

Baptism

TESTIMONIES

SPRING 2026

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

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



GABRIELE ANGELINE

Life before knowing Christ:

I feel so extremely grateful and blessed that I always believed in Jesus my whole life. I grew up going to Sunday School, I was baptized as an infant (Thanks Mom!) .

But I'm not perfect. I strayed from starting my young adult life. I stopped going to church and studying the Bible. I had been going to church here and there but got lost and stalled in building my connection with Him.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

What I believe about Jesus is that He is God who came in human form to die for all our sins so we can live. He is the almighty God, the creator of everything on Heaven and Earth, the author of tomorrow and the one who created us uniquely according to His image even before we were born. I believe that when Jesus came to the world, He was the only person who was perfect in everything, and that sets an example for all of us to try and be more like Jesus.

Most recently I started diligently reading the hard copy of the Bible again (because of Pastor Gary's sermon about AI a while ago from last year) and by reading the Bible it has changed me, I really want to dedicate and center my life around Jesus and his Word.

What Jesus did for me:

- Jesus is my savior, the one and only Christ, Father in Heaven and He is the true provider of my life
- He gave me life and died for me on the cross, and He suffered greatly for that. Scripture said that even we too shall carry the same attitude to endure hard times
- He was always there for me no matter the circumstances
- His love is like no other in this world. The peace and joy He gives

me that I experience in life is something that is beyond human understanding

How Jesus saved me:

- He waited for me and forgave all my sins and renewed my mind, and He gave me the Spirit of Christ who lives in me
- He gave me what I understand is the only source of true contentment in life

Life because of Jesus

I believe I can do great things with Him in my life. That He is always at work even when we can't see. I care less about worldly possessions and material things. We live temporarily in this world, and it's better to fix my eyes on the treasures above.

The Holy Spirit leads me and guides me through everyday life now. I feel like I talk to Him constantly throughout the day. I find that studying His Word is actually really a joyful thing to do, surrounding myself with God's people and removing myself from worldly things.

Most of the time I don't always know what to do or where to go, but I believe that through prayers, worship, and spending a lot of time with Him, He speaks, He leads and guides me in navigating the unknown life. This verse comes to mind, Proverbs 16:9 "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."



DEVIN BRANKOVICH

Introduction

Life rarely unfolds the way we expect it to. When I look back on my life now, I see a story shaped by difficult choices, unexpected mercy, and a slow but undeniable pull toward God. For many years I searched for meaning, identity, and peace in places that could never truly provide them. Yet through every season of my life—long before I recognized it—God was present and working. My story is ultimately not about the circumstances I faced, but about the grace of Jesus Christ, who patiently guided me through years of wandering until I finally understood that He had been there the whole time.

Early Life and the Search for Belonging

My first clear memory comes from when I was three years old, on the night my parents divorced. The house was filled with confusion and tension. Police officers stood in the living room while my mother was carried out on a stretcher wearing a neck brace. I remember watching my father and my uncle standing against the wall as they were searched. I was too young to understand everything that was happening, but I knew that something in my world had changed.

Not long afterward, my father disappeared from my life for several years. Soon after the divorce, our family life shifted dramatically when my parents were excommunicated from the church we had grown up in. The spiritual environment that had once shaped our family was suddenly gone. Our relatives remained in the church and continued along the path we had once been part of, while our lives moved in a different direction.

For a long time I struggled to understand where I fit. Even as a child I felt the difference when we gathered with extended family. Yet despite those feelings of uncertainty, I always believed there was a God. While I

sometimes questioned my place in the world, I never truly believed that God had abandoned me.

Choices and Consequences

As I grew older, the direction of my life gradually changed. The shift did not happen all at once. It came through a series of choices—small ones at first, then larger ones—that slowly led me away from the path I had once known. Over time those choices led me into addiction.

Addiction has a way of shrinking a person's world. The things that once mattered—family, faith, purpose—begin to fade into the background. Life becomes centered on escape, and over time everything else disappears. For years that was the life I chose to live.

Looking back now, I can see how close I came to losing everything, including my own life. One moment in particular remains vivid in my memory. During a hospital stay after complications related to my drug use, I had a severe reaction to medication. Suddenly I could not breathe. My body was shutting down, and in that moment I believed I was dying.

What happened next is something I have never been able to fully explain.

I saw a bright white light, almost as if reality itself had opened. From that light came a presence I immediately recognized as Christ. I could not see His face because the light was too bright, but I felt Him reaching toward me as if my soul were being drawn toward Him.

Then suddenly I was back in my body, gasping for air while doctors worked around me.

At the time I did not know how to interpret the experience. But years later, when I reflected on that moment, one truth became clear: even before I truly knew Him, God had been there.

The Beginning of Change

Although I did not fully understand it at the time, this period of my life

became the beginning of real change. For many years my faith had been uncertain. Like many people in recovery, I believed in what Alcoholics Anonymous calls “a God of your own understanding.” I knew there was something greater than myself, but I did not yet know who that God truly was.

Still, God continued working quietly in my life.

Around that time, my mother brought me a photograph of my grandmother and me while I was in detox. When I looked at that picture, something stirred in my heart that I had not felt in years.

Hope.

My grandmother had been a devoted follower of Christ her entire life. Faith was not just something she believed; it shaped the way she lived every day. My grandfather was the same way. He had been a preacher for forty years, and God was truly the center of both of their lives. Their relationship with Him was not something reserved for Sundays— it was part of their daily lives and the foundation of everything they did. God was number one in their home.

When I was a child, my grandfather would sometimes sing over me in a soft voice. It was almost like a gentle chorus he would repeat:

“Devin’s gonna go to heaven,
Devin’s gonna go to heaven.”

At the time it sounded like a simple song.

Now I see it differently.

In many ways he was speaking truth over my future long before I believed it myself.

Not long after that, one of the most significant turning points in my life came when I sat down with my sponsor and spoke honestly about the mistakes and darkness of my past. Saying those things out loud required humility and honesty that I had avoided for a long time.

Yet after that conversation something changed in a way I could not explain.

The obsession that had controlled my life for years suddenly lifted.

For the first time in a long time, I felt free.

Recognizing Christ

Over time my life slowly began to rebuild. I stayed sober, worked hard, and began putting the pieces of my life back together. Yet even after many years of sobriety, I experienced a relapse that reminded me how fragile life can be.

For a period of time I was using fentanyl every day, one of the most dangerous substances in the world today.

And yet somehow, I survived.

When I look back on that time now, I do not see luck. I see mercy. Even when I had completely lost control of my life, God had not lost control of it.

As the years passed, something inside me continued pulling me toward Jesus. It was not dramatic or sudden, but more like a steady drawing of my heart.

Then my son Chance was born, and becoming a father changed everything. For the first time I realized that someone would look to me for direction, someone who would learn how to walk through life by watching the way I lived. I wanted to show him a different path than the one I had walked for so many years.

The path I wanted to show him was Christ.

Gradually the quiet pull I had felt for years became undeniable. The “God of my own understanding” was no longer enough. I wanted to know the truth.

And the truth I found was Jesus.

I came to believe that Jesus is the Son of God who entered this world to save sinners like me. I believe that He lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again so that anyone who believes in Him

can be forgiven and receive eternal life.

Life Because of Jesus

On Easter Sunday in 2025, I walked into South Bay Community Church. As the sermon began, something inside me broke open. I sat there overwhelmed, tears running down my face as I realized something that had been true all along.

Christ had been calling me home.

For the first time in my life, I knew with certainty that Jesus was not simply an idea or belief.

He was my Savior.

Later that year, on September 21st, 2025, I publicly confessed what had become the deepest truth in my life:

Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

Today my life looks very different from the one I once lived. I am sober, I run my own business, and I work from home with the family God has given me.

Yet the greatest change in my life is not success or stability.

It is the presence of God—His mercy and His grace at work in my life every day.

