

JAKOB MAHER

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Hello, my name is Jakob Maher, I'm 18 years old and the youngest in my family. I was born April 20, 2000 in Santa Maria, California. When I was growing up I always said I was "Christian," but never really knew what it meant to be a Christian (I didn't read the bible as a child). As I grew, my curiosity about Christianity also grew. As a child I learned some of what I know of Jesus from TV and movies (which isn't always the best place to get theology), but I learned most of what I know now through Element.

I started to attend Element with my parents when my older brother, Jonah, joined the Marine Corps and started going to church in boot camp. He had sent letters home about how he accepted Jesus, so we decided to start going to church as well; that is when we found Element. It was a big eye opener for me when I truly found out what Jesus did for us. I can safely say I accepted Him after the first few Sundays of learning more about Him. We've been coming to Element for about 3 to 4 years now.

Once I started to get comfortable at the church, my parents asked me if I wanted to join the Youth Group. While I was thinking about it, a youth member named Stephen came up and asked if I wanted to go to the meeting, I said yes and started to go. It was rough at first being new to a group of people who all knew each other, but I slowly got to know everyone and now am great friends with all of them. My story is very short and simple and I intend to glorify God throughout the rest of my life.

KATIE STEINER

Hi! My name is Katie Steiner. My husband Shawn and I have lived in Santa Maria for about 20 years. On October 5th of this year we will have been married 16 years! We have two beautiful kids, Maura and Martin. Our family has been attending Element for about five years. Our Element church family has been a great blessing for us!

I grew up in Northern California in a family that didn't attend church on a very regular basis. My mom and step-dad were very loving. However, unfortunately, as a young child I did suffer sexual abuse from a family member. That event would lead to self-destructive behaviors for me in my teen years. When I was 15 years old, I was baptized by a Lutheran church in Chico, CA. However, I was in a very unhealthy place in my life. I was battling an eating disorder and a drug addiction. My heart was too hardened to fully let God in.

Shawn and I met in Northern California when I was very much a work in progress. I was 19 years old and still a bit lost, but I like to think I was getting better. He took me on hikes and got me outdoors. Eventually Shawn was hired on with Santa Barbara County Fire and we moved to Santa Maria; we have since moved again and now live in the tiny town of Buellton.

My hubby is my rock. In 2010 I suffered an ectopic pregnancy and my mind started to think that it was my punishment from God for horrendous things I had done in my past. Shawn taught me that that isn't who God is; I remember that it was at that point I decided I wanted to learn and know who God really is. My heart started to open

Shawn and I have been through a lot together. Shawn went through a health crisis and almost lost his life in the Spring of 2013. This was the beginning of a challenging three-year journey for our family. Right before this crisis happened, though, the Lord

delivered us to Element's door. We could not have taken this journey without the huge support of family, friends, and our Element family and ultimately Jesus.

About four years ago, I searched for and made contact with my biological father! I grew up with no contact or communication with him up until then. Having a family and children of my own brought a sense of curiosity and a desire to complete my history. He lives in Ohio and our relationship has been a very good and welcomed one!

I recently went through the Redemption Group ministry at Element, it was an amazing experience! The group offered a safe, loving environment where I was able to realize my sin of pride, but also how the guilt and shame I bore from my past was not mine to carry. It was a beautiful reminder of who our God truly is: forgiving, loving, and almighty. Our God is so great that He would wait on such a wayward sheep such like me and bring me home to Him!

I'd like to share the Psalm I wrote as a part of my Redemption Group experience:

"You waited for me with open arms. As I ran, unknowing,
bent to hurt myself. You waited for me with open arms.
When I thought I'd been abandoned and sought comfort in
sin. You waited for me with open arms.
After shame and insecurities held me back from Your light.
You waited for me with open arms.
I can not fathom Your patience as I ran astray, confused and
vengeful.
I run now to Your open arms.
I do not give myself the credit. All that I am now is a new
creation made by Your mercy and grace.
I have run into Your open arms.
Your name I call out when I hurt now.
You embrace me with Your open arms.
And now I wait. With anticipation, faith, and a growing
trust in You."

