

FAMILY SNAPSHOTS OF HIS GRACE



Jesus used parables, stories to reveal the heart and mind of God. We're all wired to enjoy a good story especially when the story is a God-story. These stories encourage and challenge us to follow him more closely and to trust him in all circumstances (particularly when life is challenging).



This week we'll take you through a series of deeply personal stories. Each story has one central biblical truth that reveals an aspect of God's character, his love for us or how he longs to work through all of us to bring his kingdom here on earth, even as it echoes in heaven.

DON'T DOUBT ME!



God said, "Adopt an older child."

Read: Romans 4:1-25

We'd been happily married for many years. We'd however promised to obey God as living sacrifices. Thus, ensued plenty of kicking, screaming and wrestling with God about his latest order. This would irrevocably change our lives. We came to the stark realisation that we couldn't pick and choose what we'd do for God.

We had to be all in: either we obeyed God in everything, with everything we had or not at all. We chose to say yes to God, "being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (v21).

The system didn't know what to do with us. People typically adopt babies. The system said there were no adoptable older children in South Africa. Utilising our networks, we found ourselves in interesting neighbourhoods, met incredible godly people and faced heartbreaking situations. God said he would let us know who our child is. We therefore continued in obedience. It wasn't easy, it was actually really, really hard. After 2 years we were ready to give up. If it was our idea, we would have walked away. But God...

When we met our son, Luca (meaning: Bringer of Light) there were no lights streaming down from heaven. We were numb. Then we heard God say, "Don't doubt me!" We didn't. We cannot envision our lives without our precious son. Life hasn't always been easy, but God has enriched us beyond anything we could imagine.

WHAT ARE YOU NEEDING TO TRUST GOD FOR?

A BETTER WAY



Bullying: the repetitive, intentional hurting (physical, verbal, psychological) towards someone seen as vulnerable; seeking to harm, intimidate or coerce.

Read: Matthew 5:38-48

Our son was relentlessly bullied at primary school from Grade 2 onwards. One of the bullies was a loner who decided it was fun to taunt our son. Luca would come home in tears, frustrated and ostracized. Discussions with teachers didn't solve the problem. We taught Luca some self-defence moves hoping this would give him some confidence and help him to stand up to the boy. Luca however chose not to use his kid-ninja skills. Our hearts were breaking for him. We felt so helpless. Then our son comes home and says, "We should invite this boy for a playdate".

I made sure my face didn't show my shock and asked, "Why?".
Luca responded, "Because I think he's lonely and needs a friend".

As parents we really didn't want to invite this boy into our home and lives. Luca had however come up with a solution that none of the adults had even considered. We thus began a journey with this family (led by our son). This included playdates with the boy, building a relationship with the single mom and taking him to our church holiday club.

We wanted to save our boy from bullying. Our son decided to save the bully.

Who is God asking you to love, to provide for, to pray for?

**Thank you, Jesus, that you give us the strength
to do what seems impossible for your kingdom's sake.**

A GIANT INVISIBLE HAND



**While Jesus said
we would have
trouble in this world,
he also promised us that
he has overcome
the world.**



Read: Psalm 91:1-16

It was a family road-trip, the three of us singing along to our favourite road-trip songs while navigating the busy long-weekend traffic. We were driving up a mountain pass, sheer drop to our left, plenty of oncoming traffic – But then a fully laden trailer broke loose from a car travelling towards us. The trailer became airborne and in a matter of seconds, we saw the scene unfold in slow motion. The trailer was headed directly towards our windscreen. We had nowhere to go, we were hemmed in by oncoming cars, cars behind us and a sheer mountain drop. We were getting ready to say, “Hello Jesus” when, a breath away from us, the trajectory of the trailer changed dramatically. It was as if a giant invisible hand had pushed the trailer away from us and down the mountain gorge.

Then there was the time when Luca was running in the forest and was about to leap onto a small mound of sand. In mid leap, what felt like an invisible hand, pushed him sideways onto the ground away from the mound. As he dusted himself off, he looked at the mound and saw an enormous coiled up puffadder. He, now ashen, ran as fast as he could back to his Dad.

**Where has the invisible hand of God been at work in your life?
Thank God and tell someone that story to encourage them.
God is indeed your refuge, shield and fortress.**

THE SHINY THING



Sport is a happy space for our active teenage son. He unfortunately experienced a frustrating year of continuous injuries that excluded him from all activities including his favourite sport, hockey.