I know that I do not deserve the life I have been given, and that the forgiveness and new direction I have received are not things I could earn. They are gifts of grace.

There have been many moments when I did not know how things would work out—moments when the future seemed uncertain. Yet again and again everything has come together exactly when it needed to.

Over time I realized something simple but powerful.

My plans rarely worked.

But God's plans always do.

Instead of trying to control everything, I now try to follow Him. I seek Him in prayer, worship Him, and try to raise my son to know the same God who has shown such mercy to me. Each day I ask Him to guide my decisions and lead my steps, trusting that His ways are better than my own.

Conclusion

When I look back on my life today—the mistakes, the miracles, and the moments when I should not have survived—I see something I could not see before.

God was there through all of it.

Even before I knew His name.

My prayer today is simple: Lord, keep me close to You. Guide my steps, hold me on the path, and do not let me wander too far.

Because now I understand something I once could not see.

God was guiding my life long before I realized it.

Just like my grandfather used to sing over me when I was a child:

“Devin’s gonna go to heaven.”

And now, for the first time in my life, I believe it.



JAKOB CAAMANO

My name is Jakob Caamano and I am 12 years old. I was brought in Christianity by my parents and I joined KidzKrew at the age of 2. As the years went by, I learned more about God. I remember reading the Bible with my family, listening to worship music, attending KidzKrew and joining VBS every year. Now, I go to evolution on Fridays which has helped me understand more things about God. I see how he helps me, and guides my steps. When I choose my own path and disobey, God still loves and forgives me because I trust in what Jesus has done. I believe that God is forgiving and loving to everyone, and he saves all people who accept Jesus as our lord and savior and choose to follow him. I believe that He is merciful and cares about every single one of us. I am grateful that God so loved the world that He sent Jesus to sacrifice himself so we can be saved by accepting Jesus as the one who has saved us from eternal death and has helped us have a relationship with God. I'm grateful I will get to see God at the end of this life.



GABRIEL CAAMANO

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

Before believing in Jesus, I would only see church as a place to go every Sunday because I “had to”. As someone who was raised in a Christian family, I had always heard that Jesus came to die for our sins on the cross and we could be saved through him. However, I never really understood the importance of it. Even though I was going to church and praying, I was still living for the world instead of living for Christ. I still cared more about what other people thought of me instead of what Christ thought of me. I would pray to God asking for forgiveness, but I would keep on repeating the same sins over and over again because I was too comfortable to give up my old habits and wasn't willing to completely submit my life to Christ.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

I would often find myself living for the world and convincing myself that I could live a life of sin and still commit my life to Jesus. I always wanted to fit in with everyone else and I sought validation from kids at school so that way I could feel accepted. However, after doing the wrong thing, I would feel guilty knowing that I wasn't honoring God with the things I was doing. These feelings of guilt led me to ask God for forgiveness for my sins. God showed me the importance of living to please him instead of living to please others.

Life because of Jesus

Ever since I placed my faith in Christ I've felt a lot less anxious and stressed about things. I've given all my doubts and insecurities to God and he has helped me to overcome sin. Even though I still find myself falling into sin, he has shown me the importance of building a relationship with him because nothing on this Earth lasts forever. Everything that I love on this Earth will eventually come to an end but the only thing that lasts forever is God which is why I chose to put my faith in him.



JOSEPH CHAN

Life before knowing Christ:

I grew up in a Catholic household and attended church every Sunday with my parents. However, I didn't truly know God or have a personal and intimate relationship with Him. Because I didn't learn the importance of prayer or the value of studying the scriptures, I rarely prayed or read the Bible. Being a self-reliant person, I have typically relied on my own belief and understanding to make decisions and solve problems rather than leaning on God for wisdom and guidance.

How did I come to believe in Jesus?

Following the passing of my father after his long illness, I have been struggling with deep sadness and anxiety. The situation has been pain-

ful and difficult to manage. The resulting grief has taken a significant toll on my physical health, mental well-being and work performance.

At a friend's suggestion, I sought guidance from a pastor at his church. She listened to what I have gone through and offered prayers and spiritual support. The pastor also invited me to attend a service on Sunday to hear her preach. Although I was initially hesitant, I have decided to accept her invitation.

Attending a Christian service for the first time was a unique experience for me. The service began with the worship team leading the congregation in praise songs, followed by the pastor preaching a sermon. This week's sermon was on John 15:5-10, "The Vine and the Branches." Both the worship and the sermon message were quite different from the Catholic masses I used to attend.

The message of John 15:5-10 has profoundly impacted and deeply resonated with me and I felt as though God was speaking directly to me and about me during the sermon. I have been reflecting on the message throughout the day. The scriptures perfectly described my current relationship with God. I have been like a branch disconnected from the vine and have wandered away like a lost sheep for many years. Acknowledging that I am a sinner, I felt a deep desire to reconnect with God and accept Jesus Christ as my Savior.

I shared my reflections and responses to Sunday's sermon with the pastor. She led me in a prayer to confess my sins, ask for forgiveness and accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I believe that Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead and I know that I have been saved by grace through faith. From this day forward, I am committed to following Jesus and remaining connected to Him.

Life because of Jesus / Where is he leading me?

My spiritual journey towards reconnecting with God continues to evolve and improve. I have continued to attend the Christian worship services regularly since confessing my sins and accepting Jesus as my Savior. A few weeks later, I was invited by a brother to attend his weekly small group meeting.

Participating in the small group has been a life-changing experience for me. Through the support of the brothers and sisters in the small group, I learned how to read the Bible and how to pray regularly. These practices have significantly improved my spiritual health and helped me gain a much deeper understanding of the scriptures and how to apply God's words to my daily life. Consequently I have found immense joy, peace and hope in studying God's word and my previous feelings of sadness and anxiety have greatly diminished.

I have learned to lean on and trust God for strength and wisdom rather than relying solely on myself, knowing that Jesus helps me carry my burdens. Through prayers, I have learned to surrender my struggles to God.

This spiritual growth has also positively impacted my professional life. I feel more energetic and my work performance has considerably improved. Most notably and interestingly, I have witnessed many of my patients, who had not responded to prior treatments from other providers for years, experience a sudden and remarkable reduction in pain and physical impairments following our treatment sessions. I recognized that I am simply a conduit for this healing, which I believe truly comes through the power of the Holy Spirit.

I am thankful for God's grace and compassion. I now realize that my past difficulties served a purpose in bringing me closer to Him. Through His love, He did not abandon me, but instead used the pastor to reestablish an intimate relationship with Him.

Moving forward, I am starting my new spiritual life with joy and peace, having found hope in His plan for me. I have learned to live without fear, to pray consistently, and to find strength and endurance through the scriptures. I have learned to bring my burdens to Jesus, trusting in His strength and rest. By focusing on my connections with Jesus as the primary source of my faith, I remain committed to God's purpose for my life and to glorifying Him. My goal is to live in daily obedience to His teachings and to allow His words to guide my path and decisions.

I am truly grateful for how God has rebuilt my life. I intend to honor His name every day through my actions, words, and attitude. As Philippians 1:21 says, "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain!"



RAINEN ESPINOSA

I come from a family of believers, and I've believed in God for as long as I can remember. In our family, we talk about God often and try to keep Him close in our daily lives. I usually pray to God at night before I go to sleep.

One person in my life who was different was my Korean grandmother. She was an atheist, though she used to be a Buddhist. She took care of us with so much love, but when we were with her, we didn't pray at night or before meals. She didn't really know much about God or Christianity until she was 70 years old—when she finally became a believer. That was very special to our family because we had prayed for her to know God.

