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# Orphan No More

By **Yaffa Randelman** as told to **Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson**

I was two years old when my parents decided to immigrate to Israel with my siblings. I was the youngest daughter of five children at the time. My grandparents and other relatives had moved there several years earlier at the height of Operation Solomon.

We were an average Jewish Ethiopian family. My grandfather loved to read the Jewish Scriptures, but for the rest of us, being Jewish was mostly about our ancestry. That all changed about a year or so after we arrived in Israel, when my mother heard about Yeshua (Jesus) for the first

time. She had never heard of this Jewish Messiah, but quickly embraced the message of love and forgiveness for our people.




My father wasn't so sure about my mother's newfound faith, but then something interesting happened. My mother went to an all-night prayer meeting with a friend. When she walked through the door the next morning, the moment she greeted my father, he was instantly transformed and overwhelmed with love for the Lord. I was still a toddler, but from that day forward, everything changed in our family.

**By Mail:**  
Maoz Israel Ministries  
P.O. Box 535788  
Grand Prairie, TX 75053-5788

**By Phone:**  
U.S. 214.677.0560  
CAN. 866.712.0188  
U.K. 01732 886441

**By Email:**  
[usa@maozisrael.org](mailto:usa@maozisrael.org)  
[canada@maozisrael.org](mailto:canada@maozisrael.org)  
[UK@maozisrael.org](mailto:UK@maozisrael.org)

**Online:**  
[www.maozisrael.org](http://www.maozisrael.org)  
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## A Beautiful Life

My parents had a very innocent and pure faith. My father would witness everywhere he went and my mother always had people coming over for counseling. There was constant prayer in our home. Even the neighbors who weren't believers would come over for prayer sometimes because they knew we were a praying family.

I loved my family, but as a child I did not fully grasp what it meant to know God. At 13 years old, however, I went to a conference with my parents and while they were praying, suddenly I felt warmth in my heart. I began to weep uncontrollably. It wasn't a sad cry. It was like an internal washing of my soul. From this point on, I became a different person. I was suddenly so tender-hearted and sensitive.

For the next three years I read the Scriptures constantly. I wasn't just reading. I was searching. I was devouring. And if you know anything about the Hebrew Scriptures, you'll appreciate how incredible it was that at 13, I could understand it all. I understood the ancient Hebrew of the Tanach (Old Testament) just as easily as the modern Hebrew translation of the New Testament. Then I would record in my notebooks what I understood. Just like my grandfather, I couldn't get enough of God's Word.

## My Dad

Just before my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, my innocent, happy world was shattered—my father became ill and passed away. He was the pillar of our family. As a parent, he was stability and warmth and safety. He was also my best friend.

When he died, I felt so alone.

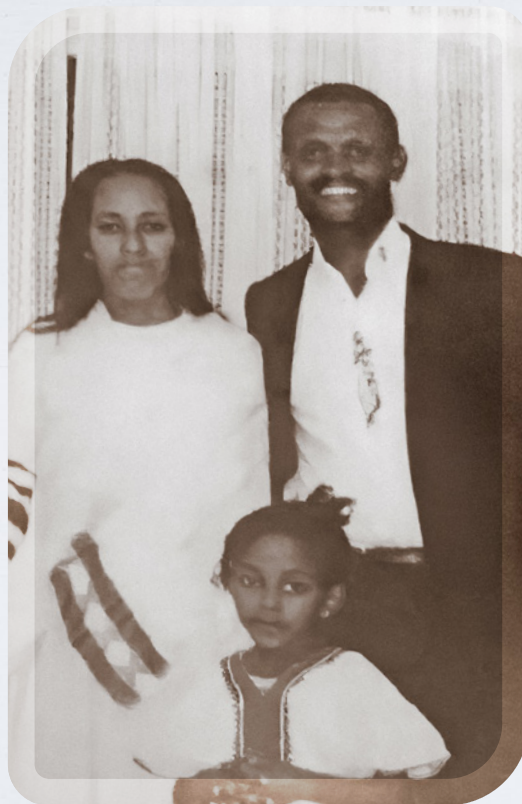
Unprotected. Perhaps only then did I realize the anchor that a father figure provided in my life. I think this is something you can only fully grasp if you've had it and then lost it.

