

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.

OUR STORIES

November 15, 2009



ELEMENT
christian church

Donald Weiting

...it was more like Jesus was slowly nudging me, calling me home, and bringing me in.

Hello everyone, my name is Donald Weiting and I am 28 years old. Believe it or not I was actually born in Santa Maria. I started attending Element a while ago when my fiancé, Laura, went one Sunday when I was too busy to join her. She told me she thought it was something I would enjoy. She was right, a church without all the politics that simply preaches about Jesus and goes by the book. You know, the Good Book? I think I've always been "the good son" in many ways. I was raised with good values; though religion and faith were never forced on me as a child. Needless to say, I didn't know much about God besides the fact that He was there, somewhere, watching over us.

A lot of people I know were raised Christian, or had a life-changing moment when they really allowed Christ control of their lives. For me it was a slow journey that I didn't even realize I was on. Through a few circumstances I gave my life to Christ around the age of 15 or 16...but the funny thing is I didn't realize I had until I was about 17 (so pinpointing the date it happened is hard... it just did). It was youth group, great friends, awesome youth leaders, and wonderful parents who allowed me to grow in my faith and share it openly.

I was going to youth group, but in the beginning it was more of a social hour than a bible study. I kept hearing these things about Christ that continued to trickle into my heart. One year, when I was 16, I was asked to lead and plan one of the youth retreats. I was more than happy to do so, and had a blast doing it. It was a wonderful feeling being able to teach God's word to people. About a year later I was at school talking to someone about Christ and trying to use passages in the bible to help them out with a situation they were going through, nothing major...just a silly high school break up. I talked to this guy for awhile, prayed with him, and then it hit me, I BELIEVE. This was not just something I saying to others because I had been taught it; I truly did believe.

I was a true believer and doing good things in God's name (and not just doing good things for religion's sake), I think there is a big difference. I never had that awing moment when I asked Jesus to "come into my life." It was more like Jesus was slowly nudging me, calling me home, and bringing me in.

Part of that slow roll also leads to the same reason why I've never been baptized. I have always had this dream of getting baptized in the Jordan River in Israel. I have these high expectations but have never found the right time or place. But now I'm in a different boat. I know I shouldn't let my high expectations control baptism when this is what the Lord is leading me to do, and this is now the time to do it. Don't get me wrong, a pool with all my friends at Element is not second best. I am glad you are all here. I just thought a trip to foreign country with all of you would be more fun.

My faith has always been strong and I pray constantly (1 Thessalonians 5:17); but like every person on the planet, my life can be hit and miss. My Christian activity has always fluctuated, and I think it's healthy to keep yourself active in your faith. All the way back in jr. high and high school I never missed youth group or a retreat. After I "grew up" I even tried my own Bible study (not like a cult leader or anything), and after that I tried to find a church I could enjoy. It wasn't until coming to Element that I found what I was looking for in a church. Now, with a new church, getting married, becoming a father, and so much other wonderfulness (and craziness) in my life, I think it's about time I get meself baptized. I love Superman, the man of steal who can rescue and save. He stays on the straight and narrow when the entire world crumbles around him. As I said before, I've always been "The Good Son," and I, like Superman, have tried to stay on the straight and narrow...but for us mere mortals that is impossible without the life of Christ living in and through us.

Now, with my return to church and becoming more active in my Bible reading, I am having more "religious" conversations with others...and I find myself being more Christ-like because of what Jesus is doing in me. I am even more open with my love in God and trying to share that with others. I am becoming more open and trying to spread God's love and word more freely with others instead of keeping it to myself.

I guess you could say that I am becoming who I was always meant to be.

Julie Chrisman

He has given me a new passion to live for Him every day in every way.

My name is Julie Chrisman – I'm 45 and I was born in Santa Barbara. I came to Element because I was grieving and suffering from a great deal of shame from my recent divorce. My kids were invited to attend with a friend they knew from school, and I knew that as much pain as we were all in, my kids and I needed to be in fellowship with the body of Christ.

