

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

September 6, 2015



ELEMENT
christian church

FAITH WEITING

My name is Faith Weiting and I just turned 8 years old. I've gone to Element with my parents pretty much my whole life. Like my parents and friends, I want to follow Jesus. I want to worship Him, and I want Him to teach me how to love Him, my family, and my friends.

Last year I watched my friend Lauren Whitaker get Baptized. I asked my Daddy what baptism was, and he told me it's a way we show people around us that we love Jesus, we're going to continue to love Jesus, and we're going to tell people about Jesus.

I know that Jesus died on the cross to take away our sins, and that was the plan for us. So one night, while I was in my bed praying, I asked Jesus to be my King and asked Jesus to help me learn to love Him.

I am really excited about baptisms because I want to show people that I love Jesus and that He loves me. I also started going to 3rd Grade at Pine Grove Elementary and I want to tell all the kids there about Jesus and why He loves us.

EMILY ALVARADO

My name is Emily Alvarado, and I am fifteen years old. I was born in Bakersfield, CA and moved to Santa Maria when I was six. My second year living in Santa Maria, I met Staci Tilley in school. The next year I moved to another school and a few years later met Michi Hinders.

I had started to look into "religion" because I was dealing with a lot of anxiety issues. My friend Michi started talking to me about Jesus and she helped me discover my need for Jesus in my life. God taught me about Himself as I learned about Him at her youth group. I am forever thankful to God for placing Michi in my life to support me and help lead me to Him.

Last year was my freshman year in high school and I was reunited with my friend Staci Tilley. She invited me to come to Element with her. I still had a bunch of what I call "little questions" that Staci walked me through without hesitation. Once again, so grateful to God for putting her back in my life.

You might think this is odd, but I am thankful to Jesus that He didn't place me in a religious home growing up. He gave me the opportunity to explore as He lead me deeper into what I now believe about Him. My parents have been very supportive and helpful through my entire journey to follow Jesus; honestly, I would never ask for a different path to knowing Him.

When Aaron announced that baptisms would be happening soon, I knew that it was my time to profess my faith in Jesus Christ before you all. Thank you for being a part of this day with me.

JESSICA BULGARA

Hello, this is just a tiny testimony of Jesus and how He's transformed me internally. My name is Jessica Bulgara, age 25. I was born in Santa Maria and have lived next to the coast for my whole life. I started coming to Element, off and on, about two years ago.

In the beginning, I had a very pessimistic attitude about Christianity, as well as towards most things in life. This wasn't because I wanted to be pessimistic, but because I had a very painful and unfavorable childhood. Unfavorable is actually an understatement.

I had to grow up quickly in order to take care of myself. My family was not one with a strong sense of cohesion. I felt abandoned. My father was nonexistent, and my mother was concerned for herself. I've gone through a lifetime of experiences that trampled all sense of faith, hope and self-worth. I once told someone (in regards to my life experience), "Think of the worst, most depressing movie you could ever possibly see, and the things that might happen in that movie, and that has been my life." I had a strong feeling of being alone, not only outside, but inside as well.

I was internally lost, and came to a point where I no longer cared about anything. Any time that I would get to a point where life seemed safe, I would head into another downward spiral.

Things started to change when I met a family that I fell in love with. I noticed that they seemed sincere, that they were accepting and that they loved me. The love they had for Christ was filled with warmth, and it made me long for Jesus to fill me with that warmth as well.

I realized I had nowhere else to turn. I finally gave in to God's pursuit of me. I found myself nose deep in a Bible that I hadn't touched in years. I prayed night and day to Jesus. I prayed for salvation, for answers, just for anything. I was tired of fighting for everything on my own, and I finally went to Jesus for help.

Gradually, things have started to get a little easier. Jesus is working on me, changing me internally. I have a sense that I am not alone, and I feel like the weight of my world is lifting from my shoulders. With each passing day, I find myself naturally happy. I have a positive outlook for my future. I know that life is not going to be perfect, and I will have set backs, but I know that Jesus is with me through all of it.

I know that God wants what is best for me and for everyone. It feels as though my life has finally started and I'm grateful to be rising out of stagnation. I feel blessed to have been introduced to Element and to have met the people who now have a permanent place in my heart. I feel blessed that Jesus has saved my soul.

ISAIAH MILLER

My name is Isaiah William Miller and I am 20 years old. I was born at Marian Medical Center in Santa Maria, CA. My girlfriend, Zoe, and I were looking for a church to go to permanently. Her Aunt Christie is the Children's Minister at Element so it seemed like a natural fit.

Growing up, my whole family has always been believers, but I never really got into church like a lot of my other family did. I would often be woken up for church and it felt like an "I have to" instead of an "I wanted to" go kind of feeling.