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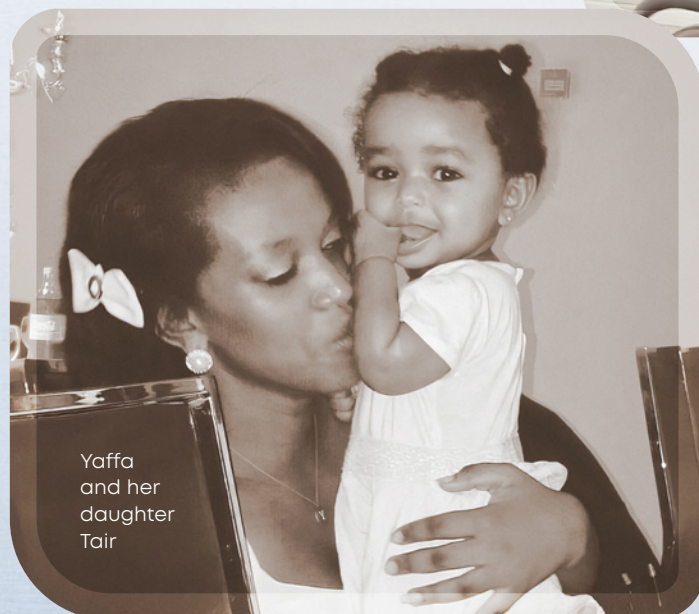
Up until that point, I experienced God as a King. The One with all the power and ability to do anything He wanted.

Then one day I sat feeling empty and I suddenly saw what I can only describe as visions. In

these visions, God was showing me how He was there with me and that I was special and beautiful to Him. It wasn't just a description; Yaffa is my name. In Hebrew it means beautiful. Suddenly the emptiness disappeared, and I could feel something deeper. God was my Father.



Yaffa and her parents in their beautiful season together



Yaffa and her daughter Tair



As I began to see these new facets of who God was, I picked up a pencil and paper and began to write. I wrote a story of how I understood God and later that day showed my mother what I'd written.

At first, she didn't understand. "This is a really great description of God's character! Who showed this to you?" she asked. "No one," I answered, "I just thought to write out how I understand God."

She was so impressed that we ended up showing our friends and family.

I loved how encouraging my mother was of my giftings. I wish I knew then how little time I had left with her.

### My Mom

Less than two years later, when I was just shy of 18, my mother passed away from cervical cancer. I was now an orphan.

The year ahead would be incredibly difficult. My younger sister, who was only 10 at the time, and I moved in with our older brother. Although my brother was gracious in welcoming us, I always felt like a guest rather than part of his home. There's something quite unique about feeling both homeless and cared for at the same time. But

I can't think of a better way to describe it.

I managed to finish school and soon enough, I was drafted into the army. During basic training, all the girls would call home in the evening, crying their hearts out to their parents. This moment should've broken me—seeing everyone calling home to their parents. But it didn't. I felt the Lord near me. I didn't need to call anyone.

People who would get to know me wouldn't believe at first that I was an orphan. "You carry yourself with such confidence. You're so solid!" they would say. I was nothing at all like what you'd expect from a young girl without parents.

Still, I think there's a difference between feeling whole on the inside—and having someone speak wisdom

into your life in real life situations. That, I didn't have. During my army time I met a boy. He wasn't a believer, but we started dating. Eventually we got serious—and I got pregnant.

This was a monumental crisis in my life. I loved my army service. But I couldn't serve with a baby. Everyone around me in the army pressured me to abort. No one supported the idea of me keeping the child.

My siblings didn't know I was pregnant and my boyfriend wanted nothing to do with being a father. I was so overwhelmed at the time, but I knew one thing—if I aborted my child, I would never be able to live with myself. I would die of guilt and regret and that was no way to live.

God was the only anchor I had left in my life. I didn't want to do anything to hurt my relationship with Him. But thoughts kept spinning relentlessly in my head. I couldn't imagine life with or without the child, so I decided to end it all. I would walk into the sea and not come back.

