

# TELL YOUR STORY

A migrant story of faith  
and hope, told in words  
and art.

Ola's Story



Tell Your Story celebrates the journey of participants from CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse) refugee backgrounds – including those currently seeking asylum. The aim is to both encourage hope and healing in participants, and to inspire faith, hope and understanding in others.

With training provided by experienced Salvation Army coaches, and with prompts/questions provided, participants (looking through the lens of faith) use both their words and art forms to tell their stories. These are shared online and in booklet form.

## My story — Ola

Growing up in Africa, I dreamed of studying overseas, despite the challenges I knew were ahead. Trusting in God's provision, I eventually moved to Australia, where I found my calling in social work. Through many trials, I witnessed God's faithfulness. Now, blessed with a family and the chance to serve others with The Salvation Army, I can confidently say that with faith, perseverance, and God's grace, even the toughest challenges — or 'mountains' — can truly be moved.

As a young boy growing up in Nigeria, I had many dreams, goals and visions — as many of us do. One goal stood out among the rest: pursuing a master's degree.

Studying abroad can be expensive, but I chose not to focus on where the funding would come from or other limiting beliefs. Instead, I took comfort in God's word, including Matthew 6:26-30, where Jesus reminds us, *"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap, yet your heavenly Father feeds them."* Knowing that God saw my needs gave me confidence to trust him as my provider.

**Right:** Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, where I lived before I moved to Australia.





**Above:** At work in Nigeria, before coming to Australia.

## Following a dream

Coming from a humble family, I worked and saved some funds to supplement support from my father for a master's degree in the United Kingdom. I felt secure in the job I was doing and was successful. Having a secure job gave me extra confidence to think about pursuing my dreams.

Then, one day, an old friend called to tell me about the opportunities he'd found in Australia. During another conversation, he took the time to ask meaningful questions about my goals

**“BUT FAITH IN GOD SUSTAINED ME... I AM SO GRATEFUL TO GOD FOR BRINGING ALONG THESE FRIENDS – AND SO GRATEFUL TO THEM!”**

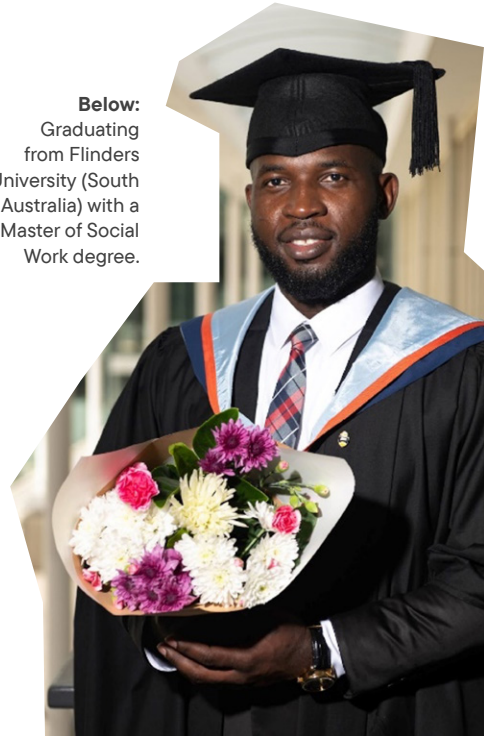
and dreams, and, before long, I was eager to start a journey to Australia. Things soon began to fall into place, including funding for tuition and other expenses.

I began studying a Master of Commerce, but then discovered a Master of Social Work, which felt like a perfect fit for my calling. It aligned with my abilities and passion for serving those in need, especially the oppressed and disenfranchised.

## Life changes

During my second year, COVID-19 struck. My father's business closed, and he could no longer help me financially. With only two weeks until the semester, I faced the daunting task of raising \$30,000 — a massive challenge for anyone, let alone

**Below:** Graduating from Flinders University (South Australia) with a Master of Social Work degree.



someone from my background during a global standstill.

But faith in God sustained me, and the fees were paid with the help of others. I am so grateful to God for bringing along these friends — and so grateful to them!

While working as a placement student with The Salvation Army, I saw the impact of the pandemic firsthand. Many students reached out for support, some about to lose their accommodation and others needing help with necessities. This experience deepened my gratitude for God's provision in my own journey.

