

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

May 31, 2009



ELEMENT
christian church

David Boeken

I believe it begins and ends with God.

“Why do I need to be baptized? This question has riddled me for many years now.”

I would like to start in what I remember as my beginning...

My name is David Boeken and this is my story...

I am number four of five boys. My parents divorced when I was about four and that would make my youngest brother two. I do not remember much about how my father treated my mother while he was her husband (but I guess that is understandable as I was only four).

As I got older I did get to see how he treated my mother as an “ex-husband” – terribly. He never supported her decisions or her actions. I know that at times my mother was difficult, (I remember that I did not always agree with her decisions – but I was a kid and I knew everything, so how could I be wrong) but I also know now all the decisions she made where in her children’s best interest.

My father had his theory about church and the theory was simple, “God did not have a church so why do I need to attend one.” I found this odd because his parents often took us boys to church with them. At church I was able to hear stories about who Jesus was and what He did for us and paying the penalty for our sins.

Even when I was little I always had a vague understanding of what it meant to be a Christian. To me it meant that you knew that Jesus died for us and that we should be thankful. Honestly, I had nothing more to go off of other than the knowledge of what I could fathom up as a child. I have always thought, “I have never murdered anyone...so I am good right?”

Today I understand that I am not so good, I am a person who has sinned against God and I am far from perfect. I still have not murdered anyone (that’s a joke) but I have made plenty of bad decisions that have affected my life and those around me. Even though I have not followed the path that I believe God would have me follow, Jesus, the one perfect

being, still died for me. Like 1 Peter 3:18 says, “the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” I know that the old me has been washed away or drowned if you will and baptism is my public acknowledgment of that fact (Aaron that does not mean hold me down longer than normal).

Today, I want to be the husband and best friend to my wife that God calls me to be. I want to be the father to my boy that God has called me to be. I want to be the best son, brother, and friend that I need to be. I believe it begins and ends with God.

Baptism, for me, will be a place where I can come face to face with my inner demons and conquer them. I believe that facing your inner demons and progressing from this point forward makes us all stronger and gives us the tools to conduct ourselves as true Christians. These newly discovered tools give us the strength and knowledge to fight what wages against us and keep them from making a mess of our lives. I believe we all need to truly understand that we need God in our lives each and every second of each and every day.

I know I did titled this why do I need to be baptized? However, it should have been titled why do I want to be baptized? I want to extend my deepest thanks to all that are attending today (or reading this story online). I guess decision to get baptized should be an easy one but this is not always the case. People often fear public situations, but I know that this is such an occasion that I should not fear.

I am honored to have my dear friend Aaron perform this covenant between God and I. I also look forward to continuing this new life which is better than I could ever have imagined. My life is now a life with God being my heart and soul in everything I do. I have willingly handed over the keys to my life to God, because He is sober and the rest of us are drunk in sin. We are not a people who should be behind the wheel in our condition.

God thank you so much for everything you do for us, God we are reckless drivers’ thank you for taking control of our lives.

Hailey Hagel

I've learned to trust that He will always provide for my needs...

My name is Hailey Hagel and I started coming to Element with my aunt and uncle as soon as I moved to the area, which was almost a year ago. As soon as I got here I immediately became involved with the youth.

I was raised in the “church.” My parents took me to church every single Sunday of my childhood. And I never minded going, I actually liked church. But as I got older it started to feel robotic, it was just something I did because my parents told me too. Church eventually became just my social network instead of a place where I served God and could draw close to Him.

I first “accepted” Christ when I was six years old in an act of rebellion. My mom told me I couldn't be one of God's sheep until I accepted Jesus in my heart. I wanted to be a sheep. So, I (silently) asked Jesus if He wouldn't mind living in my heart so I could be a sheep too. Then I proudly announced to my mom that I had already done that and, “I was too a sheep.” I did it again a few more times as a kid just to make sure I was covered. And then once more when I was in Jr. High because I wondered if I really understood what I was doing when I was little and wasn't sure if it still counted. So much guilt and so many questions were never how Jesus intended us to live.

I went to Sunday school, Awana's, summer camp, winter camp, youth group and any other event or mid-week offered. It was what I was raised to do and it became something I did mindlessly. It was “what I was just supposed to do.”

