



BAPTISM

Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you,
not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an
appeal to God for a good conscience, through
the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 3:21



TESTIMONIES

FALL 2024

4 Things You Need to do to Receive Jesus Christ Into Your Life

1. ADMIT your spiritual need. "I am a sinner."
2. REPENT and be willing to turn from your sin.
3. BELIEVE that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.
4. RECEIVE through prayer, Jesus into your heart and life.

PRAY
SOMETHING LIKE THIS FROM
THE SINCERITY OF YOUR HEART

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner.
I believe that you died for my sins.
Right now, I turn from my sins and open the door
to my heart and my life. I receive your forgiveness
and ask you to be my personal Lord and Savior.
Thank you for saving me.

Amen

CARA CHOE

God loves you and He will always be there for you!

I always knew about God, but I did not understand how important God was and what it truly meant when people said “*God loves you*” or “*He will always be there for you*”. I learned what that meant when I went to Mount Hermon, a retreat in Santa Cruz this summer. A counselor named Savanna explained to me how much Jesus loved us, that He would die for us, even if I was LITERALLY the only person on Earth. Jesus would have died just for me. That’s how much He loves me and you. I understand now when people say “*God loves you*”.

I really latched on to Christ, when last year, my family and I were affected by the Palos Verdes Landslide. Some of our neighbors’ houses fell into a canyon and never got to see their home again. Some of our neighbors are in different homes now. Thankfully nobody got hurt, but the homes and our neighborhood is in horrible shape. At the beginning, I felt like Psalm 10:1 “*O Lord, why do you stand so far away? Why do you hide when I am in trouble?*” We were out of our home for 3 months and we moved from place to place, not knowing if we would be able to move home. That 3 months, I really had to trust that Christ would hold our house up. I am so happy that I got to experience Christ that way. I felt like Psalm 10:17 “*Lord, you know the hopes of the helpless. Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them.*” My spiritual director Ms. Jessica helped me to remember that God lifts me up when I fall. Thankfully we got to move back in. All that time, we were held up by Jesus’s power and by everyone’s prayers. Thank you to everyone that prayed for us, brought us food, gifts, and for supporting us. I understand now when people say “*God will always be there for us*”

I am turning 10 on September 28. It felt really special that I could get baptized on my birthday weekend. My Sophia eemo (aunt in Korean) encouraged me to read verses from chapter 10 of different books in the Bible to see if God had any special messages for me for my 10th birthday and He did (from Psalm 10 and Matthew 10). Once I am baptized, I want to tell people how much God loves them and that He will always be there for you. I will also look in the Bible for special messages from God to me, like in Matthew 10:23 “*Everyone who acknowledges me publicly here on earth, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.*”

Thank you!
Cara Jieun Choe

KAREN GONZALEZ

I was lost and didn't know it. I knew I was missing something but honestly couldn't say what it was. Then, January of 2023 my cousin died. It was the hardest hit of pain I hadn't experienced before. A year later in March of 2024, my favorite, most genuine, caring and loving aunt passed away. This time the pain was hard to bear with and I remember my cousin hugging me the day my aunt passed asking *"why, why us? What did we do wrong or where did we go wrong that this is happening to us again?"*. I just couldn't get those questions out of my head. I asked myself why so many times. I felt so lost in life like I just couldn't figure out what to do or where to go to get myself out of this hole I felt stuck in. Then my first time at SBCC was Sunday April 21, 2024, the day after my aunt's viewing/burial services. We were invited to church by some friends from my son's school and we decided to show up. The topic that day was "Abide in Prayer", and I felt so much calm and peace at that moment. I knew then and there that I wanted to keep coming back because it felt so good to be there and listen to God's word. Shortly after my first visit I realized that was my missing piece, to reconnect with Jesus Christ.

I am learning every day, and I want to continue to learn because there are so many beautiful scriptures and testimonies that speak on the presence of God. For me personally, I came to know Christ because I knew I was sinning. I consider myself a decent person, but I knew I could be a better person. Even in Jesus' last moments he asked his father to forgive those around him because they did not know any better. That is exactly how I feel, I do not know any better but I *can* be better. I have found atonement in Christ who sacrificed himself on the cross for us, for me. He has freed me from my sin, and I am learning and striving to live in victory over that sin as I follow Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Without Jesus, I have seen I cannot do it. He has shown me that I can feel lighter if I just speak to him. If I continue to pray, he will continue to show me His light. There is a reason I am here today in this moment, because God knew he wanted me here.

