

# 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 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

April 14, 2013



ELEMENT  
christian church

# Kaitlin Campbell

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Hi! The name is Kaitlin, and this is my story.

Whether I knew it or not at the time, God started working in my life at a very young age. When I was just three and a half weeks old, I was adopted into the Campbell family. That was a blessing in itself.

My birth mother was using Meth and drinking heavily when I was in her womb. My birth father drank excessively as well, and when I was born didn't even want to be known to me. God blessed me not only with becoming a healthy human being, but also with a loving family that has made me into the girl that I am today.

I remember attending church when I was younger; however, when my family became actively involved in my club soccer, our world started to revolve around that instead of church. Even though I never attended church anymore, I still always believed in God, I just never took action in showing Him that.

It wasn't until I was in 9th grade when I slowly started to attend church again. My friend's parents were the pastors of the Christian Family Church in Santa Maria, and I began going with her family every Sunday. I again found time to make church a priority, even with club soccer on the weekends. I became very involved with their youth group and felt myself becoming closer to God again.

My sophomore year of high school I went to Spirit West Coast with the youth group. It was truly an amazing experience where God moved in my life. I grew closer to God, more so than I have ever been before. I surrendered my life to Him on the very first night of camp. Ever since that moment I have felt a special connection with

Jesus, and He has gradually pushed me to overcome life's trials and enlighten me in the way of His word.

As good as Christian Family Church was to me, I felt as if God was pushing for a change in my life. Through God's plan for me, I ended up here at Element Church, thanks to my best friend, Sierra Carlberg. It was about a year ago when I started going with her every weekend. I really enjoyed Aaron's preaching and was able to relate somehow to a lot of his sermons. In the last year, I have felt God's presence in my life more than ever. I have met people in the past few months that I feel God has put in my life to keep me on track for the plans that He has in store for me.

For a while now, I have been interested in getting baptized. I know it's something we are all called to do, it has just been a matter of whether I was ready or not. I now feel as if I am ready. It was kind of a God sent miracle actually, because the night before Aaron announced that there were going to be baptisms, I prayed for God to open up an opportunity for me to go ahead with renewing my life with Christ. That's when I knew it was my time.

Today, I profess my faith in Christ in front of all of you. I hope one day you too will be able to have the same experience.

# Devyn Martinez

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My name is Devyn Martinez, and I am 20 years old.

I was born here in Santa Maria. When I was five years old, my parents got divorced. A few years later my mother took me and my brothers, Blake and Easton, to Crosspoint Church; I was eight at the time. Then, for whatever reason (I really don't know), she stopped taking us; maybe it was too hard only having us half the time.

Essentially, I grew up knowing we used to go to a Christian Church but didn't know anything about it. Growing up with divorced parents is not easy on a kid, as many of you know. When I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, my dad stepped out of the picture and stopped paying child support all together. I felt abandoned with no father figure to tell me right from wrong and my mom working fulltime to support 3 kids. Eventually, I did what most young girls in my situation do: I entered into the social circle of parties, sex, and drama.

When I was a sophomore, I began a relationship with a boy in his junior year. Then, as if on cue, began the cycle of him lying, cheating, verbally abusing me, and drinking excessively. He went to college in Portland, Oregon, so as soon as I graduated high school, I moved up there too. My mom even helped me move into my new apartment in September.

After she left, I found a note from her. In the note she expressed that she wanted me to start going to church again. I ended up with multiple Christian coworkers....in Portland, crazy right? It's all God's providence because it got me thinking about the choices I had been making in my life and the kind of relationship I was in.

In November, I decided to ask my boyfriend what he thought about religion. He told me he did not believe in a God. After the

conversation, I came to realize how much that actually meant to me, even more than all of the ways I felt neglected, this effected me more. I wasn't sure why at first; I hadn't even been to church since I was eight, but I was suddenly taken over by an abundance of strength and security that helped me leave that relationship which I had felt trapped in for so long.

I realized shortly after that it was Jesus working in my heart. I moved home to Santa Maria in February, and a lot happened in the short six months I spent in Portland. It was a difficult adjustment being home again. I had separated myself from most of my friends from high school, except my best friend, Holly, who had moved away to college and my friend, Bradley.

Bradley and I started to hangout a lot, and he invited me to go to church with him. I have been going to Element and dating Bradley for a year now. I attend Trevor and Deanna Carpenter's gospel community and a college bible study. I help teach Sunday school for the 4-5's class, and I am also a volunteer Wyldlife leader (for those who don't know, Wyldlife is a Christian organization that reaches out to junior high kids). I'm also a cosmetology student at the Beauty College here in Santa Maria.

I feel so blessed that we have a God who forgives, and who has surrounded me with so many amazing new friends. He found me when I was lost and needed Him and I have surrendered all I am to Him. I know that my relationship with the Lord will continue to grow. I have dedicated all of my life to Him in response to Him first loving me. Jesus is more gracious than I can ever explain to you, and I encourage you to trust Him with your life as well.

I wanted to end with my favorite verse, and thank you all for reading this. *Psalms 18:1-2 "I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold"*

# Aimee Talleur

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Hello, my name is Aimee Talleur, and I was born in Loma Linda, California, 29 years ago. My family moved to Orcutt when I was about 4 years old because we wanted to get away from the smog and the big city. I actually came to Element Church because I had been praying for a church to go to and found Element on the internet. So, I went to the website and read a little bit about Element's mission and decided to come check it out. Well, as many others did, I fell in love with this church right away and began attending during the "Summer of Love" sermon series. The message seemed so clear to me, and it spoke straight to my heart.

