

A Boesmanlander's story of drought

By Madeleen Visser

God is good. God is always good. It doesn't matter what happens, what the circumstances or era it is, His character is steadfast. What a comfort! What certainty! What a precious lesson the drought has taught us.

Towards the end of 2005, Johnnie's marriage proposal was as follows: "*Darling, there is a drought, and I don't know how long it will continue, but ... will you marry me?*" And so our fairytale began – Johnnie, who knew and feared the drought and its consequences, and me, who thought that the *Boesmanland* only needed faith.

During Passover of 2006, the heavens opened. My dear husband was quiet at first. I was disappointed that he wasn't as ecstatically excited as I was, and complacent, because the *Boesmanland* only needed faith after all! By the evening, a festive atmosphere reigned in our home and we wondered whether our guests would be able to drive home the next day.

In the following months I learnt and saw how keenly the *Boesmanland* responded to rain. Die wild lettuces (succulents) were plentiful and swollen, and the bees were busy. We even considered a honey business.

Little rainbug

At the birth of our daughter at the end of 2007, our excited neighbours informed us that it had rained a little, and they called our baby "*Little Rainbug*". Hope flared up again since the rain had stayed away for so long.

This became the pattern of our lives: watching the weather forecasts and the weather, the inexpressible disappointments when nothing came of it, the feeding of the animals, asking for rain, the flaring up of hope when it did rain. Then there were the exhausting conversations about the drought, the meaning and reason for it, the expression of a disconsolate man coming in from the field ... encouraging words that sounded hollow to one's own ears; eventually only silences, tears at the washing line while a hungry ewe bleated at you. Doubt, unbelief and resentment that threatened to creep into your heart.

Had our fairytale turned into a tragedy? That's just it! God doesn't write fairytales, but life journeys, because we are on a journey. And He doesn't only write it, *He walks it with us*, just as He walked with the Israelites through the desert – a time when *He was their source* and provider, and *not the rain*.

Ours, too.

Never during this time did I feel that I had lost anything. But many a time I was stunned by His care, and now, in retrospect, even more so. Not only do I believe that He provides, I KNOW He does, because we have experienced it. So many times, during this time, Johnny would come in from the parched field and say that we

would soon not have any lambs to sell, and yet, wonder above wonders, there were lambs once again.

Supernatural provision

In times of crises, such as in sickness or the death of a family member, there has inexplicably been money for diesel. I seldom had to buy clothes for my family. His miraculous provision and care for us during our time in the *Boesmanland* became even more clear to us after we had moved away from the *Boesmanland*. Our printer's ink, which we needed to print our children's vast amount of schoolwork, lasted a full year while we were still living in the *Boesmanland*; now I buy monthly, and I print less. Suddenly I couldn't buy groceries with the same amount of money as before! And so my manna list goes on and on.

We learnt that *whatever you focus on, overwhelms you*. What you talk and think about, determines your quality of life. When we speak and think primarily about the drought and the uncertainty of the future, we quickly become depressed, and the *laughter disappears* from our home. However, when we speak and think about God's provision and His goodness, we become full of hope, and *laughter comes easily again*. The drought and its consequences are a fact. That is true. But so too is God's goodness and care. We have a choice about which one to focus on.

Debilitating fear

We learnt that *fear* of the drought and what it brings with it, is worse than the drought itself. I would like to explain

this by means of a dream that I once had. I dreamt that my father was about to die; I experienced a debilitating fear of his impending death, and woke up, wet with perspiration from the terror which the dream brought. Slowly the truth dawned on me ... my father had already passed away. That is not a nice thought, but the fear of what *might* happen was much worse than the reality of the fact that he was already dead.

Fear often robbed our family of joy. *It paralysed us*. It stole from our quality time with our children. Fear is disobedience towards God. *"Do not worry then, saying, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear for clothing?' For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your Heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."* Matthew 6:25-34

We learnt that worrying about tomorrow is not *"being responsible"*; rather it is *"disobedience"*. Through worrying we place a burden on ourselves which God never intended for us to bear.

Faith tested

I learnt that untested faith, is not faith. It is easy to believe during the good times. *"Now faith is the certainty of things hoped for, a proof of things not seen."* Hebrews 11:1. Reading through Hebrews 11, one finds that many of things that people believed for, were not fulfilled in their lifetime. However, centuries later, looking back, we know that their faith was solid. Faith is much deeper and more intimate than the mere hope that it will rain.

We learnt that God is good. I had a friend who always used to tell me: *"God is good."* I discovered deep inside

of me that I doubted the truth of it. It didn't rain. I also discovered that, to us farmers, God's blessing was equal to rain. If it rained, God was blessing us; if it didn't rain, God wasn't blessing us. Then He wasn't good to us. It took the drought to teach me that rain was only one of the manifold ways in which God blesses us. Had it not been for the drought, I would never have had the privilege of experiencing His other blessings and perceiving His unlimited goodness. What a drought and poverty it would have caused in my soul!

Drought exposed me

I learnt that I did not truly long for God. It took the drought for me to understand something of David's cry. *"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, God."* Psalm 42:1. I discovered that my longing for God didn't have even nearly the same intensity as my longing for rain. I realised that I pleaded more feverishly for rain than for His kingdom and His work.

The drought exposed me. And that was good.

God brought us to a place which doesn't know drought. The *"never ending drought"* still rages on and is becoming more intense in the *Boesmanland* and surrounding areas. But it is also spreading to other areas that don't know what a feeding trough looks like. Thus, it stands at our door again. We see how people are starting to make plans, with fear in their hearts. They encourage one another that the rain is coming, but we see the uncertainty in their eyes. We have become mute about the topic of rain. We hold our breath when it begins to rain for fear that it will just pass before it even started,

as we have come to know *drought-rain*. Sometimes I think when they look at us, their fear increases. Drought made us move. What a fearful thought!

In don't know how!

Dear believing friends had to stand by and watch their little son die. A few months later I asked the mother: "*I don't know how a parent copes with losing a child?*" Tears streaming down her cheeks, she muttered, "*I don't know either.*" How does one get through a drought? How does one offer encouragement in a drought? "*I don't know either.*"

May I, Henry, also add something here out of our own experience ... How does one encourage a person who has been viciously attacked in his own house – had a dear family member brutally murdered. "*I don't know.*"

How does one close the doors of your farmhouse and just walk out, leaving beautiful furniture, food in the fridges, clothes still hanging in the cupboards, your carefully bred cattle, your tractor, truck, implements, your life's investments and flee out of your country overnight with just a suitcase of clothes each? "*I also don't know*"

Madeleen again:

Precious testimonies

I feel quieter and more dumb about drought than ever before.

However, ...

Over time, God has written many testimonies in our hearts about His goodness, love, favour, and care. And I know that this is not a fairytale but a journey of life on inhospitable roads and through deserts into eternity - a journey *not travelled alone, but with God*. Not next to me, *but inside of me. So close*.

Our family has come to know His blessings, His goodness, and His faithfulness. May it remain with us, strengthening and encouraging us in these dark and uncertain times.