

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

October 23rd, 2016



ELEMENT
christian church

TRACY BOUZA

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)*

My name is Tracy Bouza. I am 42 years old. I was born into a "Christian family;" by that I mean we were at church all day Sunday (every Sunday) plus Wednesday nights. My parents were strongly involved in the "Christian community" here in Santa Maria (They owned KGDP, which was a Christian radio station). However, my upbringing was nothing what you would have expected given the reputation my family had...because that's all that it was, reputation. Our home was a completely different story.

My dad was an angry man and picked me out of all the kids, being the oldest of five children, to push around. I was so angry at God for allowing this to happen. I thought if He was there (or cared), He would have done something about it. As I grew up, the abuse continued and transformed into mental abuse; the more this happened the more I continued to become bitter, angry, more unstable and unpredictable. My moods were out of control, but no one seemed to take any of this seriously.

I left home at 17 and started to live on my own. I made a lot of bad decisions because my moods were so up and down and unstable; at 18 I started down the long road of becoming an alcoholic. The party scene was enticing which led to more and more recklessness in my life.

The funny thing though, the whole time I was out of control, I could still feel Jesus calling me, talking to me, telling me to stop, and drawing my heart to return to Him...but I just couldn't.

At 23 I was diagnosed with the mental illness, bipolar disorder. I really didn't understand what this fully meant, but it gave me some answers as to why I was so up and down. When I found out

TRACY BOUZA (CONTINUED)

that I had to start taking medication, I was angry with God once again. I asked myself, and God, why He was picking on me? I wondered why I had all of these things in my life I saw myself as having to suffer through. I really just wanted to be “normal” (as if that is something that is even a thing).

Throughout the next few years I went on and off my meds which only served to make me even more ‘me’ crazy! I got married twice, neither of which worked out. I got married for a third time and my husband died in surgery. Instead of dealing with the death, or grieving through it, I pushed it down as far as I could. I eventually tried to overdose twice and ended up in a mental hospital.

It was at this time in my life that I met Eric, my husband. Eric became part of my life during recovery and stood by my side every step of the way. When Eric and I got married, I told him I needed something, WE needed something in our life that was greater than ourselves, we needed Jesus.

It was at this point that I also quit drinking. I’ve actually been sober 4 years now and consistently taking my medication. Eric has given me such love and support through it all and that is what makes much of it possible.

When we started to look for a church, Element was the first one we visited. We left after the first service knowing that was the church we were supposed to attend! I eventually got involved in the women’s bible study where I have grown and learned so much about Jesus and His grace.

Jesus is not the reason my dad hit me; if he really followed Jesus, that never would have happened. Jesus is not the reason I suffer from bipolar disorder. Jesus is not to blame for why I went out of control...the truth is that Jesus loves me and died for me and never stopped pursuing me in and through all my dark places. Though Eric was with me through so much of my recovery, so was Jesus...He is closer than any human being could ever be. I am healed and saved because of what He has done in me.

I love Him and thank Him for bringing me out the other side better and stronger with a truer understanding of who He is and who He is to me. I was originally baptized when I was 10 years old mainly because my best friend was doing it. Today I want to be baptized because I now know what Jesus’ death and resurrection means, it means my salvation, and I want to publicly share with all of you that I believe and trust Jesus Christ.

JASEN TAPIA

Hey there! My name is Jasen Tapia, and I am 20 years old. I grew up in a home that focused on Jesus and I really don't remember not knowing who Jesus was. From a young age I had always believed in God and never doubted His existence. That being said, the beliefs and doctrines that I held were very basic.

I knew Jesus loved me. I grew up hearing and knowing that Jesus died for me...but that was basically it. When I became a teenager, around age 13 or 14, I began to ask myself the question, "why." I would think, "Wait, But why? Why would Jesus die for me? Why...me?" The answer, I would soon learn, would change everything.

Around this time (Jr. High School), I began to set out to find the answers to some of those questions I had been asking myself. I decided to go to a youth group at a newer church in town called Element. I didn't really know anyone there other than the youth pastor, a young guy named James Fairfield. I remember walking into the church building and being completely confused with the layout and had no clue where the other students gathered.

I followed the sound of some strange, chaotic version of a ping pong game up a staircase. I remember being very nervous and so desperately wanting to fit in. When I finally walked into the upstairs area I was greeted by some of the leaders...and then got thrown into my first game of "king pong." I quickly felt at home at this youth group and grew close with the other students...some of which I now consider my greatest friends.

