

Testimony of Liubov Shmanova

I was born into a traditional Orthodox family.

We celebrated church holidays, believed in God — but it was a distant, cultural belief.

I didn't know yet that faith could be alive.

When I was 13, my aunt secretly brought me to a different church — full of life and the real presence of God.

She told my father we were going into the city, but she was really taking me into God's arms.

There, I encountered Jesus for the first time — not as a figure in icons, but as Someone living, Someone personal.

I remember weeping during worship, overcome by the love I had never felt before. The Holy Spirit was real. And I knew — even at that young age — my life had changed.

But life moved on. I left home to study at university, and with adulthood came noise, pressure, and busyness.

I never stopped believing, never stopped praying... but slowly, without noticing, my heart drifted.

I chased comfort, safety, dreams.

I thought we were building a beautiful life — a home, a future, stability for our children.

And then the war came. In an instant, everything we built crumbled.

We had to flee — from a large, lively city to a quiet American town of 10,000 people.

We lost almost everything — our home, our sense of identity, our financial foundation.

But it was there — in the wreckage — that God met me again.

At my lowest, I collapsed before Him.

"Lord," I prayed, "I can't do this anymore. I am tired. If You have another way, show me."

And He did.

Not through comfort — but through surrender.

Not by restoring what I had — but by transforming what I believed.

He carried me through the wilderness.
He broke what was proud in me and softened what had grown cold.
He didn't just rescue me from danger — He rescued me from myself.

Now, my faith is no longer something I reach for in moments of need — it is the foundation I stand on.
I believe in Jesus Christ — that He took my sins, suffered in my place, died on the cross, and rose again to give me new life.
I don't carry shame anymore — because He carried it for me.
I don't chase control anymore — because I've learned to trust the One who sees beyond what I can.

I've repented.
I've laid down my old fears, my pride, my need to understand everything.
I've learned that real faith doesn't begin with strength — it begins at the end of yourself.

God changed my heart. He taught me gentleness, patience, and peace — the kind of peace that doesn't make sense in the middle of a storm.
The Holy Spirit comforts me, teaches me, speaks to me even in silence.

I used to be anxious and restless — now I'm learning to walk slower, love deeper, forgive quicker.
Not perfectly, but intentionally.

Prayer has become a rhythm in my life — with my husband, with my children, with my community.
The Word of God is now not just a book to me — it's where I go when I feel lost.

I want to be baptized — not as a tradition, but as a declaration.
I want the world to know: I belong to Jesus.
I died to my old self — and I am alive in Him.

And I want to be part of this church — not just as a visitor, but as a member of the Body of Christ.
This church welcomed us with open arms, embraced our family in love, and gave us a home when we had none.
Here, we've seen what grace looks like in action.
Here, I've found not just a community — but a spiritual family.

I used to believe in God. Now — I walk with Him.
I used to know about Him. Now — I know Him.
He didn't save me once. He saves me every single day.

Background:

I was born into a traditional Orthodox family. We went to church on holidays, and my parents believed in God, but only within the framework of Orthodox tradition. When I was about 13, my aunt secretly took me to another church — one that felt more alive and personal. It was very similar to the Apostolic Christian Church. She would tell my father that we were just going to the city, but in reality, she was leading me to services where I got to know Jesus on a deeper level.

I fell in love with that church. There, I truly felt God's presence — I cried during worship, and I knew the Holy Spirit was speaking to me. That's when Christ settled in my heart for good.

As I grew older and moved away to attend university, life became busy, and many things distracted me. Yet I always longed for places where I could feel close to God. I never stopped praying or talking to Jesus. But my focus slowly shifted to the little things of everyday life.

Even then, the Lord never left me. His voice never stopped speaking to my heart. In the years that followed, our lives became focused on material things — our home, our comfort, our plans. Our children were growing, and we were working hard to make those plans happen, not even noticing that we were drifting from what truly mattered.

Then the war began, and everything changed. We had to leave our home in Ukraine and come here — to a small town in Indiana with a population of just 10,000 people. It was nothing like our city of Odesa, where over a million people live.

We lost so much — physically, emotionally, financially. But in the middle of that sorrow, God met us.

Personally, it was one of the hardest seasons of my life. I went through every stage of grief — denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally, acceptance. There was a deep battle within my soul and in real life.

And then, one day, the Word of God came to me... I heard a gentle voice inside me ask, "Do you have any idea why all of this happened?" And I was stunned.

