

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

April 1, 2012



ELEMENT
christian church

Candice Fleming

...so I got on my knees before God and asked for His help. I have been drug free since that moment...

My name is Candice Fleming. My story begins 28 years ago in Hawaii; I was born in Kahlua (it's pronounced just like it is written). My dad was a Marine, and we moved a few times while growing up.

We moved to Oceanside after Hawaii, and after my parents' divorce, I ended up in Orange County. When I was 12, we moved to Lompoc, and at 16 I essentially took care of myself after my mother died.

There are a lot of details of my story that are very hard to share, so I will not go into all of them. My history, as so many others, is full of a lot of pain and hurt. I have done a lot of running away from the Lord, and I always seem to come right back to Him. Every time I run away and do things on my own I end up messing everything up, Jesus ALWAYS brings me right back to Him and HE does miracles again in my life.

Every obstacle I have faced, I have prayed for His guidance and help, and He has helped above and beyond, always getting me out of that hole I have dug myself into. For 28 Yrs. I have lived off self-will; I am very tired of it. I am done. God keeps proving to me that I will be all right if I just rely on Him.

At one point I could have lost my child or even ended up in prison; so I got on my knees before God and asked for His help. I have been drug free since that moment. My past has led me into a drug rehabilitation program. That program is actually how I came to Element, a housemother where I live attends Element and introduced me.

At this point in my life, I have surrendered all of me to Jesus. He sought me and loved me and has called me home. I am now choosing to live as Christ would have me live rather than the way I have lived in past.

This day I am here, not to prove anything to myself (or to my husband, or my son), but to my Father in Heaven that I am ready to live HIS WILL. I am ready to be the Daughter He put me here to be, the Mother I need to be and the Wife I vowed to be. I am ready to do His will and to walk in His light the rest of my Life.

I like that Element has us write our stories (even though it is very hard) because I would like you to know that, if you are struggling through something you think is impossible to get away from, Jesus offers hope and the restoration of true life. New life truly is possible. Jesus longs to lead all of us into freedom, and that is what baptism represents today; I am dead to my old life and alive to my new life in Christ.

Erica Erskine

...my relationship with Jesus is what saw me through. I pray for, and have forgiven, all the people who have tried to hurt me.

My name is Erica Erskine, and it is a great joy to tell you my story (it is much longer than what you will read here, so if you want to know more please feel free to ask me).

I was born in Gdansk on the Polish side of the German border in the 1950's. At that time, Poland was under communist influence. It was a very hard life for everyone there. Our community was very small, so small in fact that it only accepted one type of faith: The Catholic faith. When I was one year old, I was baptized according to the practices of the Catholic Church.

I followed the tenants of the faith, I practiced what I was taught, but I never experienced true grace. No matter what I did, I felt like I was still destined for hell. I grew up with a horrible home and school life. I am not trying to complain and be the victim, but almost everyone in my life has hurt me...except for Jesus.

During all of the worst of times growing up, my relationship with Jesus is what saw me through. I pray for, and have forgiven, all the people who have tried to hurt me.

When I was in my teens, I immigrated to the United States. I first lived in Chicago, Illinois. While in Chicago, I would occasionally attend a church, but I never found any place that I could call my own (or what I felt could be home). I was alone, but never actually felt alone because God was and is always with me; He never left me. I could always talk to Him and that made me stronger.

These same feelings continued when, over twenty years ago, I moved to California. I moved so many times that it became

virtually impossible to ever find a church to truly belong to and call home. I have now lived in Santa Maria for the past three years.

I have never blamed Jesus for any of the bad that has happened in my life; I truly believe he used everything to help me to have stronger faith. I even became a nurse (though I no longer am one) because I wanted to help people.

I used to, periodically, pass by a building with a big sign that said "Element," but never knew it was a church. One Sunday, when I was walking my dog, I was surprised to see the building full of people. The next Sunday I attended the services, everyone was so friendly (that would be you as the parishioners) and the message spoke to me so much that I have attended service every Sunday since.

A lot of people have the one moment that they gave their life to Jesus, for me it has simply been a continual process. I have loved Him for as long as I can remember and want to live my life loving and serving Him more.

When the subject of baptism came up, I decided that this is the church I would like to become a part of. I know baptism is not a magical formula that will fix everything in my life, but I do feel that this special event will give me a sense of a new lease on life. I want to daily grow closer to God through His Son Jesus Christ. What more can a person desire?

I hope that God will also use me, and my unique experiences, to help me be an asset to the body of the Christ.

Daniel Keinert

My name is Daniel Keinert and I am fourteen years old (I turn fifteen on March 31).

