

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 2, 2010



ELEMENT
christian church

Jason Cassaro

I find enjoyment in serving the Lord.

My name is Jason Cassaro and I am 24 years old.

My journey with God began at a very early age; however, it was not until a few years ago that I (or God in me) really started deepening my faith. As I grew up, I didn't really go to church, but I went to Pacific Christian school from preschool through part of fourth grade. It was during detention (yes, isn't that great) my kindergarten year that my teacher asked me if I had accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior. I hadn't, so she asked if I wanted to. God moved my heart in such a way that I turned my life over to Christ. My teacher explained how Jesus had died for my sins and what it looked like to be a follower of Christ. I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my life and to give me a new heart.

I remember feeling different; that I wasn't on my own and that I was now a part of something bigger. I felt safe, but safety never seems to last. My parents divorced my fourth grade year, and as a broken family we could not afford the school anymore and that ended my Christian influence for awhile. I stopped learning and growing as a Christian for many years, but I still had many convictions that helped guide my decisions.

I always considered myself a Christian and wanted to do what was right; but during my senior year and right out of high school, I started questioning my Christian convictions. I was surrounding myself with people who lived to only please themselves. It started to have an effect on me, and I acted on and tried to justify my sinful desires. I was double sided. Around my Christian friends, I hid my sins; but around the other group, I was encouraged to sin.

After about two years, one friend who was actively pursuing God, started encouraging me to get my life on track also. I began pursuing a relationship with Christ (because I know now that Jesus has always been pursuing me). This led to hanging out with Christian friends and going to church and college group. I began cutting ties with the bad influencers in my life and started focusing more on what it means to be a follower of Christ.

During this time my dad was diagnosed with cancer, and his battle with it was getting worse. I remember specifically praying at college group that the Lord would take my dad right up to the edge so that he would become a Christian. Well God answered that prayer, and I was taken aback that God had listened to my prayers. Unfortunately, a few months later he lost his battle to cancer. Until then, my dad had been my greatest influence. When he died, I was left with a void. This, however, only strengthened my relationship with God.

In some ways I am still the same person, but in other ways I am a different guy. Now I don't have a double life; everyone knows where I stand. I find myself looking for opportunities to share my faith. I find enjoyment in serving the Lord.

Rather than just knowing I'm a Christian, I try to live like one.

Cindy Mayorga

I have committed my life to Him and long to get baptized to make that statement to my church family and the world.

My name is Cindy Mayorga, and I am 16 years old. I was born at the Marian Medical Center on July 9, 1993.

When I was twelve years old a close friend, Chelsey Cornell, invited me to come to the church she was attending. It was amazing because I felt that after years at my parents' church, I was able to know God for the first time. Soon after starting to regularly attend I met James Fairfield who spent years giving me advice on just about everything and telling me about Jesus. I truly felt close to God, especially during Aaron's service on Sunday nights, which was pretty much the highlight of my week. I learned a lot there and remember my first experience truly feeling connected to God was at summer camp.

After Element started, and James soon followed, I decided to stay at the church I grew to know God at. However, my strong relationship with God began to waver and I had lost my way for a while (I even stopped attending church). I felt I was continuously making mistakes at home, school and disappointing all those around me. It was a little longer than a year that I lived an entirely churchless, and ultimately unhappy life. Please don't misunderstand me, I do not think "Church" makes you happy, it is simply a place I believe God wants us all to be; a place where He is worshipped, spoken about, and loved by a bunch of people.

Once again it was Chelsey who pointed me in the right direction. At the end of our Sophomore year (in High School) she started encouraging me to attend Element. There I reconnected with old friends and began to listen carefully to the things Aaron and God's Spirit (not necessarily in that order) taught, so Jesus could illuminate the path and I could find "my way." I went to the Element's first summer camp that year and left with my faith being stronger than ever before. I have been attending Element ever since on Sunday nights. I also attend the youth group, the leaders have always been helpful to me on how to stay strong, especially Terri Djafrودي.

Before giving my life to Jesus I had little knowledge of God. In fact, I owned a Spanish bible for years and never once opened it. On my 15th birthday I asked and received a new Bible (in English!) and have been reading it and learning since then.

Although I had felt God's love before, the immensity of it all hit me most at camp when I was surrounded by close friends who all led me to make radical changes in my life. Being that I was always insecure, I had the most trouble comprehending the unconditional love God gives us everyday, for I had only felt this from my parents and immediate family. I was taken aback after reading the verse 1 John 4:19, We love him, because He first loved us. This verse was what opened my eyes and showed me that I was able to love God and know for a fact that He too would always love me.

