My journey of gratitude

Thandi Haruperi

Almost 13 years ago, I got news that changed my outlook on life. ‘The test results have come back,’ the doctor said. ‘The HIV test, unfortunately, has come back positive.’ I sat there in stunned silence trying to decipher the news; the word ‘positive’ is supposed to be good, so why did his look suggest otherwise?

He had given me a good prognosis, assuring me that my life chances were very high. With good HIV treatments available, people with HIV are living longer, healthier and more normal lives. In my case, with no symptoms or illness, a good immune system and a very low amount of virus in my body, I would not need to start treatment immediately and perhaps for a while to come. These were perhaps some of the benefits of being tested early.

What followed was a period of unanswered questions, bouts of shame, confusion and soul searching. Paradoxically, this was also the beginning of a personal journey that awakened me to my identity, my values and my purpose, enabling me to define and recreate myself into the person I wanted to be. Whilst some might have expected me to crawl away and hide until I shrivelled away like a fallen orange under my hot African sunshine, looking back now the only thing that has shrivelled in me is fear. Like a worm buried deep under the rubbish tip, I wriggled myself up and out.

The question people asked me is how I have managed to have peace and forge ahead in life despite this challenge. The apostle Paul’s letter to the Philippians gave me a model that I have followed: first, not to be anxious about anything (which includes the bad news) but instead to pray and present my request to God. The caveat for me is the word ‘thanksgiving’ which has formed the foundation for my prayer and the outcome of my prayer. Paul was right: it is in my continuous thanksgiving that I have found the peace of God which transcends all natural knowledge and understanding. It is in thanksgiving that I have found sanity and it is thanksgiving and a grateful heart that has kept me going for 13 years since my diagnosis and will keep me going for many more years to come.

Thandi is the founder and director of RestorEgo, a consultancy which seeks to address various health related issues. She is an international speaker, an advocate, educator, mentor and advisor.

The changing harvest

Paul Farrington

I remember an autumn time when I was younger, I can nearly smell it. I remember early starts, the rising sun, lemonade, jam sandwiches and Kit-Kats. I stood with my dad on top of a large stack of straw bales, on a trailer moving down the fields of the farm. Bales were being thrown up by farm hands, family, friends and anybody else available. Harvest was a defined time; it had parameters and boundaries. There was a start and a finish.

How harvest time has changed! Farms are mechanised and computerised. They have more crops, with all year harvesting and seasons that drift into one. The world has got faster and faster and it appears there’s nothing we can do about it! Sound familiar? Especially in these current times of uncertainty, life doesn’t always feel defined. This isn’t just in farming but is a reflection of the world in which we now live. Currency buys us less, pension funds grow smaller, jobs are not for life (though sometimes they may feel like a life-sentence!), there is chaos on our streets and the finish line of retirement has moved. People still live in poverty, slavery still exists, wars still continue, earthquakes and natural disasters seem common place . . .

When I focus on all the awful things in the world, I find it difficult to be thankful to God and generous towards others. So when I get overwhelmed I go for walks in the Lake District, read Psalm 23 and look at what God has entrusted to me: land, property, crops, machinery and my relationships with my farm hands, customers, suppliers, family and friends. Then I think, ‘What did God originally intend these to be used for and look like?’ There is a Hebrew word for this, tshuva, which basically means to return to God’s original intention.

Maybe this harvest is the time to be truly thankful for what God has entrusted to us, to see what is in our hand, its original God intention, and how it can bless others, in our communities and around the world. In a time when harvest and abundance appear in short supply, may we as the UK church be a people where God’s grace and his amazing provision are most evident. This harvest let’s remember he can do more than we could ever ask or imagine, and ask him to reveal his tshuva for our lives and all he has blessed us with.

Paul is a farmer in Preston.