

(1) Bernelee Thys, 18

For many years, Bernelee had secret thoughts of suicide.

“I had an identity problem. I never liked who I was; I didn't know where I fit in and I thought I had no purpose.”

Bernelee grew up in a Christian home – her mother was a Sunday school teacher, and had taught Bernelee about Jesus from a young age. But she still struggled with her identity.

“I was so angry with myself and felt rejected by God for not hearing me. I started drinking with friends, having suicidal thoughts, going into depression and just wanted it all to end.”

Then not long ago, during a church service, one of the elders asked the congregation who wanted to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Without even realizing what she was doing, Bernelee raised her hand and went forward. She accepted Christ into her life and since then has been learning what it means to find your identity in Christ.

“I'm learning that, even before I was born, I had a purpose. The Bible says in Jeremiah 1:5,

“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I set you apart. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

Bernelee is 18 years old and is slowly discovering her purpose, having just embarked on an exciting journey as one of AE South Africa's new Foxfires.

“With Christ living within me, for the first time in my life I have come to the realisation that I can't do anything without Christ because he gives me my identity,” she said. “I have so much joy within me, knowing that I have a purpose in life.”



(2) Bongani Ramongange

Bongani grew up as an orphan; his mother abandoned him when he was a tiny baby, and his father died a few years after that. He was raised by his father's family.

"I had questions growing up, as to why my mother would leave me when I was just days old in this world."

But no one in his extended family would tell him anything about his mother.

"She was like an unknown person. Nobody spoke about her; they only had lies to cover up."

Life was hard. He was often cold and went without shoes and warm clothes.

"I grew up with the negative influence of my friends who motivated me to do what was wrong; drinking, smoking dagga, and becoming a bully at school."

Bongani started failing at school. His self-confidence plummeted. He felt desperately alone.

"I blamed myself saying, why am I even living in this world? I couldn't forgive myself, or my mother for leaving me to die, or my father for passing away when I was a child."

In 2009, on failing his third set of exams, Bongani was ready to give up on life. But then some friends introduced him to the Lord Jesus.

"It was the same friends I went drinking and smoking with, but they invited me to a Bible study. When I went there the person who was standing there told me about the love that we get in Christ, and I wondered if a person like me could be loved and cherished. But the speaker said that Jesus loves you as you are."

Right there, Bongani got up and accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour.

"I finished my studies and now I am serving the Lord Jesus with my life. I am devoted to do His will, even though my family is not saved and even though I still struggle with many things at home. I believe that the Lord is working mightily."

Because of his faith, Bongani was able to forgive his mother when she returned four years later and told him she was sorry for abandoning him as a baby.

"She asked for forgiveness and I forgave her. The following day she passed away. It was painful but I have peace and am relieved that the struggle is over."

Bongani has faced countless difficulties in his life and his faith, but he trusts God.

"I challenge you to do the same. If He changed and helped me, He can do it for you too!"



(3) Reshé Francis, 19

Reshé was born and raised in Johannesburg, South Africa. When she was very young, her parents split up. Reshe and her brother stayed with their mum.

“My father got re-married and it was very difficult watching him start a new family. My mother was a faithful Christian, but watching her struggle to provide for my brother and I caused me to be angry with God.”

But Reshé watched her mother closely and saw how she lived her life for God.

“My mother honoured God no matter what we face.”

Her mother influenced Reshe deeply and the Holy Spirit slowly began working in her heart.

“At first, I was so focused on what I did not have, that missed and completely disregarded my daily blessings. But after some time, I decided to accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Saviour because I understood God’s active grace over my life.”

“It was really difficult adapting to the change of mind-set and standing firm in my faith and God’s promises. Many times I did not understand God’s ways and plans – but one thing I’ve come to learn is that God is mindful of me.”

Reshe is walking in faith, trusting God even when she doesn’t understand. She is grateful for God’s care of her. She has joined this year’s AE Foxfires in South Africa to serve and learn more about God.



(4) Dwight Daniel Naidoo

Born and raised in a Christian family, Dwight says that he felt comfortable as an only child and didn't think he needed anything.

"I was rather spoilt. Everything I needed was provided. Life seemed perfect and even though my father was an alcoholic, he used to provide everything we needed."

"My uncle is a pastor and my mother's family are all Christians so I used to go to church every Sunday, attended Sunday school and Youth Group and, when I was older, I considered myself a Christian."

But all these things are not what counts for salvation. Dwight only realized this in 2011, when the AE Foxfires and Pastor Steven Lungu visited his church.



"Pastor Lungu started talking about his life story and I was so touched by it. During the service they had an altar call but I never went up. Then, when Pastor Lungu started praying I truly felt the presence of the Lord and I decided to change my life because I realized that the world can't give me what the Lord has given me."

Six years later, Dwight joined the South Africa Foxfires to work for Jesus and is excited for the year ahead.

"Remember, Jesus loves you!"

(5) Lucian Van Rooyen, 19

With two loving, devoted Christian parents, and a grandfather who was a pastor, Lucian and his siblings grew up in a family that had a strong Christian legacy.

“My parents raised us in the fear of the Lord. I grew up learning about Christ from a young age, hearing Bible stories at home and at Sunday School, learning how to pray, learning about what’s right and what’s wrong.”

“But this did not make me a Christian at all. It just gave me knowledge about Christ.”

When Lucian’s grandfather passed away in 2006, his father took over pastoring the church.

“As I grew older, I saw how my parents lived their lives, how serious their faith was, and that they had something I didn’t have.”



He couldn’t figure out what it was and soon became annoyed at having to be a pastor’s kid.

“I could never do what other young people were doing, like coming home late or going to parties or going out with friends. I always used to stay home. Even having girlfriends was a problem, so I did it without my parents knowing.”

Lucian began to resent the time his father spent at church.

“He could never spend much time with us because of his duties, which was hard for me.”

Soon, Lucian was being influenced by what he called “bad friends” – friends that weren’t Christians and encouraged him to watch pornography and use vulgar language.

“I got addicted to porn without my parents knowing.”

But he didn’t like the person he was becoming.

“I decided to become serious with my walk with Christ, because I knew all of these things were wrong”, Lucian said.

With this simple but serious decision, his life changed completely.

“I experienced love, joy, peace and happiness so great, it cannot be described. I became a people-person, I loved more. The chains of peer pressure in my life were broken, temptation became less and I knew that God was with me always.”

As the only Christian among his friends, Lucian felt that God had put him there for a reason.

"I was the light in our group. Whenever my friends wanted to know about God or about Christianity or prayer, they would come to me. They even called me "Pastor"!"

"I realised all the training from a young age had prepared me for this."

Having joined the AE Foxfires, Lucian is using his fervour for Christ to touch even more lives.

"God's grace and favour have never left my life. I know He has a purpose and plan for me. I just have to live for Him and that's what I'm striving for every day."

(6) Rowan Murray