Read: 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

While our son watched the first team hockey match from the sidelines, I felt heartsore for him. The crowds enthusiastically cheered the team on, and our son was missing out. God chose this very moment to speak quietly to my disappointed heart saying, “Do you want the applause of people for your son? Or would you rather have your son applauded by all of heaven?” I missed most of the match, as I pondered these powerful words of truth.

When our son was young, none of the players held their position. Wherever the ball went, the entire team would follow (sometimes even the goalie). I heard the coach shout, “Don't chase the shiny thing!” Every time I feel saddened by missed opportunities, envious of others or feeling like a failure, I hear God say, “Don't chase the shiny thing!” We all need to fix our eyes on Jesus and on eternal things. While we can feel overwhelmed, we must remember that the power of God dwells within us and is achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs all the worldly shiny things.

Lord Jesus, help me not to get weighed down by “light and momentary troubles”. Help me to trust you and release those shiny things. Set me free to joyfully walk in faith and obedience with you because nothing else matters more than you.

REMEMBER: DON'T DOUBT ME!



Moms are superheroes with super-powers of multitasking, eyes-at-the-back-of-head and steadfast strength that holds everything together...until that superhero cape gets stuck in the plane's engines and things fall apart. Or do they?

Read: Matthew 14:22-33

As a mom I had a wobble, feeling the weight of condemnation and the often-present concern: "I'm not doing enough to help my son in his spiritual walk". God clearly and firmly said, "Are you doubting Me?" I replied, "Of course not! I'm doubting me" to which God repeated even more firmly, "Are you doubting Me?" It hit me then that I was so focused on my shortcomings that I had completely minimized the miracle-working power of God. God then reminded me of all the prayers we've prayed over our son, the bible studies, the in-depth discussions, the moments of revelation and the experiences of God's provision.

God told us not to doubt him when we welcomed Luca into our home. For the past few years our son has volunteered for every mission trip. He told us about a man he'd prayed for whose leg and heart was sore. The next day the man came back, joyfully saying that God had answered his prayers. Our son is still growing in his faith and has much to learn but we thank God for evidence of answered prayers.

**When we find ourselves in the storm, doubting God,
may we remind and encourage one another that we are held by
the sovereign, almighty hand of God. He also lovingly holds those we love.**

RAISING THE BAR



Luca was competing in high jump for the inter-house athletics championship.

He was in fine form. It however became clear as the bar was raised to ever higher heights, that all was not well in his world.



Read: 1 John 3:1-24

Luca was in pain. Then I saw something deeply profound. A few of the other competitors had noticed that a fellow brother of theirs was in difficulty. There Luca was, clad in his yellow team colours, crouched on the ground in a foetal position, clutching his knee. One by one, he was surrounded by a red, a blue and another yellow. Moments earlier they were competitors – now they were a band of brothers. Their collective ministrations (standing with, speaking to, supplying ice) were exactly what he needed.

He stood upright, pain still etched on his face. Even though he stood on his own (for no-one else could jump for him) he was not standing alone. A split second before he lent forward to start his run-up, I saw a new resolve on his face, defying the tread marks of tears down his cheeks. The colour brothers held their collective breath as he launched into the air, in seeming disregard for gravity – clearing the bar seemingly effortlessly and setting a new school record!

“This is how we’ve come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves” (v16 Message). If a bunch of 15-year-old boys could pick up on this, then certain we too can raise the bar.

IN SUMMARY



The power of the story to wow and wonder, to bring hope and healing, to challenge and bring courage, cannot be underestimated. No wonder Jesus used stories to give us a glimpse into the heart and mind of the Father.

We are reminded that God is faithful to his promise and so can be trusted, that often we see the character of God through the actions and innocence of children, that he shields us from evil, that we are our brother's keepers and that, especially when it gets rough, we are to keep our focus on him – for we'll all live happily ever after...

QUESTIONS

1. We can remember stories told to us when we were wee little children, but so often struggle to remember last Sunday's sermon. Why do you think this is?
2. "We wanted to save our son from bullying. He wanted to save the bully".

Have you found that those less mature than you have been picking up what Jesus was putting down but that you'd missed it? How can you be a better picker-upper?

3. What stories do you have of being miraculously shielded by the invisible hand of God? Who could God be asking you to shield?
4. Jesus: "Don't Doubt Me!"
Why could he possibly be telling you this?

THE END...for now