I've learned about faith mostly from my mom, who is a Christian, and from my dad, who is Catholic. They both taught me what it means to believe in Christ. I started coming to this church in 2019, about seven years ago, and it has been a big part of my faith journey. I read my children's Bible a few times and believe that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and that He has saved me many times in my life. One time, I was at a swimming pool when someone threw a big floating swan on top of me. It was heavy, and I got trapped underneath it in the deep end. I started to feel light-headed and scared, but God was watching over me—someone saw me and pulled me out just in time. I believe that was one of the many times God saved me and protected me.

I find myself constantly talking to God and asking for His thoughts on things, even when I don't really need help. Sometimes I just tell Him about my day—things that made me happy, sad, or even just small moments. I often think about how different my life would be if I didn't believe in Him. Without prayer or feeling His love, I think my heart would feel empty and lost.

God is with me every day—from when I wake up to when I play games, and even in the smallest moments, like brushing my teeth or using the bathroom. Sometimes I feel like He is whispering to me, helping me decide what's right or wrong. For example, I don't feel right about

hurting or killing anything, even the tiniest bugs. Whenever I see a spider or insect in my house, I try to catch it and set it free. I used to enjoy fishing, but one Saturday, I went to a man-made pond where the owner wouldn't let us release the fish we caught even after paying for the fish. That really upset me, because I didn't want to kill the fish. If I had known we couldn't let them go, we wouldn't have gone there at all. I felt very heavy about this incident and prayed about it. This is how God works in my life.

Jesus changed my life by dying on the cross for my sins. The more I get to know Him, the closer I feel God's presence showing me the way through life. I believe that my faith in God will not only guide me through this life but also lead me to heaven one day so I can be with Him and my loved ones who had gone before me. I try to live by His words in the Bible and share what I learn with my friends, especially those who don't yet know Him. I believe God put me here for a reason—to follow Him, to trust Him, and to help others know His love too.



RICHARD HERRERA

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

Life before knowing Christ was odd now that I look back at it. I was really spiteful, angry a lot of the time, careless about life, and really lost. Finding “happiness” in being alone, and getting intoxicated to distract myself from my thoughts. Taking life for granted, thinking I don't matter to anyone, and living really careless because of that.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

I was brought up in a Christian household, so I always was a believer. But due to a rough life, I turned away from religion, and blamed God for all the bad things. After another rough patch in life, I was seeking some sort of peace in my head and a break from my thoughts. So I started looking up a church to try out, this led me to SBCC. From the second I walked from my car to the church I felt so welcomed, and like

I actually existed. The service and message really hit me hard, making me realize that this is where I belonged, seeking a relationship with God. Now I feel all that happened for a reason, and God spoke to me, telling me I should be at SBCC. Now I'm devoting my life to Christ and thankful for how it has changed me and my outlook on life. So grateful for the sacrifice he made for all of us, and so grateful for every single person at SBCC.

I think Jesus needed to save me because I was a broken person who had no hope for love or peace. I believe he has given me peace of mind through believing in him, through answering my prayers, and making me feel loved by him. He has opened my eyes and made me repent for my sins, and to strive to do better, for myself, my family, and everyone around me. To spread his word, to spread kindness, and love.

Life because of Jesus

I'm back to spreading kindness, love, and telling my loved ones about God. Being optimistic about life, and God's plan for all of us. Trying to be a good God-following leader to my family. Knowing what I've gone through was for a reason, to bring me closer to God, and trying to be more like him. Reading my bible more than I ever have in my life, learning about how he lived, and trying to be more like him. So excited for this new life with Christ, and the community at SBCC. From the bottom of my heart, thank you all so much.

✱

ZEPHYR HONG

I feel like all my life I've known Christ. There wasn't a moment that I can remember where I didn't. My parents raised me to be christian and I was surprisingly enthusiastic about church and the people there. During Halloween I would even miss trick or treating so I could serve at the harvest festival here. I believed in Jesus's death and resurrection and I saw it as great news to know that God cared for us enough to sacrifice his one and only son which is why I was so eager to believe it.

Later in my life I feel like I've turned distant from God more and more. I like to think I have a good understanding of the Gospel and Christ desires, which is why it confuses me whenever I choose the world over him. I know what's good for me and I know what's bad for me and yet I choose the bad more and more. Even after surviving a near death car accident where a telephone pole had pierced the front of my windshield and into the passenger seat headrest. I remember the first thing I thought was I needed to be saved, because death could happen any moment so I knew I needed a revival in my relationship with God, because I almost just died.

But apathy is the biggest killer of followers of Christ—within a month I started living my life normal again with the same sin and laziness not reading the word or attending church. I used to think that understanding God's messages made you into a better christian to a point where you secured a spot in heaven, but now I don't know. I feel like I've wasted my knowledge and ambition for something comfortable and an easy life. I've been delaying this baptism due to apathy, I never really cared for baptism. I always assumed I would do it later but that day never came until I took action. I know this baptism won't save me or change me but it serves as a marker in my life to at least show something for all my years in this church. I believe Jesus has saved me both physically but mostly spiritually through prayer, especially when times are hard.

*

DENA JAQUEZ

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

As a child, I don't have any recollection of attending church. One thing I admired was that I always saw my Nana praying, and believing in God. As an adult, my mom and I began attending church together and I really enjoyed it. Although I always believed in God, my knowledge about the Bible was limited and I really didn't know or understand what Jesus had done for me. I would go through the motions, but wasn't truly understanding the Bible. I had made decisions in my life that weren't the best, which caused me to feel lonely, lost, anxious and sometimes depressed. I didn't consistently attend church and when things didn't go right in my life, or when someone I loved was sick or died, I would question my religion and God. I had not yet developed my knowledge about the character of God and had not deepened my own personal relationship with Him.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

Many years ago, my dear friend Patty invited me to her church. I attended because I knew that something was missing in my life, but wasn't sure what it was and thought this may help. After attending, I enjoyed it, however, I didn't feel it was the church for me, so I continued attending Catholic Church. I applied for the RCIA classes twice so that I could complete my sacraments believing that this would bring me closer to God and help fill the void I was feeling. Both times, I received no response. I felt rejected, judged and like I wasn't enough in the eyes of my church because of my past decisions. I was confused because if Jesus could forgive me for my sins, why couldn't my church? Wasn't I good enough?

In January 2024, I asked my friend Patty again to attend her new church with her and her husband Hector. I attended Sunday service at South Bay Community Church on January 7th. I listened very attentively to Pastor Greg. I laughed, I cried, and I knew at that moment that I had found what was missing in my life. I began to grow in my faith

and my knowledge about Jesus and the Bible and began to find community. I also discovered my love of worship music and the peace it brings me. I felt welcomed, loved and like I was home. Meanwhile, I still struggled inside for what the right decision was for me. I felt as though I was betraying my heritage and my Nana who I always remember praying the Rosary. I prayed about it, talked it through with a family member who had also had the same feelings as she also had been attending a Christian Church. A few months later during service, I accepted Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to forgive my sins, as my Lord and Savior. I know that my Nana who I loved so much would be proud that I was serving our Lord no matter what religion I chose to be a part of.

Life because of Jesus

I have been so blessed over the past year attending SBCC with my dear friends. I look forward to Saturday nights learning about Jesus, worshipping Him, and meeting new friends in Christ. I continue to grow in my knowledge of the Bible and strive to be a better human and live like Christ. I've started going to the Women's Bible Study on Saturdays and am also stepping out to attend some church events.

I don't have to be perfect as long as I strive to be my best. Christ renews me and because of his resurrection, I will have eternal life.

Thank you Patty and Hector for introducing me to SBCC, and thank you Jesus for accepting me as I am and for everything that you do for me.



AVERY LIU

I grew up going to church, listening to stories of Bible characters and memorizing John 3:16. Since I started middle school, I started wanting to learn more of God's character. In 6th grade when I started going to "big church" and youth group, there were so many things I wanted to learn, but I kept overthinking what it meant to believe in God. I was also struggling with normal middle school problems. At school, I was constantly wondering, "who am I going to sit with at lunch today? Does that person not like me as a friend anymore? Am I too boring? Am I going to fail in school?" And at church, it was hard for me to come out of my introverted shell and make some new friends. I did not know it yet, but God would later use these tough moments to show me the meaning of humility and grace.