I know a lot of people have a certain day and time that they remember dedicating their lives to Jesus, but for me I don't remember a certain day, or time...I have just always believed. I am not saying I was born a Christian, I know that is not how it works, but for a long as I can remember I have basically believed in Jesus.

I grew up in a Christian family with a great and loving mom, dad, and two sisters. All of them have helped me grow in my walk with God, challenging me along the way.

The first time I had ever really understood Jesus (more than simple belief) was three years ago at a winter camp my church went to. At that time I surrendered my heart and soul to the Lord. This was at a place called Hume Lake (which is a Christian based, Christian run, camp). It was a very humbling experience for me, and I will always remember it; I will also always remember this day (today) that I get officially baptized.

When I was really little my parents dedicated me, but I don't even remember that. When I was about 10 or 11, all of my friends were getting baptized, I remember wanting to do it too, I even begged my mom for weeks and she kept telling me to wait until I truly knew what I was doing.

Sometimes it is hard to understand why parents tell you, "no," but now I thank her greatly for that because I really didn't know what I was doing. Now, finally, I realize what it is to get baptized and truly make this declaration of faith.

I love God so much and feel like this is the time to make this statement of faith. Thank you all for reading this!

Frank Dubon

Hi, my name is Frank, and I am so happy to be here before you today to reaffirm my Love, Faith and Trust in our God.

I left the church in my teens (I won't tell you how long ago that was, but it was a while). I didn't leave out of anger or anything; life simply overtook everything to where God took the back seat...and then I got drafted.

I eventually joined the Marine Corps, then the Air Force, then the Post Office (I have seen it all), and finally ended up at Vandenberg and all of a sudden the new millennium was upon me. I had spent so much time of my life being busy that real life simply started to pass me by.

Eventually more and more sorrow started to become prevalent in my life. There had been ill family members, some death, and a few broken relationships that lead me to a place in 2004 where I actually began to start praying again. As I prayed, I saw our Lord begin to guide me in a more positive manner giving me some peace in my life.

In 2006, I finally surrendered all of my life to Jesus. I asked for forgiveness because I actually now knew what it meant to ask. A very close friend would talk to me and make a difference in my life daily with spiritual inspiration; this brought the Lord and I closer than ever before. I began to see that I needed to be His man and not my man. He graced me with the ability to see the needs of others and help others instead of always helping myself.

In 2009 I got married and I am the happiest I have been in my life. I know happiness is not the point, as Aaron always says "Jesus is the point," but I now have a been given a bigger and greater understanding of the Gospel and Faith in the Lord. God has blessed me with so much and I have not looked back since the day that He saved me.

I hope my prayer from 2006 becomes yours, to glorify our God with prayer and deed every day; when we do that He blesses us with wisdom and guidance.

Jessica Sterling

He has always been my rock and I could not imagine life without Him.

Hi, my name is Jessica Sterling and I am 16 years old. I was born on November 28, 1995 in Santa Maria, California. I have been going to church ever since I could remember and have been attending Element for over a year thanks to my friend, Sierra Carlberg.

I'm not going to lie, when I heard that I had to write my story for all of you to read, I was scared. I don't have some crazy, intense moment where I started following Jesus. But I do know one thing, no matter what I have been through and no matter how many mistakes I have made, Jesus' love has never failed me.

When I first started going to church, I always went with my parents because they wanted me to. Don't get me wrong, I have always loved Jesus, but at five years old I never truly understood just who this "Jesus" was and why I loved Him. As I became older, going to church became less of what my parents wanted for me and more of a feeling (actually, more of a need) to be closer to God.

I had been to previous youth groups at other churches before, but I never really felt welcome or connected to anyone. Thankfully, I got invited to come to Element's youth group by my friend (Sierra Carlberg). I took the offer and began attending the youth group on Thursday nights. I instantly felt like I never had before, everyone was so nice and welcoming and all of the leaders were great. James Fairfield's lessons were very easy to grasp and understand; I wasn't used to learning about God on a level that really spoke to me.

Shortly after coming on Thursdays, I was invited into Hailey Fairfield's small group with three other girls. I am still in this small group and it has definitely helped me to connect with Jesus and people my age.

I know for a fact that I could not go through, and continue to go through, what I do without Jesus. He has always been my rock and I could not imagine life without Him.

God will always find me, as He already has. Jesus will always lead me, as He already has...always in the right direction, no matter what obstacle I face. I have absolutely started to feel like my relationship with God is my own, because it's something that I long for and want to make stronger.

Instead of being something that my parents did that I was just going along with, my faith is now my own, given to me by my Great God. I am so excited for my relationship with Jesus to continue to grow because I know He has a lot in store for me and I can't wait to see where He takes me.

