

Sunday 17th November 2024 - Testimonies from Charles & Aneise Hughes

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Preachers: Aneise Hughes, Charles Hughes

[0 : 00] It's great that we're going to hear from both Anise and Charles this morning as they share why today is the day that they want to get baptised along with Makayo and Naya Rose as well.

So, looking resplendent on the front row there. Do you want to avoid the water coming down? I don't know who's going to go first. Anise, do you want to come and share a little bit first? Is that all right? Or Charles? Whichever, you choose, you choose.

But as they come forward, should we give it up? This is Charles and Anise. Come on down, come on down. Nice to see you. Well done, well done.

I think you've both got to share something, aren't you? So, I'll give you the mic. Thanks, Matt. So, well, yeah, this is a massive day for us as a family. Anise is much more courageous and brave than me, so she's going to speak off the top of her head.

But I've pre-prepared some words that I would like to say and I hope this shows our declaration and gives a bit of an insight into, personally, where I've come from and how I've got to this stage, but also us as a family, hence why we've made this decision to do this all together.

[1 : 14] So, today is a big day for not just me, but the whole family as we take this major step forward with Christ today. Since joining St. John's back in September 22, we have felt like we've joined one big family.

The inspiration, support, guidance, and love that we've received from everybody has been truly special. I could not think of a better place to be than here with you all as we undertake this next important chapter in our faith.

My own path to Christianity has been a fairly slow one. Interactions with other churches when I was younger was always fascinating, especially at a loud singing Pentecostal church in Dagnum.

But I never came from a family of church-going people, although thankfully, I did have a number of friends who played a big influence, including the godparents of Micayo and Nairros and those closest to us.

Internally, I always felt drawn to the concept of faith and appreciated the utter complexity and nature of the world in which we live in. As someone who was pursuing a career in science, I even went through a very sceptical and somewhat ignorant phase in which I felt like I had to scrutinise God, challenge claims from the Bible, and only ever focus on things like empirical evidence.

[2 : 36] How funny and ironic it is when I look back at this now as I stand here and declare my faith in front of you all. It's amazing how ignorant we can be when we haven't even tried to learn, understand, listen, or even engage in something as important as God and creation.

All of the staff here, Matt, Gemma, and the wider team, have really shown us what true Christianity looks like. It's not about judging others or trying to exert our own interpretations onto other people. It's about being open and open to what they speak on and trying to think critically for yourselves about what the Bible teaches us and how they offer in their interpretations. You have also shown that true belief is demonstrated in action with all the incredible work that you do and the people and organisations in which you support.

Me and Anise could tell from the day we stepped into this very room that this was a pillar of the whole community. So on a personal note, we genuinely want to thank you all.

We also want to give a special thanks to Matty and Carol Sutton who have also personally played a massive role on this journey. Your support and love shown to us from the first week we joined has been nothing but humbling and something we truly cherish as a family.

[3 : 57] So, the reason why we all come here every Sunday and for so many more days in the week for others is Jesus Christ. To me, Jesus is the highest of ideals and the pinnacle of virtue and of course, this makes sense as God is the one who created it in the first place.

He represents the perfect balance between humility, righteousness and courage in human form. Not only is he God, but he is also the moral and spiritual framework on which if you base your life on, you will only see improvement and a hunger for being a better version of yourself.

I think we can all agree there is no such thing as the perfect Christian. We are ultimately all sinful by our very nature. But what I do believe is that anyone who is endeavouring to live as Jesus exemplified on earth will only be a force for good.

Not just to themselves, but to their families, friends, communities and ultimately the world. That may sound cliché, but when you really think about it, every way in which we as individuals, united by our common faith, behaves or acts, can influence the whole world around us.

Just imagine if everybody actually followed the principles laid out to us by Jesus. I don't need to remind you all of the challenges we face, whether it be environmental, political, economic or spiritual.

[5 : 21] Our faith in Jesus is what unifies us all and allows us to persist in the face of adversity. He provides us with a vision of hope, even when circumstances around us appear dire.