Growing up, I was raised in a religion that believed that all you need to do to go to heaven is to be a good person and to follow laws that their prophet came up with. I never understood completely what I believed, but I do remember memorizing prayers that we would recite in front of the elders or at holidays. My mother was of a different religion so we would attend services with her once in a while at the church she frequented. During this time, softball was my sanctuary, and my religion in a way, because it was a way for me to escape the cruel world and to be good at something.

As I became an adolescent I stopped attending the church that I grew up in and began attending youth group with my best friend at the time. I think it was the summer before freshman year of high school when I "asked Jesus into my heart" to be my Lord and Savior. I didn't really know or understand exactly what I had done, but I did know that I wanted what my friend's family had. At that time, my life didn't make a complete 180 because I didn't really know that much about the bible or Jesus. I simply went on living my life as best I knew how and continued to try and be "a good person."

I moved on with my life and tried to do things my way instead of the way God would want them to be; it left me with a lot of pain and

heartache. It wasn't until I began attending Element and getting involved with my gospel community that Jesus really began to move in my life like never before. For a long time, I was still struggling with different things, but I began to pray that Jesus would help me. My pride keeps getting in the way, but I am truly trying to fully follow Him. I knew that I was my own worst enemy and the only way I could change is with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Christmas Eve, of 2012, my whole family was visiting for the Holidays and I began experiencing really bad anxiety to the point I thought that I was going to die. I got on my hands and knees in my room and I asked Jesus to forgive me for all my sins and to take my anxiety away and I would follow Him for the rest of my life.

Slowly but surely the Lord began to change my heart in a way that I never could have imagined. In that moment, I know I was redeemed. I know it doesn't work this way for all people, but I have to say that ever since that day I have not experienced another anxiety attack. I am now living in a state of repentance and relying on God in every aspect of my life. The Lord is amazing, and I can't believe it took me this long to realize what I was missing out on. It is one thing to know the truth and it is another thing to live the truth (and I plan on living the truth).

I am now excited about my future and look forward to the adventure that Jesus has in store for me. No matter where my life leads or where it goes, I know now that I am in safe keeping. I desire to be a good example to my friends and family so that Jesus can change their lives just like He has mine. I keep this verse on the inside of my binder for school, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). This verse keeps me humble by reminding me of my weakness and understanding God's greatness.

Thank you so much for letting me share my story with you and for welcoming me into Element Church. This church is a blessing and a miracle and has shown me how awesome and powerful God is.

# Brisa Frame

When I thought about being baptized, my first thought was not of my fondest spiritual memory of coming to faith. To be completely honest, I simply interrupted a friend of mine in the middle of *her* conversation about baptism by saying, “I want to be baptized!” She pulled out her phone, made a quick text to make sure that would happen for me, and here I am.

When I was in middle school I began going to a youth group at Crosspoint Community Church with a few friends. Initially, I wasn’t familiar with any of the faces I was seeing other than my close friends. I continued returning to that youth ministry every week and my faith began to grow. It was something that spread throughout my entire life. Since that time, Jesus has meant everything to me; so much so that I feel there is even something special simply in His name.

As a child, I never attended a church or had any religious beliefs placed upon me, forcefully or otherwise, by my family. However, as I have grown up my heart has been fully taken in by Jesus; I stand in awe of what He did and continues to do. My relationship with Jesus was difficult at first because it was so contrary to my mother and father’s side of religious history. They came from an eccentric background, but I do not believe anything could stop me from the illuminating grace of God and His Love.

I have struggled, as have we all, with my loyalty to the Lord. I have, on too many occasions, felt like I have fled, denied, and broken trust in my beliefs, but I have always run back to Jesus. When all seems like it is full of despair and hopeless, I know there is one I can trust above all others to forgive and relieve my burden.

After the unfortunate closing of Crosspoint, I was invited by the friends I made there, who I consider family, and a few friends from school to join them at Element’s youth ministry. It was a difficult transition in so many ways because the people I had learned to love, and the place in which I came upon my faith, was gone. I felt broken. Many people told me that it doesn’t matter the house in which we praise the Lord, but the action in which we do so, “He shall love us nevertheless.” But it was so hard for me that I denied the generous and quick acceptance I received at Element because I resented ever leaving what I knew and where I was comfortable.

I now realize, only by the grace of God, that I can be more faithful and encouraged in my belief no matter where I am because He is the one who is with me. I want to walk in the way Jesus has taught me, for there is no better stride. I have not only learned about Jesus, but spread the love He has placed upon us as a people. As His child, I feel so blessed. I believe that since I have attended Element for the past year or so my love for Jesus Christ has expanded in all directions. I only hope to touch others the way I have been so humbly touched by the Lord.

To conclude, I am here to tell you *that* is why I would like to be baptized.

# Sierra Brownlee

My road to salvation began shortly after I had the stomach flu, which isn't especially romantic considering that salvation was the most beautiful experience of my life. It was the morning after the flu. I was lying in bed staring at my ceiling in physical and emotional pain. In the preceding months a lot of things had happened to me, nothing catastrophic like a natural disaster or a loved one dying, but there had been a relentless, merciless line of painful experiences that I couldn't handle.

Normal people handle problems as they come one by one, but I didn't. I had a mind boggling amount of little problems that had become one huge nightmare that weighed roughly a million tons (I have a scale that goes that high). I could feel devastation looming over me and knew I needed a way out. So, what did I do? I did what had gotten me into that mess in the first place, I avoided it...but I also started reading the Bible.

