

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.

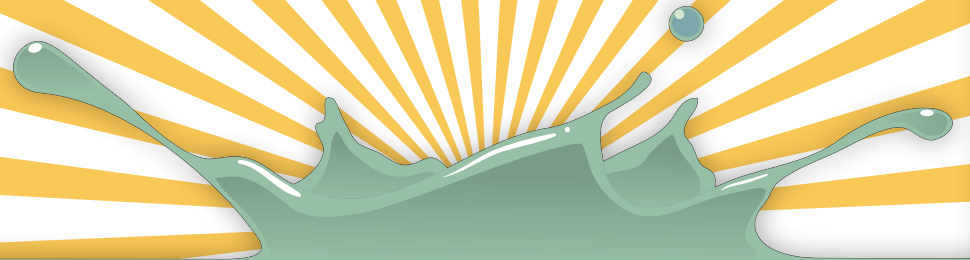
We also have the hope that one day you too will come to the saving knowledge of trusting in Jesus with your life. It makes all the difference in the world.

Aaron



OUR STORIES

May 15th, 2022



ELEMENT
christian church

BREANNA BRADY

Hi! My name is Breanna, but I go by Bre. I was born in Visalia California, grew up in Bakersfield, but moved to Santa Maria a few years ago. My parents and I visited a few churches when we first moved here and ended up staying at Element because of how welcomed we all felt.

Church has always been a big part of mine and my family's lives. I grew up going to events like Vacation Bible School and remember trying to memorize verses and behave in a certain way because I thought that's what it meant to follow Jesus. I don't think I realized that there was a difference between having my own relationship with God compared to just doing what my parents did.

I remember coming to a place of understanding my own faith in Jesus when I was 7 and at a Children's Church event. There was an entire message about accepting Christ and at the end they asked if anyone was ready to accept Christ themselves. I remember feeling ready and they prayed with me.

I've tried my best since then to continue growing in my relationship with Jesus along with friends that believe in Him (and adults who help guide and teach me). I now try not to just go with the flow or follow the crowd when I see something negative happening or being talked about. I also know that having my own relationship with God, going to church, and learning as much as I can about the Gospel has a purpose. These things help change my behavior and affect the choices I make every day.

I am now 14 and getting ready to start High School next year. I am very excited to start the Summer by declaring my love and faith in Christ and being baptized in front of my family, friends, and church.

ADRIANA MARION

My name is Adriana, and I was born and raised right here in Santa Maria. I have been attending Element for 4 months and when I heard about baptisms, I knew now it was finally time to stop holding on to my old life and surrender fully to Jesus. Attending Element has been something I enjoy doing and have felt blessed by.

In my heart my story starts with a desire for a fatherly relationship. When I was a child my dad was not present. I grew up feeling abandoned and confused. I was raised in a religious household that introduced me to my Heavenly Father, but I admit I was still a troubled teen for many years; my troubles carried over into adulthood.

I recently realized that all along, I was searching for the love I did not feel like I had growing up. As I got older, I was able to realize that the only place I would truly find refuge was in the person of Jesus. With God there is a comfort, safety, and a right-minded hope that comes from knowing the Gospel.

Understanding who God is better helped me to see how important it was for me to let go of my past, embrace His eternal offering of grace, and begin this new way of life. I believe Jesus has made me stronger by trusting in Him, as well as bringing me joy and growth in my knowledge of Him.

I chose to be baptized today in front of all of you because I am confident in God's strength, that I can continue this forward movement in life with Him as my God and my Redeemer.

ENI RODRIGUEZ

Hello, my name is Eni and I was born and raised in Salinas, CA. I began to watch Element's service online in December 2021. After my first time watching, I immediately became interested in the church. I enjoyed the music, the welcoming announcements and I especially enjoyed the sermon.

Growing up, I never practiced any religious rituals. My parents believed in God but never preached about Him to my siblings and me. We'd only attend church a couple of times a year for special occasions. However, my mother did teach me to always be grateful to God for my food and to pray to Him when I was troubled.

In my 20's and 30's my main focus in life was my career, family, and friends. I had a passion for helping others. I kept myself busy working for the community and being there for loved ones. I went through many challenges and heartaches, but I always seemed to get through them without acknowledging God. During this time, I would hold grudges, not forgive people when they would hurt me, and I dealt with addictions.

Two years ago, I went through some difficult situations that caused my mental and physical health to decline. I faced traumas that caused me to feel depressed, angry, and lonely. I was angry at the world, my family, friends, and even with God. I blamed God for everything I was going through. I felt He wanted me to suffer. I couldn't understand why He was allowing me to feel this pain when I had always loved unconditionally. For about a year, I had secluded myself from everyone and everything I loved. All I wanted to do was sleep.