I started to get really depressed around the summer after 8th grade and it got progressively worse as I entered into high school. I dreaded waking up and going to school every day. I dreaded trying to act "happy" around my friends and family. From my perspective everyone and everything seemed to do nothing but make me angry or feel more worthless and depressed. As my depression progressed, I turned to drugs for comfort, and that got bad really fast. I was taking about 6-12 pills a day and smoking as much as I possibly could. It became not just something for fun but a necessity.

I became addicted and I was ready to die.

One night I tried to kill myself. The last words I said to myself with the pills in my hand were, "God, please don't let me wake up," and then I swallowed them.

As you can tell by reading this story Jesus did wake me up. Jesus pulled me out of that hell and I woke up sadder than I've ever been, but I slowly stopped taking pills. Every time I put them in my hand I could feel something, really *someone*, telling me to

stop. It was Jesus. His Holy Spirit came upon me, opened my eyes, and allowed me to see; I noticed this most fully one night with my cousin.

Since that night I have been hearing His voice and His leading every day. He has been showing me the power of prayer and how much God is the center of, and answer to everything we may have questions for in life. Being a man of God is all I want to do in life. Seeing people lead into freedom, healed, and being full of joy from praying is one of the greatest things to ever experience in life. I have been ready for this change in my life for so long it literally aches my bones.

Thank you so much for witnessing my confession of faith and this important milestone in my life.

DANIEL KOBER

My name is Daniel Kober. I am 10 years old. I chose to be baptized because I promised to follow Jesus two years ago at camp. I want to obey Jesus by being baptized. I wasn't quite ready to be baptized after the first year I went to camp; I felt like I needed more time. After going to camp again this year, I came to the decision that it was time.

When I first went to camp, I decided to follow Jesus. This is how I'm going to show it.

Jesus has changed me. I love Him and I want to follow Him all my life. I know He loves me too. He is very important to me. I want to obey Him more than I used to and listen to Him.

KELLY MARTIN

My name is Kelly Martin and I am 30 years old. I was born in Pasadena, Texas. I started attending Element after moving to California to be with my husband. I grew up in a Christian home and attended private school from elementary through high school.

I've always known of Christianity, but it hasn't been until recently that I learned the importance of Jesus in my own life. Life is not always easy, comfortable, or predictable, but I now believe that with Jesus all things are possible! He is the one who redeems all things, including us.

I want to lead my children to know Jesus by being the best example for them I can possibly be. I want to let go of myself and let the love of Jesus guide me. Since my complete submission to Jesus Christ I have been faced with more challenges than before, yet each and every time I am able to rest in the peace of knowing the Lord provides in every circumstance that comes my way.

PASCAL MARTIN

Hello there, my name is Pascal Ray Martin II and I am 30 years old.

I was born in Gretna, LA, and raised deep in the woods of Mississippi. My father worked off shore in the oil field, therefore, we moved to a few different places, such as San Juan, Puerto Rico, Wiggins, MS, and Channelview, TX.

I have been attending Element for about 2 years now. A good friend of mine recommended the church to me and I have been coming here ever since. I am currently in the military and I have been living in the area for approximately 4 years. It took me awhile to find a church that I really liked, not meaning to imply that there are any bad churches in the area, but I really wanted to find a place to call my home. Element was that home for me.

Growing up, my family and I attended church every Sunday morning and afternoon. We lived in a very small town in Mississippi where a lot of the members of the church were also my family members. If you love family then you see this as a win/win situation. We got to attend an amazing church and learn how to be followers of Jesus...and we also got to spend time with family.

At the time, I had a lot going on. I was playing sports and doing everyday kid stuff. Like a lot of people I thought that attending church was the only thing that I needed to be a Christian and go to heaven. As I got older I thought to myself, "I'm saved, I don't really need to go to church anymore, and I am a Christian." This line of thought started a slow decline of me attending church and living that Christian lifestyle that I thought I had. This pattern continued to be my logic for several years, thinking that because

I was "saved" I could "live" life however I wanted. I told myself that nobody is perfect and God will take me to live with Him forever no matter what I do.

Now that I am older, I realize that this isn't true. Being a Christian is a lifestyle of being a Christ follower; it's not (or shouldn't be) a title that is given to you just for attending church. God longs to develop a relationship with us as His children and even though God accepts us because of the blood of His son, Jesus, we still must be a people who live in relationship with Him. When we pray we are talking with God and sharing life with Him. He must be part of our lives and not just part of our words. The more that I speak to Him, the closer I feel I am to Him, and it is an amazing feeling. I almost feel invincible. knowing that I have God on my side.

