

*Raymond's Baptism Experience inspired by Matthew 3:13-17, 28:19-20, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-29*

Raymond reached the community center early, the winter sun still low over the Atlanta skyline. He stood by the glass doors, hands in his pockets, replaying the past few weeks in his mind with questions about faith, purpose, and what it meant to start over.

Flint arrived next, earbuds dangling around his neck and guitar strapped around his shoulder. "You look like you're waiting for a verdict," he said, nudging Raymond with a grin.

"Feels like it," Raymond admitted. "I've been thinking about this step for a long time."

Jimmy and April came in together, both carrying a box of supplies for the outreach program they all volunteered with while April set the box down happily displaying her new battery powered mini piano and studied Raymond's expression.

"You're nervous," she said gently.

"Yeah," he said. "But also... ready."

### **The River Walk**

They walked together toward the Chattahoochee River, where their church often held outdoor gatherings. The water shimmered in the cold light, and the air carried the scent of pine.

Jimmy broke the silence. "You know, when Jesus came to John at the Jordan, He wasn't there because He needed cleansing. He was showing us the way choosing obedience, choosing to step into His calling."

Raymond nodded. "Matthew 3. I read it again last night. 'Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.' That line hit me hard."

Flint kicked a pebble into the water. "It's wild to think the Son of God stepped into the river like any of us...No spotlight...No fanfare...Just obedience."

April smiled. "And the Father's voice saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' That moment wasn't just for Jesus. It was for everyone who would follow Him."

Raymond exhaled slowly. "That's what I want is, 'To follow.'"



## **The Commission**

They reached a clearing by the riverbank where their pastor waited. Before the baptism began, April placed a hand on Raymond's shoulder.

"You know this isn't the finish line," she said. "It's the beginning. Jesus said, 'Go and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you.' That wasn't just for pastors. It's for all of us."

Raymond looked at her, "I don't know if I'm ready for all that."

"No one ever feels ready," Jimmy said. "But He promised, 'I am with you always.' That's the part that makes the rest possible."

Flint added, "And you're not doing it alone. You've got us."

Raymond felt something settle in his chest that felt like peace, steady and warm.



## **Into the Water**

The pastor stepped into the river first, motioning for Raymond to follow. The cold water rushed around his legs, but his heart felt strangely calm.

“Raymond,” the pastor said, “do you believe Jesus is the Son of God, and do you choose to follow Him?”

“I do.”

As Raymond was lowered into the water, he heard the river’s roar, the wind through the trees, and the quiet prayers of his friends on the shore. When he rose again, the world felt brighter and washed clean.

Flint whooped and played a song lyric...Everything in you-like sin, must come out. April clapped and played a tune on her battery powered mini piano, singing that God had smiled on her. Jimmy wiped his eyes and pretended it was the wind.

## **The Table**

Later that afternoon, the four of them gathered in the community center kitchen. April set out a simple loaf of bread and a cup of grape juice.

“Jesus said, ‘Do this in remembrance of me,’” she said. “Not as a ritual, but as a reminder of the cost of grace.”

Jimmy added, “Paul wrote that when we take this bread and cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. But he also warned us to examine ourselves to come with sincerity, not pretending.”

Raymond looked at the bread, then at his friends. “I don’t want to take this lightly.”

“You’re not,” Flint said. “You’re taking it honestly. That’s what matters.”

They bowed their heads. Raymond felt the weight of the moment, not heavy, but meaningful. When he broke the bread and tasted the cup, he felt connected to something ancient, something alive, something that stretched from the riverbanks of the Jordan to the heart of Atlanta.



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As they cleaned up, April nudged him. “How do you feel?”

“Different,” Raymond said. “Not perfect. But... new.”

Jimmy grinned. “That’s how it starts.”

Flint slung an arm around Raymond’s shoulders. “Welcome to the journey, man.”

Raymond looked at his friends, the empty table, the fading afternoon light. For the first time in a long time, he felt like he knew where he was going and who was walking with him.

“Let’s keep going,” he said.

And they did.