

# "God keeps



**Award-winning singer and actress Queen Latifah opens her heart to *Simple Grace* about how God's love has helped her overcome unimaginable tragedy and fills her with joy every day**

by Gina Roberts-Grey

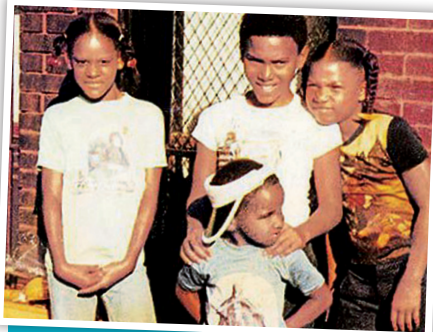
**P**icturing Dana Owens, better known as the superstar Queen Latifah, as anything but calm, cool and gracefully collected is almost impossible to do. The 47-year-old Grammy-winning and Academy Award-nominated entertainer exudes confidence, wisdom and down-to-earth warmth, but she's also the first to admit that life can sometimes be too much for her to handle alone. And whether she's rapping live on stage before thousands of fans, delivering witty lines in a sitcom, working on her latest credit as a producer or starring in feature films, Latifah relies on her relationship with God to see her through the stress, worry and chaos. "There are always gonna be days where

# His promises"

you're run-down, hurting or need help," she tells *Simple Grace*. "That's when I'll pray [for God] to help me do the best I can, to lift me up when I'm tired and to help me be the person He wants me to be." Here, Latifah shares how God's love has helped her endure tremendous personal pain and inspires her loving heart.

## HE BLESSES THE POOR IN SPIRIT

When Latifah was 22, just as her career was kicking into high gear, her older brother, Lancelot Jr., was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident. Compounding her pain was the knowledge that she'd bought Lance the bike he'd been riding. The siblings had shared what Latifah describes as a "spiritual connection," and the death of her brother plunged her into a dark spiral swirling with emotional pain that she tried to soothe with drugs, smoking and alcohol. "That loss, man, I was rocked to the core," Latifah recalls of her brother's passing, the pain still palpable in her voice all these years later. "I felt guilty



Latifah (right) in 1980 with older brother Lance (center), sister Raven (left) and little brother Angelo (front)

because I got angry at God. But you know, He loves me anyway, even though I'm no saint and I'm far from perfect."

It was her honest relationship with the Lord and knowing she was loved by Him no matter what that helped pull Latifah out of the darkness. "The verse Matthew 5:3—where Jesus said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'—was very comforting to me at that time," she recalls. "For me, it was a powerful reminder that God doesn't make promises He doesn't keep." ➤

► Latifah also says she was comforted by the stories in the Bible where people endured suffering, but then God always came through in the end. “Job 42:10 says, ‘And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before,’” she quotes. “Understanding that God never leaves us helped me realize my brother was in a better place.”

## HIS JOY IS OUR STRENGTH

Latifah credits her mother, Rita, for showing her just how mighty God’s love can be. “My mother’s faith has been inspiring

throughout my whole life,” Latifah says. “And seeing her draw inspiration from Him and set such an example for our family is truly amazing.”

Ten years ago, Latifah’s life was upturned again when Rita was diagnosed with heart failure. “She was never a smoker or drinker. She wasn’t overweight. She wasn’t, you know, all the things I was and did,” Latifah explains. “Her diagnosis was such a scary shock. But having our faith in God, along with the love and support of family and friends, has been immeasurably helpful in dealing with all the emotions that come from the fear of losing her.”

Today Latifah is still being inspired by how her mother lives each day with a joy-filled heart no matter what difficulties come her way. “She never pities herself or has a ‘woe is me’ attitude even if she’s in the hospital,” Latifah says. “One of the biggest lessons my mom taught us—like Nehemiah 8:10 says—is that the joy of the Lord is your strength. That teaches us that we don’t need God to ‘get us out of’ a bad situation,” she explains. “We just need to keep His joy in our hearts and that will give us strength to overcome any



Latifah is inspired by the unshakable faith of her mother, Rita (shown here in 2016)

situation ourselves. This is something I've relied on when going through all kinds of trials and troubles in my life."

## HE IS HAPPINESS

God's joy has not only given Latifah strength, it has helped her understand the true definition of happiness. "I'm human, and like everyone else, I get the blues—but you can't stay in that place," she states. "I look to my faith and all the examples God gives us, along with my mom's faith, and it's wonderful inspiration to move forward and leave those dark places."

Latifah's faith has also helped her see the importance of having the courage to pray and talk to loved ones about a difficult emotion, struggle or hurt to get it off her chest and shine the light of truth on the situation. "In life, you'll go through ups and downs, but you will come back up eventually," she says with a smile. "I've found that if I focus on others' joy—despite if I actually feel happy or not—then joy always shines through. If I keep joy in my heart and laugh in spite of wanting to cry, I actively move my mind to a happy place."



Latifah and DeOndra Dixon at the Global Down Syndrome Foundation 2016 fashion show

Living in the present moment is another way Latifah finds God's effervescent joy. "My schedule can be so full, it would be overwhelming," she confides. "So I've come to learn the importance of staying in the moment and being present where I am. I focus on all of life's joyful little things like a good meal or an unexpected text from a loved one. The now is where God is, where you can feel His love the most. And knowing that, feeling love like that in your heart, gives you comfort and peace to keep on fighting the good fight." 