Which, I guess, reminds me of today. He has brought me here to this backyard and this pool (as He has brought you here) to experience His grace through baptism. I truly hope it blesses you as much as it blesses me and we can all glorify Him together.

Sierra Carlberg

...my journey of Jesus revealing Himself to me is more of a process where daily I come to better understand who He is.

Hi. I'm Sierra Carlberg, and I'm 16 years old. I was born at Valley Community Hospital, and I have lived in Santa Maria my whole life. I have been going to Element since it started.

I have been sitting here for what feels like forever trying to write my story; I think I am making it way more complicated than it needs to be. I have always believed in God, so I don't really have that amazing, life changing moment when God has opened my eyes. Instead, my journey of Jesus revealing Himself to me is more of a process where daily I come to better understand who He is.

My story starts in Sunday school (I know if you go to Element you may not even know what this is). I always dreaded going to Sunday school, I felt like I was being forced into these rooms with overly excited adults attempting to teach me who Jesus is. Up to this point, in my mind, He was just another storybook character. Jesus never really seemed 'real' to me. But, as I got older, I noticed that life is a lot more harsh and complicated than it was back in Sunday School (this is what happens as you get older). I guess youth group was the 'eye opener' for me; I came to know who Jesus was (and is) and wanted to learn more about him.

I even decided to join a small group about a year ago, and it has really helped me grasp the concept of Jesus Christ and what His plan is for me. Even though I still have a lot to work on, I have started living my life through Him and His strength; I have now started seeing a difference in how I react in certain situations. I go to church every Sunday now, not because my parents are 'forcing' me to, but so my relationship with God can grow stronger. I pray and read my bible every night, but I really feel church is the place I can focus and be with Him without any distractions.

I even understand now how God uses all of us to grow each other in our knowledge of Him. The church isn't just something I go to on

a Sunday; it is all the people who love Jesus in the entire world. It is those I have met and have influenced me, but it is also those I have never met. All of us are called to be baptized as a public showing of our faith, and that is why I am here...because of Jesus, because of some of you, and to hopefully show those of you who don't yet know Jesus that there is no better life because there is no other life.

Abraham Youngblood

My name is Abraham Youngblood, and I am 10 years old. I was born in Branson, Missouri. One day I was reading my Awana homework with my Mom. She told me that if people don't ask God into their heart they won't go to heaven.

My dad is a theology guy, so he asks lots of good questions. I never felt the urgency of my sin and thought (even at 10) that I was a pretty good guy and my sin wasn't so bad. After a conversation about witnessing in my life, my parents helped me to understand the weight of my sin and how good Jesus is in saving me.

When I got it, I was like, "What?! Why didn't you tell me this before?!" Then I ran up the stairs and asked God into my heart. Since I have asked Jesus to be my Savior, I want to make God happy with how I act. I do my best to keep sinful things out of my life. I try to love others and to show kindness to others.

...my parents helped me to understand the weight of my sin and how good Jesus is in saving me.

Noah Youngblood

My name is Noah Youngblood, and I am 8 years old. I was born in Branson, Missouri. One time, my Mom was telling me about Jesus and how my brother Abraham got saved (you can read that story on the previous page).

I had never asked God to save me; I just kind of assumed it, but I did understand my sin was bad in the eyes of a holy and righteous God. When I understood Abraham's story it helped me to understand better that all people need the redemption Jesus offers (even the ones who think they are pretty good to start off). So, I then I asked Jesus to come into my heart, forgive my sin, and save me.

Now I know that God takes care of me, and He loves me. I like to pray, and I like to go to children's church (you can't go unless you have kids or are a kid...but Aaron says you can go if you want to be a helper).

I hope Abraham's story and mine (even though we are pretty young) would help inspire you to love Jesus and surrender to Him too.

Now I know that God takes care of me and He loves me.

Josiah Youngblood

The things that everyone sees as hindrances no longer keep me from loving others and talking about Jesus...because all things lead to Jesus.

My name is Josiah Youngblood, and I am 12 years old. I was born in Santa Maria (I know, if you see my brother's story you may be thinking "what?"...Don't worry it's all legit).

I am very hyperactive, and I get in lots of trouble. This hyperactivity got so bad that I even had Sunday School teachers ask my parents to not bring me any more (yes, that's a blow to self esteem). My parents kept wanting me to surrender my life to Jesus in hopes that it would fix me (but I think Jesus likes my energy level).

I also have very bad dyslexia, which made it very hard to keep up with my friends when they were reading BIG words and I couldn't. I started to feel like I wasn't good enough to be a Christian because I couldn't read like them, understand some of the things they were telling me, and compete in bible quizzes like other kids my age.