I still faced many challenges in the process of settling in Australia. In one job, I often woke at 1am to catch the bus for an early shift at a cold-room facility and due to bus times, I had to

**“Trust in the Lord  
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and lean not on your  
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### **Proverbs 3:5-6**

All Bible verses are from The New International Version (NIV)

jog for 20 to 30 minutes to reach work on time. Fitness became essential, not optional! I would finish work at 4pm and usually get back to my hostel a few hours later.

### **God's path unfolds**

I later moved to a different state to continue my studies/degree and worked as a carer in the aged care sector. I remember someone saying in an offhand way some negative things about aged care. It hurt to hear this negativity, but I learned a valuable lesson that day: challenges and negative judgments are inevitable on the path to achieving your goals as God leads you.

But I also learned that you cannot let obstacles or negativity stop you or discourage you from pushing forward until you reach your destination — because, as Proverbs 3:5-6 guides us, *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”*

We must remain steadfast in faith, as Isaiah 40:31 encourages us, saying: *“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.”*

“Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low.”

**Isaiah 40:4-5**

### Reflecting on God's faithfulness

Reflecting on my life, I see how God has miraculously provided for my needs, and I realise I could do nothing without his grace. With God, all things are possible. Isaiah 40:4-5 became my assurance: *“Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low.”*

A Bible verse given to me over a decade ago, Isaiah 55:12, also took on new meaning as I faced challenges: *“You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.”*

### A trustworthy God

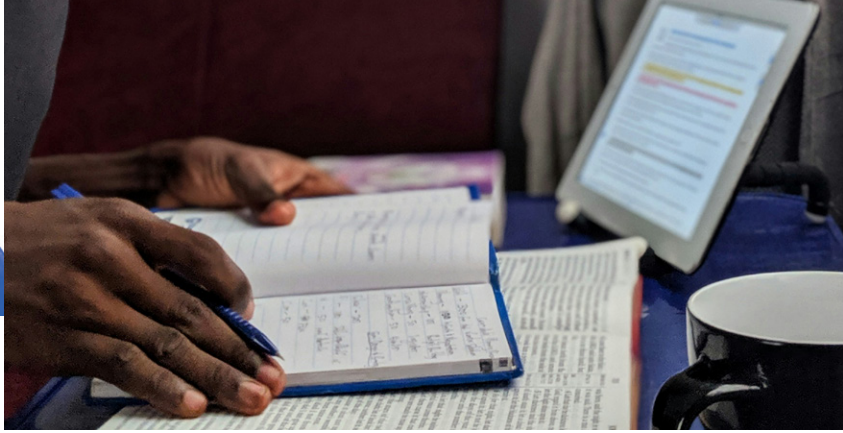
When I first came to Australia, I was alone. But now, I am blessed with a wonderful wife, a beautiful daughter, and the opportunity to work at The Salvation Army, managing one of the Doorways sites.

God has been with me every step of the way, and I wouldn't have achieved any of this without his strength and grace.

One thing I know for certain is that God is faithful. His grace is sufficient for all who trust in him. Matthew 17:20b says, *“... if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move’.”*

Moving to a foreign country, facing high living costs, and navigating the impact of COVID-19 were all ‘mountains’, but by God's grace, each one crumbled in time.





## Hope for all

To anyone reading this, I encourage you to *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight”* (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Trust God fully, and he will direct your paths. If you have dreams, don't let obstacles stop you — God will make a way.

## Inspiration from the Bible

In the Bible, there are stories of people migrating from one place to another for various reasons. Today little has changed. People migrate from Australia to the United Kingdom (UK),

United States (US), or Canada; from the US to Canada, Mexico; and from lower-income countries to wealthier countries like the UK or US. Reasons for migration include job opportunities, lifestyle, education, family reunification, cost of living, weather and medical treatment — to name a few.

There are several Bible characters and stories I can relate to in my own immigration journey — Abraham, Jacob and the Israelites.

God called Abraham to leave his homeland of Ur and travel to Canaan, promising to make him a great nation. Jacob moved his family to Egypt to escape famine, and God later rescued his descendants (the Israelites) from Egypt, bringing them to a *“land flowing with milk and honey.”* God's grace and favour in my life align with the biblical concept of divine providence — God's hand guiding and protecting his people.