I then felt “because I was a Christian” I had the responsibility to get everything right. I was supposed to be the picture perfect Christian that had everything together. But as I got into High School I started to want more out of my relationship with God. I started to realize that perfection wasn't what God wanted from me; He just wanted me to trust Him and put my faith in Him. I realized that if God had expected perfection He wouldn't have sent His son to die for me. He knew I would sin and His death was my freedom from that burden. Me trying to achieve perfection just cheapened that gift.

I finally learned to simply trust God for His gift of Christ.

A year ago I took a huge leap of and moved out of my parent's home. Leaving home was possibly the scariest decision I've made, but through that decision God has taught me that even though my faith wavers He does not. Since then I've become more independent of others and more dependent on Jesus; I've been able to make my faith my own. He has pushed, challenged, and caused me to grow in more ways than I can count. He started to free me from the idea that I had to be the perfect Christian and that there wasn't a right way to love Him. He truly sets us free to be who He created us to be. He created us all to be unique, different, with different gifts and different abilities and He doesn't expect us all to be the same cookie cutter Christians.

I've learned to trust that He will always provide for my needs, that Jesus has a plan for me, and that He will always follow through with it. I might not always understand His plan, but I've learned to trust that He knows what is best for me and He will be with me every step of the way.

“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”
Philippians 1:6

Salvador Virgen

God is my savior and He is the one who saved me.

My name is Salvador but everyone calls me Sal...so you can too.

I grew up not really caring about anything at all. I mean, I knew there was a God but I just didn't care about what that meant to me or for me. I would drink (a lot) and get high (a lot) but lived like nothing really mattered to me... because it didn't.

The word I would use would be careless – or I could care less. I was careless in school because I just wouldn't show up, I didn't care about getting in trouble, and I could care less about life. I was what I would call a rebel child.

That all changed on July 18, 2008. I was at a weeklong event that was called MOVE. The whole thing was about living WITH the Spirit of God and being bold and actually standing strong for something. I was asked a question that seemed to speak to my soul... it was "What do you stand for?"

Until then I never really cared to think about it... but all of a sudden God was speaking to me and showing me that I needed to stand for something (other than not caring). The speaker at this session asked if anyone in the room wanted to live WITH Jesus. I walked up to the stage and fell on my knees and gave my life to Jesus.

My eyes were open and it was clear to me that everything I was doing, and had done, was getting me no where and I was called to a greater purpose than not caring, I was called to be a child of God.

God is my savior and He is the one who saved me.

He is the one who now brings purpose to my life.

I have since stopped drinking and smoking because I realized it was pointless. It is amazing because I actually TRY in school now. Because I am trying I am actually learning and getting stuff out of it. I finally see that I have a future. I try to now live with my parents without constantly fighting because my purpose is larger than that.

I now spend time with people who were once in the shoes I was in by giving my time to a ministry called Block Bangas (it's a street ministry through Mc Risk). I am blessed by God to be a blessing to others... it stretches me to go out and reach people.

I have a purpose and that purpose is to love Him and all people because He first loved me. Purpose, hope, peace... found in Jesus.

Kimberly Corona

God has been holding my hand guiding me along a path to Him
for a very long time

My Name is Kimberly Corona (yes, like the beer, don't make fun me). It wasn't until recently that I really understood what it meant to be a Christian.

I had always called myself a Christian growing up. I believed in God, went to church as a child (several denominations), and knew Jesus died on the cross for my sins. As I grew to teenage years and then into adulthood my visits to church became less and less frequent until, of course, I quit going all together.

I still considered myself a Christian though. I always tried to do the "right" thing, treated others with respect, and just tried to be a "good" person. I didn't go to church, or read the bible, or pray (except to ask for something). I believed I didn't need to do those things to be a Christian. Didn't God know I was a good person? Today I now know that 'being a good person' didn't make me a Christian.

In 2002, I started to go through some really tough times with my marriage. A very good friend of mine would sit and talk to me for hours. She would say things such as "God has a plan and all of this is part of that plan." She would also say, "There is a reason you have to go through this." Then when something else would happen and I would think "I just can't take anymore" she would tell me, "God won't give you more than you can handle." I knew in my heart she was right, but my mind wasn't ready to believe yet. After several months she invited me to attend church with her and her husband one Sunday. I felt so uncomfortable that it reaffirmed my belief that I didn't need to go to church to be a Christian.