A few months before I had the flu I had given up on any semblance of ever having faith in anything. I had "tried" to believe in Jesus. but it just never "worked out" for me. My spiritual status was similar to the parable of the sower. My faith seeds had been scattered but they had all landed on the path and been trampled, snatched up by birds, choked by thorns, or scorched by the sun. I assumed that faith, true faith, was either not real, or a delusion you had to be raised in to believe. I had this concept of an agnostic view of God the Father and Jesus; meaning, that if God existed (which He probably didn't) then Jesus would most likely be His son (maybe).

When I read the Bible in the midst of my problems, I wasn't looking to believe in anything, I was simply reading to escape from the reality I wouldn't, or couldn't, face. I read Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus faster than anything I have ever read in my life. I retained

little to none of it with the exception of Leviticus, I thought it was the funniest thing in the world, so naturally remembered most of it (like what was the proper protocol to follow if my neighbor's ox fell into a ditch I dug, or how I was supposed to go about getting rid of yellow fungus in my house as opposed to green).

After I was back at school, I still read. I began to read out of desire rather than self-preservation. I enjoyed reading the stories of the Old Testament and spoke to one of my teachers about my progression through the Old Testament, and he instructed me to stop where I was and go to Matthew. I didn't want to read Matthew. Matthew was Christian doctrine, and way too close to home.

I didn't like Christians because they had something I couldn't have, faith. But, I complied. I read Matthew...and I loved it...and, slowly, I began to love Jesus. But my love of Him was more like one would love a great philosophical teacher: I loved His words and I tried to follow His commandments as best I could. I didn't realize how much I loved Him until I was having a conversation with a boy in my geometry class. We were joking around and he made a crack at Christianity. I said something that revealed I knew way too much about the Bible which prompted him to ask, "Wait, are you a Christian?" My response was, "No, I just... try and follow Christ."

That prompted me to think *Yah, stupid, that's what a Christian is.* The thing is, that isn't what a Christian is...a Christian is someone who follows Jesus as their Lord, and I hadn't done that. At that point, I firmly believed in God, *and* I believed Jesus was God in the flesh. I believed that Christ came to save, and I believe that He did save, but He didn't save me. I believed that He came to save people like my teacher, Mr. Mason, or speakers I had heard in the Christian Club. I had never, up until that point, considered Jesus to have saved *me*...

# Sierra Brownlee (Cont)

I thought about it for a while until I came to understand that God created me, loved me, and sent His son to save...and that means **He** sent **His son** to **save me**. So I prayed that I could have Jesus, or more rightly that Jesus could have me...But, most importantly, I prayed that Jesus would own me, that I would be Jesus'. I wanted, more than anything, to belong to Him. That prayer was when I understood my salvation and when I accepted His love and salvation.

*1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says "You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. Go glorify God in your body."* Because Christ paid for my sins with His blood I belong to Him. I am a slave to Christ, and I couldn't be happier about it. Being bound to Jesus is the only true freedom I have ever known; being tethered to His grace actually sets us free.

Following Jesus in my life is, and will forever be, the greatest thing that has ever happened to me. To be honest, I can't remember who I was before Jesus, and that is a little terrifying. Christ has become my identity, and my love for Christ has altered everything that I am. The fire of His love consumed and turned to ash everything that I had previously been. My whole perception of my existence has changed. I am no longer the center of my own universe. Now He, my God, is the center of everything.

I believe that is the reason that I am at peace today, because everything has been put right. Everything is prioritized. I have a deep abiding joy that is hard to believe I ever lived without. Now what I want out of life is to be with God and to be "good;" sometimes it is harder than others. This last summer was joy, love, peace, and for the first time ever; my seeds of faith were able to grow and flower.

I will admit that it's not all fun and games though. My mother today is now one of my biggest, and most painful challenges because I love her, but she hates what I love most: My faith in Christ...but it is who I am. She hates my most predominant character trait and feels abandoned by me, even though it is her who is being repelled. When I turned to Christ, she feels she lost me.

I know she is hurt and, more often than not, angry at my choice. It hurts more than anything, but it's worth it. I have lost friends, a lot of them, but He is worth it. I lost an entire future with someone, and an entire life of social comfort with my family who are primarily Anti-Christian, but Jesus is so worth it.

Being with Christ is always worth it.

My life verse is Romans 8:38-39 "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be enough to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

I believe that every day we grow stronger in faith, our once minuscule seeds will one day tower over all of our lives. When I was first saved I was alone (with the exception of Jesus). I didn't have another true Christian to talk to. Because of this, I relied completely on the Bible and used the word of God as my north star. Slowly but surely I have been meeting people throughout my journey who have been doing the same.

I have a wonderful mentor now that does the same. Most of my friends are people who use Christ's commandments as their compass. I think that Element does the same as well, uses the word of God as their beckon of light.

# Joy Sussex

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My name is Joy Sussex. I was born in California and have called it home for all of my 46 years of life. I am a wife, mother, daughter, sister and aunt.

I began attending Element after the church I was attending sadly closed. I feel that God has brought us to Element for reasons I might not even be aware of. One thing I do know, my teenage kids are connecting to the messages which help us to grow in Christ as a family.

I grew up in a non-Christian religion. Before I became a follower of Christ, I believed that simply being a good person was enough. In fact, I thought God was more of a concept and people in other religions and cultures just had a different name for it. I didn't know there was only one True God and that He wanted a personal relationship with me. I believed Jesus was an incredible historical figure, but not my Savior. I also thought I had to understand everything before I could commit my life to Him because I didn't want to be a pretender only to turn away later. As if all that wasn't enough, I also had many non-Christian beliefs that had to be shed.

