

As I sit here ready to type, my thoughts are immediately drawn to the Italian movie, "Life is Beautiful". It is an incredible story of tragedy yet victory, as a dad and his son live out the horrors of concentration camp life whilst celebrating the beauty and strength of the human spirit. It is a movie which portrays some of the worst of humanity and also the best. As I think of this period of lockdown we have experienced, we will all come out with different stories. For some of us, our stories will be tragic due to the profound losses with which we have had to wrestle and continue to learn to accept; for some, there will be victories of family drawn closer and healing of worn out souls. The memories of this time, for each of us, will be interpreted differently depending on the lenses we have worn and continue to choose to wear, just like Guido and Giosue.

This is my story.

It is not a story of major consequence. From the outside, there has been no physical change. I have not lost my home. I have not gone hungry. There are many out there that may then say, what qualifies you to write? Well, I honestly don't have the answer to that, dear reader. The only thing I will say is that writing helps to capture those what-would-seem-to-be-non-consequential moments, analyse the emotion and behaviour surrounding them and then without one realising, paints a picture of the transforming journey on which God takes each of us. I'd really encourage you to write your own story too.

Three weeks of lockdown. An unknown concept to us all. Me, an extrovert, revitalised by people, started the journey with some mild apprehension, but determined to enjoy 'the break'. The first week passed quickly with all the characteristics of a normal holiday, sleeping a little more, family games around the table at meal times and a couple of good novels devoured. Week two started and a restlessness set in. My lack of purpose for getting up each morning began to, in truth, frustrate me. I grappled with the sense that cleaning my house (endlessly), keeping the kids entertained and providing continuous food was just not enough. I was used to being kept busy, looking after many more people, enjoying the privilege of interacting with many. My world had suddenly shrunk and I didn't particularly like it.

By the end of week two, that frustration starting dictating my emotion. I would normally consider myself quite objective and a relatively stable person emotionally. On my fourth day of tears, I realised that I needed to get a grip...and yes, I started crying out to Jesus. Funny, how we wait until we are down in order to do that. At first it was, "Jesus, why aren't You using me" and then, "Why aren't You hearing me"! Sounds a bit like a petulant child, doesn't it©. Later I realised that it wasn't Him not hearing, it was just me not listening. I knew then that I needed to knuckle down to do some serious soul searching.

You see, Jesus often needs to bring us to crossroads, T-junctions and even places where it looks like the road is a dead end and that there is no option



but to turn around. In doing this, we are forced to slow down, analyse that road map, and figure out that next leg of the journey. This is exactly where I found myself. He slowed me down to almost a stand still. I wasn't sure where to turn...I felt like I was wasting time...I mean, driving 120km/h to get to Joburg makes sense, doesn't it? It makes sense when the road is clear and wide before you, but in that moment, it was as if I had run out of road, I just didn't know how to get back onto it. In crying out to Jesus, and then settling down to listen, I realised that He was simply asking me to step out of the car and follow Him as he led the way down a beautiful path away from the main road and into the good old Eastern Cape bush. In my own busyness, followed by frustration in the non-busyness and perceived purposelessness, I may very well have missed it. I may have chosen to continue mourning the loss of the old or embrace the adventure of the new.

As week two ended, the announcement of the lockdown extension to five weeks happened and then later the advent of level 4. With my week two wrestle done and my emotions settled, I started on this new path of discovery along the 'narrow bush track'. I began enjoying my new routine of exercising before nine every morning, along with the rest of the neighbourhood and with it a process of very simple engagement with people who have always lived close but never before been as accessible. I really started to love the homestead style feel of cleaning, cooking and sharing/trading home baked goods with neighbours. Engaging with my children in their home studies was fascinating as I figured out where they were at in this whole process. I also slowly embarked on the concept of long distance pastoral care☺

And as the time progressed a number of life changing, not necessarily visible from the outside, but definitely tangible on the inside, things happened within myself and within my family. A new depth of friendship has been forged between my eldest girl and myself. We have the same general outlook and approach to daily life and we laugh at the same silly jokes. She can often sense my mood and read my thoughts and I can do the same with her. This time together has allowed us to simply enjoy each other's company. She literally brought tears to my eyes on the evening she told me, "I am glad I get to do this lockdown with you, Mom".

I have seen my second daughter blossom before my eyes. She has a gift of expression and creativity which I think the pace of life pre lockdown never allowed her the time and freedom to fully live. She has become more talkative with both her Dad and myself, expressing her thoughts from the day. Her cuddles have become more frequent and freely given. I have witnessed an incredibly special bond forming between herself and her daddy. Pre lockdown she seldom sought him out, but now, she can't wait to 'farm' alongside him in our back garden and often just comes to give him a hug for no apparent reason. Her creative outdoor games have kept herself and her two siblings



entertained for hours and hours. And she has delighted me with her independent and incredibly mature approach to her school work, needing very little assistance or encouragement.

My nine year old boy will never be far from my heart. He comes through each morning to especially give me a morning hug. Our story time at night, without our many evening meetings, has become more frequent and he'll move himself right over on his bed just so I can come lie down right next to him. He has also become my most consistent running partner, riding his bike alongside me, keeping up a constant stream of chatter, pointing out mouse birds and red collared barbets, enabling me to see the outdoors and life in general through his eyes.

I have had the incredible privilege of sharing this lockdown with my favourite person and best friend, my husband. He has listened to my frustrations through those days of tears and supported my moments of madness, like running a marathon in our back garden. We've spent many precious times chatting about anything and everything and just as many times (maybe even more) in companionable silence, reading, doing chores and just being. The time he has spent outdoors alongside the kids tending all his farming endeavours, and teaching them throughout, has been invaluable. I can never thank God enough for placing me at this man's side.

About me, I have also learnt many things. I like to feel useful. When I don't, I start doubting my purpose and why I am where I am. I also don't like change. I find it difficult to adapt to new routines. And then I very much like routine. I think it helps me to feel productive and get the most out of a day. And it's comfortable. Through this time, I have been challenged in each one of the above. And through it, again I have had to learn the lesson (and I say again, as it is again...and it may have to again happen again) my identity is not in what I can do, how productive I can be. It is in who I am in Jesus. Sometimes He just wants me for Himself and doesn't want to share me with everyone else, and that's OK. Actually, that's amazing!!

Also I have learnt that my emotions are fickle. It is at times of high emotion that I want to change my course and fight every battle. But God has shown me that I cannot base my faith or trust in my emotion. What I can do is embrace that emotion, live it and then take it, allow God to settle it and use it to analyse the 'Why' behind it.

And as life is about to take another turn, I have realised that I have really been the "Giosue" (the child in 'Life is Beautiful' whose father shielded him from the realities of the war) in my story. I have had a Father who has cocooned and sheltered me from the reality of this pandemic. My life has been beautiful, for that I can't apologise. But I do need to listen carefully for the next set of instructions as this journey called life changes course yet again.