After that fateful Sunday however, I felt like something was missing in my life. I continued to talk to my friend about God (it really did help) but there was always this hole. I actually think it had been there all along but now it was growing! I kept telling myself, "I have to find a church where I feel I can really belong. Is there such a place?" I had never been to a church, even as a child, that I felt could be my home.

I kept putting off finding a church. I think deep down I didn't want to go to another church and once again feel like I didn't belong. I have always been a very shy person and have to force myself to step out of my comfort zone. Placing myself in a group of strangers, even Christians, is extremely difficult. One day my friend Donna told me that her son's youth pastor had planted a new church. She said it was different than churches she had been to in the past, and suspected I had been to, and suggested I come see for myself.

From the very first service, I knew I had finally found what I had been searching for since childhood! It is like I was parched and can now drink. I want to learn as much as can. I joined women's bible study, took some of the classes Element offered, began reading the bible, praying, and started to volunteer and learn what gifts I had to offer. I still don't read enough or pray enough (but then who does, that's why Jesus gives us His grace). I do strive to do what I can and improve my walk daily. I love being part of a community of people that truly understand the most important things in life.

There is really no exact "moment" in my life to define when I became a Christian; though I do believe. God has been holding my hand guiding me along a path to Him for a very long time. He led me to Element, to this wonderful community, where I am finally learning. I have been craving God's truth and love for so long yet many times refused to acknowledge it. My relationship with Jesus gets stronger daily. And even though I have turned control of my life over to Jesus I still need to pray and ask him to remind me to listen when He is talking and guiding me.

Because of faith in Christ and His work in me I now know that I can truly call myself a Christian.

Joseph Vieira

...we love because God loved us first.

My name is Joseph Vieira. I was born in Santa Maria at Marian Hospital. I weighed one and a half pounds, had heart complications, and lung development issues. I guess you can say that I had a tough start.

As a child my family attended various denominations of churches, until my parents were divorced when I turned thirteen. When my father left to go to a new town, I went with him. While there, I tried a few different churches, but never really felt like I belonged.

Soon after that I stopped going to church, other than the few times I was invited by family or friends.

I have always talked to God, but until recently I never knew how to listen. I am still learning what God's plan is for me, and how to best serve him. I know have a long way to go, (but don't we all?).

I have always been a prideful, stubborn, and impatient person. I have also realized that I can be very selfish at times.

While talking to a friend, a conversation about churches took place. He started talking about Element. The more we talked the more it sounded like somewhere I could fit in, somewhere I could be myself. At once upon walking through the door, I felt at home. I felt a sense of community and acceptance was surrounding me. I've been here ever since.

When I started going to element I found an inner peace that has been lacking for some time. I hope by giving myself to Jesus, that peace can surround my life.

Baptism is my public declaration of faith in Christ, but I guess what I hope to receive from baptism is a better communication with God as I become a more stable person. At times I feel powerless. I am having trouble with finding a job, with my addiction to smoking, and avoiding responsibilities. God offers hope, and only God can bring clarity in my life.

One thing that has always stuck with me is we love because God loved us first. I feel there is no better way to show that love than to give your life to Jesus.

Wisdom, what a great word. Wisdom is the ability to make good use of knowledge; the ability to recognize right from wrong. I would have to say, getting to know God has given me a bit more wisdom every step I take. For the first time in my life I am abstaining from sex until marriage, it is a beautiful and frustrating experience. I don't expect to see changes happen all at once. Just as a new baby has to learn and grow, I believe that I have to do the same.

Donna McNutt

No more guilt, no more shame, and no more blame; just Love and be loved.

My name is Donna McNutt (Newman). I was born in Oconto Falls Wisconsin and I like California much better.

I was baptized for the first time when I was an infant. That's what my mom's parents did when she was a baby, so it made sense that her babies would be baptized as infants as well. My father had no use for churches, he would say "they're always asking for money," but he did keep a small bible next to his bed that he read from. I went to catechism, had my first communion, etc..., but something seemed to be wrong, missing. I couldn't put it into words, but I felt like I was missing something.

Like many families ours was dysfunctional one...parents fighting A LOT – Yelling, screaming, throwing (and breaking) things, and hitting. I spent a lot of time hiding and praying. More than once I am convinced that God came to my rescue. He would find me crying, shaking and wanting to die but He wouldn't let me go. He would bring me peace and tell me that it would be better tomorrow, just wait and see. Have Faith.