I was raised in a home that attended church regularly, but to me Jesus was a gentle guy who was always carrying sheep. My parents divorced when I was eleven, and then Jesus became the one who rescued me from the pain of my parents' divorce. I walked down the church aisle one Sunday morning as a kid, and was baptized thinking I was now a Christian. It was not until many, many tumultuous years later with much heartache weighing me down, that I was confronted with the truth that all of my own measures to fix myself were not working. It was through a series of events that the Lord began to draw me to Him, and I was face to face with the truth that I could do nothing to make up for my poor choices and broken relationships. I could never be good enough! It was then that the Holy Spirit started bringing true believers into my life who demonstrated His love to me, who walked me through His word and shared the good news of Jesus doing for me what I could never do for myself. I exchanged my empty dead works for His truth of everlasting life and placed my trust in His complete and finished work on the cross.

Since that time, the Lord has taken my guilt and shame and replaced it with a firm foundation of His love and grace. It is actually meant for me, and meant to pour out to those around me. He has given me a passion to help other women who are bearing the weight of their past or present, and to lead them to the truth of freedom, healing, and true forgiveness in Christ. He has given me a new passion to live for Him every day in every way. There have been many challenges along the road since beginning new life in Christ, and Jesus has been there through every storm and every challenge. He celebrates all of life's joys and gives me the courage to stand when I want to give in. Walking with Christ has not immunized me from effects of sin in the world we live in, as I am learning

to live yet another new and unexpected chapter in my life as a single mom after 17 years of marriage. It is not a path I would have chosen for myself, but even in this time God has proven once again that He is faithful and His promise to never leave me or forsake me is a comforting truth that I can trust.

Shaye Reed

I'm thankful that He loves me and I am His child.

My name is Shaye Gabriella Reed. I am 10 years old and was born on April 27, 1999, at Marian Hospital, Santa Maria, CA. Since my birth I have always been surrounded by family who loves me – my mother Heather, my grandparents – Tom and Kimberly, my Aunt Christy, my Uncle Michael, and my great-grandmother Jannette. I also have a brother, Micah who is 7 years old, and Dasiah who is 2 years old.

I was dedicated when I was three months old. At my baby dedication, I was given my first Bible from a friend. My mom would read to me from my little Bible and other story books and pray with me; and my grandmother would read books at her house and pray over me when I was little as well.

My family would take me to church through the years, and as I got older I was able to go to Sunday school and learn more about God.

My grandmother remembers when I was about 3 years old that I told her I saw God's eyes looking at me one morning when I was in bed. I don't remember this at all, but she said that I explained to her that His eyes were smiling at me.

I accepted Jesus into my heart as my Lord and Savior when I was about 7 years old. My grandmother, and I have talked about what it means to "ask" Jesus to come into our lives and our hearts many times. My family has bought me books to read (books for girls that talk about faith and Jesus) and I also have several Bibles I like to read. I just received a prayer journal, and have started journaling and sketching, because I love art and I love to draw different things.

I have been attending Element Christian Church with my family for over a year now. I love the Kids Program on Sunday mornings and I also love to come on Sunday nights because I enjoy Aaron's teaching. He makes me laugh and I learn a lot of stuff.

When I heard that Element was going to be having baptisms in November, I knew that I wanted to get baptized. My grandmother gave me some information about children getting baptized.

I was reading that water baptism is a command of God, just as prayer, worship, and faithfulness are commands of God. Baptism symbolizes the salvation that I've already received when I asked Jesus to come into my heart and life. Being baptized is a promise to always try to live for Jesus. Being baptized is an important step in my life and I want to do it.

I feel proud to have Jesus in my life because many people don't know Him personally. I'm thankful that He loves me and I am His child. Being baptized is a special day for me.

Andrew Carlberg

...I know that I truly love Jesus. I want to show His love to the world.

