

*“When I could not see because of the brightness of that light,  
I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus”*

ACTS 22:11

## Concerns of Life

**I** begin the class by asking the 8th grade girls, “What are your biggest concerns? In your life? In your world?”

The first hand goes up, “Ma, (the school’s term for Teacher) my biggest worry is what will happen to me if my mother dies.” Another hand, “Ma, my biggest worry is what I will do if my mother and father cannot take care of me.” “Ma, my biggest concern is where I will live if my mother leaves me.”

This is not what I expected... Not what I’d hear from 8th graders in the US. But this is South Africa. Although no one is exactly sure, the official line is that 1 in 4 women are HIV positive (compared to 1 in 14 men). That disparity is one of South Africa’s tragic legacies. You can see why Momma’s health is their central concern. When prompted, they quickly broaden the discussion and mention other concerns: child abuse, HIV/AIDS, poverty, unemployment.

I point out that, in Bible times, people had similar concerns and different ones; that is why at times the Bible sounds strange to us. I teach the girls about the Apostle Paul. They are engaged. On the chalkboard, I outline my timeline of Jesus’ life, then the Gospels. Then I show where Paul fits in. We read in Acts how Paul was converted, how he went from being a persecutor of the early Christians to spearheading the whole movement. I explain how he “planted” a faith community, moved on to start another, and then, when questions arose, he wrote them letters. We look at some of those letters in the New Testament: Romans, Galatians, Philemon. At the end, I ask if they have questions about Paul, or anything for that matter.

One hand goes up, “Ma, does God have a mother??”

*Let us together pray: Dear One, How we long to be held close. How we long, all of us, wherever we live - squatter, town, or loft apartment - to be safe. Gather your children close, hold them tight. By the mystery of your Spirit, may we bring comfort to those close and those far away. Amen.*

Holly McKissick is a short-term volunteer to Inanda Girls’ Seminary in Durban, South Africa. She is involved in the life of the church and school community as a teacher.



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