The most beautiful thing I have seen come out of my newfound relationship with Christ has been seeing my children talk about God and ask questions. We have been learning together what it means to talk to Christ. Learning that praying is how we get to speak to Him even when He doesn't speak back but He listens to us and gives us signs that He heard our prayers. I found myself constantly stressed out as a stay-at-home mom of three small children and Jesus is teaching me patience. I need patience to teach my children with love and compassion rather than with fear. Every day I see the opportunities that He gives me to make better choices. The signs that He gives me to slow down. Small things I never paid attention to I realize now that our Lord is always with me and it's His way of letting me know that He's there.

AMANDA GRAY

I always say I accepted the Lord when I was seven, but the reality is that understanding what that really meant has taken time. Things really changed a lot for me about ten years ago when I started being exposed to Protestantism. Growing up as Catholic, getting into the Word, the understanding that I could hear God's voice, and missions really changed a lot for me.

Then, things changed even more three years ago when I had a deliverance experience. That is, I experienced a moment in time where the Lord instantly rid me of sin I had had all my life, sin I had tried very hard on my own to understand and master for nearly a decade to no avail. The freedom I obtained led me to establish new understandings and rhythms. I understood on a deep level that I am helpless to change my own tendencies and that only Jesus has the power to break my sin, that He wishes to do so regularly, bringing me more and more freedom throughout my life.

Now, instead of trying to force my way into mastering my own difficulties, I live with a regular rhythm of seeking Him for the root of my problems, repenting, and walking in more and more freedom as I root myself in my identity in Him. But this year, as I have sought Him to be more and more sanctified, He spoke to me about being baptized as an adult, citing that this step was needed for the continual freedom I desire.

ISLAKANG

Honestly, I don't remember a time when I didn't know God. My family has always been teaching me about him, reading Bible stories to my brother and me, and praying about everything. Although I didn't have a personal relationship with God, I just knew he was real. I always prayed the same prayer before my meals and only my parents prayed for me before I went to sleep.

During Covid, my family and I went on walks and my dad would point to the sky and say, "*Do you see how big the sky is? The whole sky is just one tiny piece of God's eye, watching over us.*" I began to realize that even though the world is so big, God still knows me personally and always has time for me. As I attended Kidzkrew and VBS, I realized how much I need Jesus in my life. I started to do more personal prayers and began to read the NIV Bible not the children's illustrated one. I also came to know Christ through surfing with my dad. Before our early morning surf sessions, we look at the Bible verse of the day through the Bible app and have a conversation about it. Doing our morning devotionals together brought me closer to God and my dad. I feel that God is pleased with us because we are putting God first and involving him in everything we do.

When I was really young, the bible was just a bunch of stories to me. Through my experiences of getting to know God, I now fully understand that Jesus died on the cross for my sins so that I can be saved. Now that Jesus is real to me, I trust Him in everything that I do. I talk to Him when I need help with something and thank Him for His blessings in my life. I am now confident in everything I do because I know God is with me no matter what. I hope that getting baptized will show God that I love and appreciate Him.

SUNNY KANG

Ever since I can remember, my family attended church, almost every Sunday. Although I remember being dragged to church on Sundays, I don't recall any one of us having an actual personal relationship with Jesus. I guess we were typical Sunday Christians. As I grew into my adolescent and teen years, I became rebellious to my parents and eventually God, even to the point of denying His existence. Let's just say that I became as distant from God than a troubled teen can possibly be.

My parents left the US when I was 17 so I lived on my own and found different ways to get by. After a few years of drugs and gang life, my mother returned to the US and I noticed that she had become an entirely different person. I saw Christ in her. She came back to intercede for me and do what she could to save me from prison or death. She prayed every day and eventually I agreed to leave my chaotic life in Koreatown by moving to OC for a year to get away and attend Junior College. After only one semester, my mother miraculously got a letter of recommendation from a Pastor that helped me transfer to a Christian college in San Diego. Through some supernatural events, Jesus made himself real to me. My mother didn't believe me when I told her over the phone so she drove to San Diego as quickly as possible and when she saw me, she happy-cried out loud because she said she finally saw Christ in me. For the first time in my life, I actually felt that Jesus died on the cross for me personally and took the punishment for all my mistakes then resurrected to new life so that I could also live a new life in Him. I was actually connected to the living God through Christ, and also for the first time, truly connected to my mother as well.

I've been a Christ-follower for decades now, and I've definitely had my share of high peaks and deep valleys, but over the years I've realized that I just cannot live my life without His presence and guidance everyday. Like a TRUE knucklehead, I've had to learn every lesson the hard way, but one thing I know for sure is... God keeps His promises. He's been so faithful to me in my marriage, family, ministries, and careers over the years. I thank Him every day for who He is and I want to live my life to glorify Him and be used by Him to expand His kingdom in whatever way I can. God has always been down for me over these years. I want to be baptized and publicly express that I will always be down for Him.