My name is Andrew Carlberg (or formally Puntorno-Carlberg) and I'm 17. I began going to Element right when it started.

As a young child I went to another church's Sunday School, but I absolutely hated it. I couldn't stand getting shoved into the brightly colored room with Bible books where Noah was smiling with the giraffes as He watched everyone drown. My parents would always say, "Oh, it's good for you," or "it'll bring you closer to God." To me God was a fictional character in a very well planned book. As soon as I could get out of Sunday school I ran.

Little did I know that I was running straight into a bigger room with bland walls and some guy up front telling me how to live my life. I was around nine years old and still very confused as to what the point was to sitting in these chairs. I spent the next couple years drawing on the envelopes in the seat back in front of me.

After awhile my uncle (formally known as Pastor Aaron) began doing his own service called X-Service. This atmosphere was what I could get used to. A bunch of people around my age (or older) gathered to listen to a more humorous and intriguing sermon. I thought everything was getting better until my dad said, "Why don't you go over there and sit by James and the older kids." Heck no! I felt mighty comfortable next to my dad's arm and I had no intention on leaving. With time I was convinced to make friends around the church. Slowly I became comfortable and started attending youth group on Wednesdays for two reasons. 1. It was fun to be around the people, and 2. my dad always took me out for dinner.

Well, it wasn't long until news started spreading about Winter Camp. I had never been to one, but it sounded like a fun time. I said to my dad, "Sign me up!" Once I arrived I knew it would be fun just by the surroundings, but when we met on the first night disappointment came. I have to go to church at Winter Camp? It was a good thing the snow made dealing with church an okay deal. Okay, that is, until the last night.

The last night was held on the mountain in a huge room. I can't even remember what the speaker was talking about, but man I was crying like those tears had been building up for years. After the sermon was over, we began our ride alone down the mountain in the ski lift. Going down I was still crying and listening to the laughing kids on the lifts behind me. It hit me then. I knew who God was because of how I felt then, and I wanted to reach out to Him.

My uncle started Element and I wanted to do all I could to help the church grow. I volunteered as much as I could; even though, I didn't have any real skills to help. When Youth Group came I saw my opportunity to help. Even though I wasn't all too useful, I knew I loved God and that I wanted to serve him. I eventually started playing guitar for Youth Group. After some heart to heart with James and others from Youth Group, I was ready to make the next step and get baptized.

Today I call myself a Christian, and I know that I truly love Jesus. I want to show His love to the world.

Kylie Fredrickson

I've been so affected by God's gentle push for change in my life.

Hi! My name is Kylie Fredrickson and I am nineteen years old. I was born Santa Barbara but moved to Santa Maria when I was just three. Ever since I can remember I have gone to church. I remember always being dressed up on Sunday mornings and loved answering the questions about Jonah and the big fish in Sunday school. I started coming to Element once in awhile when Aaron first began, but really started to come consistently within the last few months. The period in between growing up in the church and coming to Element was really all over the place. I stopped going to church around middle school simply because life got busy. But when I got into the last two years of high school, I suddenly found myself going to various youth groups to get a little taste of Jesus at a different age. I liked it a lot. I like being part of something where I could be real and open with people, learning about things much bigger than ourselves.

The actual moment I gave myself over to Christ was when I was six years old. I remember sitting with my grandma in my living room and her telling me, "You have to accept Jesus into your heart so He can live in you." I remember closing my eyes and asking Jesus to be in my heart. The actual moment was quite simple, but I think I actually started living like Jesus was Lord of my life about a year ago. I made the decision that I was going to live for something else besides this world and myself.

The movement from a young church girl to an investigative young adult was so seamless. God placed people in my life who were into Him! He was putting me into situations in which I couldn't help but see His glory and goodness. I was able to go with a youth group to Mexico in the summer of '07 and really let my heart grow for the poor and grow for missions. I was building friendships with people who were also seeking God, so we were able to grow in that together. After I left high school I was able to get involved with a group on Allan Hancock's campus called InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. Through the fellowship I was able to learn so much about God. I've been to conferences where I've seen hearts broken and mended, I've seen people on campus in a different light, as sweet children of God, and most importantly I was able to participate in a Urban project through the nation-wide organization. While on the urban project God stretched my love for people even further.