One day a guy showed up that took the Awana program all over the world (Africa, Indonesia, Philippines) and explained how they take the program "outside." They teach about Jesus in an interactive environment that isn't all reading and study work. During this slide show they explained the gospel in the ways they do to Third World countries....AND IT WAS THERE, in how Jesus reaches these people, that I heard the gospel in a way that I could actually understand.

Maybe, instead of being born in Santa Maria, I should have been born in Africa...my journey to Jesus could have been shorter.

At this Awana presentation I realized that I needed to be saved and I asked Jesus to be my Savior. Since I have come to know Jesus, I feel happier. I pray and read my bible (as best I can).

My life still isn't the easiest, I still have way more energy than the average bear, and reading is still difficult, but the difference of having Christ in my life is profound. The things that everyone sees as hindrances no longer keep me from loving others and talking about Jesus...because all things lead to Jesus.

I think I would love to be an overseas missionary who could run around, love people, and share about Jesus in a very tangible way.

I love Jesus, my Savior, and my favorite verse (and I am not making this up for the sake of the baptism story book) is Ephesians 6:1 "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."

Gil Cabacungan

The Lord has brought me to my knees, and He has blessed me.

Hello everyone, my name is Gil and this is my story.

As a young child my father died from Leukemia, there was a lot of pain involved on his side for having the disease and my side in losing my father. As I grew up and became a preteen the pain still followed so I began to find comfort in mind-altering substances.

Through many hardships I found myself in jail, again, at the age of 35 years old. With an extensive police record (7 drunk driving and 3 under the influence of a controlled substance charges) I was a mess addicted to drugs.

That was March 25, 2000. I cried out to Jesus for the first time in my life, asking Him to help me. I even challenged Him to do something I thought He couldn't do, which in retrospect is funny. 3 days later, I was shocked and scared because He did it...I promised Him I would stop doing drugs as a result of His goodness. But now I did not know how to do that. So, I cried out to Him again and asked Him to help me, but most importantly, to never leave me. I said that over and over for a couple of hours while crying in my bunk in jail.

It was then that I felt His spirit and I knew that everything was going to be okay. The day I was arrested, March 25, 2000, was the last time I ever used any drugs or alcohol to change the way I feel on the inside.

Today, I know God lives in me. 2 Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come." The Lord has brought me to my knees, and He

has blessed me.

When I was released from jail I only had a nice pair of shoes to my name. Today, I have many Earthly things that mean nothing, even though I enjoy them. I know God can take it all away; but without Him in my life, I am nothing but a lost soul.

For the last 5 years I have been reading my bible every morning. Then I get on my knees and pray. Prayer and meditation is the key. A whole new world has opened up to me. I am a modern day disciple.

I have never been baptized in water and Jesus has put it on my heart to do so, that is why I am here today.

I now minister to teens at a teen retreat. I also minister to adults as well. My bible tells me about the cleansing of sin with water and that baptism is a way to show others that I am a new creation in Christ. So, I must lead by example.

I came to Element because I was looking for a church and the bible states I need to belong to a church. I saw Element for a long time and thought it was a skate shop (yes, that's funny). Then one day I saw the sign out front that said "church." I was looking for a church where I was comfortable and felt like home, Element is that for me. I have never had that in other churches.

I also love that the messages are straight from the bible.

Thank you for sharing this day with me, and allowing me to part of this family.

Thomas Carpenter

My name is Thomas Carpenter, and I am 10 years old. My favorite color is purple; some people might say that's weird, and it is. I was born in Camarillo, CA and lived there for most of my life. A few years ago we moved to Santa Maria, and my parents took us to a Christmas Eve service at Element; we have been attending ever since.

Before Jesus saved me, I would do a lot of mean stuff, well, mean stuff for a kid. I would trick my friends (a lot), take things (like toys) away from my brothers, and I would yell at my mom and dad. It may not sound like much, but even as a young kid, it just shows that we all need Jesus.

I felt a calling to accept Jesus in Sunday school. After the lesson, one of the teacher's said, "If you haven't decided to follow Christ, you can pray to Him right now, ask Him to come in to your heart while I pray." At that time, I decided to follow Jesus the rest of my life. Since that day in Sunday school, my life has been so much better, and I am very happy for what God and Jesus have done in me.

Now that I am saved, the evidence in my life is that I actually live differently. I share things more, I don't trick my friends, and I do better at obeying my parents.

I am getting baptized because I want to be better at obeying Jesus, and I want the world to know I am a follower of Christ and will be the rest of my life. At the next baptisms I am pretty sure my brother Eli will get baptized as well. I think that will be pretty cool, seeing him do what I am doing today.

...I want the world to know I am a follower of Christ and will be the rest of my life.