ALEX LIM

Hello, my name is Alex Lim and today is a special day as you will be witnessing the baptism of my fellow brothers and sisters as well as myself. Before I go into my testimony, I'd like to begin with my introduction as many of you don't know me as I've been attending SBCC for 6 months. I was raised in a church all my life, mainly that of a Southern Baptist, and more recently have I been involved at a Pentecostal denomination. I stumbled upon SBCC as I was seeking a service time to accommodate my 7 day working days and didn't really care for the denomination as long as it's Jesus-centric. I decided to take advantage of this opportunity to get baptized as I've never been before.

I'll go ahead and tell you right away that I had a divine experience with God – it was in the days when I was at an all time low and have been in quarantine, locking myself in my bedroom, which lasted a total of 3 years (I began a year prior to COVID). Depressed would be an understatement as I would go about for months at a time, not bathing or taking care of myself as I neglected any wellbeing or any ambition to be something. I had even exhausted many attempts at multiple urgent cares. It was so bad to the point where I even rotted out all my teeth. I remember every morning when I would hear my mother crying in her bedroom, praying to God everyday earnestly for my healing, to which I was lackadaisical and nonchalant at the time. I can't seem to recall exactly how I felt, but I can promise you that it's not something that I wish for anyone.

One day, behind closed doors at home, immediately after an argument ensued between me and my mom, I went to the garage and was overwhelmed with God's presence where I couldn't help but to kneel and rest one elbow on the front cowl of my car and my left hand reaching for the heavens all while my head was forced to look down. This event was different than everything else in my life – during this time, it felt like a beam of knowledge was being blasted in my head, almost as if my cerebral cortex was being developed in rapid pace, but not really. It felt truly unreal and I ended up praying for 4 hours. I won't be going into the details as it may baffle you more, but long story short, the situation ended up where I would be taking a trip to Sydney, Australia and end up in a mental hospital and received the care I needed for my mental health. It was then that I found out I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and received proper treatment throughout the 5 week stay. The hospital bill was covered under their Section 22 for free mental healthcare to everyone. For those that are wondering I have bipolar I with extreme manic breakouts.

After that trip, I realized that I will never be able to fathom how God truly works & who He will utilize. This goes for what He holds in the future. It feels like He purposely blinds us in whatever path that He has in mind for us so that we can grind daily like the parable of the mustard seed and it is only revealed at His discretion. Not only have I recognized His existence now by heart, but also grown my faith into trusting Him more as I go about blindly throughout my days. I don't believe myself to be a good image of Christ as I still struggle with an addiction to cigarettes, but I have come a long way eliminating all other habitual sins. I ask that you please pray for my battle as it seems impossible to quit on my own with my own prayers. I feel like I will always fall short of God's glory, but what I do know is that I accept and proclaim King Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior and that's all that I believe is necessary to continue with the baptism. I'd like to thank SBCC from the bottom of my heart for this opportunity – thank you.

MONTSY LLOSA

I had trust issues. Really big trust issues. I mean who doesn't? People are very untrustworthy and not reliable. However, I had the biggest trust issue with the most important person in my life, Jesus Christ.

In fact I didn't even know who Jesus really was until I started reading the bible with a close friend about a year ago. So how can I trust someone like Jesus, if I didn't even know who He really was? Sure I knew who Jesus was on a superficial level. I knew what He did, I am sure most people do. But do you really know someone based solely on just their actions? Do you really know your friends or family based on what you see or hear? No, of course not. I feel like you really know someone when you understand and know their thoughts. So as I read the bible with my friend I started to hear His thoughts and began to understand who this Jesus was.

The one thing my friend kept saying before we started reading, is that God is perfect. Which felt so bizarre to me at the time because logically that did not make sense. I mean in theory nothing is perfect, hence the definition of perfection. On an emotional level my logic was like, well if God is so perfect, then why did it feel like my life was in shambles. How could someone who has made me suffer be so perfect? How could I trust someone who has made me suffer? I literally could not wrap my head around it. So I nodded and agreed with my friend.

But now, let me tell you something...God is so PERFECT!

God knows me so well that He knew the only way for me to get closer to Him was through a very unconventional route. Before I started reading the bible, I was actually a buddhist. The buddhism I practiced was a very lax and laidback practice; however, it jumpstarted my interest in spirituality and faith, which is something I always struggled with because I am a very logical person. My mind thinks in a very analytical and logical manner and spirituality did not make sense to me because it goes beyond the laws of nature. Learning buddhism opened that door. As I embarked on my spiritual journey I started to become more open to learning about other religions and forms of spirituality. I am not going to lie, I was also preaching buddhism. One day I talked to my co-worker about this and she started to talk about her faith. She mentioned something about "*a calling*" and I was so interested, I was like what is that?. And I don't remember exactly what she said. I guess that conversation did something because the next time I saw her she said "*I brought you a bible*". I was shocked because it was a really nice beautiful bible. I was also surprised because she knew I was buddhist. I took it because I didn't want to be rude and it sat in my drawer for a couple of months. During those couple of months I started to get more into buddhism, and I started to give books to people. I remember giving a book to a friend and her returning it saying she was not able to read it. I was so hurt. So from then on I started to read books people gave me. Then I remembered the bible my friend gave me months ago and was like, oh gosh. With this new principle, I have to read this beautiful book.