I've been so affected by God's gentle push for change in my life. He has surrounded me with quality people who are working to see the Kingdom of God come. He has put new perspectives in me that affect how I see and treat people. God really has used the last two-three years of my life to bring me out to the sunshine.

I'm excited to see where God uses me in my life. He really has blessed me beyond measure. Because of that I feel like I am called to serve Him unconditionally. Right now I don't know where my life is going or where God will use my gifts; what I do know is that I was always meant to do this all. I was always meant to be in the place I am today, I was always meant to have the people in my life IN MY LIFE. And with that knowledge I know that I will be destined to fulfill one specific calling that God has placed for me. I have so deeply felt the love of Christ and the huge blessings on my life from Him. I think it will be beautiful to watch it come full circle and grow deeper into a oneness with Him.

Jean Morse

“Mommy, are we Christians?” Little did I know that that question would change my life.

My name is Jean Morse and this ‘story writing’ is nerve-racking. My story.....well, I have been a Christian for some time now..... but just have never been baptized. I believe I have always loved God – but I just didn’t know Him. In my childhood we really never went to church except for holidays here or there. The first church service I can actually remember was spoken in Latin (Guess I just dated myself! I did all the catechism and confirmation classes, but that was all formalized and repetitive prayer with lots of fear thrown in (the only thing I remember about it was being scared). I always longed for the God I loved.

I moved to California some years ago as a single mom with two children and really no other family. Life was rough and I was very scared and lonely. I remember being so desperate one day and cried out to God that if He really existed then “please show me.” And God seems to always hear the cry so, here is my story.....

My 10 yr. old daughter was attending a small church in someone’s house with a friend she had made down the street. I, of course, could never go to something so intimate (I am simply too shy). One day I picked her up at the bus stop and she asked me “Mommy, are we Christians?” Little did I know that that question would change my life.

I thought “wow” and told her, “Well, I think so – we are “Catholic” and believe in Jesus – so I guess so.” It really bothered me though; I realized there was something I didn’t know and understand (which was actually a someone). I used to walk with my daughter’s friend’s mother so I told her about my dilemma and started asking lots of questions. In the meantime, I got a new co-worker, who guess what...(yep) was a Christian.

I continued to walk with my daughter’s friend’s mother (sounds like a mouthful every time), and we would have lunch and talk about “Jesus.” Her husband would come at lunchtime and bring his Bible and answer my many, many (MANY) questions. One day I asked myself, “Do you believe this?” I remember the moment when my heart cried out “YES!” It just all made sense. Life made sense and at that moment I realized, “I am not alone and will never be alone again.” All of my desperate fear was gone and the comfort of our savior began.

Right at the same time my daughter’s little church moved into an actual room at the Vandenberg Inn, not a house any longer, and her friend’s dad invited me to go. I was scared to go but stepped out of my comfort zone and walked into a loving (put you under their wings), very small church where the pastor was going verse by verse through the book of Romans. What a blessing indeed!

I now look back at my life and remember being a small child with a mother who would read to me from this iddy bitty, small, square book about God. I remember the idea that God is everywhere, knows everything, and that He made me. In that moment, as a small child, I know I loved Him, but it took all those years for me to know Him and His name is Jesus.

I am amazed to look back and see His hand on me the whole of my life, through every struggle and journey. I now see the people and places He took me though and into, to get me to Him. I am truly blessed.

Melissa Maxwell

...and know that His plan for me was to bring me back to where I started.

My name is Melissa Maxwell and I started at Element just a couple of months ago. To understand how I ended up at Element would be better told by how I started my path of learning about the Lord.