When my husband and I were newly married, we began attending a Christian church together; this was not new for him. We dedicated our children and committed to raising them in the Christian faith. Even though we were attending church regularly, I still didn't understand my walk with Jesus could be so much more than simple attendance. Through an invitation of a friend, we began attending his church. There we met more people, began attending a small group bible study, and I felt part of a church family for the first time.

I began to realize the true meaning of faith and trust, and I surrendered to Jesus and invited Him into my life. I now feel like I am standing in the middle of a suspension bridge, looking back at where I have been and valuing each plank that has lifted me up and gotten me to this point. God has always been with me. He gave me a Christian husband who leads by example, He provided a wonderful church family, and placed people like our good friends John and Roxanne Slocum in our lives so that I would come to know Him better and better.

Today, you may not recognize the man baptizing our family. His name is John, and he has been instrumental in our family's life. I asked John to baptize my kids, Jacob and Jenna, and I because he has encouraged us the most in our walk with Christ. He has led our small group, taught our children in youth church, and John and Roxanne continue to bring people together for Christ in their home.

I am excited to be baptized and to share this moment with my new Element family as well as familiar brothers and sisters in Christ. I look forward to my walk with Jesus across the rest of that suspension bridge, trusting in Him every step of the way. I now know that we don't have to know and understand everything about God and His Word before committing our lives to Him (an impossible task). With Jesus, it's okay to lead with your heart when He is the one leading.



# Jacob Sussex

My name is Jacob Sussex, and I am 16 years old. I was born in Santa Maria and am a sophomore at Righetti High School. After my previous church closed down, my family and I began to try new churches. After looking at many, we decided to attend Element because we felt that the messages were easy to understand and, at times, really funny.

When I was younger, bible stories just seemed like stories. I used to think that going to church was just about having fun. Material objects were very important to me.

One summer I was camping and the view was so beautiful that it dawned on me that God was the creator of it all, including me. That moment completely changed my life to where the songs at my old church, I used to work with the band, really helped me connect with God. Some of the messages that I learned I began to apply to my life. Most importantly I saw significant changes in me and I felt that I was living a better life with Christ guiding me.

My youth pastor got me involved in church related activities and relationships with others. He was truly living a Godly example of life, so much so that I committed my life to following Jesus.

I now understand that through God's Spirit I never have to worry about being alone. I know that He has a plan for me, and I keep my mind and heart open so He may show me His ways in all things. When I am struggling, I turn towards God and other followers for comfort and advice. When others are struggling, I want to help them and be an example of the love that God wants us to show to others.

So, thank you for being here and sharing this day with my entire family.

# Jenna Sussex

My name is Jenna Sussex, and I am 14 years old. I have lived in Santa Maria since birth. The church I had been going to since I was about four years old closed down in March of 2012. My family and I went to a couple different churches in the area, but we found Element was the best fit for us.

Both of my parents are Christians and have taught me about Jesus and how I should love Him and seek Him because He first loved me. I'm thankful that I was raised in a Christian home because I learned about God's gift at a young age. I'm not sure exactly how old I was when I believed in Christ, or "accepted Him into my heart." I learned about what God did for me mostly through my youth pastor(s) at Crosspoint and my parents. It was through them, and God's Spirit, that I made the decision to commit my life to following Christ.

I feel like God always has a plan for my life, no matter what happens. I am thankful for everything He has given to me in my life. It's comforting to know that God is watching over me, and I am never truly alone. I pray a lot, asking Him to lead my life and help me when I'm not sure what to do. When others are struggling, I do my best to show them who God is, and that they can lay all of their troubles at His feet.

# Phillip Heuchert

My name is Phillip Heuchert, and I am 28 years old. I was born and raised in Santa Maria. I am the third oldest of four children in my family. My life with Christ started when I was young. My parents would gather all us kids up and hop in the station wagon and zoom off to church downtown every Sunday morning, but I never really “met” Jesus until later in life. None of my closest friends were believers growing up, and the way we were “forced” to go to church every Sunday morning never really led me to believe it was for me, since the lives my friends lived always seemed pretty fun and exciting without having God “holding them back.”

All of that changed when, later in life, I realized that it was through all the times that I resisted God and continuously tried to prove to myself (that I could do what I wanted, when I wanted, and I knew the good for), but it all only led to a greater sense of emptiness and a false sense of control. I now realize how much I owe it to my parents for planting the seed of God’s truth in my heart.

When I grew up and moved out of my parent’s house at the age of 18, I thought I had it all figured out and that it was time to live my life the way I wanted, without anything or anyone holding me back or telling me what was wrong or what was right. I was happy to be free and did all the things I wanted to do without any repercussions, but I always felt this stabbing conviction in my heart, almost like I was trying to run away from something or someone I used to know.

One Sunday, about 5 years ago, my sister and her husband casually invited me to Element and told me it was this cool church they’ve been going to for a little while (they just left it at that). That day I felt God pulling me back to Him harder than any force I’ve ever felt

in my life. I felt like all this time I had resisted the Lord and tried to make sense of my life without Him and it came to this turning point where I knew this hole in the puzzle of my soul only had one piece that fit; it was Jesus Christ, and it was my turn to respond to Him calling me back.

I attended Element’s services every Sunday, but still had this pressing feeling inside that made me want to question God at every turn. Being the logic-driven person I am, I came with lots of skepticism and questions that I felt I never had received answers to in my heart from all the years being fed the same thing each week in Sunday school growing up. The gospel class I started attending, led by Aaron, let me get all my questions and skepticism out on the table, since I still felt like God wouldn’t make sense until I got passed my own hang-ups.