Of course God was right, he always is. Tomorrow did come and it was better...but the better didn't last, but what about life does (except God). I continued to live and look toward the future, finding joy where I could (and there is a lot of joy in the world if you are looking). There are many moments during this time in my life when God stepped in and saved me or those I loved.

My dad was going to be laid-off from his job so we had to move; Goleta California is where we ended up. It was supposed to be a new beginning, but it wasn't. The same things kept happening and finally my mom divorced my dad and moved back to Wisconsin with my two younger sisters while my little brother and I stayed with my dad in California. Life did get better; no more yelling, screaming, throwing (or breaking) of things, and no more hitting.

When I was 17 when I began seeking for what was missing. I attended many types of churches/denominations and only in one did the pastor's words sound right. I went to a church with a friend in Santa

Barbara and the pastor wasn't talking from a pulpit, but was walking among the people. He wore robes (as many do), but he was talking to us not "at" us and I found myself listening, understanding and actually agreeing with what he said. He spoke about how God loved us as His children and gave up His only son so we could be forgiven.

This wasn't the first or even the thirty-first time I heard that phrase used, but I finally understood and believed it was true. However, I didn't return to this church or any church for a long time. I still had Faith, but didn't believe that I was truly forgiven for my sins and so I didn't feel I was worthy.

I ended up married to a pastor's son (that's always fun). He was not religious (so I found out after marriage), and in fact he forbid any reference to God or Jesus. He lived his life as a contradiction because we baptized our children after they were born (just like I was). His father even performed the baptism, but we didn't go to church and still couldn't talk about God when the kids were small.

I wanted my children to have a choice, so when they were 11 & 9 yrs old I found a church in Arroyo Grande that I really enjoyed. They had a great youth minister and so we attended there. And yes I mean "We." All of a sudden my husband wanted to go; but what we mostly did would be called "religious works." We'd show up each Sunday morning; we became Greeters, then breakfast hosts, then Hosts (deliver the wine and bread to the minister during the service) and our son Travis even became an alter boy.

We looked like the Ozzie and Harriet of our time (or NOT). Our family was being torn apart little by little from the inside. I eventually told both my children that they needed to make up their own minds about God and not let anyone else make that choice for them. I made mine a long time ago and I believed!

But what did I believe, exactly?

Donna McNutt (continued)

I attended a women's weekend at Mission San Miguel, during our time of silence I found myself sobbing terribly because I still didn't believe I was worthy of God's love. I had done so many things in my life that I was ashamed of. My family was falling apart and so I thought I couldn't be loved, especially by God. But God, through Christ, again came and lifted my head (even though I tried many times to bow my head) and assured me that He did love me and that I was forgiven and was worthy of His love because HE made me worthy.

Now you'd think that this would have been enough to convince me, but not really. Life got in the way (as it typically does for all of us); I spent more time at looking at what I was going through instead of where I was going to.

I knew my marriage was finished and when it finally did end, my son came home one weekend from college. He said that his youth pastor had planted a church and he wanted to go see it on Sunday morning. I asked to go with him and I met Aaron and Marianne for the second time in my life. But this time it felt like I was Home and found what I was seeking. A place where God dwelled, people believed what I did (that Jesus lives and we are to Love God and one another and forgive those who trespass against us) and a real community spirit. And so now I GET to be baptized. So I can recommit my life to Christ and Live the life I was suppose to live. No more guilt, no more shame, and no more blame; just Love and be loved.

Nick Hagel

My name is Nick Hagel and I am 10. I know my story is short, but then again, I AM 10.

My family started coming to Element almost from the day they started. My dad helped with a lot of the HVAC stuff and actually helped Element get their permits so they can meet where they are (Aaron says my dad is pretty cool).

As long as I can remember I have always gone to church, I even remember my brother and me playing in the elevator at our old church.

When I was 6 my uncle was reading the bible and I was watching him. My uncle turned to me and asked, "Do you know who Jesus is?"

I said, "No."

So my uncle told me about me Jesus in a way that I understood. So I asked Jesus to come into my life and I have followed him ever since.

Today I have learned more and more to trust Him. When I see people being mean, like if a kid is being teased by a teenager or something, I pray right away. I pray for my friends that don't know Jesus. I also sometimes I pray when I'm scared or I want something to happen.

Jesus is great and He wants you to follow Him too.