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A R E A D I N G   G U I D E

*Dr Michael Janse van Rensburg*

## A B O U T   T H E   B O O K

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This memoir is unusual in one critical way: it was written while Lynn is still alive. Michael Janse van Rensburg wrote it in the present tense, in real time, during one of the most devastating seasons of his life — his wife’s terminal cancer diagnosis. That immediacy is not merely a stylistic choice; it is a theological one. The author refuses to look back from safety. He writes from inside the storm.

The book spans Lynn’s journey from her first cancer in 2009 — a leiomyosarcoma deemed surgically cured — through a devastating metastatic recurrence in late 2025, a prognosis of “weeks” delivered in February 2026, and the family’s ongoing life inside that sentence. It is a memoir about marriage, about parenting through grief, about the failure of easy faith — and about a man trying to hold his theology together when it most needs to hold him.

The four parts move from the world before (Part A), through diagnosis and crisis (Part B), to the sons (Part C), and finally into the theological darkness where the author has been forced to live (Part D). The epilogue does not resolve the story. It records a decision made in love, and ends there.

## H O W   T O   U S E   T H I S   G U I D E

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This guide is designed to work in two settings, and you may move between them freely.

If you are reading alone, the questions that follow are an invitation to slow down — to sit with the book rather than simply finish it. You may find it helpful to keep a journal alongside your reading, returning to a question when a chapter stirs something you want to hold onto. Not every question will land equally; follow the ones that do.

If you are reading with others, these questions are a starting point, not a script. Choose what fits your conversation and leave the rest. This is not a safe-distance book. People in the room will carry their own griefs, their own questions about God, and their own encounters with illness and loss. Make space for silence. Not every question needs a resolution.

The “For Personal Reflection” section contains prompts that are more inward in nature. Whether reading alone or in a group, these are private — offered as an invitation to notice what the book has stirred, without any obligation to speak it aloud.

The “Theological Threads” section at the end provides brief explanations of key ideas that run through the book. It is there when you need it — as background reading before you begin, or as a reference when you encounter an unfamiliar term.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

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### *Part A — The World God Made (Chapters 1—5)*

1. The book opens by establishing what was good before the crisis. What does Michael's portrait of Lynn reveal about his understanding of love and marriage?
2. Michael phones Lynn from his Cape Town office to deliver the news of her original cancer diagnosis in 2009. He later says he regrets not waiting to tell her in person. What does that moment cost each of them?
3. Lynn's first cancer was surgically removed and deemed cured. How does the earlier brush with illness shape the way the family encounters the recurrence?
4. The title of Chapter 3 is "What the X-Rays Did Not Show." What do you think was hidden that the scans could not detect?
5. Michael was completing a doctoral thesis in theology while the illness was unfolding. What does that irony — studying suffering academically while living it privately — do to your reading of the book?

### *Part B — The Grace That Did Not Come (Chapters 6—9)*

6. Chapter 6 describes a word — "attune" — and a transformation Michael underwent while travelling. He came home a different husband just before everything fell apart. How do you make sense of that timing?
7. After the histology confirms the terminal recurrence of the cancer in 2025, Lynn's first words are "I am so sorry." Why do you think those are her first words? What does that reveal about who she is?
8. Chapter 9 is titled "The Prayers." Michael's experience is that prayer does not work in the way most prayer implies. What do you make of that honesty — and does it resonate with your own experience?
9. The title of Part B is "The Grace That Did Not Come." How do you respond to that framing? Is the author saying grace was absent, or is he redefining what grace looks like?
10. The book deliberately avoids Romans 8:28 ("all things work together for good") and Jeremiah 29:11 ("plans to prosper you"). What do you make of that choice? What does it protect?

### *Part C — Our Sons (Chapters 10—13)*

11. TJ is an extrovert — the centre of every room. Daniel is quiet, independent, the one who picked up crochet in the radiology waiting room. How does Michael navigate the different needs of each son?
12. In Chapter 11, TJ asks "Is it cancer?" before being told. What does that moment suggest about what children absorb, even when adults try to protect them?

