

23. WHERE YOU FIRST SAW THE LIGHT

*At times we feel alone in the
world, isolated from everyone
and everything.*

#NCSAMENTALHEALTHDEVOTIONS

WHERE YOU FIRST SAW THE LIGHT

Psalms 94:19: "When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul."

Have you ever said or thought these words: "Man, I wish I could just die." I recall numerous days in my life when I prayed to the Lord and asked Him: "Won't you just take my life? Just let me slip peacefully away in my sleep and not wake up." There has been really bad days when I wished someone might do me the honour and simply take my life, maybe a burglar, or a mob during one of those famous South African riots. On particularly dark days, thoughts of self-harm and even suicide crept into my mind. Those were merely thoughts, I never really had plans or actions to complete those thoughts.

Looking back on those dark days made me realise there are dark days we have to go through in life. Such days leave us feeling very hopeless and sometimes even scared. Dark days when we feel alone in this world, feeling very isolated from everyone and everything. Like David in Psalms 139:23-24, you also perhaps have prayed to the Lord, saying: "Lord, know my heart, see my anxious thoughts!" Prayers to show and tell the Lord that you are alone and don't feel well: "Lord, see the anxiety of my heart!" Perhaps you have felt abandoned and pushed aside with no one to turn to.

I remember when I was in college, there was a specific time of my life when I felt very alone; a time when I had troubles and felt like I had no one to talk to.

I RECALL NUMEROUS DAYS IN MY
LIFE WHEN I PRAYED TO THE LORD
AND ASKED HIM: "WON'T YOU
JUST TAKE MY LIFE? HAVE YOU
EVER FELT THIS WAY?"

I remember at that stage taking my phone, going to my phonebook directory and paging down all the names and numbers. I had hundreds of numbers which I paged through but with every single name I went through, I felt like no one was there who I could talk to. There was nobody on that list, amongst my family, amongst my friends, who I could call upon.

We face difficulties and it seems as if there is no solution. During those dark times we cannot see a way out of the confusion of life. Have you ever been at a place in your life where you've experienced so much pain and you've struggled to cope, a time that left a very bitter aftertaste? Perhaps you too have asked the question whether life is worth living for. Have you ever wished for a fresh start? Have you ever said this life you are living now is not worth living for, but perhaps if you had a different life, perhaps if you could have a fresh start or perhaps if you could just leave and go live somewhere on an island where nobody knows you and you can start over, then maybe life would be worth living for? Maybe then you might see the light at the end of the tunnel again?

Maybe this is where you are today, living your life but cannot really see the light at the end of the tunnel. Perhaps this pandemic caused by COVID-19 has shaken your world. It is important that at the end of it all, you find the light that will keep you going.

Today's topic is something we don't speak of often. It is a reality which many of God's people within His church face, but they pretend being all okay on the outside while they are withering away on the inside.

HAVE YOU EVER WISHED FOR A FRESH START? THAT THE LIFE YOU ARE LIVING NOW IS NOT WORTH LIVING FOR, BUT PERHAPS IF YOU COULD JUST LEAVE AND GO LIVE SOMEWHERE ON AN ISLAND THEN YOU CAN START OVER?

Most people at some stage or another in their lives, face thoughts and feelings of wanting to die, wanting to just escape from the pain and the confusion and the stress of this life and not really finding the hope which is available to them.

Today I want to address the following question: What can keep you going through these particular dark moments of life? What is the solution to the pain, the hopelessness, the isolation and the confusion, having this anxiety and where life is so confusing that it seems as if there is no escape? I can tell you these feelings and thoughts are like no other. If you haven't experienced it, you will not understand what it involves. Within the world and within the church specifically, there is a silence and a stigma surrounding feelings of 'I want to die' and 'I don't want to live life anymore' and 'it's just too much for me' and 'I'm not coping'. We don't talk about it. We don't talk about the fact that we are not coping and that we can't see a way out of our trials and tribulations. The result is that we end up being very isolated. We don't feel that we are safe to be able to talk about it. If this is how you feel today, I want to encourage you to find somebody to talk to. Do not go through it alone. If you cannot trust people, go to God, speak to Him and lay your burdens before Him.

I also want to assure you that you are not in this fight alone. A song we like to sing says: 'Someone is praying for you, someone is praying for you.' You may not be able to think that right now there is someone out there in this world who is praying for you, but I can tell you, there is!

