

# BAPTISMS

March 28th, 2021

westside church<sup>+</sup>



## ADRIENAH REESE

I grew up in a relaxed Christian family where we only went to church on important church days like Christmas and Easter. Reading the Bible and getting to know God was done due to personal curiosity and to me I regarded being a Christian as a burden; I thought it was hard and complicated to be a Christian, the rules and laws in my view were so complicated and unfair to us humans as I thought they didn't give us space to enjoy this world with its pleasure. Even though I found it hard to be a Christian, I forced myself to go to church some Sundays due to fear of going to hell. I put my effort in school and other things putting knowing God at the back of mind.

While in high school, the pressure of grades, socialising, being perfect in front of parents and peers got to me, I tried reading secular novels to try to ignore what was going on around me and fill the restlessness plus the void inside of me but I still found myself getting depressed about the situation.

Knowing my love for reading, I was given Christian novels by Francine Rivers as a gift that began my journey to know God at a deeper level. I started reading my Bible every night to try to know more in addition to prayers I learned in Sunday School. Even though I didn't feel the change immediately, I just kept the practice as I wanted to know what makes people courageous in Christ. Many times, I had the urge to get baptised,

but I struggled with letting go of control of life and giving it to Christ completely, to me the idea of trusting your whole self, future and not worrying about anything was absurd. To overcome this, I talked to a Christian friend of mine about letting go and bringing all my anxieties to Christ. From our talks I gradually learnt how to let go, to choose faith over my fear of failure. I learnt to ask God to change my mind inwardly about difficult situations. I found myself acquiring peace and confidence about difficult situations because I knew this time, I had a powerful backer and He wouldn't let me down.

I learned that God does everything for a reason and that even the bad situations in life will bear fruit at some point. Many people told me after that I had become more optimistic about life, that I had a peace of mind, unlike before where I always looked troubled and lonely even though I had a loving family and loyal friends. I believe Jesus died for me on the cross wholeheartedly, branded me a child of God giving me a new family and no one in this world can take that from me. I always take Numbers 6:24-26 with me. It's the greatest gift I have ever received for it always affirms God's love for me. To me, this baptism is the beginning of my journey in Christ and courageously proclaiming that I am a child of God.



## ALANNA BANTA

I have known Jesus for a long time now, but it's been in the last 10 years that He has really become the one leading my life. I grew up having a lot of head knowledge about who Jesus was and hearing about His desire to walk with us, but I always felt really distant from Him.

As a teen especially, I remember feeling alone and isolated from most people in my life and, in a moment of desperation and despair, I cried out for Him to meet me there. I was expecting Him to remain silent because I had done too many things that I felt disqualified me from His love. And yet, in that moment He spoke peace and compassion into the depths of my broken heart. He helped me realize that He was a God who works in us despite the darkness we may feel and the messiness of our lives. That moment and the ones that followed were what solidified my love for Him in response to the gift of His grace and compassion for me.

From there, I grew hungry to know who He was on a deeper level, so I studied with YWAM. That season was a time of God surpassing my expectations in showing me not only more of who He is and what His word says, but also the beauty and power of Christian community. There, I was also given the privilege of volunteering with victims of human trafficking and wrestling through some of the tough questions of how God, in the love He extended me, could allow such suffering and injustice to continue. In walking through that, God really confronted my own pride in thinking that I was the solution to the problems around me and

that I knew what people needed better than He did. It was a profound season of coming to terms with the fact that though we are called to be workers of justice, He is the one who ultimately does the work.

Little did I know how quickly I would forget that lesson and the ways that I would need to be reminded over and over again of the truth that He is both good and God in every situation. The years that followed returning back to Vancouver were filled with many valleys. The loss of several loved ones, the loss of my health for several years, and ultimately, the loss of the ideal life that I had hoped would define my Christian life.

But as per usual, I discovered He had better plans for me in the midst of the grief and struggle. These past seven years have been a tough but ultimately sweet journey, as He has shown me over and over that His love is there in every season, though the outcomes I long for may not happen on this side of heaven. His grace and faithfulness is unending in the face of my own brokenness and the brokenness of the world we live in. He holds onto me, and us, far stronger than I will ever be able to hold onto Him. And in that, that true rest is not found in the contents of our circumstances but in the never failing hope that He offers us.

