

Charlene Tan's Testimony

I was baptized as an infant into the Roman Catholic faith and raised by my devout Catholic mum. My extended family and relatives are fiercely Roman Catholic. Growing up, I attended church services and Sunday school regularly, read about Jesus in storybooks as a child and had some vague knowledge of God.

Growing up was tough, sad and difficult. My parents separated early and I yearned for what my friends had – a loving and nurturing family unit with both parents present. I struggled academically, was often bullied and mocked in school, and faced harsh words at home from my mother. Her words broke me and they cut deep. I felt crushed, my self-esteem hit rock bottom and I worried about everything. Finally I gave up on myself and on my studies and repeated a year in Secondary 3, much to my mother's shock and anger. I felt alone, abandoned and lost.

Just as I started to turn to the wrong crowd for comfort, a sense of belonging and identity, God in his mercy and kindness, found me. That year, the school organized a Catholic charismatic youth camp for those of us interested to attend. I went and for once in my 16 years, I felt alive and confident in him and trusted that he would walk with me, no matter what. It was at that camp that I understood God was not some distant and cold being living out there in the universe, but that he lived in me, loved me and knew me intimately. This was only the beginning of something even more beautiful to take place and this journey with Christ would take another 22 years to unfold (and continues to)!

I became even more devout in my Roman Catholic practices – I would say the rosary 3 times a day, attended daily mass and went for regular confession with the parish priest. I was perhaps driven by the need to do good works – I was desperately fearful of Purgatory and eternal damnation, and that I would never enter the Kingdom of Heaven. I still did not fully know or appreciate who Jesus Christ truly is!

During this time, I tried to read the Bible. I felt a great yearning to read His Word but did not know how to or where to begin. The Catholic church, I realised does not study the Bible well.

I did well for my "O" and "A" levels albeit with a lot of self-doubt, fear and anxiety. I kept God close to my heart and leaned on him for strength and he very ably and faithfully carried me through. I was a History major at the National University of Singapore, graduated in 2001, and worked as a social worker with juvenile delinquents for 5 years. During this time, I thought I met the man of my life, a Roman Catholic himself. I looked to him to "save" me from my mother's grip and hoped so much that we could settle down and start our own family.

He quickly became my idol, a false god – the one who would remove me from mum's home and hold. I endured 13 years of emotional and verbal abuse at

his hands. Those were dark days – painful, filled with tears, guilt and confusion. My self-esteem and self-worth took another beating. I felt God had abandoned me; now I know that it was I who abandoned God.

In the 4th year of our relationship, I left Singapore to study medicine in the UK. I continued to attend daily mass there but did not know how to pray. I asked the saints to prayer for me, to intercede on my behalf – especially with regard to my relationship and for exam success in medical school. God surrounded me with good Christian friends who accepted me and loved me even though I was still very much holding on to my Roman Catholic beliefs and values.

I returned to Singapore in 2012. Work was not easy as a junior doctor, the relationship was messy, chaotic and cruel; and the home environment stifling. I felt I was drowning, struggling and I wanted to run away from all of the mess and hide. I cried out to God for help.

God is truly merciful, generous and kind. Even in my fallen state, he met me in my pain and shame, picked me up and found me again a second time, working through two amazing sisters in-Christ. I met them through work in 2014. They helped me recognise how unhealthy the relationship was and prepared me emotionally and physically to choose truth, to walk in the light and to finally put 13 painful years behind me. More importantly, they challenged my Roman Catholic beliefs and values in a safe environment and guided me towards a better understanding of the gospel and grace. They introduced me to RHC and God gave me the courage to attend in September 2015 when the sermon series was on the book of Genesis.

I was blown away by the sermon! I enjoyed the teaching and the careful, precise and detailed explanation of the Bible and how we could apply this to our daily lives. God softened my heart and allowed me to savour, appreciate and accept his gospel and his grace.

In the last 1.5 years, I have grown as a Christian and I can now confidently say that my hope and salvation lies in Christ alone for his death on the cross has satisfied the Father's wrath against my sin. It is only by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone that I am saved and not by my own efforts or good works, for God is much greater than anything I could ever do. I feel free and liberated, not bound to good works or the fear of Purgatory or Mum. My identity is bound only to Jesus Christ. He is my Lord and my Saviour and this truth has set me free!