Today, I follow Jesus' words in obedience because he has loved me and saved me; I want to love Him back. He constantly puts things in my path that He is calling me to live to the best of my abilities (which are really His abilities). I still have my days that I struggle and fall, but He is always there walking with me and lifting me up. No matter what you're going through in life, no matter what challenges you are faced with, Jesus is on your side and will help you walk the path He wants you on. He wants what's best for us, and I want to be the best that I can be for Him.

"Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me."
- Psalm 119:133

FRANSISCO GARCIA

Hello, my name is Francisco (some call me Cisco) and I'm 25 years old. My history is weaved with seasons of going to church and not since I was about six years old. Growing up, I learned to be fiercely independent and self-reliant, which is not the way I should have gone. In short, my childhood story is that I was abandoned by my father, and even though I had a family and a step dad (eventually), I feel I was basically left to fend for myself from as early as I can remember. I did what I wanted because I could: good, bad or indifferent.

During grades 5-7, I was taken out of the public school system and was home schooled. The first year was a good year, but the rest marked a steady decline in my behavior, attitude, mentality, and morality. Living in a small, but very full, house, while being home schooled proved to be very difficult and stressful. It was around this time that I actually began to spend more and more time around the church and believers because had nowhere else to go. Eighth grade and up was when I began the negative snowball effect on my life. Living in a stressful environment, along with all the feelings and emotions that begin to develop in Jr. High and High school, I walked away from God and the church. All the changes that happened started inwardly and quickly developed outwardly.

My feelings of frustration quickly turned into anger and evolved into malicious hate and dark apathy towards anything and everything. Eventually, my walk away from God came to a head when I was arrested for armed robbery that I had committed about a month after I turned 17. I was charged as an adult. In the end, I was sentenced to 5 years and given my first strike at the age of seventeen. To boot, my girlfriend at the time was pregnant with my first daughter.

My time in prison was hell. There was a nasty learning curve that was unforgiving. When my time was completed and I left the state prison grounds, I didn't just leave with two boxes of personal property,

I had a lot of undiscovered mental baggage in tow that took me a long time to realize.

For the longest time, Jesus' name was awkward on my tongue. But with much time on my hands in prison, I listened diligently to Element's podcast sermons. What struck me the most was how whoever was speaking always stressed Jesus. This helped me to see that it has always been about Him, from the beginning to end of the bible, all of scripture is about Him. No longer do I pray to just "God" but I came to know Jesus as my savior and redeemer, who paid the way to make it possible that my many sins could be forgiven and I could be saved (not just to get into heaven, but to receive any mercy or grace because I have nothing to offer).

It's only now, in hindsight, that I truly see that God kept me in the palm of His sovereign hand, despite my flippant behavior with Him. I took God's gift and blessing and turned it into an idol. My daughter, Danika, became my primary focus for years to come.

After getting out, I kind of knew that I was different, as well as the things around me; I just didn't realize the depth to it. I began to pursue my daughter, Danika with the utmost determination and sober mindedness I could afford. I gave my all and did my best to do everything on the straight and narrow when it came to Danika and excluded almost everyone else from helping me on MY mission, including God. As a result of my solo attempt to get back into my daughter's life, the weight of prison, PTSD, and anxiety, compounded by vicious opposition by her mother, I eventually fell apart and broke down, physically first, then emotionally, and finally mentally. I spent a lot of time trying to treat the symptoms of my anxiety while trudging forward into a far worse situation, straying further away from God. Eventually the visitations with Danika stopped and my situation got worse. I started medicating myself with opiates and other distractions, which again led to a further low.

(FRANSISCO GARCIA CONTINUED)

I got into another relationship and have a second daughter, Hope. Being there through the birth and over the past two months of her life, God has shown me just how much I am “poor in spirit” – how much I need Him. Every point of my life, whenever I did it my way, it never worked out right, but God brought me my daughter. I’ve realized just how terrible of a father I am, but God has shown me how good of a Father He is, and how He provides grace and hope and that I need to clean my life up for my daughter.

Getting clean was a long, slow, and painful process but God was ever patient and long suffering with me. To wrap this long story up, God has worked through, and in spite of, all my relentless misdeeds and thick headedness. He has shown me how to think of myself less and of others more, to be a more loving, patient, and forgiving person and father to, not only my own children, Danika and Hope, but my girlfriend’s three kids: Vincent, Raidin, and Marry. The most influential role models I have had were men in prison. God is re-working me by showing me my need to focus on Him and to be in community with other believers, other men and fathers, who can help me grow.

God has shown me how poor in spirit I’ve been over the years and how He has blessed me with His mercy and grace. He has shown me how I need others, how I am part of His chosen people, and how I should bless others.

Want more information about JESUS?

**Ask any of the people baptizing,
and the Element Leaders,
or read more here:**



*[http://www.ourelement.org/about/
what-we-believe/statement-of-faith](http://www.ourelement.org/about/what-we-believe/statement-of-faith)*