And so, He has led me to baptism despite my stubborn heart, in order to take another step of trust and obedience recognizing that my hope is meant to be in Him alone. That my life and story is His and for His glory no matter what has happened or what lies ahead.



## AMAIRIS WONG

My walk with Jesus and knowing him started at a young age of 4. At that age, my family and I were going through many unfortunate events, including my parents fighting over custody of me. I remember going to church every Sunday and learning about him where I found my peace and my mom did too. Church gave me a stable ground for a few years, but I slowly started to resent Christ and my parents for what I was put through leading me to move further away from my relationship with Jesus, and moving closer to my friends and others that were not followers of God, alongside talking down upon him. To add to that, my father isn't a follower of Christ either so it was hard having one parent believe so much in faith, where the other put it down. I stopped praying and had no motivation to go to church or school. I drained myself at an age before my teenage years wanting to end my life. I struggled for a year after that during school and with most things but took account for my actions and knew that I wanted to regain my relationship with him. Which leads me to tell the story of where I was.

It was 2017 and Missions Fest—also known as the Festival of Hope—was holding a three day conference/concert starring Billy Graham's son Franklin Graham as well as the band King and Country. Franklin preached a sermon about joining God's family and becoming a true follower. I remember him calling everyone who wanted to learn more about Christ down to the floor. I went down and talked to one of the

leaders about my struggles with faith. He reminded me that I can put all my worries aside and trust that God would do great works in my life which actually leads me to a verse that is close to my heart, as well as being on my purity ring: "For I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

Ever since then, I have seen the Lord do great works in my life including helping me through tough times especially throughout this past year with Covid and my father going into the hospital. I have also seen him change my thoughts, actions, attitude and words into a more positive, hope-filled, lifegiving and faith-filled existence. What a relationship with him means to me now is having communication from God himself and through his word to prepare me for what his plans are and not studying him as an object, but really getting to know him. Jesus died on the cross for our sins which gave us an amazing opportunity to live for eternity and put our trust in him. Getting baptized for me is a fresh new start to life. I've actually wanted to get baptized ever since I was dedicated, so I'm so excited that it's happening now!



## AUSTIN LIU

For my entire life, I grew up in Christian household. Attending church every Sunday and learning about the Bible was very normal in our family. My parents valued our relationship with God and would try to encourage us to have a habit of studying the Bible. We had family Bible study time every evening. We would talk about a passage in the Bible and pray together.

As time passed, many of these biblical teachings lost a lot of meaning for me. I became calloused to the teachings and disinterested to create a relationship with Jesus. I decided to live my own life so I planned things out on my own and consumed my life with school and work. I went off to achieve what society would perceive as successful or important without regarding what God had in plan for me. I felt like I was on top of the world with full control of my life.

Achieving these selfish goals provided only a fleeting satisfaction. With each goal achieved I would just chase after another. My life felt like a rollercoaster of highs and lows. It just felt like an endless cycle of meaningless goals. In mid-2020, work became increasingly stressful with the pandemic. People were getting laid off, deadlines were unchanging and customer demands became more aggressive. I was so afraid that if I missed a deadline, I would lose my job. I literally felt I was drowning in anxiety and stress from work. The

stress was so intense that I would be unable to sleep and I would skip meals.

One evening, I sat at my desk so miserable and empty. The goals and expectations that I thought I achieved were not providing me any happiness. I prayed to God asking him to save me. All of sudden, I felt a wave of peace rush over me. The feeling of peace was unlike anything I have experienced. I felt God speak to me saying "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps." – Proverbs 16:9. He convicted me and asked me why I don't trust Him to lead my life. Why I keep chasing and planning these meaningless goals. He told me he has a greater purpose for my life to serve his kingdom. In that moment, the story of the prodigal son came into my mind. God has been pursuing me and He loves and cares for me but I decided to lead my own life. That evening, I prayed to God to forgive me of my sins, my disobedience and stubbornness. It has been my disobedience and stubbornness that caused me to walk away from the Lord for so long. He has always been there for me and He wants to lead my life.

Since then, I have been so thankful for God's grace and presence in my life. He has realigned my priorities and begun to take control of my life. He has revealed my identity, that I am a child of God. He has provided so much peace and purpose in my life. I know that He has a plan for my life and I just need to commit my works to Him. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." – Proverbs 3:5-6.