Since 6th grade, I wanted to pursue a relationship with God and understand him more. In the summer after 7th grade, I decided to put my faith in Him at the SBCC youth "Anchored" retreat. God taught me that there are so many bad anchors that intentionally drag us away from Him, and so many false anchors that look so promising and good in the moment. But they ultimately don't fulfill the purpose that we've been designed for. They lead us away from Christ and become worldly idols. But, my eternal, faithful anchor is Jesus Christ. It was then that I made the decision that Jesus would be my everlasting Savior. It wasn't a big, dramatic moment. That's the thing with giving our life to God. It's not the experience we get, but the truth and presence of God that we get to have forever.

As I think back, God has been slowly teaching me lessons along the way. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God who humbled Himself, came to earth, and died an unfair death. It was never His fault that humanity had turned out so sinful, but it was our own choices that led us here. Jesus did not want us to die and rot in Hell walking blindly in sin. The perfect Son of God spilled His blood so that we could choose to live.

The thing that sets Jesus apart from other martyrs from history is that He didn't stay dead. He rose back to life, and because of Him, so do we. It's the greatest gift that we could ever receive, so why should we waste that? All along, God had been faithful to teach me:

1) Through this struggle of loneliness, He is the most faithful friend I could ever have. He also showed me how to be a better, more Christ rooted friend through Jesus' example of His friendships with His disciples.

2) He forgives and loves all of His children.

3) God taught me that His wisdom is so much better than worldly wisdom. He showed me that wisdom is not just an overnight thing where all of a sudden the next day I'm a better person. Wisdom comes through being connected with God. I know because I am known, and all the wisdom and knowledge that I have of God is meant to be a gift that is shared, not a weapon to hurt and attack others.

4) God showed me that I need to humble myself. Inside, I was a prideful person. God taught me that being humble means to hold myself and everyone else to God's standards, and on this even playing field, we are all so weak compared to Him. Through this though, we support each other as brothers and sisters in this hike to heaven, no matter how many times we stumble.

5) Because Jesus treats the church like His bride, with love and care, I will also love this church community. It's not the church I belong to, but the Lord who loves me.

He was there yesterday, waiting patiently with kindness for me to accept Him. He will be there tomorrow to catch me when I fall and to teach me to be more like Jesus. My life, your life, all of creation, is for the glory of God.



MILA LOPEZ PEGULLO

Life before knowing Christ:

I've known Jesus Christ since I was born. I prayed and went to church every Sunday with my mom and brothers when we lived in Argentina. But the moment I moved to California I wasn't as connected as I was before.

I wasn't praying as much, and I was more interested in hanging out with my friends and doing my own thing.

Even though I was distant from Him I never stopped believing in Him and that he died on the cross for our sins and he rose from the dead on the 3rd day. I still believe that He is the son of God.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

Sometimes I would get really sad and stay alone in my room for hours because other kids would tease me at school. I kind of shut myself out from everything and I felt very insecure and worried about what anyone would say about me.

Then after some time, my mom started talking to God again. I saw her getting closer to Jesus. She started going to church again and taking us along. She even enrolled me and my big brother in the Youth Group which I love and I enjoy a lot. I also go to church on Sundays with my mom and take notes. I have this cool app on my phone that gives me Bible verses to read every day.

How has He changed you since you placed your faith in Him?

Jesus is helping me find real peace and happiness. I still have my ups and downs but that's normal. God gives me strength to get through the hard times.

My friendships have been healthier and better overall. Things don't seem as hard as they used to be.



MATEO LOPEZ PEGULLO

Life before knowing Christ:

I knew Jesus since I was a baby because my mommy always talked about God and took me and my big brother and big sister to church.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?:

When I started feeling worried or scared about things, my mommy would always tell me to pray and talk to Jesus. I would start feeling better right away. When I think about Jesus, I feel happy and safe.

I believe in Him and I know that He came here to save us. He died on the cross because He loves so much and He came back to life.

How has He changed you since you placed your faith in Him?:

He's leading me closer to him. I want to go to church more and be a better person to everyone. He is making me want to do good things.



HAVANAH LOWERY

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

Before I truly believed in Jesus, my life felt really lost. Even though I'm only 14, I went through a lot of feelings like anger, depression, and emptiness. I knew about God and Jesus because I went to a Catholic school when I was younger, so I had heard the Word before. But even though I knew about Him, I didn't really know Him in my heart yet. During that time, I often felt confused and hurt inside. I carried a lot of anger and sadness, and I didn't always know how to deal with those feelings. Even though I had heard about God growing up, I still felt empty and like something was missing in my life.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

I came to believe in Jesus when I started realizing that the emptiness and pain I felt couldn't be fixed by anything in the world. I knew something in my life was missing. As I started learning more about God, I began to understand how much Jesus truly loves us. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins so we could be forgiven and have a relationship with God. I believe He rose again and gave us hope and new life. When I opened my heart to Him, I realized that Jesus was what I had been missing.

Life because of Jesus

Since I placed my faith in Jesus, my life has changed because I try to live differently. I think more about my choices and try to do what is right. Jesus has helped me grow in my faith and trust God more, especially when things are difficult. Knowing that He loves and forgives me gives me hope and peace. Right now, I believe He is guiding me to keep growing in my relationship with Him. I'm trying to learn more about God, pray more, and treat others with kindness and love. Wanting to be baptized is part of how I want to follow Him and show my faith.



ALESSANDRO MASCIOTTI

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

I come from a broken home, divorced parents and so I was raised by my Catholic grandparents in Lima-Peru and they took me to church every now and then. My neighbors were Mormons and they were righteous people so my grandma asked them if they could take me to their church and when I turned 8 years old I was baptized and became a Mormon. I always paid attention to their testimonies and what they said "I believe this is the only true religion on earth" and that made me think..But what about the other religions?" Then when I was at home with my Mormon brothers, Evangelicals would knock on the door to preach and share the

word of the Lord but my Brothers told me not to open the door, to ignore them and that they were no good so that made me think..Why would a religion think is better than the other if there is only One GOD.

Then I realized at a young age that Religion wasn't for me and that instead of uniting people they were doing the opposite. Thereafter, I've heard on the news that some priests of the Catholic church were abusing children and that the Church engaged in systematic cover ups to conceal these crimes and protect the abusers; after hearing this news I was so upset and decided to stay away from any religion and became more spiritual.

Since I grew up without a father & a mom, I spent my early life figuring things out and learning the hard way so when I became a parent I felt totally lost.

I always reminded my kids to believe in God but I never took them to church or read the bible with them and as I grew older as a parent I began to search for purpose in my life as I could see the world around me falling apart and becoming more divided.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

I always believed in God and knew about Jesus but this time I wanted to reconnect in a deeper way so I started searching online for a Christian Church in the South Bay area and that's how I found the SBCC fam.

On my first visit to SBCC service I fell in love with the sense of community and felt welcomed; I enjoyed singing and praising the lord made me feel great inside. I loved it so much that I told my 11 year old daughter and she agreed to join me on my next visit; ever since I first attended SBCC I felt better internally and made me want to come back for more. My daughter also enjoyed coming with me to SBCC and we've become regulars.

I suddenly started having pain & fatigue in my hands and feet; I went to see the doctor and I was diagnosed with a very aggressive Arthritis condition; my future felt uncertain and I was really worried and sad that one day @ SBCC after service I stayed and asked for prayer and felt better thereafter.

Going back to Church and putting my faith back in Jesus as my lord and savior has saved me and it's had a transformative effect in my life giving me new purpose, leading to more love, inner peace, mercy and a desire to serve others. A feeling like no other...like being born again.