**I WANT TO ENCOURAGE YOU TO
FIND SOMEBODY TO TALK TO. DO
NOT GO THROUGH YOUR
STRUGGLES ALONE. IF YOU
CANNOT TRUST PEOPLE, GO TO
GOD, SPEAK TO HIM AND LAY
YOUR BURDENS BEFORE HIM.**

I remember a while back in my life when I was experiencing a bad day, a down day, an off day, I felt so miserable when I woke up. I felt like I was all alone with nobody caring about me. I believe it was God's providence that somebody sent me a text saying: "I don't know why, but I felt impressed this morning to pray for you. I want to let you know that I have prayed for you and whatever it is that you are going through, I have laid your burdens before God's feet." I felt that it was God who impressed this person to pray for me during that time. That is why I know there is someone praying for you somewhere.

If it is difficult for you to believe that there is an earthly friend praying for you, I want to mention a Bible verse which demonstrates that it is not only earthly friends who are praying for us. Jesus was speaking to Simon Peter and He said to him: "*Simon, Simon. Satan has asked to sift each one of you like wheat, but I have pleaded in prayer for you that your faith will not fail. And when you have turned back and you have been strengthened, go and strengthen your brothers also*" (Luke 22:31-32).

Jesus declared to Simon that He prayed for him, that He knew Simon was going through trials and tribulations. Jesus prayed for Simon and Jesus is praying for you right now. You may not believe me, but if you look in the Bible and read Romans 8:34 it tells us that Jesus Christ is interceding for us: "*Who then will condemn us? No one – for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us and right now (that's today, in the Sanctuary), He is sitting in a place of honour at God's right hand side, pleading for us, pleading for you.*" In other words, Jesus is at God, the Father's right hand side right now. He is talking to God, the Father, about you and pleading for your cause.

**JESUS TOLD SIMON THAT HE HAD
PRAYED FOR HIM, AND THE BIBLE SAYS
RIGHT NOW HE IS IN THE HEAVENLY
SANCTUARY "PRAYING" FOR US.**

Other translations say: "He is making intercession for us in the heavenly sanctuary." Jesus is pleading on your behalf. You are on His mind right now.

There were Bible characters who also went through times of tribulation when they felt that life's troubles were just too much and that they would rather just die. I recall the story of Job feeling that the weights of life were crushing him to the point of death. Read Job 3:20-26 to give you some insight into his thoughts: *"Oh, why give light to those in misery (Job busy talking to God), "and life to those who are bitter? They long for death, and it won't come. They search for death more eagerly than for hidden treasure. They are filled with joy when they finally die, and rejoice when they find the grave. Why is life given to those with no future, those God has surrounded with difficulties? I cannot eat for sighing, my groans pour out like water. What I always feared has happened to me. What I dreaded has come true. I have no peace, no quietness. I have no rest; only trouble comes."* Job's lamentations to God are heart-wrenching. I am sure a lot of us can relate to it, where we can ask: "Why am I even here? Why am I living this life with so many troubles around me?"

When I was young, I wished certain things would never come on my path, but it did. This is exactly what Job was saying. Maybe you have felt the same way, also had these dark groanings towards God, asking, "Lord why? Why am I here? Why can't I just go and rest in the grave?"

**IN THE WORLD & THE CHURCH,
THERE IS A SILENCE & A STIGMA
SURROUNDING FEELINGS OF 'I
WANT TO DIE'. WE DON'T TALK
ABOUT IT OR THE FACT THAT WE
ARE NOT COPING AND THAT WE
CAN'T SEE A WAY OUT OF OUR
TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS. .**

How are you going to get through your darkness? Job somehow managed to get through it, to get out of it alive. What is more, Job managed to prosper in the end and to be happy again, to return to the joy he first felt in his life.

There are things that will carry you through the darkness. You may be surprised that you will find those things in your past, things that have already carried you through other trials in your life. What are those things, even if it is something small, that gave you hope in the past? The things that enabled you to keep going, that carried you through?

Somebody once said to me that in times of distress she was not able to do anything, She wasn't able to read her Bible, she wasn't able to go to church, she couldn't ask anybody for help. All she could do at that stage was to **pray**. Sometimes all you have is prayer and that is all you need to carry you through.

I remember back at university I was going through a particularly rough time in my life. I felt very alone and isolated. Many days I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep. My days were messed up. I was struggling to study and to concentrate. It felt like I had nothing to carry me through my days. I had a few friends here and there, but when I really needed them, they were doing their own thing ... not that I couldn't call on them, but I didn't want to disturb them. I remember dreading that time of my life, asking what's going to carry me through? I felt like I wasn't going to make it. I recall how I used to walk around on the campus of Helderberg College in the dead of night (midnight and past midnight), trying to chase my sleep, not being able to quiet my mind from all the negativity.