Fast forward another year. I had been learning more about the bible than I could have imagined and realized I had so many more questions than I started with. But I always seemed to come back

to that one question, "Why did Christ die for me?" It was constantly on my mind. I had heard the answer in probably every one of James' sermons...but I just couldn't quite wrap my head around it. Then I heard James' talk about "Agape," God's love. And it clicked, like a light switch.

The understanding of why Jesus died for me wasn't necessarily a concept I hadn't already heard, but in that moment I felt God's love in a way that I never had before. I remember trying to hold back tears. I felt heartbroken, devastated, and at the same time so full of hope and joy. Jesus died for me. Perfect redemption. Not based on anything I had done...and there's nothing I could ever do to earn His love. God chose me, and saved me from sin and death. This changed everything for me. And I realized that I needed to put Jesus in the center of everything because Jesus already was at the center of everything.

In recent years, God is continuing to change me and give me new desires. I began to seek His will in my life and continue to do the same. I've been blessed to have the opportunity to use my passion in photography for multiple ministries. I have been blessed to have many great gospel conversations with people from all walks of life who have had the same questions I once did...even when they don't know that is what they are asking. I am looking forward to the plans God has for me and to grow and learn more about Him every day.

JT TEEL

Hi, My name is Jason Teel (JT). I am 37 years old and was born May 15, 1979, in Santa Maria/Orcutt CA. I am a proud father of two amazing kids who are the energy of my soul. My daughter, Riley, is 7 years old and my son, Ryan, is 18 years old. I am blessed to have my entire family live here on the Central Coast.

I can remember growing up not having any involvement with the church or exposure to God until I went to High School. Attending a Catholic school was my first introduction to religion, and I wasn't quite sure what to make of it all. None the less, it got my "wheels turning" about God and what a relationship with Him looked like. But it wouldn't be until last year when I would come to understand what that really meant.

As I entered adulthood after High School I thought I was invincible. I thought adulthood would be easy because I could do what I wanted and make my own choices. Little did I know I was about to climb onto the roller coaster of life with no ounce of control.

For the next sixteen years I rode this uncontrollable roller coaster; everything I did made my life worse. It was a ride filled with no real direction and poor, selfish choices; choices that would benefit me and only me. The choices I made hurt myself and others emotionally. I was surrounded by negativity at work, home, and just about everywhere I seemed to turn which left no room for any sort of peace.

During the really bad times, I would cry out to a God that I didn't really know and ask for help. When things eventually did get better, I would dive back into my own self-centered life and have no need for God. I would return to my destructive ways and toxic relationships. The only good thing that came out of my mistakes

are my amazing kids; I am forever grateful that God brought so much good out of those relationships.

In all that I did and believed, I truly thought I was above Christ in my ways, my power, my thinking. As this ride of life was getting faster and even more out of control, I felt lost and hopeless. I felt myself crying out loud for this ride to just stop, I wanted off; It was time for things to change.

I started to attend church here at Element in June 2015. As I sat down one Sunday morning, I could feel this overwhelming sense of peace within me. I was greeted by so many new people along with others I already knew. As I closed my eyes in prayer, I could feel the roller coaster coming to a stop. It was at this moment I felt God grab my hand and help me off. Jesus grabbed me.

God opened my eyes to what Jesus did on my behalf and the great news that He cleared my sinful slate. I was shown how Jesus Christ is truly above my ways, my power and my thinking! He opened my eyes to the relationships I have hurt because I made my life all about me and my selfish ways. Today I respond and live truly differently because of Christ's work in my life.

My walk with God since then has been amazing. He has replaced my selfishness with a firm foundation of His love and Grace. He's redeemed all the negativity in my life with positive blessings that humble me. He has given me a new passion to love and forgive as He does. He has given me the strength and direction that I never dreamed possible. I could not be more thankful than I am today for the relationship I now have with Christ.

Jesus is my Savior, my redeemer. He is good, and I owe Him my life. Baptism to me is the promise to try to live, love and forgive as Christ does in everything we do. I'm excited for this next chapter in my life. I love you all.

SHANE PIPER

My name is Shane Douglas Piper. I am 56 years old. I was born and raised in Idaho Falls, Idaho. I was raised with both of my parents, two brothers and one sister. Today, my parents are still married 65 years later.