My journey hasn't always been easy, and often others took the wheel when I headed in the wrong direction. People struggle everyday to follow Christ, but I know He would not put something in front of me that I cannot handle. I believe in Jesus, His grace, His love and because of that realization I have committed my life to Him and long to get baptized to make that statement to my church family and the world.

Chelsey Cornell

I gave my life to him and He gave me a purpose to live.

Helloooo...My names is Chelsey Cornell. I was born and raised in Santa Maria, CA. I grew up in a Christian home, so I always believed there was a God but I never really knew Him. My parents would always make me go to church every Sunday morning. I would usually not enjoy being there.

Later on in life, in Jr. High, my close friend (Maddie Lopez) asked me to go to a summer camp put on by a church. I had been to that church a few times before with her and I really enjoyed it there (it was a lot different than the church I went to with my parents); So I told her I would. It was the summer of 2006 that I got a glimpse of God's glory. It was a real eye opener of who God was. I felt like when I returned from camp I was starting a new life with God. All I would do and talk about had to do with God. It was awesome.

Then, I got into my 8th grade year and I started hanging out with the wrong crowd and would put myself in the wrong situations (I could have really gotten into a lot more trouble than I did). I started noticing myself growing distant from God. I would still go to church but I would just go to be with my friends and not to learn about God. It was not the smartest time in my life.

High School started, it was my freshmen year, and I pretty much just slowly stopped going to church all together. I just didn't really care anymore, I mean I still believed in God but I definitely wasn't living like it. It was at this time that some of the people who I hung out with started saying how they went to a church really and liked it...and...they were talking about how they wanted to go to the summer camp (called CIY - Christ In Youth). I thought it sounded like fun AND that summer of 2008 was when God changed my life back around.

CIY was one of the best experiences in my life. God revealed himself to me and His love. It made me realize how lost I was. I gave my life to Him and He gave me a purpose to live. He showed me His grace and mercy, He is such an awesome God and he has changed my life!

A few months after CIY (or some amount of time I can't put my finger on) I found myself at Element Church. It was over a year ago now that I have became a part of Element (and I love it here); everyone is awesome and nice and makes everyone feel welcome. I have grown so much since then and I still have a lot to learn. But with Jesus as my God and King I will continue to grow into who He intends for me to be.

Brandon McCool

...and I want to continue to grow in my walk with God to know Him better...

My name is Brandon McCool. I am 24 years old and was born in Santa Maria. I am so excited to be baptized, and I have never felt like there was better timing. After my first experience at Element Church, I knew it was the church I wanted to be a part of. I have always looked up to Pastor Aaron and his wife Marianne, and really love the environment Element provides.

I grew up in a Christian family, and enjoyed going to church for the most part. Little did I know, when I hit high school, my priorities were backwards. I thought that hanging out with my friends and my social life were both more important than going to church or paying attention in class. I have never really had “one of those” experiences where a ray of light shines from heaven and I hear angels singing and I say a certain prayer. My life with Jesus has been a journey.

As long as I can remember I have had an understanding of who God is and simply always “believed.” There are many times I simply have not been very faithful to what I believe. I would pray every once in a while, but mostly it was when I wanted something. I do believe Jesus is who He said He was and that He is Lord, I have placed my hope, life and future in His hands, but again, for me, this has been more of a journey than a one day revelation. As I got older, I understood that I needed Jesus to be a bigger part of my life that I needed to surrender “me” to “Him”, and ever since I started going to Element my relationship with the Lord has grown immensely. I have developed a better understanding of God, and also the Bible from Pastor Aaron’s teachings.

I have realized that not only do I need God; but He needs me as well (so to speak). I need Him to show me the path He wants me to take, give me His strength to live life, and develop His great love in me. He needs me (or wants me) to be an example to others of His wonderful grace and love He so graciously gives. Later this year, I will be getting married to my beautiful fiancé, and I want God to be the focal point of our marriage when we don’t quite know what to do or expect.

In better developing my relationship with God, He has helped me to be much more appreciative of the people and things in my life, and helped me to be much more confident every day I wake up. Knowing He is with me and watching over me makes me feel fantastic, and I want to continue to grow in my walk with God to know Him better, and to become a better missionary for Him.

Samantha Castillo

My walk into relationship with Christ has been a journey rather than a day event.

My name is Samantha Castillo and I am 27. My husband, Jason, and I started attending Element a few years back. Aaron married us on June 30, 2007 and we were happy when we found out that God had led him and some others to plant Element. My husband and I were having a hard time fitting into our old church and it felt like it was more of my mom’s church instead of our church. We love Element and love the fact that we were able to find a church that we both enjoy. We feel very comfortable in our surroundings and never feel judged (even when Aaron says hard things). It’s a good feeling.