I was pretty confident the baby would make it to heaven. After all, it hadn't been born and hadn't done anything wrong yet. As for me, I expected I'd end up in hell, but I simply couldn't come up with any other "solution." I was at the end of myself—and this is where God intervened.

I was determined to die. My mind could think of nothing else. I imagined the headlines on the news, "Mystery of Soldier Found Dead in the Sea." I got up in the morning, went to the bus station and waited for the bus to take me to the beach.

They usually came every 15 minutes or so. For 3 hours I stood there waiting, but every bus that went by was heading to Jerusalem. I was getting frustrated. I waited another hour. Bus after bus came by—headed only to Jerusalem.

Suddenly my phone rang. It was my oldest brother. "Hey Yafa, I don't know why," he said, "But you've been on my heart so strong and I feel like I'm supposed to tell you to drop everything you're doing right now and come to our place in Jerusalem."

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I went to Jerusalem, seeing it as an opportunity to say a final goodbye to my family and then go back to the beach. When I got there, I shared nothing of my plans. But when my brother invited me to a prayer meeting, and I decided to go with him, what did I have to lose?

During the time of prayer, the pastor came up to me and said, “I don’t know why, but I feel like the Lord is telling me to tell you, ‘Don’t be afraid!’” When he said this, I broke. I started crying and told my brother everything. I told him about the baby and how I was going to “fix” the situation. My brother responded magnificently. “Don’t do anything. I’ll explain everything to the family and I will take any hits if anyone needs to process negative emotions. We’ll get through this together.”

I suddenly felt like a daughter again—not an orphan. I felt like I had a parent who watched over me and defended me. And everything changed in me. Among believers, being single and pregnant is a shameful thing. But I had made my peace with the Lord and my family. I felt no shame. I walked around with my head held high.

When I chose to keep my baby and trust God with our future, I had no idea how much He would show Himself faithful. From the very beginning, I saw how the Lord carried me and my baby gently in His arms. In her early years, when it was harder for me to work, people would just come out of nowhere and provide everything we needed.

### Soulmate

But one thing made me sad. My daughter’s father wanted nothing to do with her. At least I knew what a loving father was. I didn’t want her to experience this terrible emptiness from the very beginning. People around me told me I should look for someone widowed or divorced, since no unmarried guy would consider me—an unwed single mom—a worthy prospect as a life partner. In God’s eyes, however, I was never worthless. He gave me dreams in the night that gave me hope to wait for His best. I had a childhood friend who’d kept in touch with me during my pregnancy and everything. A

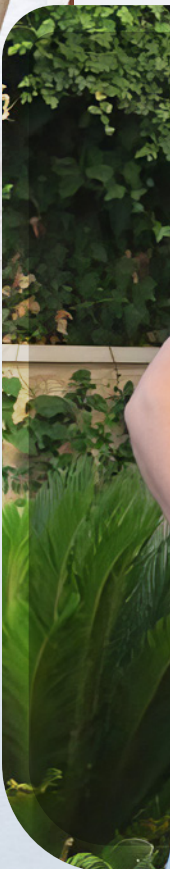
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Yaffa and Yishai on their wedding day

few months after my daughter was born, he asked me out. I liked him and even felt like our relationship was from the Lord. But my mind kept telling me—a guy like him who’s a strong believer and has never been married—is above my value. So, I didn’t say anything about what I felt spiritually. I needed him to come to that conclusion without any pressure from me.

All on his own, he fell in love with me. I loved him, he loved me, and he loved being a father to my daughter. Six months after our first date, we were married! That was 10 years ago and since then, the Lord has given us three more children.





## The Gardener

A few years ago, things were going well, then something triggered my past. That alone and defenseless feeling crept up on me again. It didn't make sense logically. I had a wonderful husband, but I couldn't shake that feeling of a little girl who'd lost her daddy. Then the Lord showed me a picture of a flower in the middle of an open space. The plant was alone but growing steadily and producing fruit. "Who is taking care of this plant?" He asked me. "Do you see the sun, the rain, the insects that crawl on it to pollinate it? I direct all those. You are this plant and I am your Gardener. I water you, grow you and care for your needs."