The Lord pulled me in closer and closer each week, breaking all my barriers down and cutting away the junk that kept me from fully accepting Him as my Savior, and I realized all the pain and running away stemmed from one thing- the fact that I couldn’t allow myself to understand how much God REALLY did love me. It was so hard to accept the fact that He chased after ME in order to renew true feelings of joy I could never acquire on my own without Him. Every time I had a question, God answered it. Every time I felt like I had it figured out, God would reveal to me how far off I was. It was scary how much He revealed Himself to me when I had always thought of God as a metaphor or an idea that I couldn’t interact with on a personal level. That time in my life marked the point where God turned from a distant, impersonal and vengeful deity in my eyes, to the strongest, most comforting and worthy force of fatherly love I craved all my life...

# Phillip Heuchert (Cont)

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He has always chased after me and picked me up when I fell, and I have been blessed beyond imagination in these last few years in my walk with Him. Through my own experiences and my own intellectual battles with God, I have realized life just doesn't make sense when we try to get in the way of His plan. As soon as I decided in my heart to surrender my whole life to Him, I finally came to realize how much I had been missing out on my entire life. I couldn't help but laugh at my former self, thinking at times that I had outsmarted the "guy upstairs," but really all I was doing was creating a fantasy in my mind where all the media and false ideals of this world would keep me believing I was in control, and it always led to more confusion when things didn't work out the way I thought they should. It's amazing how much my life has been transformed since I've realized that the pain and struggles that come from being a believer are there to make me a stronger person in God's grand plan. When my eyes became open to His truth, it burned away the former values I placed on things of this world, leaving me with the clear guidance that every human craves to the core.

Throughout my experiences at Element, my experiences in my GC (gospel community), and my walk with Him in my daily life, I have become a different person. The joy I've found in Christ has made me want so badly to be a better friend, a better employee at work, a better husband, and a better example of His love to everyone I come in contact with. He will always chase after His children like a shepherd guarding His flock and strives to consistently renew us through the forgiveness of our sins through Christ. I can't help but thank Him for everything He has blessed me with in my life and the blessings that He continues to pour out as I seek Him in everything I do. He saved me from myself and I want to demonstrate the

dedication of my life to Him through this baptism and hope I can be an example to anyone around me who may have been where I once was. Thank you for reading this, and if I can leave you with one thought, it would be this:

God knows you better than you could ever know yourself, and no matter what you do in this life, how many times you falter, or where you end up, you will never escape the loving, endless pursuit of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

# Elesa Carlson

Hi. My name is Elesa Carlson. I was born and raised in Houston, TX. After college, I chose Portland, OR as my home. It was there that I met my husband, Dave, and our darling daughter, Rachel. His career brought us to Santa Maria, CA. My oldest, Rachel, is the main reason we made our way to Element. She immediately fit right in, and she has blossomed under Element's Bible study and summer experience at Hartland Camp. She's been an inspiration to us all, but especially to me.

There wasn't Sunday school, prayers, or conversations of Christ in my childhood home. My mom left when I was nine. My dad remarried a woman who loved him, but had not particularly desired motherhood and had lost her faith in God. To her credit, she stuck it out and did what she knew how to do in her own way. Without proper role modeling for motherhood or life as a Christian, I've stumbled through both on my own and not always successfully.

As a preteen/teen, I attended various churches with my friends. I found comfort, but I never felt at home in any of the churches I tried. When I came to truly believe in Jesus, I was, again, on my own, feeling alone, and struggling with despair. I was a "good" kid, so my story may seem a bit dull. I tried to do everything right: made my parents proud, got good grades, didn't break the rules, and stayed on the right path...But by my junior year of high school, my home life was a wreck with daily tension & strife between my stepmom and I. The pressures at home, coupled with the immense pressure of SATs, and the pressure of college applications became more than I felt that I could bear. It was my whole world crashing down on me. In the thick of it, Jesus revealed himself to me, showing me His Love and Grace. I found immense comfort and peace in that, and He saved me.

I'd like to say that I stuck to the 'right path' throughout adulthood, but I haven't. I can honestly say that God has kept steering me home and redirecting me as I stumble. God has continually blessed me. At 27, I met the love of my life, Dave. Dave was a widower with a young child, who have their own sad story to tell, but in the end our hearts are full and so are our lives together. Unlike my stepmother, I was ready and longing to be a mother. Rachel is all mine, and I have been so blessed to have her. We have since added her little sister, Morgan, to our family.

Jesus saved me in more ways than one, but I have never been baptized. God was still working on me and kept guiding me toward something more. I have learned more as a mother than I ever had as a single person, and the lessons have not been easy. Just as in my childhood, I tried to just 'do the right thing,' striving for perfection, thinking that was enough, but generally working without a compass. What I've learned is that my will is not enough. I need Jesus' guidance, and not just a checklist of good acts and even better intentions. I have since begun to put His will first. I am learning to seek His Word and His Way. I am getting baptized today to show that change in my life- to God, to myself, and to you.

While I have many wonderful Christians in my family, I do not live near them and have not had their guidance in my everyday life. I am grateful for our move to Santa Maria; it is here that I've experienced first-hand demonstrations of women raising their children by a good, Christian example. I see them living the Word, and sharing their faith openly. At Element, I feel that the Spirit of Christ is thriving and real, it's shown as well as talked about. I've always been a hands-on learner, who does far better with a 'how to' example than on my own. I have found that here, I have finally found a church where I feel at home. Thank you.