What I think is really amazing is my brother is also being baptized today (his name is Brandon McCool). As brother and sister we really have similar stores in coming to embrace and follow Christ. My walk into relationship with Christ has been a journey rather than a day event.

I have really ALWAYS believed in Jesus and who He said was (and what He did for me by living, dying, and rising from the dead)..but I really couldn’t even tell you that a time when I DIDN’T remember not being a Christian. I was raised with a religious background, and again, I feel like I’ve always known who Christ was. Unfortunately that can go two ways. Since I was always around Christians and went to a Christian elementary School and Junior High, I felt that in High School I needed to branch out. I chose to go to a “public school” verses a “private school” and I went through some rough spots in my life that I regret, but at the same time, I wouldn’t be who I am today if I hadn’t gone through what I did... I mean Jesus can redeem anything (and when God says anything He really means ANYTHING). About four years ago I took all knew and believed about Christ and actually started living it. Since then, I can’t explain the joy I’ve experienced in my life. Christ is Awesome and I know my life would not be the same without Him.

Baptism, to me, is about dedicating my life to Christ in a public way. I believe that this is one the most important things that a Christian can do. I thank God everyday for my wonderful family and all the blessings that He has given to me. This is my way of saying Thank you and also being obedient to God’s call in my life.

I also like to say “thank you” to those who are here, taking your time, and being part of my church family in celebrating this day with me.

Thomas Corona

I want to be baptized because I want everyone to know that I have asked Jesus into my

My name is Thomas Corona and I am in the third grade. I want to be baptized because I want everyone to know that I have asked Jesus into my heart.

My uncle, Sam introduced me to Jesus. He told me all about Him and showed me a paper that told me about how to ask Jesus into my heart. He told me that if I asked Jesus into my life I would be able to go to heaven. I decided that I wanted to wait to ask Jesus into my heart until I was sure that I loved Jesus, not just because I wanted to go to heaven. When I was sure that I loved Jesus, that's when I prayed and asked Jesus to be part of my life. I am so glad that I did.

I plan on growing my relationship with Jesus by reading the Bible and praying to Him all the time. I work really hard on memorizing verses and learning from the Bible. I am excited to be able to be baptized!

C.J. Zamorano

He gave His life for me so I have committed that I'll give my life for Him...

My name is C.J. Zamorano and I am 16 years old (and driving my first car...yipee).

As a young child the idea of "Christianity" was something that was not new to me. I would go to church every Sunday and say a prayer every now and then, but in reality I had no interest in it. I had always thought, "why talk to someone I cannot see when I've got friends and family who I can talk to face to face." I thought, like a lot of people, that I didn't need God.

Then one day I found out that I would go to Crossroads Christian Junior High. This was not very good news to me, but little did I know that going there would change my life completely. Being there, around people who truly loved God and who were actually talking about Him, was strange to me. I was completely amazed how people could dedicate their entire life to someone I believed to be fictional. I felt that maybe God could work in my life like how He had worked in others.

I began learning more about Jesus and how He saves those who believe in Him. I felt a great comfort knowing that there was someone out there looking out for me. My life was placed in Christ's hands, and for the first time ever I actually had faith. I finally believed that my sins had been paid for through the death of Jesus Christ, and I knew that from then on I would try to live my life for Him. He gave His life for me so I have committed that I'll give my life for Him (by LIVING for Him).

Two years ago I was invited to a bonfire with Element. I was a little reluctant to go (for a lot of reasons), but now I'm very glad I did. Through Element I have met so many new people who have helped me on my journey to grow stronger in my faith. I feel blessed to be able to worship God and learn more about Him with people that I love. I have found a home in Element and a family in its members.

In getting baptized today I am thankful to Jesus (of course), but also to you as Element for being part of my family. Hopefully, one day, I can return the favor and celebrate your baptism with you (if you haven't been baptized yet).

Shannon Harris

He took my decisions and placed me on a road, that had been so broken, and blessed me enough to lead me to Jason and back to Him.

My name is Shannon Harris and I am 39 years old (for 3 more weeks... I am holding on to the thirties as long as I can).

My journey of how I got to the place where I wanted a relationship with the Jesus is a pretty long story, and I will have to shorten or you could still be reading this booklet long after the baptisms are done.

I was not brought up in a house that went to church. My mom would tell us about GOD and how he was “out there somewhere” and could hear all your prayers and see all your sins (He kind of sounded like Santa Claus). But in my head, I thought “Whatever, how could He see all and know all?” When I was 18 years old I was engaged to my first husband whose family were strict Catholics. His family wanted us to get married in a Catholic Church...for that to happen I had to attend “night School” to get all of the Catholic Church “requirements” done.

