

# Why Story?

At Element we believe it is important for people around us to understand the changes that are taking place in our own lives' based on the work of Christ in us. To help others understand what Baptism is and what it means to those being baptized on a personal level, we have asked them to share their life and stories with you, those attending and those online, in a more personal way than maybe you are use to.

In Baptism we are making a making a public statement about our life and commitment to walk in the ways Jesus calls us. Many people only get the Jesus "as seen on TV" and don't understand what Jesus does in "real life" or what following Him looks like on a practical level. Baptism is not magical, but it is a deeply spiritual event that reflects the work Jesus has done in our lives. The act of Baptism is symbolic in that we identify with the death and resurrection of Christ. We are essentially being buried (by going under the water) and raised to walk in new life (by coming out of the water).

The entire point is public identification with Christ and His work within us. That He is our great God and savior that has come to restore a broken humanity that cannot have a relationship with God on our own. He is the Redeemer, He is the Remedy, He is the Hope, and He is our Life.

We also have the hope that one day you too will come to the saving knowledge of trusting in Jesus with your life. It makes all the difference in the world.

Aaron

# OUR STORIES

July 3, 2011



ELEMENT  
christian church

# Sarah Carpenter

My name is Sarah Carpenter. I am eleven years old. I was born in Camarillo, CA. I also have three brothers; Thomas, Elijah, and Samuel. I want to get baptized because I want people to know that I have asked Jesus into my heart and that God and His Word are a big part in my life. I have been around Christians my whole life. My family has been the people that I look up to. When I started going to Element it was around Christmas time. My family and me were looking for a church service on Christmas Eve. We found Element. So we went, loved it, and have been going ever since.

When I heard Bethany Hamilton's story, I wanted to become a real Christian. Bethany Hamilton is the girl, who lost her left arm in a shark attack when she was fourteen years old, but her faith in God saw her through the trial and she now surfs again today. What motivated me about her story is that she kept her faith in God. I love hearing all the different stories and the Gospel, from the Bible, I wanted to hear more, and I still do. I was about nine or ten when I decided to let Jesus into my life. God promises life, joy, and much more in His Kingdom and that is why I became a Christian.

Now that I am a Christian I choose to forgive. I let more things go than I used to. I would say I am a bit less of a "punk". I try to do what I am told, when I'm told to do it. I feel a lot better now that I am Christian. (I not only don't get into trouble as often anymore, but I also love doing things right.) And when I am tempted to do something wrong, I throw the invitation away.

# Zachary Burg

My name is Zachary Burg, and I am 13 years old. I was born on October 1, 1997 in Santa Maria. I sometimes feel as if I have been a Christian all my life, but I actually asked Jesus into my life at age 6.

Not a lot happens to a person before age 6 so it wasn't a "world crashing down" or life changing experience that introduced me to Christ. God simply gave me grace by having me be born into a nice Christian family who has taken me to church all my life.

I also attend a Christian school. When I was in kindergarten the teacher asked who would like to invite Jesus into their lives. Every student walked up to her desk individually and prayed with her. I remember thinking to myself that I didn't feel any different, but faith isn't always about feelings. Now that I am older, and understand better, I take my faith more seriously and I have made the decision that would like to get baptized.

I want to get baptized so I can show everybody my faith in God. Jesus should be the most important part of our lives, as our lives are to be found in Him. I, personally, don't know what I would do without Him. I am very excited for this event, and I am glad I have the opportunity to publicly show my faith and to have all of you share in it with me.

Now that I am a Christian I choose to forgive.

I want to get baptized so I can show everybody my faith in God.

# Tom Wehlander

Work and life are still difficult, but now I know that God is with me, that He loves me and He will never let me go.

My name is Tom Wehlander, I am divorced, 47 years old and have lived in Santa Maria since 1995. I began my walk with Element about a year and a half ago. My daughter had been going to Element for a while and really found something to share with me. So one day I decided to attend a service to see what it was all about. I found a place where I can truly worship God and learn what He has planned for me.

I was raised in a Lutheran home. My parents, especially my father, were very active in our congregation. I went to church every Sunday, whether I wanted to or not. I was even an altar boy in grade school. I did as I was told, but I never really got to know God or what He was all about. To me then, He was just a bearded white guy with blue eyes. Really? Well, that's what He looked like in the portrait.

Who was God? I went through Catechism school in Jr. High. This was the first time I really got to study about God. I remember riding my bike home feeling all full of the spirit and joyful about finally getting to understand some of what was written in the Bible. After that came high school and college and more distractions. I fell away from the church and never really attended regularly. I went during Easter and Christmas but that was just for family, not for me, and not for God.

I got married, had a daughter, and moved to California. I felt that since I was starting a family, I needed to go to church so my child could learn about Jesus. We attended different churches and experienced different faiths. However, I felt that something was missing. Attending a service, listening to the man up front, singing hymns, sighting creeds was all nice, but I felt there was more to learn. I finally found myself following my wife from one church to the next. She was raised Catholic and I was Lutheran so I tried the Catholics. I am open-minded, so this seemed close enough to Lutheranism that I might like it. I attended their classes to learn about the religion, but the praying to Mary and the Church's molestation cover-up, made me realize that I couldn't worship there. My wife then decided that the Jehovah's Witnesses was where she wanted to be. I didn't know anything about them so I decided to find out and followed her there. I had never seen a religious organization study the Bible as much as they did. I really enjoyed reading the Bible and learning what was written in it. However, there was still that emptiness in me.