DEION WOODARD

My name is Deion Woodard and I'm 24 years old. I was born and raised in Nashville, Tennessee.

Being from the "Bible Belt" I have been raised in a church my entire life. My mom made sure that above all we had a strong foundation in God. When I was 7 I accepted Jesus to be my Savior, but at the time I didn't truly know exactly what it meant to be "saved." As I got older and studied the Bible the more I grew closer with God. In high school I was very passionate about Christ; always praying and reading the Scriptures. Even though my teen years were rough, my love for God never changed.

In 2012 I started college, this is when I started to move away from following Jesus. I was looking to please those around me instead of God; it led me down a path that I knew wasn't meant for me or anyone else. I was drinking, doing drugs, and flunking out of college.

When I was at my lowest point I remember crying to my mom and asking her what should I do. The only thing I remember her telling me was, "Pray and read the Word". At that moment I could see where I lost my way, and after deep prayer and meditation I knew what God was leading me to do.

On January 5th, 2016 I left to join the Air Force. During Basic Training is when I rededicated my life to Christ. I started going to church every Sunday. When I had the chance, I would live stream the church services from back home.

In July of 2016 I came to Vandenberg AFB. At the time I was looking for a church, but since I had no form of transportation I gave up. I began to fall back into my old ways from college and realized I needed to make a commitment to find and attend a church.

In August of 2017 I bought my first car, and the first thing I did was look for a church. I asked around to see what churches were in the area, and my Flight Chief told me about Element. Coming from a very diverse church I was not only looking for a good message, but a place I could call home. On my first visit I was welcomed with open arms and treated like I had been coming there for years. I knew God led me to this church. Right there I made the decision to keep attending.

I've grown so much since coming here. I'm more confident in myself and my walk with Christ has grown so much. Since being here I now know why it's time for me to get baptized. I found my new home church.

ANDREA ALLDREDGE

My name is Andrea Alldredge and I was born in Chico, California in 1960. I moved to Santa Maria when I was five years old. I had my first serious boyfriend at the age of fifteen and seven years later we were married. We left our small hometown as fast as humanly possible, but we returned to raise our family.

My father at one time believed in God, but later became an atheist; he and I do not share the same political or religious views, but he was a good dad that taught me to love others and to not be judgmental. I was baptized as an infant when I attended church with my siblings and our mother. When I was about ten, our family moved from Orcutt to "town" (Santa Maria) and for some reason, we stopped going to church. When I met my husband, whose father hails from a line of preachers, I started attending church with his family and felt a deeper connection to God than I had in my youth. Unfortunately, when we left Santa Maria, we avoided going to church altogether. It wasn't until we returned home, and I miscarried our first child, that we began searching for a church of our own.

Years later, we had a home and three beautiful children, and we felt truly blessed. Life could not have been more perfect, but it was not to be a life that ended happily ever after. At the age of forty-five, my husband was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. The pastor who baptized our children officiated at his funeral. I was comforted knowing that I was not alone during my husband's illness and his death. His passing was made bearable by the knowledge that his death was not final.

The children grew and began to leave home to start their own lives and I joined a bible study to fill the gap. I was lonely and the reality of being a young widow was beginning to sink in. It was

during this time that, by chance, I met Gene. For five years we dated, and for five years I told him I would never marry again. But God works in mysterious ways, and my heart softened. Nearly six years ago, I married my second boyfriend and we have been happily married ever since.

A couple of years ago, the church I had been attending slowly began to dissolve and my sister invited me to Element. I finally signed up for the membership class and six weeks later I decided I was ready to publicly proclaim Jesus as my Savior. He is my redeemer and through Him I have eternal life. He gives me hope and walks by my side. I am ready to see where He leads me and trust my life to Him. My heart is full, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share this day with friends and family.

