monthly toiletry packs for the girls and the boys, stationery at the beginning of each year, and we provide school uniforms, clothing, underwear and shoes, helping restore dignity and create equal opportunities. We also supply sports clothing, water bottles, winter soup packs, Christmas food hampers, and treats during Easter.

In 2023, the school was faced with another challenge – more than half of the learners could not afford the annual school fees of R400. The Sisters Ministry stepped in to cover these fees, which enabled more learners to enrol in school.

With the increase in numbers, more classroom space was required. To address this, we built seven new classrooms, and this even allowed the school to add a Grade 9 class, as they had previously only gone up to Grade 8. We also built additional toilets, so that the Grade R learners didn't have to share toilets with the older learners.

Over and above refurbishing classrooms, we have refurbished kitchens, and donated school desks and chairs. We have established community garden projects, partnered with organisations to install boreholes, and upgraded public service spaces such as Home Affairs in Randburg, and refurbished the Sandton Police Station holding cells, offices, reception area and gardens. In addition, we purchased a 12-seater vehicle to assist the station with transport and emergency needs.

The Sisters Ministry has been actively involved in supporting our beneficiary schools, contributing monthly towards toiletry packs, helping ensure that the girls don't miss out on school during their monthly cycle, but that they can attend school with dignity and confidence. The Sisters also provide matric dance attire, bras, jewellery, shoes, smart pre-loved clothing, interview outfits, and baby clothing for those who fall pregnant while still in school.

We have valued our partnerships with churches, schools and early learning centres in places like Alexandra Township, Soweto and Finetown, as well as KwaZulu-Natal. And with every Rivers Church campus we have opened, the work of the Rivers Foundation has continued to grow and make an impact, all for the glory of God! We are grateful to every partner at Rivers Church, every individual, organisation and business who has trusted us and come alongside us, enabling us to be the hands and feet of Jesus in our country. *Proverbs 19:17* encourages us that, "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done." So if you ever wonder about the impact your little might have, be assured that every sandwich made, every contribution and every minute spent volunteering in any capacity, goes beyond us into eternity. As we pour out into those who have such a special place in God's heart, we make an investment into our own heavenly bank accounts. So let us not grow weary in doing good (*Galatians 6:9*). Let us continue **HELPING PEOPLE!**

Nuska Zwane or "Ma Nuska" as she is affectionately known, serves as the Director of the Rivers Foundation. She leads with compassion and a deep commitment to uplifting and strengthening disadvantaged families and communities. She is dedicated to excellence and has a passion for making a tangible difference, and inspires those around her to live generously.





Psalm 16:11 NIV

You make known to me

THE PATH OF LIFE

you will fill me with joy in
your presence, with eternal
pleasures at your right hand

Surrender

Sisters of Africa 2027