In that moment, I felt the power of the Holy Spirit so deeply — it's hard to explain with words. It was like a puzzle suddenly clicking into place.

I understood that God allowed everything to fall apart — not to destroy me, but to humble me and build something better. He was leading us through the wilderness... to the Promised Land. He never abandoned us. He showed us His love — not through comfort, but through transformation.

From the very first day of the war, we saw His hand over and over again. It wasn't luck. It wasn't our strength. It was God's grace — guiding us step by step, breaking,

rebuilding, restoring.

And here, in this quiet place, we finally slowed down — and realized that all the material things we were chasing and achieving... had no eternal value. For the first time, we gave everything fully into God's hands.

I remember one moment when we had no choice — we had to drive our children through missile strikes and live in constant fear. I was completely drained and discouraged. I fell to my knees and prayed: “Lord, I can’t do this anymore. I’m tired. I give it all to You, into Your hands, my Father. If this door is closed for me — I will accept it. But if Your will is something else, please show me. I trust You with every part of my being.”

And the very next day — God answered. He continued to lead us, step by step. It felt like He wrapped His arms around us and carried us through the storm.

Coming here was never our plan — it was His. We have a powerful testimony of how God brought us here. It was His hand, not ours.

And here — in this small, quiet town — we were renewed. God humbled us. He softened our hearts. And we fully surrendered to Him. Here is where we truly accepted Him — not just with our minds, but with our whole hearts.

Testimony – Eldar Shmanov

Hello. My name is Eldar Shmanov, and I want to share my testimony.

I was born in Kazakhstan, in a regular family. My father is a surgeon and my mother is a nurse. My father is an atheist and still doesn’t believe in God. My mother believes in God and follows the Orthodox tradition. Although we now live in different countries, we sometimes talk about faith, and I hope she continues attending church.

Later, we moved to Russia, and during that time I started to feel a deep spiritual hunger. I was drawn to churches. I often visited Orthodox churches. I didn’t know exactly what I was looking for, but I felt peace there. I often sat in silence, thinking about my life. Sometimes my older brother came to visit, and we went together. I didn’t have many people around me to talk about God, but something was pulling me closer to Him.

Later, I met my wife Lyuba. She was already a believer, and she showed me faith through how she lived and loved. She told me about her church in Odessa, Ukraine. When we moved there, we started attending the First Odessa Church, a Baptist

church. Some of our relatives serve there, and we had many conversations with friends and family about God. That was a special time for me. I felt welcomed, accepted, and surrounded by people who really loved God. That was the moment when I started thinking deeply about my relationship with Him.

In 2016, I was baptized in an Orthodox church in Saint Petersburg. I didn't do it because of tradition or pressure — it was my decision. I felt that God was calling me. I also took communion, and I began praying together with my wife. Slowly, my heart started changing. God was working inside of me. He was softening my heart, removing selfishness, pride, and fear.

Later, we moved to America. At first, everything was new and unfamiliar, but God provided for us. We found a spiritual home in the Apostolic Christian Church. It reminded me of the church in Odessa — sincere, Biblical, and full of love. Every Sunday we attend services there.

We also attend a Ukrainian Bible group at Pathway Church every Friday. Our Ukrainian pastor, Sergey, leads it. We read the Bible together, sing songs, and share what God is doing in our lives. That's where I started reading the Bible in Ukrainian. I enjoy it deeply.

Right now, I try to study the Bible more — both in Ukrainian and in English. At work, I listen to Bible podcasts and stories. I've found some great channels, and I really enjoy them. They help me grow and understand God's Word more.

I'm very thankful that we are here in this country. I believe it is God's will that we ended up here. We are deeply grateful to our wonderful American sponsor family, the Grubbs. They took on a great responsibility and welcomed us with love. They did so much for us. Our life has completely changed for the better. And all of this — is because of God. I want to serve Him with all my life.

Faith, for me, is no longer just a word. It's something I live every day. It means trusting God when I'm tired, when I don't understand, and even when I fail. It means loving my family the way Christ loves us. It means asking for forgiveness, giving grace, and putting God first.

We pray together as a family — before meals, before bed. We tell our children about Jesus. And God is becoming the center of our home.

That's why I want to be baptized again — this time with full understanding, faith,

and a sincere heart. Not because I have everything figured out, but because I know that Jesus saved me, and I want to follow Him for the rest of my life.

Thank you.