Of course, this is a long road ahead and one that never truly ends. Many of you have been at it for a lot longer than us as a family. And each day, another miracle was born, person saved or love of our common faith shared.

It does not, of course, come without its challenges. Whether we like it or not, we are all to be tested and judged. I know there will be times when we feel like we are in a bit of a spiritual drought or the challenges we face in our lives may feel overwhelming.

But what I do know is that when we walk into St. John's with all sorts of mundane stresses relating to everyday life and hear the word of Jesus, we will walk back out with a smile on our faces and the feeling of enlightenment and a soul well served.

Every time I read the word, particularly the gospels, I feel a deep sense of belonging. It's difficult to define the precise emotions it stirs when reading about what Jesus did, what he represents and his impact on people of his day.

[6 : 32] You feel like a moral obligation to follow the path that he has set out before you. Being Christian is being Christ-like. Not just talking about the wonders of God and what he has done for us all of creation, but fulfilling the prophecy of being a light in the darkness, a person of integrity, compassion and love.

The nature of our very existence is a representation of God and how incredible it is that we are even given the opportunity to fulfil such role. We are often distracted by earthly pleasures and earthly pains.

I often have to remind myself of the bigger purpose, of my duty to live how Christ would want me to be and to love my neighbours and remain humble. See, often many aspects of Christian life are not easy.

In Matthew 7, verse 12, so in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you. It sounds straightforward, but try practising this when someone is being unjustifiably cruel or unkind or when you are going through untold stress and suffering.

It's easy to slip into ways in which Jesus would not want us to be. These, what appear to be simple messages or commands, are often very difficult when practising them day to day under different circumstances.

[7 : 45] These words of scripture have been with us for so long that we often take them for granted. But when you sit back and actually take in the words as you flick through scripture, you realise just how integral they are to our being as well as our civilisation.

And then there's gratitude. When I reflect back on the life I've already lived and the gifts we as a family have received from God, I often have to pause and take a step back and truly appreciate it. I have such a wonderful family, an incredible wife in Anise, with beautiful young children, Makayo and Naya, and more on the way. I also have amazing friends and colleagues.

For those who didn't know, Anise is actually pregnant, so, you know, baby number three is on the way. Sorry, I just declared that publicly.

I also have amazing friends and colleagues all play an important role in my life. Just to be in a position where we live, where we do not have to suffer in conflict and constant fear and oppression, where we have so much freedom and leisure, these are all easily taken for granted, especially in the context of the world we live in now.

[9 : 01] I often ask, why does someone who has equally the same amount of faith as me have to suffer so terribly? We can all ask legitimate questions whilst also accepting that we, a product of God's creation, do not have all the answers ourselves.

However, what I do know is that I must cherish what I do have. I must thank God for the fortunate position I am in. That's not to say God puts people in terrible situations purposefully, but I understand that we as people have a huge responsibility ourselves as God's children to make the world a better place as God would envision for us.

Lastly, I just want to finish on one of the most, probably one of the most important verses in the Bible and it sums up really what I've tried to say in this testimony, albeit in a much more concise and direct way.

So in John chapter 8 verse 12, when Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

I hope that after today, we as a family do our very best to continue to hold the torch for Jesus as we do our utmost best to shine a positive life for the rest of the years we have left together.

[10 : 13] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. That was really good.

I wish, maybe I should have prepared something. I just want to thank everyone for coming here to witness our baptism today.

It means a lot to us as a family. Just, probably not as good as that, but just a little insight into my life. I was brought up Christian, but I was never christened nor baptised, and I think I'm the only one in my family who still isn't.

But I always just felt quite blessed and I've always felt like I've had God's grace. So, in a sense, I felt like I never had to. I always just thought, well, I have a relationship with God and I love God, so that's absolutely fine.

I know me, God knows me, so there's no need for that anymore. And then we got, but then I think deep down, it's because I always just felt like I wasn't good enough to actually say, I'm a Christian, so I didn't want to, I didn't want to declare that.

