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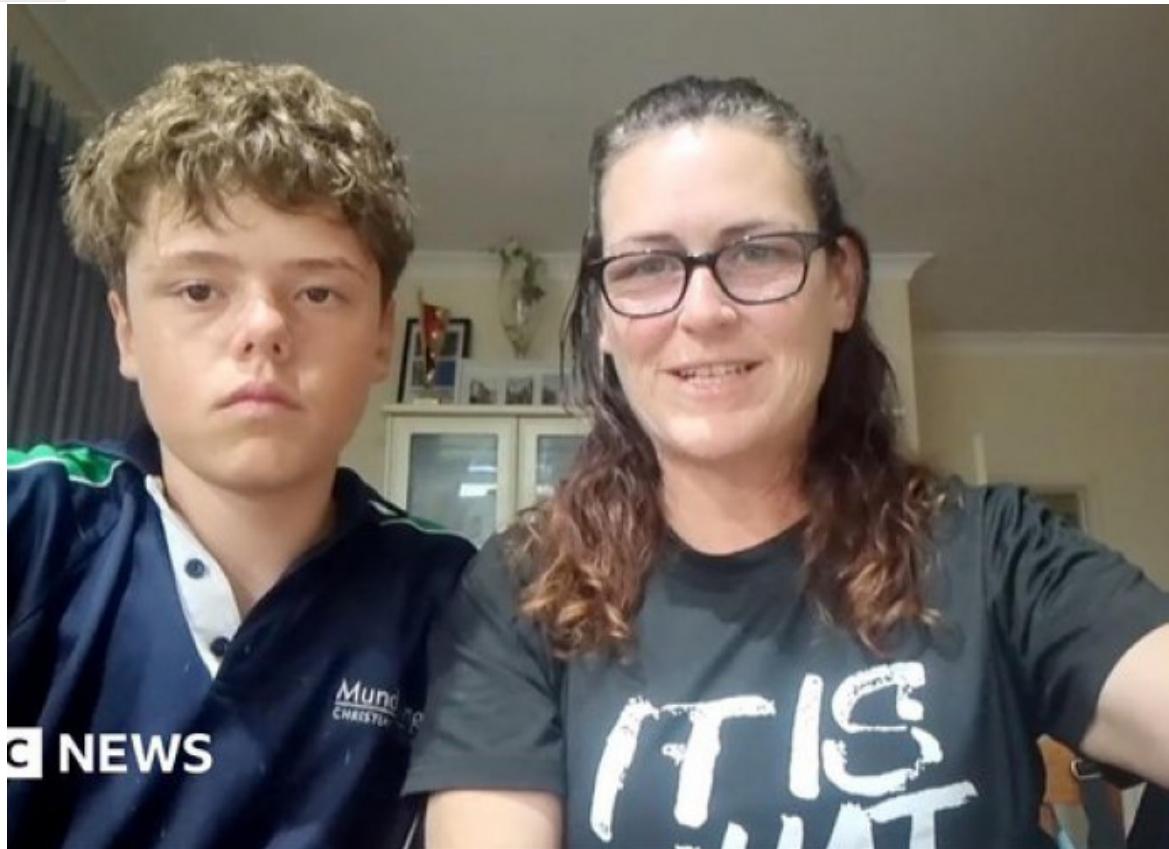
TRUE STORY

Child hero from Australia saves family thanks to faith

WORLD

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At a time when news reports often focus on war, corruption and scandals, netizens have been sharing a [video](#) that's capturing hearts around the world. They are celebrating 13-year-old Austin Applebee from Western Australia who in an extraordinary act of courage

and faith beyond his years, swam four kilometres through treacherous ocean currents to find help after a riptide had carried his family's kayak far out to sea, putting their lives in danger.

However, Austin's story is more than a tale of survival, it is a powerful testament to Christian family values. The faith and love that sustained him throughout his ordeal were nurtured at home by his Irish mother, Joanne Applebee from County Monaghan. She taught her children that even the smallest amount of faith can achieve great things, and how to pray to find strength and calm in dangerous situations. It was this that Austin remembered as he battled the waves crashing around him. "I don't think it was actually me who did that. It was God the whole time" he said afterwards.

On 30 January, Austin was on holiday with his family, his mother Joanne 47, brother Beau 12, and sister Brace 8. It was the last day of their vacation in Quindalup, Western Australia. They had hired a small kayak and two inflatable paddleboards from their hotel to enjoy a fun day at Geographe Bay. When they entered the water at around 11 am, the ocean appeared calm. However, by midday, the wind and waves had picked up. The kayak began to fill with water and they lost their oars. Gradually, the strong currents gradually swept all four kilometres offshore.

As conditions worsened and there was no one nearby to help, Joanne made the agonising decision to send Austin for help, as he was the strongest swimmer and she could not leave the other two children alone at sea.

Austin first tried to paddle back in the leaking kayak, but it was taking on too much water. He abandoned the kayak and continued swimming, still wearing his life jacket. However, when this slowed him down, he took it off. He then swam for about four hours through rough, choppy ocean water; the massive waves and currents pulled against him the whole time.

In interviews later, Austin explained that he had kept himself going throughout the gruelling swim with positive thoughts about his girlfriend and friends from his Christian youth group, as well as happy memories. He said that he had told himself, "Just keep swimming, just keep swimming" to stay focused. However, his real source of strength came from the prayers his mother had taught him and his Christian faith. He thought of Christian songs and sang them in his head. Rather than focusing on fear, he prayed continuously and turned to his faith to help him keep going. At one point, he told God that he would get baptised.

Exhausted, he finally reached the beach and ran along the sand back to his family's accommodation to raise the alarm. After **calling the emergency services** and giving them an urgent report, he explained where he had last seen his family. Austin fainted after making the call and was taken to hospital.

At around 8.30 pm, a rescue helicopter spotted Joanne, Beau and Grace, who were by now about 14 km offshore, clinging to a paddle board after being adrift for nearly 10 hours. They were all rescued safely and taken to shore, cold and exhausted. They were reunited with Austin in hospital.

Police and rescue officials said that it was ultimately Austin's courage and determination that saved his family's lives. Western Australia's Premier, Roger Cook, described Austin's actions as "an extraordinary act of courage". 'This is what a true West Aussie hero looks like,' **he wrote on social media**.

The family's Christian beliefs were central to the ordeal, with both mother and son drawing on prayer and trust in God during the crisis. However, Austin and his mother both admit that there were difficult moments when they thought they might have lost each other. After reaching the beach, Austin said he had worried that he had taken too long, and that his family might have died while he was swimming to shore; he was overcome with feelings of guilt. Joanne Applebee said that, as the hours passed after she lost sight of Austin in the waves, she wondered if he had made it back and whether it had been a mistake to send him.

In interviews, Joanne has spoken about praying with her children before and after the incident, emphasising that faith can provide strength and calm in life-threatening situations. Like the mustard seed in the Gospel, Austin's inherited faith was alive within him. However, it was not until that fateful day in January that it took root in Christ. Not only has Austin vowed to be baptised, he has also started going to church on Sundays. He now hopes that his testimony will offer hope and inspiration to others who hear it.