# Rachel Carlson

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I am Rachel Carlson, and I'll be 12 years old in just a few weeks. I was born in Portland, OR, and I moved here three years ago because of my dad's job. I was really upset to move here, at first. Now, I love living in Santa Maria. I've been part of eKids for about a year now. I'm a sixth grader at Valley Christian Academy, and I am a proud member of the Santa Maria Swim Club.

Before we moved here, I knew about God, said my prayers every night, and said grace at the dinner table. I didn't pray much more than that. I didn't read the Bible much, either. I went to church with my grandparents on holidays. I was a pretty good kid with some bad behaviors, like lying, arguing and disobeying my mom. I knew about Satan, and I was scared of him. But, I didn't really know about being "saved."

When we moved here, I started going to Valley Christian Academy. We have Bible study every day, chapel every Wednesday, and we even have prayer requests in class. I started to get to know God better. One day in fourth grade in our chapel lesson, Pastor Shettler was talking about Jesus being crucified. I couldn't believe that Jesus would be crucified for my sins. I thought I should get saved so I could go to Heaven and praise Him for what He did for me. I thought I should be a better person, and I felt like if I followed Jesus I could come to know God better. I couldn't wait and got saved that day right after chapel. I was so excited and happy. I ran around school telling all my friends that I was saved by Jesus.

Before I was saved, I didn't know what it meant to be saved. I was scared and confused about going to Hell. Then someone explained to me what 'getting saved' meant. I started to change my behaviors

that I had trouble with, I wanted to praise God, and I wanted other people to know Him too.

I want people to hear my story. I really want everybody to understand salvation. I want other people to know what Jesus did for them. I have had a lot of struggles in my life, but I want people to know that if you have bad days or bad things happen to you, God still loves you and wants to help you. Because of that grace I want to keep working on being a better Christian.

# Emily Stovesand

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My name is Emily Stovesand. My story began 26 years ago. I was born in Goleta Valley Hospital in Santa Barbara and raised my whole life in Santa Ynez.

I was raised in a good, loving family, but we did not regularly attend a church. I started to learn more about Jesus as I became a teen and was attending a youth group with a friend. As I continued to grow older, I found that I had not made much of an effort to be close to God, but my world shattered when I was 20 years old.

My best friend, who was so close I considered her my sister, was killed in a head-on car crash while she was on her way to work. I became so angry and mad at God. I hardened my heart to the idea that God loved me. This bitterness and anger went on for years. Finally, after much persistence from a good friend of mine, I agreed to attend a new church with her. We found ourselves at Element. I was unsure how I would feel allowing God back into my life after I had felt so angry, but it was strange, as I sat there in church listening to Aaron speak of Love, Faith, and God's plan, I felt comforted.

I had been so angry at God for so long that I had forgotten everything. God loved me, and cried when I cried. My biggest struggle was why. Why did this tragic event have to happen? There are some things in God's plan we will never understand, but God is always with us. I knew that even though I had pushed Jesus away, He never pushed me away. He had been right beside me wanting me to open up my eyes and see Him. I believe that He put my persistent friend in my life to keep pushing me to find Jesus and attending church. For without her, I may not have opened my eyes to the most amazing sight, Jesus.

Since deciding to follow Jesus, I have noticed a change in me. I turn to Jesus in prayer for every circumstance in my life. I have found peace in knowing how much He loves me. I am overjoyed to know how much He has given to me so that I can be made new. That no matter my past, my bitterness, or my lack of knowledge in His word, He loved me so much that He bore all my sins so that I may follow Him with a new heart full of love and willingness to spread His love to the world.

So, I am here today to be made new, to surrender my life to Christ and live how He wants me to live, to be the wife to my husband that Jesus wants me to be, and to be the mother to my kids that He wants me to be. I used to think I had it all figured out and had a plan for everything... now I know my only plan is Jesus. I give my life to Him, and He will lead me.

# Pete Newman

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I became a Christian many years ago.

After years of going to a Catholic Church, my father decided it was time for a change I suppose and we started attending a small Christian Church in Palmdale. I liked the church. As kids, we went to Sunday School, not boring Mass. One Sunday, at Sunday School, our teacher told us the story of Gideon. Wow! What a story! I am sure now that I missed the point of the story but I had this vivid picture of this big strong warrior Gideon etched in my mind. Anyway, we went home from church and I told my dad I wanted to be like Gideon, I wanted to become a Christian. So, way back then (I was 8), I was baptized.

When you look at the story of Gideon he really wasn't that warrior that I aspired to be as a young boy. He was kind of an unhappy guy that wasn't too happy with his life or God, and it wasn't until he let God lead instead of leading himself that he became an instrument that could do great things. He had to surrender to God. I have to constantly remind myself of that. I have to constantly remember to slow down and move out of the way and do things God's way.

Back when my oldest daughter Ashley was 4 years old, we went camping at Huntington Lake. Ashley ended up getting E. coli. Back then, it was a little different than today and nobody seemed to know what to do. You would read in the newspaper about kids dying from it. She ended up in Children's Hospital down in Los Angeles, where, it appeared, and according to the doctors there, she was dying. What a hopeless feeling. Nothing I could do could change that fact. I remember telling God all sorts of things. I cut deals with Him. I made promises to Him. She just got worse. I would go on these walks down by the hospital, which was kind

of in a run down, trashy area. I was walking one morning and there was this piece of paper in the gutter, and on it was the word "Gideon." I glanced at it for a second and continued walking and then I stopped.... I went back and picked it up and stared at it. My mind was blank and then it came to me. Back when I was that 8 year old kid. Gideon. And then I had a calm feeling. No more deals with God. No more promises, just Faith in Him. That is what there was to do. Surrender my will to Jesus. Ashley is 26 now.