During these dark times, I expressed to a close friend how angry I felt with God. She told me "Friend, don't blame God, blame the Devil. The Devil is the one causing all this darkness in your life and

he wants you to blame God. You are allowing him to win by being angry with God." She advised me to get on my knees and have a conversation with God. That night, on my knees, I cried out my troubles to God. I begged Him for help. After crying my heart out, I felt a warm feeling that felt as if God had hugged me. I suddenly felt safe and loved. These emotions inspired me to learn more about Jesus.

After that night, I wanted and needed to become closer to God. I started my relationship with Jesus and this started my healing process. I began to open my Bible, a Bible that I had for 15 years but never took the time to read. I started to look up words in the Bible's concordance and would read verses that mentioned the word I had in mind. I searched the internet for movies and videos that were related to God. I began to ask people about their church and religious beliefs. This is how I found Element and immediately felt connected. Element is a good place where I can grow in my relationship with Jesus.

Today, I still struggle, but the struggle is different. My faith and trust in God becomes stronger every day as I continue to learn and build my relationship with Him. I've learned that Jesus Christ is our Savior and died for humanity. As my relationship with Jesus Christ grows, I am learning how to forgive, have patience, and love others with no judgment. I have chosen to surrender to Jesus Christ. I am thankful for the opportunity I have been given to be part of His family.

MATT TRACY

My name is Matthew, I'm 43, and was born and raised in Chicago. Faith wasn't a huge thing growing up. I think I may have been baptized before as a kid, but I am actually unsure. One side of my family was Catholic, and one side was Lutheran. I didn't have a clear understanding of who God was, or why I need Him. Nothing was consistent, so I don't recall having much of a belief in Christ early on.

I lived in that the Chicago area until 1999 when I decided to join the Marines, which sent me out to California for bootcamp and my first duty station. I spent time in Okinawa Japan and was deployed twice to Iraq. During that time, I struggled with suicidal thoughts, and became addicted to opioids and alcohol to cope with these struggles.

I moved out of SoCal after I got out of the Marines in the end of 2006 and moved to the Central Coast, but I still struggled with the same issues. After a couple of unsuccessful suicide attempts, and a couple divorces, I slowly started to look to God by searching for a church to attend. I started to get my addiction under control and stopped drinking for a few years, but didn't stick with church because I always felt unwelcomed and judged heavily. How could God or other church goers care about me with some of the things I've done/had to do during my military career? I couldn't make sense of it and stopped trying.

I still worked toward turning my life around little by little by getting mental health help from the VA for myself. Shortly after that I met Stephanie, now my wife. She was always trying to get me to come to Element with her, but never pushed me too hard. She just kept inviting me. She finally got me to come to the Christmas Eve service of 2016, after I had proposed to her earlier

that day. The music got me hooked just like she said it would. I've been loving the community and this church family ever since. I never once felt judged, I was always welcomed, and became excited to come to church for once in my life. Soon after, I moved to Santa Maria to help her take care of her grandmother, and so we could attend regularly.

My faith and understanding of God has definitely grown over the recent years, but part of me still never fully surrendered until I literally had no choice. At the end of last year, I was battling an extreme case of Covid-19 and was faced with being put on life saving measures. I remember praying fiercely the night they told me I was going to be placed on the ventilator. I FaceTimed my wife, she prayed with me over the phone and I knew that's the moment I needed to fully surrender myself to Jesus and His will.. Long story short, after being in the hospital for 63 days, I see it was truly God's hand in my situation that saved my life. I know that it's a miracle I'm still here, and I thank God every single day. I look forward to everyday that I'm blessed with to spend more time with my wife, family and friends.

I have a renewed sense of purpose, of belonging and excitement that I'm eager to use however He leads. I've always done what I could to help other veterans, but the HOW wasn't ever very clear before now. I currently feel that tug to help bring other veterans to Christ, so they can know the Gospel and learn to trust in Him in all aspects of their lives just as I have done. So that they can know it IS possible for everyone, even us stubborn vets that believe we're too far gone.

My life was saved for a reason, and I never want to take that for granted again. I'm excited to truly live for Christ, together with my

MATT TRACY (CONTINUED)

wife and our community. My baptism today is a public declaration of that. Everything I've been through has led me to this place. I was lost and broken, and now I feel like I'm really a new version of me (with the same joint pain unfortunately, but I guess I can't have everything!)

Thank you to everyone that's supported me on this journey! I'm excited for what's to come! This is just a new beginning.