Like Apostle Paul states "...it's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me"

Life because of Jesus

Since I returned to Jesus I've felt internal positive changes like the need to pray and praise the Lord, spiritual growth, to be righteous... my life shifts from self to living for a higher purpose, to know, love and serve God and others.



COLE MATSUNAMI

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

I was born and raised in a Christian family, and I remember we would always go to church every Sunday when I was little. But of course as a little kid, I didn't comprehend who God or Christ was at the time. What I found most engaging about going to Sunday School was the different Bible stories we would learn about from the Old Testament like Moses, Daniel, and David & Goliath, but yet I still didn't understand who Christ was and what he did for us. As a young kid, I struggled with listening and paying attention to the lessons we were taught at church and being able to take them to heart in a serious manner. But I remember there was this one song from one of my favorite childhood shows that was about the story of Jesus, who he was, and what he did in a short narrative form, and one of those lines from the song had a lasting impact on me and helped me to understand why we truly come to church which is, "He died for us to give us life, and to give us hope He rose."

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

During my time in elementary school, I still went to Sunday school every week, but Christ wasn't the first thing on my mind while I was in school and I preferred to keep my church life private around my friends and classmates. As I started my first year in middle school, I slowly began to accept Christ into my life as I continued to go to the middle school ministry, but as I went into my last two years of middle school, that was when Christ began to not be my top priority anymore, especially when I was in 8th grade.

During my 8th grade year, I was part of my soon-to-be high school's marching band, and because I was committed to it, I didn't have time to go to South Bay's middle school ministry or have any quiet times with Christ due to so many rehearsals and afterschool practices. All the intense long hours of practicing and rehearsing on a football field made me exhausted, fatigued, and trapped to the point where I didn't think about Christ anymore, or ask why he put me in this place where I felt unaccepted. As my first year in high school was going smoothly, half of it was cut short due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and during the pandemic that was when my bond with Christ began to rekindle slowly, and eventually I accepted Christ back into my life again during that time of isolation.

As I went into my last two years in high school, I went through a time of loneliness, self-doubt, and self-discovery for myself. It was mainly a tug-of-war between what I liked to do versus how other people viewed what I liked doing. At that moment, I decided to slow myself down and just listen to God, and how he has influenced my life in terms of what he has given me and my journey in coming back to Him started. I think back to when Christ was brutally beaten and torn apart by the Roman soldiers who made him suffer immense pain before he was crucified on that tree. I reflect on that because I saw myself in that place, being beaten down, pressured, unaccepted, and feeling different for having a love for musical arts.

But as I was reflecting on why Christ was beaten and nailed to that cross, I started to believe that God allows bad stuff to happen for a greater purpose, and that's what he did during Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. I came to believe that Christ died for us to save us from sin and fear, and to show us that there is always light in the darkness,

that was when He rose from the grave showing us that there is always hope, even in the toughest times of our lives. Once I came to that understanding, I began to compare it to my life and what God has given to me to help me become the person that I am today, and all the trials and tribulations that I have faced that led me to this point. From doing regular band, to marching band, to choir, and to theater, I started to believe why God gave me these opportunities in my life, not to make me miserable, unsatisfied, or suffer, but to help me to become the person He wanted me to be and to help me love and accept the different gifts He gave me.

After I came to that realization, I started to believe that Christ saved me from not feeling like I didn't belong anywhere or being alone, leaving behind all the things that He has given to me in my life that would make it seem like it was all in vain, and not being willing to accept the person God made and wanted me to be as his child.

Life because of Jesus

After I completely put my faith and trust in Christ, He started to change my life by helping me to open my eyes to what His Word teaches us about the values of life through His teachings and what he says about certain topics that have influenced my journey. One of my favorite verses is in the Book of Hebrews and that's Hebrews 10:36 which reads, "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." This verse has made a big impact on my life on what I've been through and how I learned that God wants us all to persevere even in the hardest points of our lives and to always trust in Him that He'll see us through. As of today, Christ is guiding me by helping me to reconnect with the people who have also put their trust in God and by helping me to see that I'm never alone, even in when times get tough in my life, I can always cast my burdens to the Lord and He will sustain me, which is what Psalm 55:22 reads. There's one other verse that has made a tremendous impact on my life, and that is Jeremiah 29:11 which reads, "For I know the plans I have for you", declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Every single step that I have taken and every move that I have made in my life was all part of our Father's plan for me. I am blessed to not only be given so many opportunities that not only define who I am today, but also to my family, my mom and my dad who have always supported me throughout every challenge in my life, my sister who has always been there for me, as well as my grandparents who have supported me and watched me grow, and my cousins who inspired me to get baptized because of their faith and devotion to Christ. And to the friends and leaders that I have who helped me to reconnect with Christ throughout my time at South Bay ever since I started coming here back in 2017 while I was in seventh grade.



MADELINE MINNE

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

I was incredibly anxious and self conscious. I was constantly trying to fit in with the people around me, even if that meant being rude or judgmental towards other people. But it got to the point where I was incredibly depressed. I didn't want to do anything and I was constantly missing school and skipping my activities. I struggled to act or dress like the popular group, and that only made me irritable and lash out on others. I was very dependent on other's validation and 'fitting in' with a specific group. No matter how much reassurance I got, it would never be enough, and I would try harder and harder to be the best, but I would constantly fizzle out and be too tired to continue.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

God's grace and protection ultimately helped me believe in Jesus. I was in a friend group for years that would be very toxic and backhanded towards everyone. I would constantly 'forgive and forget' their actions towards me, yet I would still hold on, holding grudges and talking behind their backs, which wasn't much better than what they were doing. Even when I left, I was still in their social circle. It wasn't until after they

kicked me out that I found God's love in making 'bad' things happen. Looking back, he saved me from that friendgroup. He surrounded me with teachers of the gospel, like my small group leaders or my friends at church, even before I prayed for him, who helped me through that tough time and brought me closer to God. I can see now that his love is not just giving me things I want, but putting me through tough times (or roadblocks, as pastor Cory would say) to show how much I need him to guide me, and to teach me lessons on how to be more like him. I was so dependent on others' validation before, but after going through such a hard lesson, Jesus revealed his love and how the world can never fill me, only he can anchor me in love and true forgiveness. No other 'godly' figures can ever satisfy and heal and forgive me like Jesus can. He did die for us, how much more loving is that?

Growing up, I was surrounded by wants. I want to dress this way. I want this cool new toy. I want to fit in with this group of girls. I constantly tried to fill myself with worldly validations; whether it be putting other girls down or trying to act a certain way to fit in. This drained me though, I constantly felt less than the people around me, and when the same girls I desperately tried to fit in with would be rude, the load of stress would pile further onto me. Instead of going to the cross, I leaned on worldly desires that only made me more stressed. It was when I was around 7th grade when Jesus saved me from worldly reassurance and helped me recognize his love. He cut me off of my school friends, and surrounded me with people from my church who were filled with love. I would go to youth group before, but it wasn't until 7th summer retreat where I really felt God's presence. We were worshipping and it wasn't a sermon that pushed me but the music. I felt God's presence in that moment, and it was like my view snapped into focus. Of course, it was just the beginning. I had so many suspicions that I wanted to be answered, and throughout 8th grade and this year, God has answered those questions. My heart and mind has recognized that science and history process the bible, but also his love, protection, and wisdom over our lives reveals that he is real. The world is just so detailed that it doesn't make sense for it to be nothing, and the fact that Jesus just loves us so much that he died for us, even though we are just so undeserving, just makes me want to pursue and serve him.

Life because of Jesus

I'm happy with being alone. I once was set on eating with a specific group, or hanging out with a demographic, but that only caused more chaos. But now, I like being alone during lunch, cherishing it. Or when I pray, I enjoy just telling him everything. I always end up thankful for him. He helps me let go of the previous day, and be ready for the day ahead. I am able to connect more, yet I don't really find it the most important part of my life. It's nice talking to people, but I also enjoy laying alone and not talking to my friends 24/7.