Now the bible is a pretty big and intimidating book. There was no way I was going to be able to read it on my own. So I told her this book is pretty intense, would you mind if we could start reading it together?

She said yes. So we started with Matthew. Thus when we read the bible, the buddhism knowledge I acquired helped me understand the bible better and get closer to Jesus. The whole situation blew my mind because it was like God knew exactly what to do in my life to get me started reading the bible. God knew to place the right people in my life. If my friend was not so patient or had asked me to read the bible before I was ready, I probably would have resisted and said no to reading the bible. If God had not placed that other friend in my life that rejected my book, I would have not felt the calling to read the bible. God had orchestrated the perfect plan for me to get here. God does things in our lives so perfectly that we don't understand until we do. God is just so perfect, it is beyond human comprehension, don't even try to understand it.

While reading Matthew we read this: Matthew 17:20 *He said to them, 'Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.'* These are Jesus' words. At the time, I was like cool a mustard seed is pretty small and I want to move mountains. So if all it takes is a mustard seed of faith to do that, sign me up! I saw how Jesus changed my friend's life and it was inspiring. I wanted some of that. At the time, I was suffering a lot, that even the word suffering itself caused me pain. Professionally, romantically, financially I was not where I wanted to be. I was miserable. I idolized things that I should have not.

The more we read the bible I was pretty impressed and could not deny the work of Jesus. I mean He is pretty amazing. However, I still had to face the biggest issue I have which is trust. How do I trust someone I cannot see? How can I trust someone when he does things beyond my understanding. Thus I said I believed in God and Jesus, but the truth is my faith was not even the size of a proton.

Society teaches us, if you want something you most likely have to do it yourself. Thus not only did I have major trust issues, I also had major control issues because I didn't trust people. The funny thing was the more I tried to control my life, the worse it got. It was not until I completely gave up control in doing life my way and just started trusting God, to let Him do it His way. When I started to do this my faith grew, while my worries diminished. Faith and fear are the same, but opposite sides of the spectrum. You can either have faith or fear.

The reason I want to get baptized is to get closer to Jesus and to one day have faith as big as a mustard seed.

I am a pretty oblivious person, So I am sure God has worked in mysterious wonderful ways in my life that I can not even see. However, I do believe that God speaks to each of us in various different ways. Ways that would resonate uniquely to each of us. For me it is coincidence and synchronicities. Most likely because they defy logic. Since I have started to have faith in Jesus, I started to notice little things actually working out. For example one day, I was at Costco and I wanted to buy a cookie. Someone let me use their Costco card to buy the cookie, because I didn't have one. As I was in line, I saw they had sodas. I then wanted a soda, I thought about buying one, but realized I could not because I used someone else's card to buy that cookie. I was a bit sad and accepted the fact that I wouldn't have a soda. Then this beautiful older lady came up to me and gave me her soda!

What are the chances of that?! Out of all the people she chose me. Of course, I said yes! Well technically I said sure, because I did not want to sound too excited. That small act of kindness, I knew was from God. And that's what Jesus did for me - giving His life at the cross, forgiving my sins, and rising from death to give me new life - none of which I could have earned myself.

It is the little impossible things like that, that I know God is there. Even when things don't seem to be going right in terms of a human perspective. I know that God is planning something so mind blowing that we literally cannot understand. As I have placed my faith and trust in Jesus, I have seen almost all areas in my life improve. My life is not perfect and sometimes my faith shrinks back to the size of a proton, because I am human, we all are. My testimony is not so much about a Costco cookie, but about trusting God, when things don't go your way. Sometimes God is working so much in the background it seems like nothing is happening, but it will soon. Through faith I have learned it is not so much about *my* timing but God's timing. I would have not imagined that someone would have given me a free soda! Not only did I get what I wanted, but I didn't have to pay for it. It was literally better than I could have imagined! With that said, I am still in the middle of my suffering and as I carry my cross, my spiritual muscles build and the cross starts to feel lighter. The weight of suffering becomes more bearable because I know God has a purpose for everything in this world and God's plan are perfect. Because I am not perfect, but God is.