My wife and I were going in different directions and we divorced. She stayed with the Witnesses, but I couldn't find a connection there. The recession came and my business took a big hit. I was getting depressed, lonely, and needed help. I met the director of my daughter's high school band and found this beautiful, loving, Christian woman. We started dating at the urge of her students and since then I have been the happiest I've ever been. Now, I needed to find God, because I know He put her in my life for a reason. I wanted to see what Element was about and invited her to go with me. I discovered a place that helped me find that connection with Jesus and others. I couldn't make it through the first song without crying. I have never wept in church before. I could feel the Holy Spirit with me. It was like God told me I was home. Now I yearn to go to church, not for someone else (other than God), but for me. I want to be a part of the congregation, to study the Bible with friends and really feel the presence of Jesus. Work and life are still difficult, but now I know that God is with me, that He loves me and He will never let me go.

I thank God for guiding me on my walk with him, leading me to Him, and giving me the blessings of two beautiful daughters, a woman that I love and who loves me for who I am, a church to worship in and a place learn about who God is and what His plan is for us. Looking back I see how He has been with me through every stage of my life. Today, I am closer to God than I have ever been in my life and my Baptism will truly be a special day to share with my daughter.

I guess the truth is that it was not me "finding God," it was Jesus seeking and finding me because I was lost; but now I am found by Him.

# Sara Wehlander

I want to become closer to Him and live up to what He knows I can be, and what He created me to be.

My name is Sara Ashley Wehlander and I am 18 years old. I was born in Carrolton Texas and moved to California when I was 3. I started going to Element through my boyfriend (his name is Andrew, you might have met him, or even read his baptism story in a previous book). I started going to youth group with him, and then he got me to go to a church service. I've been going ever since.

Before I started going to Element, I never felt the urge to go to church. It was always just something my family went to on Sunday. Growing up, I experienced four different churches, all of which had a different way of doing things. When I was young, I didn't really know a whole lot about God. Sunday school taught me some bible stories, but I mostly remember making cookies and playing computer games. When I went through my first communion, it didn't feel like I had gotten any closer to God or had gotten any more spiritual. I felt like the priest did all of the talking and I just sat there and nodded.

My mother started going to a different church when I was about 13 and that church was ok. I started learning more things about the bible and I even had those days where I wanted to go to church. The problem I had there was that I always felt excluded from the youth at that church. There was no youth group and I rarely got invited to go do things with other teens my age. No one would come up and greet you there unless they knew you. I felt like an outsider looking in. I didn't feel like I really belonged there. I was just going because my mom would make me. Make me go to church, make me do book studies, and make me become closer to God by forcing me to do things I got no joy out of. Everything changed when I met my boyfriend three years later.

My boyfriend went to Element and convinced me to start going to their youth group. I had never been to a youth group before in my life (except for Sunday school). I had no idea what to expect. When I got there, I was amazed at how everyone was so nice, and how everyone was included in everything. I really started looking forward to going to youth group, but I wasn't quite ready for a church service. I still felt like I should go to church with my mom. When I finally attended my first church service at Element, I felt this joy in my soul I have never felt before. I heard

amazing music that I didn't even know existed in a church setting. I was used to singing to a pre-recorded keyboard playing, not a live band. I didn't have to come to church all dressed up anymore (I wasn't the biggest fan of skirts back then). Everyone was so nice and happy, and people I had never seen before would greet me with a smile on their face. The whole church felt happy. Aaron made the service funny and educational instead of the serious and dreary services I was used to. That was also the first time I have ever cried in church before. I didn't understand why I was crying, I mean, I wasn't sad so why should I be crying in church? I felt a joy inside myself that I have never felt before. Element gave me a feeling that no other church has ever given to me. Church became a part of my week that I would look forward to, and not just something I had to go to. I turned down things I wouldn't normally turn down because I wanted to go to church or youth group instead.

I want to dedicate my life to Christ because I know He is watching over me. I feel Him with me at church and I have seen His works in my life. I want to become closer to Him and live up to what He knows I can be, and what He created me to be.

Today I am getting baptized because it is the logical next step after surrendering my life to Christ. I also want you all to know that I appreciate you, the people of Element, for being so instrumental in how you welcomed me into this family.

# Joshua Marangi

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My name is Joshua Marangi and I am 8 years old. I was born in San Luis Obispo, California. I have a brother named Jakob and a sister named Brooke. I want to get baptized because I want everyone around me to know that I love Jesus. When I was about 5 I wanted to start learning more about who Jesus is. I started praying and reading the Bible and started really listening in Sunday School. A little while after I started learning all about who Jesus is, I decided that I wanted to become a Christian. I asked my parents about how to invite Jesus into my life and they prayed with me.

Now that I have become a follower of Jesus, I try to act more like Him. I try to forgive people when they hurt me or hurt my feelings. I try to read the Bible more and learn more about Him. I pray more so that I can get closer to Jesus.

I am really excited about being baptized. I am excited that people will be able to see me being baptized and know that I love Jesus.

Now that I have become a follower of Jesus, I try to act more like Him.