

Baptism was sign of leaving my stubbornness behind

One of the catalysts that led Ashley Plumpton to faith was a poignant moment with his mum on her deathbed

AS Ashley Plumpton emerged from the water of baptism, he felt like he had come home.

His full immersion was a public sign of his new-found faith in God, and an acknowledgement that his life had changed. He figured that if God could work in someone as stubborn as him, he could transform anyone's life.

It was also a precious moment for his wife Abi, who had been praying for him to convert for a long time. The family are grateful to those at St Margaret's Church in Southsea, who helped them as they inched towards this moment, step by step.

One of the major signals that God was at work happened on Ashley's mum's deathbed. And Ashley sees that moment, in January this year, as one of the triggers that prompted him to explore faith.

"The journey over the past six to ten months has been just amazing," he said. "The change in me, in how I

think and feel, is just phenomenal. I truly owe this to the Holy Spirit, that has taken over my mind, body and soul. I believe baptism is a symbol of honouring our God, in his grace and glory."

Ashley, now 36, and Abi, 34, had moved to Southsea from London in mid-2021, with their children Ollie, now 14, Imogen, seven, and Demi, three. Abi had a church background, but it was Ollie who happened to walk past St Margaret's one day and decided to go in. From there, Abi and the children started attending services regularly on a Sunday.

Ashley had always been fascinated by church architecture and enjoyed the peacefulness of church buildings, but had stubbornly held out against embracing the Christian faith. He started helping the vicar, the Rev Fran Carabott, at church and they began a friendship.

Meanwhile, his mum, who had battled cancer for almost 30 years,

was becoming more poorly. By September 2023, she was given between three and six months to live. Fran's father passed away in 2023, so he and Ashley would meet to chat and support each other.

"Fran was very good at segwaying faith into the conversation and praying for me, but I was quite stubborn about it," he said. "But on my mother's deathbed, God showed up. She went into hospital on Christmas Day and by a few days later, she was on end-of-life care, and her pain was being managed by a syringe driver. She was unconscious for much of the time, and we'd had no conversation with her for two days.

"Abi sat at the bottom of the bed and read a prayer and some verses from the Bible. Out of nowhere, she opened one eye and said: 'Abs, are you reading the Bible?' as clear as day. She nodded her approval and sat back. She died the very next day. Looking back, that was a big catalyst and showed God at work."



Ashley Plumpton is baptised at St Margaret's Church, Southsea, by the Rev Fran Carabott

After her death, Ashley picked up a book she had been reading, called 'Stairway to Heaven'. His mum had marked the page she had read up to – a chapter entitled 'Jesus and the Holy Spirit'. It was another sign for him. After that, he discovered multiple prayers were being answered.

One significant moment came when he and Abi had argued for a whole weekend. Ashley decided to take the car and just drive without a destination in mind. He found himself in Christchurch, Dorset, and was drawn to the Abbey. He sat inside the church and started reading from the Book of Jeremiah.

"I knelt down at the front of the abbey and for the first time, I really prayed," he said. "I prayed for peace between me and Abi. I drove home and she acted as though nothing had happened. I knew that was an answer to prayer."

He started praying silent prayers and reading more about God. Fran gave him a book by John Mark Comer called 'Live No Lies' which helped him to crystallise his thinking. Then this summer, the family went

to Devon and Cornwall. They visited a few churches including one in Devon where he took Communion for the first time.

He visited Wavehouse Church in Newquay, a church for surfers that includes skate ramps, and then went to Truro Cathedral. It was there that Ashley discovered a memorial to Chris Parry. He was a Cornish aid worker who had rescued over 400 Ukrainians from their homes as Russian troops invaded, and who had been killed in January 2023 at the age of 28.

"It really moved me, as I had recently watched a documentary about Chris Parry called 'Hell Jumper,'" said Ashley. "I had no idea that the cathedral had hosted a memorial service for him and he was actually from Truro. Here was a massive mural about his work. I started crying and I signed the tribute book in floods of tears.

"I also knelt and prayed, in front of all the people taking photos. That was another moment for me, in which I decided to surrender to God. I wanted God to give me a sense of purpose, as Chris Parry had."

Back home, Ashley found his behaviour changing. He downloaded the Youversion Bible app to read a verse of the Bible each day, and prayed out loud with Abi and his children for the first time. They went to church as a family, and Ashley met Fran regularly to study the Bible.

He felt able to be baptised this autumn, on the Sunday when the church celebrated seven years since its re-opening. Ashley is the 32nd new believer that has been baptised there since the start of this year.

"I felt it in my heart I wanted to go in to 2025 baptised," said Ashley. "My journey is really a series of dots that have joined together. Lots of things have lined up together and in retrospect I can see that's God at work.

"Finding faith has taught me what is really important in life, how living a life without faith is just a journey with no destination. I honestly believe I now have a destination, I have purpose, and I am now free to become what God made me to become."