I am excited to begin the process of learning more about who Jesus is what He has in store for me. I hope that I will become a more Christ-like person and that I can/will share the gospel, my time, and my spiritual gifts with others. I am truly blessed to be supported by Element Church.

SAMUEL CARPENTER

My name is Samuel Peter Carpenter, I am eleven years old and was born in Camarillo, CA. When I was little my family moved to Santa Maria because I have 3 siblings and we needed more space (Santa Maria was less expensive). My family came to Element for the first time on a Christmas Eve service, my dad wanted to find a night time Christmas Eve service, he drove by Element and came inside. I have been here ever since.

The last few years have been very hard for me. My dad, Trevor, got leukemia. He fought it for a couple of years and eventually died; it was a long process that put a lot of strain on our family. My mom and dad split up in the middle of it all. It hurts so bad sometimes that I don't know what to do with my sadness or anger.

My attitude at times was (and is) really bad. I can be rude and mean one second and ready to cry the next. There is one person I have wanted to fight many times at school, but recently I've tried praying for our relationship. Every time I've gotten really mad, I've thought about what my dad would say or tell me.

I became a true follower of Jesus last year at Hartland Christian Camp. The person who helped me become a follower of Christ was the leader of the camp, Kurt Johnson. Following Jesus is changing my life. It is making me care so much more about others; it actually makes me *want* to help many people. Following Jesus is even pulling me to love all the people in my classroom at school. I am also growing closer to my sister as a result of knowing Christ.

Since becoming a Christian my attitudes have gotten better and I try to help out others with many things. Now, when I get in a verbal fight with others, there are things that I want to say that

are mean, but instead I will walk away. I don't want to be mean or rude, I want to be like Jesus.

I also feel like I'm going to cry when I get baptized because I really wanted my Dad to baptize me. I am still super happy that I have my brother, Thomas, and Paul Shaver to baptize me.

STEVE REED

Hello everyone, my name is Steve Reed and I am a weathered 59 year old who is looking forward to getting baptized. Finally!

As a native Californian, born in Lancaster, I grew up in one of those families which had a house, a station wagon and a dog...and a cat. I have 2 brothers and a sister. We were blessed with parents who took good care of us and they stayed together through thick and thin. We attended church regularly and, even then, when I was quite young (and not wanting to go to Sunday school), I believed that God was always watching over us.

Although I have always believed in God, I've led a life that has been spiritually lukewarm at best. God has consistently given me opportunities to "do the right thing" yet I have consistently chosen to make choices in opposition to His wishes. Forbidden fruit has dominated a good portion of my life's diet as I have casted inferior judgement when considering the ways of survival and happiness. When reaching the finales of my many blunderings, the conclusion was always the same. Inadvertently, life's trails led to dark destinations. On many occasions I have asked God to please give me "one more chance." He gave me that chance, over and over - then I messed things up, again and again.

Despite my arrogance and ignorance, God has blessed me in many ways; I have a wife, a son, a daughter, a step daughter, 5 granddaughters, 3 siblings and a very interesting, extended family. I have also worked steady jobs and enjoyed good health. Utilizing my free will, I have traveled to several countries, ridden a motorcycle all over the USA, put myself through college, played guitar in Hollywood rock bands, own a home and live the American dream in several other ways. Using social media, I could easily make a case that my life is the boundless facade of picture-

perfectness! Realistically, my free will needs to reflect God's will. My current goal is to be cognizant of God's presence and authority during any activity in which I am part of. Life is meaningful when I am focused on God's will.

I choose to be baptized to formally declare a commitment to God and to acknowledge my belief in the gospel of the Bible which tells us that Jesus died and rose for the sake of sinful humanity (for my sins personally), He opened the door for us to enter His loving house in relationship with Him, and escape the detestable storm which we have been dwelling in.