I want to be baptized today as an act of obedience to Him because I have surrendered my life to Him and committed myself to serving Him as he builds His kingdom. I believe He died for me and forgave my sins.



## CAMERON ABRAMS

Before coming to Church I was always trying to fill myself up with the things of this world, defining my self-worth by achievements, money, grades, and career success. I was full of arrogance, impatience, and frustration. In the winter of 2018, I was going through a tough time. I felt lost, disconnected and aimless.

I was looking for comfort, answers, any kind of solace. I remembered a friend named Steven Hettler that went to church, so I came to Westside Church. I had an open mind. Every time I came I wept uncontrollably; I couldn't stop it. While listening to Norm Funk, God asked me why I was struggling and helped me search my heart.

I realized I was full of arrogance and ignorance. I saw that I didn't really know what was in my heart. I had never really contemplated my soul. I didn't recognize my sin or understand the power of Jesus Christ to transform my mind and my heart.

It wasn't easy; my soul was full of rot. I understood that, by grace, Jesus had paid the price to help me cleanse my soul. Jesus guided me through sleepless nights and gave me comfort while I confronted demons. I was hard on my family, who loved me most, but Jesus gave me wisdom to understand and love to forgive and grow.

What is the evidence of God's grace in my life? Forgiving my parents for years of pain, heartache, anger, sadness, loneliness, and frustration as I struggled with my identity and their divorce. Healing for the loss of my sister, my broken father, failed relationships, unsatisfied dreams, and careers despite all my best efforts. All because Jesus loved and forgave me.

God cleansed my heart and my soul. Armed with God's righteousness, wisdom, and forgiveness I have strength to move on, love to forgive and love to share. By His grace, He revives my commitment to Him daily, as well as my commitment to my new wife, my current family, my new job, and the future children we hope for.



## COLLEEN JAMES

My life before Christ was full of emptiness and hopelessness. I felt as though there was a hole inside of me I just couldn't fill no matter what I tried. I was searching for myself and for happiness. This consumed me and led to self-loathing. I turned to sex, drugs, and alcohol at an early age to try to fill the void inside myself. I left school, home, and began a path of self destruction. I prayed to God as a child but as I got older, I was led astray and felt ashamed of Him; I rejected Him. In my rejection, I still tried to find answers to life which again led to drugs and other religions and schools of thought. I thought I was beginning to find answers but remained with the same feelings I always had, just with different Band-Aids over them.

Then things slowly started happening where God was softening my heart and opening my eyes to Him. I found a little pocket Bible at the park and began to read it. Then, one of the ladies downtown that was always handing out little print ups of scripture and Bibles gave me a Bible, and I began reading that. As I read, I saw all around me things that scripture explained would be happening. I started noticing signs and symbols. If people worked so hard to serve the devil, then there must be a God...

God put me in the place where I met a pastor and his wife from Winnipeg in Vancouver for a convention at Westside Church. The Holy Spirit stirred in me and let me receive the message of Jesus they told us about.

That morning was the first time I ever heard of the price Christ paid for me on the cross, and the first time I had repentance explained to me. I started to realize Satan's deception in my life. The next day was the first time I had been to church in many years.

Something clicked after that. Christ has made me new. He's changed my whole life. I started going to church after that because I wanted to know more about Christ and the Bible. Everything in the world started to make sense to me; it was the missing piece. I felt so free knowing God forgave me and no "works" I or anyone could do would suffice, Christ had bought and paid for our sins. God forgave me where I never would have forgave myself.

Life in Him has brought me trust and rest. I appreciate the world around me and its beauty and I no longer need to fear death. He's broken the chains I bound myself with and given me a new life. I've never felt love like the love God has for me. I look to direct myself with things of the spirit and not of the flesh now. I think the best way I can describe life in Christ is freedom. He's healed my wounds and loves me in a way I could never love myself. Christ meets all my needs; I accept I don't know what's best for myself so I need to trust in Him. He put me in all the places I needed to be so I would come to know Him.