WENDY OKADA

I was born into a family of faith. My father was a minister, my grandfather was a minister, two uncles were ministers, two cousins were ministers and a majority of my family members were believers. Growing up, on the outside I “*did the right thing*” - went to church, went to camp/retreats, went on missions trips in high school and college, attended a Christian university and married into a Christian family, and so on. I was initially baptized when I was in 7th/8th grade because it was the “*right thing to do*”. However, despite all these things, I still felt like there was something wrong with me or missing in my life because I kept seeking out things of this world to bring me joy or pleasure. After college, I stopped going to church for a period of time not because I didn't believe in God or that He loved me, but because I was making a conscious choice to live in a manner that I knew was not pleasing to God, so I was sparing myself the guilt of leading a double life - one for Sundays at church, and one for the rest of the week. I felt that eventually I'd go back, but at that time I wanted to “*do my own thing*”. I did eventually come back to church, and I thought everything was going to be different because my outward actions had changed, but internally, I did not feel like I had changed that much - I just went back to “*doing the right thing*” in action only but not internally.

Over the following years, I struggled greatly with sins of dissatisfaction, comparison, resentment, frustration, rebellion, selfishness and so many others that caused me to be unhappy, and even through counseling, I always blamed myself because I could not look at myself the way God sees me. I never felt that God didn't love me, or that He couldn't give me the power to overcome things, but rather I always knew that it was my refusal to accept God's love and power that was causing my unhappiness. It was easier for me to accept that I was dissatisfied because I was being disobedient than to “*rise*” accepting God's help because I feared that somehow, I would still be unhappy. I felt like I didn't deserve to be happy, or because I wouldn't know what to do with happiness, it was easier for me to live in a place of discouragement and dissatisfaction because that's all I knew and was comfortable with. This is not a fun place to be, but I was afraid to fully receive what God had to offer. Maybe it was because I would have to look at others the way God looks at them, or my actions would have to be like Jesus' actions, and I didn't feel like I was strong enough to do that, or sometimes I wasn't even sure if I wanted to do that.

Over the last decade or so, I really felt God and Satan battling for my heart and soul. Many things happened over that time — both good things and bad — that started my journey back to Christ and what He ultimately wants from me and for me. There were many moments over those years where I know that God was allowing near-devastating events to take place that might have driven me back to Him, but so often I dismissed them and slipped back into my old ways. Finally, about five years ago, God allowed a “*wake up call*” in my life that really made me snap out of my own world and made me realize He was strongly pursuing me. I know that God is ALWAYS pursuing all of us, but this time it felt like He grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me and said “NOW”. Since that time, over and over He continually shows up for me, through sermons, radio broadcasts, devotionals, small group discussions and words of encouragement from friends and family. I continually hear God speaking to the exact struggles I'm going through and providing just the words I need to hear, further proving that He is always with me and meets me where I am all day, every day.

A number of years ago, a friend lovingly told me that maybe the reason I have difficulty expressing love is because I didn't fully understand the depth of love that God exhibited to me by sending His son to die for my sins so I could be fully restored to Him. Even though I sometimes still have a hard time grasping the infinite and immense love of God, every time I hear about it in a message, sing about it in a worship song or hear about how He's working in someone's life, it literally brings me to tears because I am starting to really understand the power of His love for me. I felt called to be re-baptized because in hindsight, I see now how He's always been there alongside me through all the highs and lows, allowing me to wander along the way, but always providing guardrails around me so that I wouldn't veer off course so badly that I suffered irreparable consequences. He has been so gracious and merciful to me even though I was so undeserving, and I am so grateful that He protected me through all my poor choices. I now want to choose Him because He first chose me and desire to continue to follow Him in all that I do, all to the glory of God.

DANIEL ROBLES SEGOVIANO

Before I knew Jesus:

I was baptized as a baby, but I didn't understand what it meant. I didn't go to church and didn't know much about Jesus.

How I met Jesus:

Something bad happened to my family. We started going to church. I learned about Jesus and liked him.

After I met Jesus:

My family and I are happy. We go to church and learn about Jesus. Jesus is my friend. I want to know Jesus more and have a new life with him. Now I understand what it means to be baptized, and I want to be baptized myself because I want to be a Christian.

Why did Jesus die on the cross?

Jesus died on the cross to help us. He wanted to show us how much he loves us.

Do you believe he did that for you?

Yes, I believe Jesus died for me. He loves me so much.

Did Jesus stay dead? What happened next?

No, Jesus didn't stay dead. He came back to life! This is called the return from the death.

Because you believe this, how can you show that you trust Jesus?

By being kind to others and doing what He teaches us.