**“...in all your ways  
submit to him, and  
he will make your  
paths straight”**

**Proverbs 3:5-6**

## Hardship and provision

Like the Israelites, who endured slavery, a perilous desert journey, and opposition from hostile tribes, my immigration story has its own share of obstacles that I've had to overcome.

### **“I FACED HARDSHIPS BUT FOUND STRENGTH AND SUPPORT THROUGH FAITH. I AM LIVING PROOF OF GOD’S MIRACLES...”**

I faced financial constraints, and at one point, I had no support from home due to business closures. With God's grace and provision, I was able to push through.

Other challenges included cultural adjustment and prejudice, little to no emotional support, limited social interaction, and being alone here in Australia, with no family and few friends.

My experience of facing challenges and overcoming them through faith

is particularly reminiscent of the Israelites' trials in the wilderness. They encountered hunger, thirst and doubt, yet persevered, relying on God's miraculous provision (Exodus 16:1-15, 17:1-7, NIV). Like the Israelites, I faced hardships but found strength and support through faith. I am living proof of God's miracles — from selecting Australia for my master's program to finding placement, securing a job, meeting my wife, and having my daughter.

My migration to Australia for educational and professional opportunities parallels the Israelites' journey to the Promised Land, a place of abundance and fulfilment. Despite the numerous challenges they faced, the Israelites demonstrated faith and perseverance. Even when they strayed, they always returned to God. My encouragement to you as you read this is to keep faith and persevere through whatever challenges you face — trust in God, and he will see you through.



## Hard work, positive outlook

I maintained a positive outlook, relying on God's provision despite the hardships I encountered.

At one stage, just a week before my rent was due, a casual job came through. Working in a cold room! I had been working in banking and real estate. I thought I was doing well until I arrived in Australia.

It was hard, but I never looked back — this job met my immediate needs. Sometimes my hands would go numb from the cold. I'd run to the hot water tap to warm them back up. I looked to the Lord, from whom my strength and help came. I saw the job as a blessing.

**“I DIDN'T KNOW WHERE THE NEXT PAYMENT WOULD COME FROM AND DIDN'T WANT TO CALL HOME FOR HELP.**

**I HAVE LEARNED TO LOOK TO GOD FOR STRENGTH AND GUIDANCE.”**



It covered my rent, allowing me to then move from a backpackers' hostel to shared accommodation, from a shared room to my own room, then to a rental house. (Now, I'm working toward owning a home.)

I endured irregular work hours in my early days in Australia, waking at 1am or 2am to leave for work that started by 5am or 6am. I remember paying my rent with nothing left over for the next one. I didn't know where the next

payment would come from and didn't want to call home for help.

I have learned to look to God for strength and guidance.

Today, through the death of Jesus, access to the throne of grace is open to everyone. Scripture says, *"If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move."* (Matthew 17:20b).

## My story in stamps

Stamp storytelling is an activity where participants carve soft wood to create images that represent their life stories.

1. The first image represents a moment when I faced despair, multiple challenges, and obstacles — yet I held onto hope and trust in God. He came through for me, making a way and lifting my head.
2. The second image reflects my questions and my choice to surrender everything to God.
3. The third image symbolises God's hands, evident in all my dealings. He lifted me when I needed lifting and protected me when I needed protection.
4. The fourth image represents God blessing me with a family. His love for us and his protection over us.



## My story in clay

This clay piece is inspired by the theme of 'awareness', portraying 'radiance' as a symbol of God's presence, protection and peace.

God is the potter who molds us, as clay in his hands. His presence is shown by his hand. His peace and calmness rest at the centre (the white space) and his protection encircles us. His peace radiates to us and flows through us.



## My story through cards

Card storytelling is an activity where participants are asked to tell their story using cards with images. The participants choose cards that represent their life story.

I chose these cards to symbolise my relationship with God. The letter card speaks to the way I talk with God. It reminds me of how I pour out my dreams, aspirations and even my struggles to him.

The ear card represents how God listens. He hears every cry, every request, and every dream I bring to him. This card is a reminder that God not only hears me but also answers in ways which strengthen my faith and guide my path.





**BELIEVE IN GOOD**