**THERE ARE THINGS THAT WILL
CARRY YOU THROUGH THE
DARKNESS. YOU MAY BE SURPRISED
THAT WHEN YOU COULDN'T PRAY
PERHAPS YOU COULD SING.**

The one thing I remember I used to do, which in retrospect I believe got me through those terrible days, was to sing. There was the one song I kept singing over and over again: *“Trust in the Lord and don't despair, He is a friend so true. No matter what your troubles are, Jesus will see you through. Sing, sing, sing when the day is bright. Sing through the darkest night, everywhere; all the day I will sing, sing, sing.”* That song really carried me through. The words resonated in my mind. I would walk around for hours, aimlessly, not knowing where I'm going and what I'm doing. With all those thoughts and emotions inside me, I would just keep on singing the short chorus over and over again. Sometimes even while crying, until my soul felt at peace and I could finally go to bed, exhausted, but at peace.

What has carried you through in the past? Was it those short prayers you've said along the way? Was it a song that has been in your heart? Was it that you knew God was making intercession for you and that He was praying for you?

There is another song that comes to mind, which says: *“God will make a way where there seems to be no way; He works in ways that we cannot see, He will make a way for me. He will be my guide, hold me closely to His side.”* Some of the words of these songs, are exactly for this purpose – to carry us through the darkness, to encourage us, to help us.

On the other hand, be careful of going to gloomy songs in your times of darkness. Recently I was doing a bit of research on depression and anxiety and people who felt suicidal and the songs that encouraged them.

**GOD WILL MAKE A WAY WHERE
THERE SEEMS TO BE NO WAY; HE
WORKS IN WAYS THAT WE CANNOT
SEE, HE WILL MAKE A WAY FOR ME.
HE WILL BE MY GUIDE, HOLD ME
CLOSELY TO HIS SIDE.**

I came across a blog, an internet page with songs they said encouraged them during their times of depression, times when they felt life wasn't worth living for. When I listened what these songs were about, I discovered that they were extremely depressing. So, be careful of the songs you listen to. Some of the songs we tend to go to when we are feeling down actually make us feel more depressed and put us into danger more than they help us. Rather sing the songs that encourage you, that lift up your soul to heaven and that bring you closer to the Light again.

I am reminded of the story of Paul and Silas when they were in prison. They didn't know whether they were going to die in that deep, dark dungeon or not. The Bible tells us in Acts 16:25, while Paul and Silas were sitting in the prison, at about midnight, they were praying and singing hymns to God and the other prisoners were listening. Can we, in the dark hours of life, recall those songs we once knew? Songs we used to sing when we were young but now long forgotten. Sing to the Lord if that is the only thing you can do.

Another song that comes to my mind which brings hope, is the song from Psalms 32:7 which says: *"You are my hiding place, you always fill my heart with songs of deliverance, whenever I am afraid I will trust in you, let the weak say I am strong in the strength of the Lord, I will trust in you."* Many of these songs will bring the hope that we've lost back into our minds and into our hearts.

WHILE PAUL AND SILAS WERE SITTING IN THE PRISON, AT ABOUT MIDNIGHT, THEY WERE PRAYING AND SINGING HYMNS TO GOD AND THE OTHER PRISONERS WERE LISTENING. CAN YOU, IN THE DARK HOURS OF LIFE, RECALL THOSE ENCOURAGING SONGS YOU ONCE KNEW?

Something else that could perhaps carry you through times of darkness, are Bible verses which you may have recited when you were younger, or **Bible stories** that have specific meaning for you. Call on those verses, call on those stories when you face times of trouble and when you feel like life is not worth it and life is just closing in around you.

I am reminded of the Bible story of Joseph which has often given me a lot of hope. Joseph was hated by his brothers, nearly killed by them and then eventually sold as a slave by them. When he reached Egypt, he became a slave in the house of Potiphar. He was a good and obedient slave to the point where Potiphar made him the head of his household. One day Potiphar's wife saw that he was a good, strong and probably very handsome Hebrew boy. She tried to seduce him, but being the godly man he was, he refused. In the process of her grabbing him (and in my mind trying to rape him), she torn off his cloak. In her anger she screamed and shouted until people came running into the room. She then lied and told everybody that he was trying to rape her, but she fought him off. She said the cloak in her hand was evidence that she fought him off. Potiphar arrived and threw Joseph, his slave, in jail. I wonder what went through Joseph's mind at that point in his life.