All my pain and distress served a greater purpose of bringing me to Christ and showing me God's mercy. I pray I would seek Him more, live in His way, and that He would work in me to go and share the good news with those who are still lost. It's easy to be distracted in this world of the flesh but I keep my eyes towards the Lord. And that's why I want to be baptized. I want to announce my covenant with the Lord. He has made me new and I think baptism is how I can show that Christ is my Lord and savior and that my life is now His as I walk with Him through it. Praise be to God! (Verses I love: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Psalm 118:5-18, Mark 2:17)



## DEO BOLDO

I grew up in a Catholic family in the Philippines that actively served God and the Church. When I was young, I was fond of leading youth groups in our community. I love serving, leading worship, and simply sharing faith with people. I personally believe that God is my friend, and God is my Creator and Jesus is my Saviour.

However, I'm one of the people that grew up full of faith but got deeply lost. In July 2012, I lost an amazing mother who worked so hard despite her health problems. No words can describe the pain that I felt. A few days after her death, I discovered that my father had two children outside of their marriage. Growing up, I didn't have a relationship with him. I despised him because he didn't have a job and flirted with multiple women, including our housekeeper. With so much pain inside, I focused my 100% of my time working. I sailed for 8 years as a ship pilot, travelling worldwide for 10 months and staying 2 months at home for a swift vacation. Even though I was earning great money, I felt something was significantly missing, and I was being called to live differently.

I heard Him multiple times, but I always told myself, "It's not the right time, Deo." Last year, while working away at sea, I found out that the girl I was supposed to marry cheated on me. It was excruciating since I could not do anything due to a long-distance relationship. Again, I felt God tapping and telling me, "I'm still

here, my son." I decided to stop sailing and start rebuilding my life in a fixed place. It was extremely challenging since I had to abandon the life I was "comfortable" doing, sailing. But my heart was longing to reconnect with God and live a life of service.

I was invited by a friend to attend a Christian service back in the Philippines last February 2020. That was the moment when I started rebuilding my relationship with God. It felt great. I was longing to be baptized, but Covid cancelled everything. However, it didn't stop me from serving in the Church. I missed the feeling of personal and spiritual satisfaction from doing something that can positively impact other people's lives.

On January 4, 2021, I left the Philippines to pursue my graduate degree at a university in BC. Studying in a foreign country where I have no family is tough. But I decided to embrace the uncomfortable and trust God more. Moving to a new country might not seem like the most profound experience, especially during these difficult times, but having the opportunity to be part of a Westside community group helped me make great connections. It gave me a very welcoming and supportive group of friends that increased my confidence to embrace the uncomfortable. I'm grateful for Westside Church as I really believe that the Christian faith is not meant to be journeyed alone.

I believe God's love is burning inside His heart and He wants to overwhelm me with His amazing love. According to Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you" declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." I was lost but was reminded that His love never failed. I want to be baptized to declare that I belong to the triune God and believe that I have died and have been resurrected with Jesus to a new life.



## EDISON LEE

I have been a part of Westside Church for about a year and a half. I am so thankful for God's appointment to visit Westside Church by chance on a Sunday; I was deeply moved and heard about Jesus. I started attending, sometimes I would bring my daughters in to sit with me through the service.

As I attended, I started to feel something missing in my life. Peace, calm and everything I heard about what it's like to know Jesus. When I got into it, I began to see the truth I was searching for in the stories that Jesus told. So I made up my mind to become a Christian and have eternal life with him, knowing that he went to the cross to pay for my sins.

I want to be baptized to publicly demonstrate I have received His righteousness by faith and live in peace and community.



## HIROSHI TANAKA

I came to know Jesus in my late 20s. Before surrendering to Jesus, I was searching for purpose in life, whether it be in travel, new friendships, or learning a new hobby. I mainly struggled with insecurity and anxiety, I was very hard on myself and never believed I was doing the right thing. My inability to control my emotions and communicate my thoughts caused a lot of relationship issues with friends and family. I was living selfishly.

I was in the bedroom with my future wife and we were talking about what the next steps looked like for our life. I wanted to make a commitment to her to become a supportive and loving husband. I sought to be a good husband and deeply felt it involved understanding why Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

Understanding what Jesus did for me on the cross helped me realize my relationship with Jesus can be filled with silence, reflection, prayer and confession. Life with Christ has opened my mind and heart. I want to be baptized to publicly declare I am walking with Jesus, and that Jesus has died for my sins so that I could be cleansed. I am thankful He has done this for me!

