

Salvation gives us assurance of eternity in heaven, but that doesn't mean the journey here on earth won't be riddled with heartbreak, confusion, questions and pain. Being a believer doesn't exempt anyone from hardship, but trusting God does help in navigating life's tragedies and challenges. Just ask Mandisa. After the prayers of a multitude didn't stop her dearest friend from succumbing to cancer, Mandisa withdrew, wrestled with God and fell into a deep depression.

Now Mandisa is back and she has more to share than ever. "To be honest, that's not how I thought things were going to happen," she says of her friend Kisha's passing. "I was disappointed with God. I was mad because as I prayed for her, I believed that God was going to heal her. I'm not the kind of person who shakes my fist at the Lord and yells and screams. I just shut down and started turning to food again for comfort. For years, I was turning to Him for comfort, but I didn't trust Him anymore, so I isolated and went back to my old friend, food. My loved ones were reaching out and I would ignore their phone calls and text messages. It got to the point where I had friends who, out of love and concern, came to the house banging on the door and I just put in some ear plugs and pretended I wasn't there. I stopped going to church. I didn't open my Bible. The enemy had me exactly where he wanted me."

In the middle of her pain, God answered a prayer she had been fervently praying for years when her older brother, John (the subject of her song "Dear John") accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior. "That was God reminding me that he did indeed hear my prayers," she says. "He was still there, and even though things didn't turn out the way I wanted them to with Kisha, sometimes God says 'no' and I'm just learning to be okay with that. That's been my life for the last three and a half years. I wish that I had all the answers, but at this point I say, 'Okay God, I'm either gonna trust you with all of my heart, or I'm not. There's no middle ground here. I'm going to let the value and the weight of the character of God outweigh my need to know or understand.'"

Mandisa is back with a willingness to be totally transparent and vulnerable about her journey. She's reconnecting with people, losing the weight she regained during her depression, and writing and recording such potent songs as "Prove Me Wrong" where she lays bare her soul and voices her questions, "I'm Still Here (The Best is Yet to Come)," a comeback song that proclaims that she's still here and not giving up and "Unfinished," saying...

*"Not scared to say it; I used to be the one; Preaching it to you; That you could overcome; I still believe it; But it ain't easy; Cause that world I painted; Where things just all work out; It started changing; And I started having doubts; And it got me so down"*

"The Lord started lifting me out of this pit as I started this album," she says. "My hope is that people will be on this journey with me. When I began, I was in a really dark place, but where I am today is so much better and so much lighter. He pulled me out of the dark! I'm hoping that the same way that God is restoring me, that He will restore those who listen to it."