He's also helped me quit bad habits. Like skipping practice, profanity, lust, or gossiping and depending on worldly things. Every time I do get tempted, he thankfully makes me lose attention to that. He's also opened the plethora of music in the christian genre. My favorite band, strings and heart helps me feel so uplifted through the day, and I never get sick of their songs. My friends have also been a lot better. My closest friends aren't scared of pointing me out. Even when we do clash, we always, ALWAYS make up through Christ's love. It's so nice not feeling tense after an argument. He's also helped me stay rooted in my art and expression. My clothes feel so me now, and it empowers God, which I love. I also feel more emotion in my art, and expressing my feelings through it just brings me more motivation. I could honestly talk forever about his change in my life.

How is He leading or guiding you now?

I was always anxious about everything. My looks, my future, my grades, my friendships. These emotions still haven't fully gone away. But, Jesus has helped me stay faithful in his plan. I overthink, but I always stay grounded in his plan. I don't know what will happen, but I know he will protect me, even when rough times will come my way.

I also struggle with quitting bad habits, like scrolling too much, but he is helping me with slowly bringing my screentime down. He is currently helping me with managing my anger and getting less offended, as well as overthinking. He is also helping me with motivation, getting out of bed, making an effort in life. But the main thing he is helping me with

is being more loud in my faith. I'm still a little shy about being christian, but I've definitely been pushed more by Jesus. Like reading my bible more, or sharing my testimony, or trying to help answer questions about the gospel to nonbelievers, even if I have trouble explaining.



NATALIA PEGULLO

I was raised in a Christian home since I was a baby. So, I have always believed in Jesus Christ. I felt a strong connection with the Lord at a very young age. I remember being 5 years old and worshipping the Lord with all my heart.

I believed then as I believe now that Jesus Christ is the son of God who died on the cross for our sins and rose on the 3rd day.

The only way to God is through Jesus Christ.

He is my one and only savior.

Although I've always believed in Jesus, the older I got, the harder it was for me to keep my focus on Him.

I lost my way in my early 20's.

As a young adult, I strayed away from the Lord. I got caught up in drugs and alcohol. At first it was all recreational but then after having children and feeling the weight of the world on my shoulders, feeling very alone, also suffering from depression, I started drinking more as an escape. It was a way to numb my pain and forget about my problems and anxiety. It only made things worse for me and my children. I was so lost. I was confused and angry. I hated my life and was struggling to get through my days. I didn't want to live anymore. Everything was crumbling right before my eyes. I was a mess.

It got to a point where I was admitted into a psych ward due to my mental state.

I was spiraling out of control. I hit rock bottom.

... and that's when I heard the Holy Spirit speak to me.

I felt the Lord's presence. And I heard Him say clearly "I'm here for you. You are not alone. Come back to me... talk to me. You will see, things will be better."

I sobbed in repentance. I cried out to Him and praised His holy name because I knew that He was there with me and that I was going to be ok.

From that very moment I stopped drinking and taking drugs.

I began putting all my focus on Him and I have been staying strong. My days are lighter and I haven't felt depressed since.

This is why Proverbs 3-5:6 is my favorite scripture. It resonates.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. Acknowledge Him in all your ways and He will make your path straight.

Luke 15 – the parable of the sheep is also my story.

He has found me time and time again. His lost sheep. He saved me from darkness and lifted me up.

It makes me cry as I'm writing this because I wouldn't be here now if it weren't for Him.

This is how I know He is real. I lived a life without Him and I have lived a life with Him. And let me tell you, life with Him is so beautiful! He has brought peace into my life. He has helped me see again.

I am grateful for His grace and His faithfulness.

I am grateful for all that He is.

Praise Jesus!



CELIA RAMIREZ

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

Jesus was first introduced to me by my grandma so growing up I knew there was someone greater than me, Even though I would pray with her I didn't really know what I was praying for or who I was praying to. I grew up and started going to church again which was when I had my first encounter with God. I was told I had a generational curse put on my family and I was the one who it fell on, I didn't think anything of it because I didn't care I was ignorant. My family stopped going to church. I would go here and there. I wasn't consistent anymore. I started to live in worldly sin. I struggled with thoughts of suicide, I struggled against my flesh and fell into sexual and lustful sin at a young age. I was a very angry person. I eventually stopped praying and didn't go to church anymore. I kept living in sin and just grew farther away from God. I ended up wanting to learn about witchcraft. I wasn't happy and didn't want my life anymore. I couldn't find anything to fill the void in my heart.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

Everytime I attempted to get into my word and really grow with God. I started to go through really bad spiritual warfare. For a week I would have night terrors of demons attacking me every night and I would call out for help and I couldn't speak. I tried calling out to Jesus and I couldn't say his name. I got really fearful and knew I had to change something in my life. I began to read my bible and grew a yearning for Jesus. I prayed upon my life to remove sin and help me with my spiritual warfare. I learned more about the bible and Jesus and what he did. I began to feel conviction and guilt for choosing to live a sinful life knowing all the pain and suffering Jesus went through for me. I know Jesus died on the cross for me and my sins so I could be forgiven. I wholeheartedly believe Jesus is my savior.

Life because of Jesus

I am filled with peace knowing no matter what goes wrong in my life God will not fail. I am learning to be more Christ-like every day. I can feel Jesus working in me because I can feel my heart being transformed. I no longer want to live in worldly sin. Jesus is still working on me but I know won't fight him on it anymore and he fully has my heart. I feel so much gratitude for his ever lasting and gracious love. My public dedication to this new path is symbolized by my baptism, which represents the sanctification and restoration I have experienced in Jesus. I am so excited to deepen my faith, spread the good news of God's grace, and lead a life that demonstrates his love.

*

NICK SEGAWA

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

I used to believe after death there is nothingness. So I wanted to live my life as comfy as possible. Nothing matters and nobody else matters.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

I saw a short online video that planted a seed in me. Then I did more research and I like concrete evidence. So after years, I realized this is real and the truth. I accepted he was a real historical person who was God in human form, the Son of God, who lived a perfect life and we always fall short so we needed an ultimate sacrifice. So He died for all of us, so we could get heaven.

Life because of Jesus

[Jesus] gave me a purpose in life, gave me every answer I needed. So I try to live my life according to the Bible.

*

CAMI SHIMAZAKI

Hi, my name is Cami Shimazaki, and I am a junior at North High School.

I've been blessed to grow up in a Christian household. From a young age, I frequently attended Sunday school, heard the classic Bible stories of David and Goliath or Daniel in the lion's den, and went to VBS every summer. On the outside, I looked like the "good Christian kid." However, I didn't fully comprehend the sacrifice Jesus made for me. I had heard the gospel so many times that it became a normalized story rather than something for me to truly appreciate. I was going through the motions, and my heart didn't really believe in God.

It wasn't until 7th grade when I went to Mt. Hermon, a summer church camp, that my faith took a positive turn. It was the first time in my life that I truly felt God's presence. During one of the worship sessions, we were singing the song, *The Heart of Worship*. The lyrics say, "When the music fades, all is stripped away, and I simply come... I'm coming back to the heart of worship, and it's all about You, Jesus." In that moment, those words became real to me. I realized that I was coming before God as a sinner who didn't deserve His grace, yet He still welcomed me with open arms. As everyone around me was worshiping, it felt like I was getting a small glimpse of heaven.

After that experience, I was on a camp high. I was motivated to spend time with God and truly commit my life to Him. For a few months, I was consistent. However, the post camp excitement wore off, and I got busy with school, sports, and friends, and slowly stopped making time for God.