13. Lynn buys each boy a diary and fills it with handwritten messages and baby photographs. What does that gesture mean to you?
14. Chapter 12 observes that small sufferings — a demerit, a missed homework page — do more quiet damage than large ones, because they arrive without warning and without the scaffolding grief provides. Do you agree? Has that been true in your own experience?
15. The book pays careful attention to the people around the family — the hockey stick, the annual shoes, those who simply showed up. What does it say about what genuine support looks like in a crisis?

### *Part D — The Silent Sky (Chapters 14—17)*

16. Chapter 14 contrasts two Table Mountain trips: a 2025 hike where Michael carried Daniel on his back, and a 2026 cable car visit where Lynn is visibly thinner. What does that contrast do for you as a reader?
17. Psalm 88 is unique among the psalms — it ends in darkness with no turn toward hope or praise. Why do you think the author chose it as a chapter? What does it offer that a more hopeful psalm cannot?
18. Chapter 16 is titled “Jesus Wept” — the shortest verse in the Bible. Jesus weeps at the tomb of Lazarus even though he is about to raise him. What does the author find in those two words, and what permission do they give?
19. Holy Saturday is the day between crucifixion and resurrection — a day of silence, absence, and not-yet. The author uses it to describe living inside suffering with no visible resolution. Has there been a “Holy Saturday” season in your own life?
20. By the end of Part D, the author has not found an answer to the question in the title. What has he found instead?

### *Epilogue — My Eyes Have Seen You*

21. Job 42:5 says: “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.” The author uses this as his closing verse. What does the movement from hearing to seeing mean — especially when what has been “seen” is so painful?
22. The decision to try chemotherapy is framed not as hope but as love. What is the difference between those two things in this context?
23. This book ends without an ending. Lynn is still alive; the prognosis is still “weeks.” How does that openness affect you as a reader? Is it a weakness or a form of honesty?

## FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION

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*These prompts are more inward in nature. There is no obligation to share them.*

- Is there a grief or loss in your own life that this book brought to the surface? You do not need to name it — simply notice it is there.
- Where are you in your own relationship with God when suffering comes close — hearing about God from a distance, or seeing God in the dark?
- What is your honest response to the question the title poses? Where do you believe God is when someone you love is dying?
- Is there someone in your life you are “not going anywhere” for? What does that faithfulness cost you?
- What would it mean for you to remain present in a situation where the resolution has not yet come? What does Holy Saturday ask of you?

## THEOLOGICAL THREADS

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*Brief explanations of key ideas that run through the book.*

### **Theodicy**

The formal theological question: how can an all-loving, all-powerful God permit suffering? This is the question beneath every chapter of this book. The author does not resolve it. He inhabits it.

### **Theologia crucis (Theology of the Cross)**

A strand of Christian theology, closely associated with Martin Luther, that locates God not in triumph and glory but in suffering and hiddenness. God is found at the cross, not around it. The author draws on this tradition to resist theologies that promise healing, resolution, or reward for faithfulness.

### **Holy Saturday**

The day between Good Friday (crucifixion) and Easter Sunday (resurrection). In Christian tradition it is a day of silence, absence, and not-yet. Theologians have used it as a metaphor for grief, waiting, and living without resolution — knowing that resurrection is promised, but not yet visible.

### **Psalm 88**

Unique among the 150 psalms in that it ends with no turn toward hope. The final word is “darkness.” The author finds in it not despair but honesty — a scripture that allows the sufferer to speak truthfully without being required to perform peace they do not feel.

### **Job 42:5**

“My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.” From the conclusion of the Book of Job, one of the Bible’s oldest treatments of suffering. The movement is from inherited, second-hand faith to a direct, costly, irreversible encounter with God.

**John 11:35 – Jesus Wept**

The shortest verse in the Bible. Jesus weeps at the tomb of his friend Lazarus — even though he is about to raise him from the dead. The author reads this as permission: if Jesus wept before the miracle, we may weep without diminishing our faith. Grief and faith are not opposites.

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