“Don’t copy the behaviours and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and

perfect.” Romans 12:2 [NLT]



## MADISON MAERZ

I knew Jesus at a young age. I went to a Christian school, read the Bible, and attended church. I remember first asking Jesus into my heart when I was 11 or 12 years old, which was a very special moment for me. As I got older, life got tougher. Things weren’t great at home and school was hard. My mom got really sick and my Grandma passed away. The world felt heavy. I felt lost. Betrayed. Alone. Not good enough. Hopeless. I chose a relationship that was wrong for me, abusive in many ways. I felt pressured into sex and from that moment forward, I felt like I was no longer good enough to call myself a Christian. I fell into a really deep dark hole away from God and into shame. I forgot what it meant to trust in Jesus, repent, and receive forgiveness.

I turned to the world to fix my disparity. I tried to fill my loneliness with acceptance. I didn’t eat so I could feel something. I drank alcohol and used recreational drugs. I presented my Bible memory verse in class on Mondays and then did whatever else I wanted on the weekends. It was like a double life. After starting public school in grade 12, I finally felt like I fit in. Naturally, the behaviour that I was already doing continued through high school and eventually into university. I was addicted to relationships—chronically going from one failed partnership to another, never okay with being alone.

Fast forward a couple of years and I met my now husband. We sat down on our first date and I said, “I want you to know that I am crappy Christian.” I was at a point in my life where I was searching for God. Joel looked me in the eyes and said, “Me too.” Ever since that conversation, we slowly but surely started to seek God together. We picked up and moved here to Vancouver just over a year and a half ago. Our first year here was lonely. Life was throwing out challenges, so we started praying more frequently and attending Westside online in November of 2020. I was working on Sundays, so online was all we could make work at the time. During one of Matt’s recent Corinthians sermons, on sexual sin, I remember just falling to my knees in tears in the middle of my living room. Joel and I sat there on our knees and we cried, and we prayed, and I asked God for forgiveness. I recommitted my life to Him that day. I realized that the price for my sin was already paid. Jesus has set me free from my mistakes and free from my past.

My life in Christ during this past year has been made different in so many ways. I’m not doing this alone. I cry out to God and lament for what’s broken and praise Him for what is good. I see the world differently now. I understand that I am here for a purpose, to love others like He so loved us. John 3:16 says: “For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Now that is good news!

The Lord has blessed me with this move. He has provided me with a community group that has grown into authentic, encouraging, Christ-like friendships. He has called me to spend time in His word through daily devotions and a weekly Bible study. He has kept me and continues to keep me. My relationship with Jesus means grace that has been freely given. I want to be baptized today to make it known publicly that I have committed my life to Jesus.



## WILLIAM REWCASTLE

Before I came to know God's love, I was alone in a dark, secular world. I was born an only child and have always felt alone in my journey through life before knowing the power of Christ and the community he provides. I went through life only wanting to put my energy into things that would not make me sad or feel bad instead of something good. I was in a perpetual state of constantly trying to not be miserable and was not successful. I was never welcome with the popular kids in school, nor felt the need to appreciate what the current popular trend was in the social sphere. So instead, I escaped into my computer and lived in video games and the internet, feeling that if I cannot function in the real world then I would be able to find my place in the digital world. I went through 8 years of school and 4 years of work without any other goal except being able to plug in and forget that I live on planet Earth.

There came a point in time where I had been laid off from work at my web hosting job and was consulting with my friends about whether or not this was a sign. I took this opportunity to pursue a passion and dedicate myself for a year towards it. Ultimately, I believe I failed and fell to an all time low, even planning on taking my own life. During this time, I felt the Holy Spirit call out to me and fill me with the light and hope for a future. I did not know at the time that it was the Holy Spirit and I have come to acknowledge that now. I consider myself an overly logical individual and it was difficult for someone like me to acknowledge

something like Christianity and the events that define the religion. But I eventually realized that I couldn't deny the reality of Jesus Christ and my need for him. Over the last 4 years, I have gradually come closer to Jesus and I now wish to commit to him for life.

Ever since I came to acknowledge Christ and the true God, my journey through life has brought me many tests, many adventures, and many new friends. But one of the greatest things about following Jesus has been the sense of purpose and belonging he has given me. The Christian community is something that I never understood until becoming a man of faith and it is something that I wish to have with me for the rest of my life. Overall, I want to get baptized because I have fully committed to following Jesus, knowing that he has forgiven me of my sin and given me new life with him.