If you were a lord over a slave and this slave tried to rape your wife, what would you do to the slave? I would have killed him. But Potiphar didn't kill him, he threw him in jail. Why? My reasoning is that Potiphar knew Joseph was innocent, but he couldn't show that. He couldn't show that he believed the slave over his wife, so instead of killing him, he jailed him.

**SOMETHING ELSE THAT COULD CARRY
YOU THROUGH TIMES OF DARKNESS,
ARE BIBLE VERSES WHICH YOU USE
TO RECITED WHEN YOU WERE
YOUNGER, OR BIBLE STORIES THAT
HAVE SPECIFIC MEANING FOR YOU.**

I wonder to myself if ever in his life, Joseph looked up towards heaven and prayed to God and asked: "What have I done? I haven't left Your ways. I have always been a good guy. I could have taken Potiphar's wife and I could have slept with her, but I didn't. My brothers tried to kill me. My life is in a mess. Why, oh why, have You allowed this?" While he was sitting in jail, he interpreted the dream of the baker and the cup bearer. When the cup bearer was reinstated, Joseph said he must remember him. But the cup bearer forgot about Joseph.

Eventually, after many years when Pharaoh had a dream, the cup bearer remembered Joseph and he was called out of jail to interpret the dream. You know the rest of the story. Through a long chain of events, Joseph became second in command of Egypt. He saved the entire Egypt in the known world back then from starvation and hunger. He was eventually reunited with his family. His brothers were obviously very terrified because they thought of all the horrors they had put him through. In Genesis 45:4-5 we read: "*Then Joseph said to them: 'Please come closer' and they did. Then he said to them: 'I am your brother Joseph, who you sold into Egypt.'*" They became petrified and stood there, shaking. But Joseph said to them: "*Now do not be upset or blame yourself because you sold me here. It was really God who sent me ahead of you to save His people's lives.*" In other words Joseph, in retrospect, saw the providence of God in his life. He saw that despite all the trials and tribulations and the darkneses and the hardships he went through, there was a purpose with it all.

The Bible says that: "*all things work together for the good of those who love the Lord and do His purposes.*"

JOSEPH, IN RETROSPECT, SAW THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IN HIS LIFE. HE SAW THAT DESPITE ALL THE TRIALS, TRIBULATIONS, DARKNESSES & HARDSHIPS HE WENT THROUGH, THERE WAS A PURPOSE WITH IT ALL.

Yes, you may not see it right now, you may still feel that life is a mess and you can't understand why God is allowing certain things to happen, but in the end God will make things work out and He will use those things to your benefit.

Perhaps some **Bible verses** will carry you through the difficult times. Isaiah 40:31 says: *"But those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not grow weak."* Psalm 116:1-2 reads: *"I love the Lord because He has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because He inclined His ear to me, I will call on Him as long as I live."*

It can be the **memories** of the better times you once had and the hope that things will return to normal. Perhaps you are holding on to the hope that God is working actively to restore this earth to its former ways. Perhaps the thing that will carry you through during this darkness is a **friend** or a person or somebody who you are close to. Somebody who is an anchor to hold you while the storms of life are raging.

I remember my granddad used to be my anchor when I was a young child. He died when I was around six years old, but I always used to think of him in tough times – the godly, calm, content man that he was – and that gave me peace. I said to myself I want to be the same. I want to be like him, be godly, calm and content in the storms of life. Sometimes we must call on people or on friends to assist us and to be there for us. When it seems that there is no way out, when all hope is lost, go to that place, to that memory, to that thing, to that person, that recalibrates you. What do I mean? Remember that sometimes in life, you just wish for a fresh start. When life holds no meaning and purpose any more, you wish you could start all over and then maybe life will have meaning again.

**HOLD ON TO THE HOPE THAT GOD IS
WORKING ACTIVELY TO RESTORE THIS
EARTH TO ITS FORMER WAYS.**

There are things that can recalibrate you. The things I've mentioned so far are some of the things that can recalibrate you. Those are the things that will help you to start afresh. ***'Go to where you first saw the light.'***

There is a specific story of Jacob in the Bible that I want us to consider. Jacob left his home in Canaan because his brother Esau wanted to kill him. On his way to his uncle, Jacob stopped at Bethel. There at Bethel, God gave him a dream. He saw angels descending on a ladder from heaven down to earth. At the top of the ladder, he saw the throne of God and he saw God Himself. In the dream, God blessed him and promised him prosperity and a good future. When he awoke, he made a covenant with God and called the place, *'The Gate of Heaven'*. He made a promise to God that God will always be his God.