I was born in Los Angeles and moved to Santa Maria in the 5th grade. At that point my best friend's mom, Jean Morse (my second mom as I call her) was the one who opened the doors to learning about the Jesus and that going to church could be a positive part of my life. When I would stay over at her house on a Saturday night there was one stipulation she insisted on, "I could stay the night as long as we got up in time for church the next morning." I never did go to church before that point in my life so it was a new experience. A couple of years later at that same church my best friend and I both gave our lives to Jesus.

As I grew older I continued to attend church, but not on a regular basis. I certainly kept my faith throughout my life, but as time went by and I grew older, moved away, got married and had children, life seemed to get busier and busier while following the Lord seemed to be put on the back burner. At one point I found myself not making Jesus, or the life Christ calls me to be a part of a priority.

My husband and I would only attend church a couple times a month and did not bring God into our everyday lives. I always knew this was not how I wanted to live my life, but I always seemed to have an excuse that I was too busy or had other obligations that kept me from walking the path I should be walking.

A couple of months ago my family and I moved here to Santa Maria, a homecoming for me and a new place for my husband and children. In moving back I was able to reconnect with Jean and reminisced about the days growing up. We talked about how our lives were different now. She asked if we wanted to try the church she attended, Element. I laughed and told her that we were looking for a new church so we would give it a try. The first time we attended Element, both my husband and I felt welcome and at ease there. We have been going to Element for a couple of months now.

For myself, I have started to feel as if the Lord is taking a front seat in my life again. I am rediscovering how to follow a path as a Christian and know in my heart that I am moving in a positive direction.

As I look back to the beginning of how I started my life as a Christian and how God has now brought me back to a place where I am rediscovering His path, I feel as if I have come around in a full circle. I have to chuckle because I began my journey to know the Lord due to His work through Jean opening the door to the possibility of a Christian life, and now I am rediscovering that same path by Jean opening the doors to a new church.

It is amazing what Jesus can do in your life through the Christians that trust in Him.

I thank God for the blessings in my life and know that His plan for me was to bring me back to where I started, to know Him and keep the faith in my life.

Cameron Stanley

What a great privilege that God allows us to partner with Him.

First and foremost, my name is Cameron Stanley. I was born May 12, 1994 at Marian Medical Center (in Santa Maria).

I was baptized when I was 1 month old (but obviously I have to believe people on that one because I sure don't remember it). I used to think that "just because I'm a Christian," my life is going to be perfect (that's funny to me now).

When I was five my parents were told that I had an abscess in my neck; "abscess" never sounds good under any circumstances. The doctors performed surgery on me, but when they went looking for it, it had disappeared. The doctors said it was a miracle, but my mom said it was JESUS. This helped me to start to believe.

When I was younger I said I was a Christian but now I do not believe I was. I started attending First Christian Church, and there I met James. The way he explained everything made it a whole lot easier for me to understand Christianity and Jesus. He was really the person, other than JESUS, who made me understand that if I believed in Him and truly gave my life to Him, I would be saved. I began to understand that everything would turn out to be "all right" even if I didn't understand what "all right" was, because JESUS knows what "all right" is.

When Aaron and the elders had the idea of Element my parents were some of the first people to join up. I still had commitments at a different church and did not really understand why my parents would go somewhere else. Then my parents said that Element would be starting up a youth group. I was kind of cautious about it because I did not know who would be teaching. Then I found out that James was going to teach it and I was all for the youth ministry.

I've been attending Element (pretty much) since the beginning, and since I've been going I have gained new relationships and built others as well. Aaron is the best minister because he tells you how it is without over complicating it (and I swear he didn't pay me to write that). I do not know of any other minister like that. James is a good teacher because he can explain JESUS and His message to teenagers like a teenager and

that has really helped me. I say good things about Aaron and James but JESUS is the best, I know it is He who loved me and sought me and it is He who used the people He did to reach me.

Thanks to so many people my relationship with Christ has gotten stronger and I can now hear God calling my name. I can be part of His ministry, and help others who don't know Jesus to get to know Jesus. What a great privilege that God allows us to partner with Him!