Transitioning into high school, I faced similar challenges. I made the varsity basketball team and was enrolled in the early El Camino College program, which has been a big blessing from God. But because basketball became so time-consuming and tiring, and school became more difficult, my relationship with God was no longer my first priority. I replaced reading the bible and praying with studying and practice. I placed my identity on my grades, basketball performance, and achieve-

ments that would help get me into a good college. Living my life like this, I would get stressed out easily and often felt burnt out.

It wasn't until this recent year that I began to take my faith seriously. My friends and I started to send each other our daily devotionals, which kept me accountable and motivated to build my relationship with God. In doing so, God began teaching me something important: through challenges and successes, He remains steady. When I place my identity in Him, I'm reminded that whether my grades go up or down, or whether I play good or bad in basketball, God is always there to keep me grounded.

For a long time I thought I needed some big, life-altering moment before I could get baptized. But I've realized that baptism isn't about being perfect or waiting for the "right moment." It's about publicly declaring my faith in Jesus.

I know that I am a sinner, and that I am saved by grace through faith. And today, I want to show that my life belongs to Christ.



EMILY SIA

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

I grew up in a Christian family, so faith has always been a natural part of my life. I cannot remember a time when I did not know about Jesus. From a young age, my mother brought me to church and Sunday school, where I listened to Bible stories and sang songs about God's love. Attending a Christian school since I was two years old also helped shape my understanding of faith and the teachings of the Bible. Looking back, I realize how much these early experiences quietly formed the foundation of what I believe today.

When I was six years old, I attended a Harvest Crusade for Kids where I made the decision to become a follower of Christ. At the time, I may not have fully understood everything about faith, but I knew that I wanted Jesus to be part of my life. The following year, my mom prayed with

me, and I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. That moment became an important step in making my faith more personal.

Since then, my mom has continued to encourage me in my faith by sharing daily devotions and praying together for our family and friends. These moments have helped me see that faith is not just something I learned growing up, but something that continues to grow and guide me each day. Looking back, I am grateful for the environment I was raised in, because it has given me a strong spiritual foundation that continues to shape the way I live and the choices I make.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

During middle school, I attended a two-year program at my church called Discipleship/Confirmation. It involved group and individual Bible studies, memorizing Scripture, community worship, and mentorship, all leading to a confirmation service. This experience further strengthened my faith and affirmed that God continues to shape my journey with Him.

As a Christian, I believe that God is the Creator of all things and that the world is filled with His glory. I believe that I was created in God's image and designed to live in relationship with Him and with others. I also believe that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to restore what was broken in the world. Jesus became fully human and sacrificed Himself to pay the price for the sin of the world. One day, He will renew creation and restore it to the perfection God originally intended. Because of God's grace, believers like me can experience restoration and be brought into a right relationship with God, with others, and with ourselves.

Life because of Jesus

Jesus has changed my life in many miraculous ways. Having a relationship with Him has brought me reassurance and a clearer understanding of my purpose in life. My faith has transformed my mindset in difficult circumstances, replacing fear and despair with hope. It also reminds me that I am never alone, because I have a constant companion in Christ through the challenges I have faced throughout my life so far.



ASHLEY TAUSAGA

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

Before I truly believed in Jesus, I knew about God but I didn't really know Him personally. Going to church was more of a routine than a relationship. I followed what my family taught me and did what I thought was expected, but I never really understood the gospel or felt encouraged to seek God for myself.

As I got older, I started trying to fill that emptiness in other ways. I turned to things like alcohol, thinking it would help me escape how I was feeling or make me happier. For a moment it could feel fun or distracting, but the "happy" feeling was always temporary. When it wore off, I was still left with the same confusion, insecurity, and sense that something was missing.

I was relying on my own choices and the world around me to give me peace, identity, and purpose. Even though life could look normal on the outside, I was spiritually lost and didn't understand my need for a Savior.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

My Grandma played a huge role in how I eventually came to believe in Jesus. I always admired how real her faith was. She would wake up early every morning to pray (sometimes for hours) and she would fast every Wednesday. Even though I didn't fully understand her relationship with God at the time, I could see that it was genuine.

When she passed away in 2019, I was broken. In my mind, my "prayer warrior" was gone and for a few years I felt spiritually lost without realizing how much I needed God for myself. One night, I opened my Bible where I keep an old birthday card from her and I remember certain words literally GLOWING. In Samoan, Pepe means "baby". So the words that were "glowing" to me read "To my Pepe: asking God to give you all that's good." and I just started balling. It felt like God was using her words to

draw me back to Him. The next day, I made a Facebook post sharing this and asked if anyone has a church to invite me to, I'm open to invites. So, my aunty invited me to SBCC and in January 2024, I asked my dad if he wanted to check it out and we've been going ever since.

Through the church and my life group, I came to understand the gospel more clearly. I realized that Jesus is the Son of God who died for my sins and rose again so that I could be forgiven and have a relationship with Him. By God's grace, I put my trust in Jesus, not in my own efforts.

Life because of Jesus

Since placing my faith in Jesus, my life has been changing in ways I never expected. I'm not perfect and I'm still growing, but I now have a peace and purpose that I didn't have before. I'm learning to rely less on my own strength and more on His guidance. The things I once depended on don't have the same hold on me anymore. I can see how He is using His word, my church community, and everyday moments to guide me and shape who I'm becoming.



ANSON TAUSAGA

I grew up knowing about Christ, but I never really sought Him or had a personal relationship with Him. I was living a double life. As soon as I walked out the door, I was gang-banging and doing everything that came with that lifestyle.

The truth is, the seed about Christ was planted in me when I was young because of my parents—especially my mom. She was a strong prayer warrior who constantly prayed for all of us. I'm one of eight children, and in our house my parents didn't play when it came to church. Every Sunday we were up and dressed and going to church.

The only problem was it was a Samoan church that spoke the Samoan language. Even though I'm Samoan, I didn't understand it. Because of that, I knew of God, but I didn't know Him personally.

Looking back now, I realize it was my responsibility to water the seed my parents planted in me, but I didn't do that. The life I was living kept me from seeking God. I told myself I didn't want to give that lifestyle up because I liked it. What I didn't realize was that if I had given my life to Christ earlier, I would have loved the life He had for me even more.

Now here I am at 59 years old. My brother Doug and his wife Veronica invited my daughter to their church. Being the good daughter that she is, she asked if I wanted to come check it out with her. I said sure.

That day was the day the seed my parents planted in me finally started getting watered. Since then, I've continued watering that seed, and I'm growing in Christ.

Because of Jesus Christ, my life has changed. I see things more clearly now.

My family has always known me as the jokester—the one who loves to laugh and play pranks. But there was another side of me too, a side that was better left unseen, maybe even locked up.

Today my wife and my kids can see the change in me. But more importantly, I want Jesus Christ to see that change in me. He came and died on the cross for our sins, and I truly believe that with all my heart.

And today I believe that He is leading me to life.

*

ISAAC TOY

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

I grew up in a Christian home and went to church my whole life. But before I knew Christ, I felt lost and I didn't really know anything about the Bible. I never prayed and I didn't serve others. I was selfish and did everything for myself. I didn't know where I'd get help if I was feeling down or had a problem.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

I learned in Sunday School that Jesus is the Son of God. He was crucified for my sin and rose from the dead 3 days later. I realized I am a sinner and I would die eternally if I was not forgiven. I believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that he was crucified for my sin and resurrected to new life. I accepted Christ into my heart so that I would be forgiven and have eternal life.

Life because of Jesus

After I received Jesus Christ as my lord and savior, I realized I needed to live for God and not myself. My attitude changed toward other people. I desired to show God's glory by being kind to others and praying for the salvation of my friends. The Lord is leading me to begin serving at church and I would like to go into becoming a worship leader. Because of my love for God, I want to become more and more like Jesus.