So, I was baptized already, but none of the people around back then are around me now and I thought it would be right to be baptized around the people I am with today.

# Nick Patterson

I came to Element by being invited by my girlfriend, Madison Ortiz. I think she is wonderful. She encouraged me to come to the youth ministry with her, which was actually amazing, because it fit into my work schedule. I work on the weekends, so I unfortunately can't come to Sunday service.

Before I became a true follower of Christ, I was very prideful, disobedient, and I'd always get into fights if things didn't go my way.

My conversion happened when I was starting to do some difficult soul searching in my life. I didn't really have an answer, or even a question to ask, which could help me through what I was feeling, but I knew there was "something." I followed other people in their way of being happy, but it never ended in anything that I felt was eternal or "worth it" in the long haul.

Upon coming to Element and hearing the sermons, something really lit up inside me. I thought I knew about Christianity, I was introduced at a young age, but it never really adhered to me until this point in my life. When Jesus saved me, everything just kind of...worked. It never ended in an unanswered question, and I think that is what really draws me to Christ; my questions have real, reasonable answers and truth.

My attitude has changed dramatically since I've become a Christian. I've been more humble because I now understand that we are all on an even playing field because we are all sinners. I've become more easy going towards other who disagree with me because I know that God has set a path for me that will come to fruition whether I fight against it or not. I've learned that life is to be cherished, and to be glad in each and every day that God has given us. And, I've also learned that no matter what struggle I'm going through, big or small, I will always have my Lord God to pray to, to ask forgiveness from, and to be forgiven by.

# Josh Pardo

Hello, my name is Joshua Pardo. I am 16 years old and was born and raised in Orcutt. My family isn't very religious, but at a young age my grandfather first started talking to me about God.

Being just a child, I was almost deaf to the message he was trying to pass about Jesus and His glory. Because of this, I was never really involved in a church, and therefore I never really learned about God.

That changed when my grandfather passed away in 2010. I inherited his Bible and looked at it in a different light. It was a King James Version, and I found it slightly difficult to read. Around this time was when my closest friend, Daniel Keinert, invited me to Element.

This was when my love for Jesus Christ really blossomed, and my understanding of the Bible began. I got a new Bible (English Standard) and started reading with new enthusiasm. When I have a question about the Bible or Jesus, someone is there for me at Element. Every time I come to Element I feel like I'm coming home, and every time things aren't going well, Jesus is there for me. He has blessed me with so many good friends who help me get through all the bad times in life and help me grow closer to God.

Ever since I surrendered to Jesus Christ as my one and only savior, I have noticed that I am a lot more giving and old habits have died to make way for newer, better ones. I read my Bible more and I'm not as quick to anger. I can feel His work being done through me, and it is glorious.

This baptism is a declaration of my faith to Jesus Christ. It is a promise that I will do everything in my power to live my life like Him, and that my life will be devoted to His teachings.

God has worked miracles in my life, and I think it is time to pledge myself to him. Thank you for taking the time to read this!



# Christopher Collins

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Hello there. My name is Christopher Collins. You are either reading this as I'm being baptized, or have come across this sometime later. In either case I want you to know a few things about me and what brought me to the choice to be baptized.

I was born in Cañon City, Colorado, and since then have lived with my parents in a small town called Silver Cliff, also in Colorado. In my childhood, I had heard of God and was told how He was the only God. We would go to church sometimes, but that became less and less over the years. As I got older I realized that in my small town you were put into a class or group according to what church you went to. If you didn't go to the 'right' church you were looked down upon, and in a small town with less than 2,000 people, that has a lot more effect than in a bigger city. I started to shy away from God and the church and was never truly saved. The amazing thing about this though, looking back, even then God still reached out for me. I had met a woman in the town, named Belinda, that one day offered to have me come to her home and have lunch with her. She was a very warm and friendly older woman (she was also a very strong Christian) that soon became like another grandma to me. I wanted to be like her, but when she would talk about God and Jesus, I would just tune it out.

Over the years I have lost touch with her more and more. As a teenager I became more concerned with what my friends were doing and where the next party was more than anything. I started to not like school; in fact, I hated it. It wasn't that I didn't want to learn or that I couldn't, I was growing to hate homework because I saw no point in it if I could still ace tests and prove I learned the material without the homework. This eventually led to my being held back

in school, which then led to me being transferred to another school about an hour away. At this new school I had a much easier time.

However, I also ended up losing my virginity soon after my transfer, this led me to some of the darker times in my life. I had become promiscuous and would often find my thoughts leading to lust about the girls around me. This only became worse after I had joined the Air Force and moved to Germany. During my time there I had a habit of going to get drunk every weekend and trying to pick up girls at the bar. There were a few times I would succeed in doing so. There was one night in particular though I remember, because the next morning I had come to find out she was a married woman. I felt so horrid and disgusted with myself...not only that I slept with her and didn't know...the fact I slept with her again even after I knew.

This was a sign to me that there was something wrong with me, something missing, but I had no idea what. I continued to try to fill the space with drinking, with lust, but it only made me more and more depressed. After about a year I moved here to Vandenberg AFB, where I had slowed down my drinking, but was still very lustful. For 6 years I was that guy I had always hated so much growing up; that guy that would say whatever he needed to get to a girl and use her. I wanted/needed to change, and it was during a deployment I talked with a man that helped me realize what it was that was missing. I was missing Jesus.

The sad part was I still didn't chase after Him. I had no drive to because I didn't want to give up my lust. Lust was something very comfortable to me; it's what I thought I needed to make me feel

# Christopher Collins (Cont)

better. I still knew nothing about how awesome the comfort of God felt and was too afraid to try.