REBECA SEGOVIANO

Before Jesus:

My life before I met Jesus was a constant struggle. I felt a deep emptiness in my heart and was searching for something to fill the void. I was lost and directionless, trying to find meaning and purpose in life.

Believing in Jesus:

The car accident was a turning point for me. It was a traumatic experience, and I questioned why it had happened. But through it all, I held onto my faith. I knew that God was watching over us, and it was a miracle that my son was okay. Two weeks later, I joined South Bay Community Church at my brother's invitation. It was there that I found solace and a renewed connection with God. The church community has been incredibly supportive, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to grow closer to the Lord with my family.

Because of Jesus:

Since accepting Jesus as my Savior, my life has been transformed. I have experienced a newfound sense of peace and purpose. I no longer feel lost or alone. Jesus has filled the void in my heart and given me a love that is unconditional and everlasting.

One of the most significant blessings in my life has been seeing how my children have embraced their faith. They eagerly look forward to Sundays, and they love attending church. From Daniel's thoughtful questions to Yoel's enthusiasm and Sofia's joyful spirit, it's clear that they've found a community they love. South Bay Community Church has been a place where they've learned about God's love, made friends, and grown spiritually. I'm grateful for the positive impact it's had on our family.

South Bay Community Church has also been an incredible source of support for our family during difficult times. In February, my mother experienced a significant change in her life. The church community rallied around us, offering prayers, encouragement, and practical assistance.

Their support has been invaluable, and I'm grateful for the way they've shown us the love and compassion of Christ. I am forever grateful for the gift of salvation and the hope of eternal life that I now have through Jesus Christ. He has saved me from a life of emptiness and given me a purpose that is greater than myself.

GEORGE SOTO

Before I knew Christ, I had a great life that most would dream of, but I was plagued with depression, emptiness, and addiction, and I had no real joy.

The great moment of clarity came when He inspired me to seek Him. After months of prayer, my now wife introduced me to her place of worship which intrigued me to want to know more about the God who rescued me through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus; and although I thought I was a lost cause, He led me to discover my value according to Him - which is priceless.

Since receiving Christ, He's changed me a few times. It's usually been a direct result of my inability to be holy by myself. Falling into temptation and all the while, He is showing me how much I need Him and how relentless His grace and mercy are.

I AM PROOF THAT GOD IS RELENTLESS IN HIS LOVE FOR YOU!!!

MEGUMI WATANABE

Hello church family.

My name is Megumi Watanabe. I was not born in the church. I was raised around people that did go to church but I wasn't fully aware of what Christianity really was. I've had a past of desperation with guys and got blackmailed. All I wanted to do was pour my love into someone. I basically gave up on looking for guys at the end of December 2020. But somehow in the beginning of 2021, I met a guy on a dating app who showed me who Jesus was and is. Funny enough, we are currently dating to this day. Now, I know, non christians and christians should not date but I was down to having an open mind. He shared with me the gospel and I tried out going to church with him.

We went to a local church as a start and I loved the worship but did not really connect with the sermon. The church had a college group and I tried going to that as well. I did enjoy the group of girls I met and my leader liked how open I was. She wanted to start a discipleship with me and I thought why not. This started in 2021. But as we met every week, my relationship with her was not going well. She wasn't happy with my relationship with my boyfriend because it was a non-christian/christian relationship. I wasn't really comfortable with her including herself in my relationship. I understand she was trying to help my faith, but she wanted me to break up with my boyfriend to pursue someone better. I decided to stop the discipleship in 2022. But I knew I needed to understand what it was like as a single Christian because I didn't want to go to church because my boyfriend was Christian or I didn't want people to get the idea that I was being forced to be Christian.

I accepted the gospel during my break with my boyfriend because I started to see changes in my heart. I started to feel bad for people rather than hating them and realized that everyone is not perfect. No one could ever be perfect except God and this statement naturally became true to me. That we are all so broken and I felt stuck in my life as I got into my 20's. I wanted to start somewhere to help me have some kind of light in my life and that was to trust Jesus. Sure, things don't feel fully amazing but I definitely feel like trusting God softened my heart.

Everything was my decision. I wanted to put in the effort to learn who Christ was because I've never put in the effort to learn things like this. Long story short, I learned quite a lot. I also decided to go to South Bay Community Church to prevent myself from thinking about my relationship. About a little over a month, I went back into my relationship. Amazingly enough, my boyfriend and I could agree that our relationship is so much better than ever before.

So when was my turning point? My first SBCC service was when the theme was "*Who's My Neighbor*". Pastor Greg was preaching and I fell in love with the worship. Pastor Greg threw out saying to think about who that "*neighbor*" was and why they were hard to love. He asked to pray for them and the person I thought about was my father.