In that moment I grabbed a pen and paper and wrote everything I saw in the vision. It didn't take long for the vision to evolve into a story line. A story in which different plants responded differently to a gardener's invitation to enter his garden where he can protect and care for them. I saw myself in each of the plants' reactions to the gardener in different phases of my life.

I showed the story to my husband and other friends and acquaintances. They liked the story, but some asked me, "Who's the gardener?" I would smile and respond, "What? You don't recognize God?"



Yaffa and her family today

"You should publish this as a children's book!" They encouraged me. "There are so few books in Israel for children with such deep truths like this." So I went to Hotam, a Messianic publishing company. They were amazing. They loved the book and walked through the process with me. Then in the middle of the process, I got word that the company was no longer publishing new books. I was disappointed, especially since we had such a good connection.

They referred me to another organization and this experience was awful. From the very beginning it felt off. Still, I sat down with them to hear their terms. They offered to own all rights to the book and do whatever they wanted with it, and I would get 5 copies to share with friends and family for my contribution.

When I explained that it didn't seem like a fair deal, they responded, "You say God gave you this book freely, then you should be fine with passing on the gift without being paid for it." I left there feeling very discouraged. I had wanted this to be a joint effort with believers, but it seemed like no doors stood open before me. Some friends recommended I go to a secular publishing company and I did. They loved the book and we were in talks about publishing it, but my heart wasn't settled.

One afternoon I was sharing my dilemma with a friend about going with secular publishing and she said, "Don't you have connections with Maoz? They publish lots of books!"

I had no idea! I quickly got in touch with Liraz who is in charge of Maoz Publishing and we hit it off magnificently. Liraz walked me through the process and gave me a contract. I felt appreciated and respected as a young writer and before I knew it, "*The Growing Garden*" was in print! I'm already writing another book and in just weeks of the book coming out, word is already spreading among kindergarten teachers to get it into children's libraries.

What an honor to be able to share my gift and sow this seed of God's goodness into the hearts of Israeli children. I have an incredible Father, and I want everyone to meet Him. ■

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August 2025



Shalom from Jerusalem,

If you're like me, books have shaped your life. Maybe it was a devotional that gave you peace in a hard season, a biography that stirred your faith, or a Bible study that helped you finally better understand God's intricate character. **Books have a quiet way of walking with us, guiding us, and rooting us in truth.**

Now **imagine being a pastor halfway around the world**, trying to shepherd your congregation with few Hebrew resources except a Bible that is written in the ancient Hebrew text. **Imagine a void when your mind goes to reference commentaries, discipleship books, written testimonies—or even a Hebrew worship song for inspiration.**

**Books are powerful tools to help believers—**young and old—**grow strong in their faith, encourage leaders, and like Yeshua did—introduce deep truths with simple parables.**

**For years, we have labored to end the shortage of faith-building materials in Hebrew. It took a few decades, but we have translated and published over 200 different books and Bibles!**

Recently we have stepped into an important phase of nurturing an indigenous believing culture in Israel—**publishing original works in Hebrew by Israeli believing authors!** Being able to present God's Word through an Israeli cultural lens is a crucial part of the development of the modern Israeli believer identity!

**The challenge?** Getting books from young talented Israeli authors into the hands of **those who need them most is harder than you might think.**

Books need to be edited, printed affordably, promoted through the proper channels, and in many cases, **given freely to those who can't afford them. And all of that takes time, care—and funding.**

**That's why we're reaching out to you today.**



Would you consider giving to help provide life-giving Hebrew books to congregations, pastors, and believers all over Israel? **Your gift will help:**

- Promote young Israeli believing authors
- Equip pastors and teachers with theological training tools
- Help parents encourage their children to know the Lord

Even \$10 can help cover the cost of a book that might impact an entire community.

Thank you for giving. Thank you for caring. And thank you for being part of what God is doing around the world—one book at a time.

Telling His Story,

*Kobi and Shani Ferguson*

Kobi & Shani Ferguson







# Raising Children to Recognize God



Do you want to be a part of raising up Israeli authors?  
Help us fund the publishing and first printing of:

**The Growing Garden**

by Yaffa Randelman for \$4,900