I grew up going to church with my mom, who would take us to Sunday school. As I got older, I stopped going and didn't go back to church for a long time. When I did start going back, it was for my kids and for show, but I never really gave myself fully to Christ. Even though I hadn't surrendered my life to Jesus, I did always feel a strong pull in the direction of God, which is what I believe led me here to Element.

Over the last year I have learned more about Jesus and His call in my life as a father to my children, a husband to my wife, a friend to my neighbors, and a child to my God. Today I understand that Jesus gave Himself for me, and He leads me into new and real life. Today I have fully surrendered my life into Jesus' capable hands to love, lead, guide and save me. I still have my faults and struggles, but I know my God is bigger than those faults and struggles.

I was baptized as a teenager, because of pressure from my parents. Today, I choose baptism to rededicate myself to Christ in front of my church family. I feel like I have a home here at Element, and I really like the message, and direction of this Church community.

ANNETTE PIPER

My name is Annette Meireles Piper. I am a Mother of three adult sons and share the love of my husband's three adult sons. I was born and raised here on the beautiful Central Coast of California in Orcutt/Santa Maria. I was raised in a two parent home, each with very different cultures, values, and beliefs.

My father was raised on the East Coast in New Bedford, Massachusetts by his traditional Portuguese family, who immigrated here and did not speak English. Quite the opposite, my mother was born and raised here, in Santa Maria, like her mother and grandmother before her. So, my home growing up was the East Coast verses West Coast, and yes, it was a bad rap song.

Baptism was chosen for me by my father as an infant, following suit of his faith and belief, along with my first holy communion at a private school. My mother had no religious beliefs and agreed to honor my father's wishes.

My father grew up being an altar boy and attended church with his family. My mother did not believe in organized religion and did not attend church as a child or as an adult; however, she reported believing in God, but never explained where her belief came from (or really what she believed in). Interestingly, it was my mother who had me on my knees praying at bedtime every night as a child, "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, and if I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take." She would also quote verses from the Bible sometimes, which always surprised me, because I never saw her read the Bible and always wondered how she knew certain verses, but I never asked her, either.

ANNETTE PIPER (CONTINUED)

Over the years, I attended various churches with friends, but not with my family. I don't remember ever feeling like I "fit in" with any church, because I carried so much guilt and shame from all the growing pains of being human. Sin in my life made me feel that I was not worthy of belonging anywhere and should instead be shunned. The mantra of unworthiness played on repeat, like a record skipping in my brain..."not worthy, not worthy" for many years. My shame kept me from finding a church home, and I allowed my fear as an excuse to live my life away from God.

It wasn't until last year in December, when my sister and her three children moved here from Missouri, and she began church shopping in the area for a new church family and said, "Hey, we think we found our church home at Element. You should come check it out." So, my husband and I agreed to check out Element last December and attended a service with my sister and her children.

We both felt welcome with our first step in the door. A smiling greeter, and people saying, "Good morning," and "Welcome to Element." This felt so warm and welcoming. There was a genuine sense of authentic human kindness and connection around us. The music started and I joined the song and tears began to stream down my face, because I could feel an energy and love for Jesus all around me and noticed my shame gremlins were gone, and I was at peace. This was such a beautiful feeling!

As a result of our welcome, we began attending weekly. I continued to cry for months during Sunday service, and still occasionally do, as I listen to the powerful message of Jesus and Aaron's delivery of truth weekly, as I sit with humility.

Although, I have one confession from that first service we attended and I heard Aaron's message from the Gospel. I remember thinking, "Um, he talks really fast, and I don't know if I can keep up with him?" My ears caught up with his pace, and I soaked it all in like a sponge on a wet counter. As he spoke, I enjoyed his great sense of humor and "tell it like it is" character, but more importantly, his message about Jesus. I loved everything about the service and immediately knew I had to come back, and we've been with Element ever since.

I love that Element is ALL about Jesus and embraces the love of Jesus. Shame was dealt with in the person of Jesus, He paid for sin with His death and resurrection. Everything that kept me from connecting to God and others, the sin that kept calling me unworthy, Jesus took upon Himself for us. My life of unworthiness has been surrendered and exchanged for Jesus' life of acceptance and grace. All that I am is found in Him.

It is here at Element I feel connected, comfortable, and at peace to celebrate and praise God without any shame attachments. It's because of the direction and focus of Element on the person and work of Jesus that has opened eyes to live in His new life; this is why I have chosen to be baptized.

I look forward to my baptism, membership, and being of service beyond myself to the heart of Element: Jesus!