My father had a stroke in 2022. About 4-5 months before his stroke, there was a situation during the month of December with my boyfriend. He ended up yelling at my boyfriend for something he didn't agree with. But my father is very protective. He blames my boyfriend and New Year's Eve was when he yelled at him. But what he did and said was highly inappropriate. I had a hard time having a relationship with him even after his stroke. I prayed a few times and about a few weeks later, we went to Yogurtland and it literally felt nostalgic. We talked about life, I shared my favorite songs at the time and we drove my car talking the whole time with no pauses in between. God really gave me my relationship with my father again. I remember my heart softening that night.

Another situation I want to speak a little about is the blackmail that I dealt with in 2019. The guy was someone I did not know but was very forceful and I remember hating him so much especially as a 17 year-old. I wasn't able to know anything about him and with my life was threatened by him. I tried calling 911 and the police for help, but they did nothing. A few months later, Black Lives Matter happened and the police were being hated. I jumped onto that so quickly, but in 2022 I got a call from the FBI while I was on my journey to learn more about God. They asked me for an interview to talk about 2019 and it turned out that they found the guy. Maybe it was a miracle or it could've been God knowing that I was going to follow Him and that some girl had the strength to find the FBI. This traumatic experience finally had closure.

Praise the Lord for His all-knowing glory! He gave me my relationship with my boyfriend, my relationship with my father grew stronger again, and I finally got one of the scariest traumatizing experiences to have closure.

LUCAS YOUNG

Hello, my name is Lucas Young, and here's what brought me to God.

I've grown up in the church my whole life, but I never really understood what it meant to go. As a kid, church felt like a place to eat goldfish crackers and hear stories about old guys defying what I thought was a God that I wasn't sure was real. I believed that just by attending, I would automatically be a good Christian and be saved. It wasn't until the past few years, when I began reading scripture more, that I started to understand God's power and why I go to church.

About two years ago, I found myself in a place where I wasn't living a very Christian-like life. I often hid things from my parents, lied constantly, cheated, and was always angry and defiant. It got so bad that I even tried vaping. I knew that wasn't the life God wanted for me, so I prayed hard and long for deliverance from my sins. I questioned God's authority and why He allowed me to make these choices. I blamed Him for my wrongdoings because I was angry with my life and the choices I had made. One night, before going to sleep, I felt an urge to flip through random pages of the Bible. At first, nothing spoke to me, but then I read Matthew 24:7: *"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places."* This verse struck me, and I suddenly remembered hearing about the war in Ukraine, the pandemic, and how food shortages left stores empty. I felt like God was declaring His authority directly to me.

As I read more and more of the Bible, I was hooked. I started to see the depth in even the simplest Bible stories from my childhood. I began to understand why things were the way they were and why God allowed me to make wrong choices. I realized He was testing me, wanting to see if I would choose to follow Him despite my mistakes or give in to temptations like lying or procrastinating just to play more video games. Now, I understand that God's love is about more than just going to church. It's about making the right choices and striving to live the life He wants for me, no matter how hard it gets.

As I began to know God's direction for me, I understood why Jesus died on the cross for me, to save me from a life of sins and to lead me on the right path to salvation with God. Jesus' resurrection confirmed that my sins are forgiven and that no matter how many mistakes I make, I am still loved. He has conquered sin and death for me and has inspired me to be a better person. I know I need this because I became fully aware of my sinful nature, and I realize I will always need Jesus in my life.

I have decided to get baptized because I feel that I am spiritually and physically ready to give my life to Jesus. I also want to follow in Jesus' footsteps by following His morals and His examples of how He lived life. I fully acknowledge that this journey will not be easy. I will continue to be tested by God and tempted by Satan, but I now know that whatever the challenge, I will try my best to defeat it the way Jesus would.

JAMIE YU

My salvation story started from a young age. I grew up going to a church that my parents had been going to before I was born called Cornerstone United Methodist Church (CUMC). Many of my childhood church memories include going to Sunday school, camps, holiday parties, VBS, sports events, and making some of my best friends, but my understanding of the gospel came much later. I learned about the stories of the bible, but much of it seemed very far removed from my life. "Why does this matter to me? Why should I care?" were questions that often echoed in my head. And while there are doubts in my head even now as I struggle to live by my faith, I feel that by God's grace I have been able to spiritually mature in my understanding of the truths I hadn't fully grasped many years ago.

It's very difficult to pinpoint exactly when I became a believer because I have so many memories of learning about God and sharing about him to others. One memory I have is when a group of friends and I were sharing testimonies at a summer camp. Together, we all went around and shared about how we had found Christ. At that time, unbeknownst to myself, one of my school friends shared that I had supposedly always been talking about God even from when we were in 1st grade together. This had led her to become curious about church, which led to her eventual salvation. Even though I didn't remember all of it myself, by His goodness and amazing plan, I was able to impact another girl's life at such a young age. Looking back, it's amazing to see how God used me back then, even if I didn't fully grasp the entire picture until much later.