The next year of my life, I was faced with a serious question, “Do I stay in the military?” Everything logical told me to stay in, everything worldly told me I needed to stay in if I wanted to survive in the world because nothing else would be able to sustain me, but I decided to pray about it. I was shocked by what went through my head, «get out of the military.» I didn’t understand it, but somehow I knew I was never going to be happy if I stayed in. I took the leap and made the choice to get out.

At that time, I met someone that is very special to me now. She showed me what it is like to truly be happy with God in your life, to have a life without lust and only needing the comfort of His embrace. I never had a drive before to know God, and only after Jennifer and I had been dating for a while did I have my true drive for Him. At first, I was going through the motions a bit and was going to Element for her, but after a few times in going, I felt my heart change. I wasn’t going just to see Jen anymore; I was going because I wanted to learn more about my Father. I was going because going to church was filling that hole in my heart. I had never felt it before and I wanted more.

I believed that Jesus died for my sins and was resurrected. I believed all the way back when I was 18, but never felt the need to change anything more in my life or truly welcome Him into my life until a few months ago. So, here I am today being baptized because I want to serve Jesus in my life. I want to become more like Him. I’m here because even though I’m the poorest (in terms of the world)

that I have ever been, I am the happiest I have ever thought I could be. I want every day to try and make God smile.

I know from this point on I am in for a ride, but since I’ve surrendered control to God in my life, I’ve felt nothing but peace and calm in my heart. I have the faith that no matter what comes my way, He is capable of taking care of it all.

I used to think I was so far gone and that I could do nothing to make up for it. The truth about that is I can’t. There is nothing I am able to do to make up for my past, but there is nothing I need to do. Jesus has done that work already, and it wasn’t until these past few months I truly understood that. So, I pray for you, that maybe some part of my story touched you or maybe you want to know more (because there is quite a bit) and you want to just come talk to me, I welcome it, but I pray that it is able to help you in some way.

# Jack Markstone

My name is Jack Markstone, and I am 7 years old. When I was 5 years old, I asked Jesus to be my Savior. My parents and teachers at school and church talked about Jesus, and I knew I needed Him. One night, at dinner, I told my parents I wanted to ask Jesus to be my Savior. My parents prayed with me, and after that I felt Jesus in my heart and said, "Yes Jesus, I'm going to follow You".

Since I have started following Jesus, I feel better with Him in my heart than I did without Him. Sometimes I want to do fun things that are bad, but they are the wrong things, and since I believe in Jesus, and told Him I'll follow Him, I'm going to stick with it.

A note from Jack's parents:

*When we first explained to him that if he followed Jesus, asked Him into his heart, when he died he would get to go to heaven. Jack was adamantly against it. When we questioned him further, he stated that he did not want to become a Christian. When questioned still further, he explained that, "he loves Jesus, he just didn't want to die yet." haha.*

# Tyler Spencer

My name is Tyler Spencer, and I am 10 years old. I have been attending Element and eKids! since the beginning, which is about 5 years now.

Before I decided that I wanted to follow Jesus with my life, I was very young. I was still learning about Jesus from my parents at home and at church in Sunday School.

When I was five years old, I would ask my parents questions about Jesus and about what I learned about Jesus in church. After learning about how to be saved, how to ask Jesus to be my Lord and Savior, I asked my mom to pray with me to accept Jesus into my heart. And that's what I did.

I am learning more everyday about Jesus and what it means to follow Him. My parents teach me, and I continue to come to church every week to learn more about Jesus.

# Paul Spencer Jr.

My name is Paul Spencer, and I am 17 years old. I have been attending Element for 5 years, since the beginning of our church plant.

Before I decided to follow Jesus, I was a kid that was very wild. I misbehaved at home, and got into a lot of trouble at school. I never had any rest from the consequences of my actions.

I finally decided to give my life to Jesus. I was tired of all the fighting. Fighting against others, and fighting against Jesus. I was tired of reaping the consequences of my actions, and the consequences of living my own life the way I saw fit. There had to be another way.

Once I asked Jesus into my life, there were changes; changes that I can see and feel and changes that others notice as well. I'm a different person now. I'm more mature in my actions, and I'm more mature in my faith. I'm still growing in both ways, but I can feel a difference in how my life is panning out now.

I continue to grow my relationship with Jesus. I follow Him and try to obey His directives. I am now interested in serving, not just for fun, but because it is what we are called to do. I serve in eKids! by doing the sound during lessons and music. I also help to lead kids community groups so that other kids can come to know Jesus the way that I have.

# Lauren Whitaker

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Before I decided to follow Jesus, I was a pretty good little girl -- not all of the time, but sometimes. I liked princesses, and I liked to do ballet. I had a lot of sin in my life, and I wanted to get rid of it. One morning, we were watching morning cartoons, and it was clay dolls acting out the story of Jesus.

I saw that they were being baptized and lots of people were believing in Jesus, and I thought I should believe in Jesus, too, so I can go to heaven. I talked to my Dad, and I talked to Jesus, and I prayed to Him that He would come into my heart so I could go to heaven forever and ever until God renewed the world. Since I decided to follow Jesus, I like to memorize Bible verses, and I want to teach my little sister about the Bible. I like to learn Bible stories.

When I do something wrong, I apologize to the person I hurt, and I ask God for forgiveness. I serve God by giving to my sister and my Mom and Dad. I love Jesus very much, and I care for my sister and my Mom and Dad.

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# Do you want to be baptized?

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