[11 : 31] But then once we got, me and child got married, I kind of felt like, well, actually, there's less things that I'm doing now that's sinful. I don't go to the clubs anymore. I'm not, I'm not doing, yeah, I'm not doing anything that, you know, is a little bit less unworthy, so I felt a little bit more like, actually, I can try and commit myself to God a bit more.

and afterwards, we kind of decided we wanted a family and that's when I really decided, actually, I want to raise a family within Christ and I don't, I want them to have the kind of experience that I had. Fast forward to 2020, I decided I wanted to get baptised and lockdown happened. So, yeah, so I've, since 2020, my sister's been telling me, you've got to get baptised, especially when I was pregnant with my son Makayo, and she said, get baptised before the baby comes, but lockdown happened, so I just said to her, I'll be fine.

Again, I think I just started to feel a bit unworthy and a bit like, well, if it's meant to be, it's kind of meant to be, I wasn't actively pursuing Christ and I wasn't actively trying to live a righteous life, I was just coasting and just enjoying all the blessings that God has been giving me without actually giving myself over to God.

And then, Nairose came along and I thought, again, I kind of got inspired, no, I need to get baptised this time round. I want the whole family to be baptised and that's when kind of Char started to come along the journey with me, he started to read scripture with me and we felt like a lot more in tune and we kind of seen how it was working within our lives and within our family, but as yet, we hadn't found a church.

[13 : 22] So I was looking for just a play group because I had Thursdays off and I was looking for a play group to take my son to whilst we were looking for churches. But again, we just wasn't very, I wasn't very, I just wasn't very strict on going to church and things like that and I wasn't actively looking, I just thought if somebody invites me and they say there's a good church, I'll try and attempt to go.

But then we came, I came here for a Thursday session with Gemma and yeah, we just enjoyed the session so much at the time it was just Makaya and she said, oh, you know, we have church on a Sunday and I was thinking, oh, okay, I'll see, I'll see if I can make it and I told Char about it and he said, yeah, we should definitely come along and see what the church has to say and I am just so grateful that you did kind of mention that to me and I'm grateful that I actually took it on board and took it seriously and came because it has been life-changing.

I just remember the first time we came through the doors how everyone was just so inviting to us and at the time I think, yeah, I was pregnant with Nairoso so I was pregnant and then I had a little one and I just thought that everyone would kind of just get on with their own thing but people just weren't like that.

Everyone was just so inviting and so warm and this was actually the first church I've been to that I felt, I really have felt God's grace and God's love.

I've been to other churches where I have felt the Holy Spirit and I have felt in, I felt very energised after going to church in terms of the word but this was the first church that I've truly gone to and I felt really loved and seen and I was just so, I was so overwhelmed and I said to Char, this is the church I want to be baptised in because it doesn't matter like, you know, how my relationship is with God and how His is, I want the children to feel this kind of love and I want them to grow in this kind of environment, I want them to be able to know that God means that, God means that we open our arms to people and God means that it doesn't matter whether people look different to you, you just, you should always try and be as warm as you can with people, you should always try and get to know people, everyone here tries to, you know, remember my name which is not the easiest of names to remember and everyone has a conversation after church so I'm just very grateful that this is the place that we kind of landed on really and Matt, you've been so, so welcoming to the family and you've always just allowed us to feel like a part of the church, we haven't necessarily just felt like visitors, we have felt like core members of the church and although like most of the times

[16:10] I'm just running around not really able to have a conversation with people and stuff, I know that everyone is, I know that everyone is ready to have a conversation anytime about personal life, about Christ, about anything and like it's just very refreshing and it's wonderful to be able to be in an environment like that so I'm extremely grateful that this is the place that God has led me to, led us to and I'm just very fortunate that this day has come and we are able to as a family be baptised so thank you everyone for welcoming us into the St. John community and we hope to be here for many years Thank you.