A key moment that led to my own personal decision to become a follower of Christ was at that same summer camp I previously mentioned. Because growing up in the church wasn't a decision I made on my own, it wasn't easy to think of my faith as my own. Going to church camps during the summers of my middle school through high school years allowed me to develop and grow my own faith away from my family and my parents. At the first summer camp when I was 11, I was led to accept Christ after being moved and spiritually touched by the worship and a fuller understanding of the gospel. In the years to follow, I continued to learn more about my own sin, specifically the selfishness, greed, pride, and envy I felt towards others. I came to understand my need for Christ and His grace in my life. Not only was it impossible to be perfect, but also I had to come to accept that I wasn't a good person, that I have sinned, *"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus"* (Romans 3:23-24). Knowing the grace that He has given me freely despite my sin has become the spiritual basis for my salvation.

When I was in college, I joined a fellowship called AACF (Asian American Christian Fellowship) and served as a small group leader for 2 years, one year as a freshmen small group leader and another as a women's small group leader. Those two years challenged and stretched me, as I was forced to grapple with the fact that I did not have all the answers. Being a small group leader taught me not to rely on my own strength and knowledge, but to rely more on God in everything. It allowed me opportunities to share my own brokenness and point the glory back to the Lord in every season and situation. Lesson planning in particular was tough, but I came to appreciate each time I sat with my bible and read and found answers in the Word.

Post-college, I pursued a teaching career in Japan through a program called JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching). I believe that God purposefully focused my interests on Japanese and East Asian culture from high school through college as it was the foreign language I took in high school and the major I had in college. My placement in Japan was in a small town called Mihama in the Mie Prefecture. Through teaching English and interacting with the people that I met in my everyday life, I could see God's hand in everything I did, from the students I taught, to the teachers I worked with, and even in slowly better understanding Japanese culture. As I continued to study Japanese and attended a local church there (Shingu Christ Baptist Church), I felt I was being used as a witness to share about the Lord and His grace to people there and ultimately to love them. I believe I was being called to better understand His heart for Japan. I knew that God's purpose for me was to be in the community and build deeper relationships with the other English teachers, Japanese teachers, and other people I met during that time.

Fast forward to now, I am currently an ESL (English Second Language) instructor to university students from South Korea at Hope International University and because of Christ who has redeemed me and continues to grow my heart for others, I continue to love as He has first loved me. The eternal hope that I have in Christ gives me a broader, transformed perspective that I am but a humble vessel serving the Lord for however long I have on this earth. While I still don't have all the answers to being a perfect Christian, nor will I ever, I know I am a part of a greater plan and purpose from God our King and Savior, one that I can continue to hope in and have faith in as I live my life for Him. Glory be to God now and forever. Amen.

BRANDON KONO-SONG

Life before knowing Christ:

Before my conversion I was living in the world and living for myself. I was stuck in patterns of depression, anxiety, worries, and self-doubt. I needed to be freed from the sins of lust, envy, and sloth. I was trying to justify myself that I was ok by hoping that things would get better as I matured as a man and in my mind thought I was overall a good person.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

I felt alone in my grief over my father, but realized that the Lord could be that second father to me, just someone who's always available to listen and understand me. I felt a need for purpose in my life and it was fulfilled with serving and worshipping Him for the rest of my life. My lightbulb moment was when I felt a change of heart during worship time during a Sunday service. I felt a sense of peace and calmness and began to shed tears of joy and gratitude for our Lord Jesus. My relationship with Him started when my father passed in September 2022. I did not grow up in a Christian household but was introduced to the church that same year. My first exposure to Christianity and Jesus was at college retreat in September of that year. I immediately wanted to know more about what it is to believe and worship Him, so I started attending services and college group. I quickly began to learn about the gospel and the character of Jesus. After a great and very impactful YAM 2023 Winter retreat I accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

Life because of Jesus:

He has redeemed and freed me from resentment, regret, guilt, shame, depression, and anxiety. He washed away all of my sins of from the past as I began to repent. Hate and resentment turned into love and forgiveness. I have become more patient and giving more grace with myself and others. Because of Jesus I have healed so much in regards to my grief surrounding my father's death. I know I have a forever home in Heaven and will live my life according to His commandments. I hope I can be a light of Christ and encourage others, believers and non-believers alike.

Thank you to all of
the Baptism Candidates.

Thank you for your
vulnerability in sharing your
stories of your faith in
Jesus Christ.

He is so worthy to be
PRAISED!!

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