I attended class once per week and by the end of the year I had been baptized and received “holy communion” and my “confirmation.” Honestly though, by the end of that year all I can truly say is that I was even more confused about “religion” than I ever had been before. We had our big Catholic wedding and then we became “Holiday Catholics” where we only attended on the major holidays.

Ten years later, I was getting divorced from my first husband, finding myself a single mother of 3 children. I was pretty devastated and felt I couldn't go on. A friend from work invited me to her “Christian” church. For the first time I really enjoyed it and was learning a lot about who God is and what it meant to be a Christian. My life got back on track, and I finally realized that I was going to make it through the divorce and would be fine. After about a year and half of attending church I started hanging out with some of my single girlfriends (we were going out at night and meeting a lot of guys and having “fun”)...and guess what? My attendance at church got less and less over the next few months.

When I did attend church I felt so guilty and ashamed of my behavior that I would cry at church. So instead of getting the picture that God was sending me those feelings, I just stopped going to church all together.

The guilt of my new lifestyle was keeping me from the path of true life that God wanted for me. I continued this lifestyle for the next six (almost seven years)...and though I thought I was having so much fun, I became more and more unhappy with my life. I was looking for happiness but wasn't able to find it.

In 2007, I started praying again for God to show me the way to this happiness I was seeking. The more I prayed, the more I didn't want to go out with my girlfriends anymore. I continued my own relationship with the Lord by praying and reading a few books, but I still couldn't get myself to go to church because I felt I was not worthy of stepping foot in a church.

One day I met a man at work named Jason. I asked him out and gave him my number (because that's what you do when you are interested in someone), but he never returned my call. About six months later, out of the blue, he actually came to my work and asked if I wanted to go to a “country western concert” (yes, Aaron probably freaked out when he read that). At the time I didn't like country music but said “Yes” anyway because Jason was cute.

After that night we went on a few more dates, but I thought it was strange that Jason did not try to kiss me or anything. I was wondering if something was wrong with me. Then one night I began to understand, because God stepped into our relationship. I went to Jason's softball game; after the game he said he needed to talk with me and asked if I wanted to get something to eat with him. Little did I know that Jason wanted to talk to me about Jesus and ask if I was a Christian. He was scared to ask because he liked me and wasn't sure what my answer was going to be.

We went to Subway because I was a cheap date and there was a homeless man in line behind me and I handed him a coupon for a sandwich. He thanked me and then handed me a bible tract that stated something to the effect of, “Do you believe the Lord is your Savior?” When I sat down to eat Jason asked me what the man had given me and I showed him. God works in such amazing ways because it gave Jason the opportunity to ask me, “So what is your answer to that question?”

Continued...

Shannon Harris

Jesus has made all things new and I am even a new mom again.

I responded that, “ya, I believe in God.” Jason then said, “I didn’t ask you if you believed in God, I asked if you believe that the Lord, Jesus, is your Savior.” I looked at Jason and just started crying....After I finally stopped, we had the longest and greatest talk.

I began attending church with Jason every week in Arroyo Grande. We were engaged six months later, as believers, and fully in love. I know now that God saw me through all the painful decisions I made throughout my life. He took my decisions and placed me on a road, that had been so broken, and blessed me enough to lead me to Jason and back to Him.

A little while ago Jason felt a calling to be engaged in a church in the community where we lived, so we were trying out local churches. We actually stumbled upon Element by accident (but I guess nothing is an accident with God). We were out trying churches in the Santa Maria area and heard of a church on the radio that was supposed to be by Lakeview Junior High school (see, we were actually going to go somewhere else)... but when we got there it was 9:20 and the service didn’t start until 10:00, I noticed Element across the street and the service started at 9:30. I told Jason let’s try that church across the street. We attended that day and never looked back. We loved the service, felt it was relaxed, and love the humor that is placed in the messages. It feels so easy to relate to scripture when it becomes practical. That was over two years ago, and we are still coming faithfully and look forward to church on Sundays.

Since coming to Element and marrying Jason my whole life has changed. I feel loved, not just by Jason but by God as well. Jesus has made all things new and I am even a new mom again. My friends and family have all commented on how much I have changed and how much happier I seem. I know I would never have found this happiness without God leading me and loving me first. I hope that I can be a living example to my family and friends who have met Jesus or who are searching for the same happiness and yet still so lost. I hope that they will also find it in a relationship with Him, because that is where true relationship begins.