Many years later, he was running for his life again, this time from his father-in-law. He took his belongings and his wives and ran back to Canaan. He was between a rock and a hard place because on the one side was Esau who wanted to kill him and on the other side was his father-in-law who also wanted to kill him. The Bible tells us that Jacob heard his brother was on his way with a massive army. He must have felt very distressed.

Before he crossed the river, he sent his family ahead of him, and there at Bethel, the place where he first made a covenant with the Lord, he spent the night alone. He went back to the place where he first saw the light, where he first had that dream. God gave him the recalibration he needed. God gave him that fresh start. This time around, the Bible tells us that Jacob wrestled with God throughout the night to the point that when the sun came up, Jacob refused to let Him go.

**TO START FRESH, TO RECALIBRATE
GO BACK TO WHERE YOU FIRST
SAW THE LIGHT.**

He held on to God and God said to him: "Let Me go!" But Jacob refused. God even injured him to force him to let go of Him. Jacob still refused and said: "I will not let You go until You have blessed me." And God did. He also changed his name from Jacob to Israel. God blessed him and He promised him prosperity again.

Sometimes you need to go back to where you first met God. Sometimes you need to wrestle with Him again and refuse to let Him go until He blessed you. Say to God: "Lord, give me that future You promised me. Even though I am in fear and in despair, I will not let You go until You've blessed me and given me hope."

In our lives, we do face death and we do face thoughts of death and we do sometimes feel hopeless. When we go to the grave of a person who had died, we normally see two dates on the headstone, the date of the person's birth and the date of his death. In between these two dates there is a dash, a little line, a small insignificant line that comprises the entirety of a person's life. A dash that demarcates the life this person had lived between those two dates.

For now you are still living in this dash and I want to encourage you to make this dash count. Go back to where you first saw the light. Make this dash fresh if you need to. Recalibrate. Start again if you have to. Ask God to bless you again while you are in the dash. Celebrate your life. You are fortunate to be alive still and that you can live the vision you had when you were young. Chase it again. Place yourself in the situation where you first felt hope, where you first felt passion and inspiration and had a vision for the future.

**SOMETIMES YOU NEED TO GO BACK TO
WHERE YOU FIRST MET GOD.
SOMETIMES YOU NEED TO WRESTLE
WITH HIM AGAIN AND REFUSE TO LET
HIM GO UNTIL HE BLESSED YOU.**

Some of you are in the dash but some may have experienced what we call a semicolon in life. A semicolon is a comma with a little dot at the top. This little dot with the comma at the bottom represents a life that should have ended but it has continued, despite attempts of suicide, despite attempts and threats on your life. Tragedies should have claimed your life, but by the grace of God, they did not. A semicolon is also something to celebrate, because you are still alive.

Oscar Wilde once said: *"To live is the rarest thing in this world."* Most people just exist, because they feel there is nothing to live for. We need to learn to live again. We need to find that one thing that is worth living for. We are scared to take chances and do the wild and wonderful things that are in our hearts and minds. We end up losing out on life, and life becomes a drag, a place where we just exist and which is not really worth living for. Somedays I wish I didn't take life so seriously in my younger years. I wish that I lived more, experienced more, risked more, not being afraid to make mistakes.

There is a quotation saying: 'An aimless life is a living death.' If you've been living an aimless life and you feel life is not worth living for, if you feel life has no hope and trials and tribulations come as a result of this, go and find that something that makes life worth living for. Go and recalibrate. It might not be earthly things or people because sometimes they disappoint you. Remember God and God's ways are worth living for. God has a divine purpose for your life, a divine calling, that makes life worth living for and that will bring fulfilment and joy in your life again. In Jeremiah 29:11 God declares: "For I know the plans I have for you. Plans to prosper you, and to give you a future and a hope." I pray that you will find God in your despair and that He will be your hiding place.

**TO LIVE IS THE RAREST THING IN
THIS WORLD.**

Podcast



To listen to the audio of this episode
on podcast scan this QR code with
your phone.



*Northern Conference, Pastoral Counselling Department
Revive, Refresh, Restore
flemingn@nc.adventist.org
Cell: +27836584296
Author: Nandi Fleming
Editors: Kobus & Adele Beukes*