"That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

Romans 10:9

Richard Weiser

I am no longer alone and it feels strange, and hard, but it also feels good and right.

My name is Richard Weiser and I really have no idea how to relate my story. This is really one of the hardest things I have ever done but I also believe it is my necessary next step in walking into the life God has called me to live.

I was born in Glendale, California on April Fools Day 1964. My mom is Dutch and my father is German and that makes for people who are very self-sufficient...which means I spent most of my life alone (and by alone I mean REALLY alone). My family moved to San Francisco when I was 5, then to Hillsborough when I was 7, then to Pismo Beach when I was 13; I never had time to put down roots and connect to people. Being alone is simply how I lived my entire life because it is what I learned from a very young age.

I never even had a chance to know or connect with God because I grew up in a home that had no "spiritual" emphasis at all. I never knew anything about God or Jesus Christ. There was just one time that I can remember that my mother took me to Synagogue (as she is Jewish, which I guess is supposed to make me Jewish as well). I don't remember much of what happened at Synagogue, I only know it was my half brother's bar mitzvah.

As I got older the only things I had that were my own were my sorrow in my loneliness. It became natural for me to push people away so I could stay alone. When I met Christians I would mock them and I would tell them there was no such thing as God (that they were alone). It is odd because I now realize no one was ever meant to do life alone.

Don't get me wrong, there were times that I thought I would "try God," and if you asked me a few months ago I would have told you I was saved like 20 times; but as far as I know, none of them were real. I would simply slip right back into my belief that God was not real (and if He were real, then He did not care about me).

4 years ago I ended up in a bar fight (not at all like in the movies because it was not fun). This fight has caused a lot of issues for my life that I am still working through. At that time I quit smoking while doing 30 plus days in jail, but God also used it to bring me to a new place in my life. Because my negativity about life, people, God, and everything was so bad one of the people who reached out to me the most simply washed his hands of me and said he was finally done. I had to move again and ended up Tennessee.

I have hit bottom a number of times, but if bottom has a bottom I swear I was there in Tennessee. I was completely alone again, worried about my legal troubles from the bar fight, and completely broke. I went to a Baptist church to try and get some food as they were having a Wednesday night dinner. They very graciously fed me and got me some groceries so I decided to stay for their service.

It was strange because it was the same message I have heard before about Jesus, God, saving the lost and the hurting...but something spoke to me this time. I left thinking about Jesus and what He actually offers people in their lives. I was at my very bottom and I cried out, "Jesus come into my life, I want to put my trust in you." It wasn't the most elegant of prayers but it was heartfelt and honest, and God looks at our hearts and always hears the cry.

So today I am a 45 year old man but a 2 month old reborn baby. I am still wetting my diapers but beginning to grow up. My salvation is not like some of the other stories I have heard. I do believe in Jesus but I haven't felt His touch as others describe it...but...I am learning and feeling something more of him as the days go by. I am actually reading my Bible (if you can believe it) and getting baptized because Jesus calls me to do it. I have a friend that I am doing everything I can to NOT push away (he is the one who helped me get back to California and to Element). Things are much better now, but I feel I could be kicked to the curb in an instant if it were not for my faith in our Lord. 45 years of living one way is a lot to overcome and set straight, but I believe Jesus can do it.

I have walked alone so long and have finally come to realize that we were NEVER meant to walk alone; Jesus has always wanted to walk with me, guide me, and love me. It is actually hard to let Him, but it does get easier as I now can dimly see how all through my life He has been pursuing me and I have been running away...but like a good dad He never stopped, and He has grabbed a hold of me and brought me home.

I am not saying my faith is perfect, but I am like that guy that talked to Jesus about healing his son and said in Mark 9:24, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" I really do finally believe; I now simply need His grace daily to help me overcome all the baggage of my life.

I am no longer alone and it feels strange, and hard, but it also feels good and right.