ELAINE WAKAYAMA

Life before knowing Christ:

As a child my parents raised me as a Buddhist. Every Sunday my dad would drop us off at the Koyasan temple. I never really understood the religion. We did a lot of chanting and I knew that Buddha was the

enlightened one. What the chanting meant and what it meant to be the enlightened one, I never questioned it and I never understood it.

As a senior in College, I had a lot of responsibilities put upon me. My older sister was labeled paranoid schizophrenic. My sister was living on her own and my parents had no idea of how to deal with her. I didn't even know what to do. I was mad at the world because I thought that I should be enjoying college, and not being stuck having to take care of my sister.

Well, we got through the first episode and I thought good, now I can get along with my life. I was so wrong because more episodes happened and the police got involved and she went to various psychiatric wards.

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

After college, my close cousin Gayle invited me to a church retreat. I had no idea what a retreat was but she said it would be a trip to the mountains and it would be nice to get away so I went. That was my first introduction to God. I sat there and listened but didn't really participate. After the retreat, I did not go to church but what I started to do was when my sister was having an episode, I started talking to God. I was asking him questions like if he really is a God why he is putting so much responsibility on me. I got the feeling that he was trying to tell me that he knew that I could handle it even though I didn't want to. It was nice to have someone to talk to about my problems.

I didn't start to go to church until I was married and I was trying to get pregnant. I told God that if I got pregnant, then I would start to go to church and I would raise my child as a Christian. Luckily, I did get pregnant and started to go to church. That was 33 years ago.

At first, I did not have a true relationship with God. I went through the motions of getting involved in the church and learning about the bible, but the only time I talked to God was when I wanted or needed something.

Life because of Jesus

As the years have gone by, I now feel that I have more of a relationship

with God. I try to find quiet time to not only to ask him for things but to thank him for all the great things he has given me and for his guidance. I feel like whatever situation I come across God will be there to support me through it. It has given me a lot of peace and comfort.

Lately though in my quiet times when I pray, I feel like something is missing. I think God is trying to tell me that it is now time to get baptized and proclaim to the world that I am a sinner and that Jesus died on the cross for my sins so that I can have eternal life.

*

JASON YAMADA

What was your life like before believing in Jesus?

I've always believed that there was a GOD; however, having learned about various religions and their beliefs throughout high school at a private episcopal high school, I never "truly" believed in Christianity as being "the way". My parents and other extended family were mainly buddhists but religion was never a large part of our lives growing up. Therefore, for much of my adulthood, I lived "wild and crazy" as many teens and twenty year olds do. If I were to describe myself with three words, I would describe myself at that time as "careless, self-centered, and judgmental."

How did you come to believe in Jesus?

What finally led me back to Christianity and belief in Jesus was unfortunately an accidental death of a 11 year old boy on a rental property we owned in 2017. This led to a financial struggle for a few years as well as an emotional struggle. I just could not believe that within the blink of an eye, everything that I worked for and thought was important could be lost. Over time though Jesus has taught me that GOD has a plan for each and everyone of us and that certain events occur for us to not only learn from but to fulfill his divine "will". Because we are all sinners and Jesus died on the cross and gave his blood to forgive us for our sins, we

need to live by his word and help others onto the right path as he has done for each of us.

Life because of Jesus

Jesus has changed my life by making me realize that I need to live like Jesus and try to help others do the same. He has made me realize that I should use my strengths in order to spread his love and word to as many as I can. He has also made me realize that although our sins may be forgiven, everything I do is based on what the bible teaches and what Jesus would do. Now life for me is more “care-free, selfless and empathetic”.



JANICE YAMADA

I grew up in a loving family and have always thought I had a pretty happy childhood, one that I am truly grateful for. Growing up I would say I did not have a deep understanding of religion. Ours was a home where culture and traditions were tied to Buddhism, but it was not practiced or studied strictly, nor something that I specifically understood. My superficial level of understanding of religion was that if you were a “good” person....kind, honest, modest, had integrity and treated others respectfully, that you would go to heaven. My personal efforts were all that was needed. I was ignorant.

But God did not give up on me. He placed believers alongside me. In high school, he gave me friends who invited me to attend church with them. I was wary, but excited since they seemed to be a part of something that bonded them together and something I wanted to explore. Although people were welcoming, as a 16 year-old introvert, I felt out of place and overly self-conscious of my lack of understanding. I attended for a bit and I tried to read the bible, but found the words hard to grasp and struggled with consistency. I was expecting that while seated in the pews, I should be feeling some presence come over me, which I did not experience. I had questions regarding sin I could not reconcile. Because I was not being

faithful in my study, I felt hypocritical in attending, so I stopped.

But God was faithful. He continued to place others in my life through my grad school years and beyond who shared their faith with me. My older cousin, who is now a Pastor, would faithfully share Jesus and encouragements with us over the years, and at family gatherings with prayers and blessing of our meals. As I grew older and started a family, my sister was very loving at inviting me to church and inviting my young kids to attend Sunday school along with her boys. She shared Jesus with my ill mother. The doors were open. I just was not humbled to step through at the time. I continued to stay ignorant and resistant in knowing Jesus Christ and having a relationship, despite times in my life of familial health issues and financial trials where I would pray.

Many years later, my sister's family started attending SBCC and she invited our family to attend Easter Service. Thankful for her faithfulness to the Lord! I was encouraged by this and soon after, the Lord placed on my heart the desire to attend SBCC regularly. It was at one particular service in 2019, when I felt the touch of the Holy Spirit and a huge release of emotion and tears. I felt a weight lifted from me that I didn't realize I was carrying. At 56 years old, Jesus came into my heart, redeemed my sin and burdens and saved me. He is the crucified, risen King and my Savior! He has gifted me a joy and peace infinitely beyond my "happy life", that reflects beyond myself and my own doings, and into eternity.

I see the Lord working to open up and mold my heart in ways that I previously was not privy to or reluctant to pursue. I am definitely a work in progress with my level of understanding and I still have feelings of self-consciousness creep in. The Lord gives me courage to stretch my abilities and comfort, for his sake and glory. He has called me back into dentistry for recent mission work. Public prayer is something that I naturally do not feel confident in, but I see Him calling upon me more often. He has led me to remodel my heart with difficult relationships, and I witnessed change by sharing Jesus. I am so thankful for the Lord's goodness, patience, and provision as I look back on how long he waited

for me (63 years) to get to this point. I see now that He has always been present, has put me places in life with Christ followers slowly planting their seeds...family, friends, a brother-in-laws' mother, my husband, my children...quiet in their ministry, not pushing, but just offering and opening up my heart and opportunities to know Jesus. I continue to be encouraged by others today. I pray I will be used in turn to reach others to share the gospel and I am encouraged by God's perfect timing as I pray for loved ones' salvation and the hope of eternal life through the saving grace of Jesus Christ.



TAYLOR YEE

Hi, my name is Taylor Yee. From attending Sunday School weekly, to spending summers at Vacation Bible School, I've been going to church for as long as I can remember. Since my mom was on the worship team and my dad was on the Board of Deacons I spent a lot of time at church. Even though I've been surrounded by church my whole life, it wasn't until last year that my faith truly became my own.

Allowing myself to be influenced by the world, and conforming to society's standards, I struggled to live out my faith. Trying to find my worth in basketball, relationships, and doing whatever I could to fit in at school left me feeling empty inside. I was seeking validation from others instead of God. It wasn't until I had an incident that left me at the lowest point of my life. I realized that all the things I had been chasing were keeping me from Him. I knew that I had a decision to make: Do I want to live fully for Jesus or continue trying to live a compromised life that was half for Jesus and half for myself?

During that low time, a friend from church reached out and asked if I wanted to join his bible study. I knew this was God calling me back to Him. After saying yes, I had made it a goal to read a chapter every day. Before I knew it, I had gone through books like Matthew, Colossians,

Philippians, Ephesians, Galatians, and Romans. Through reading the Word, I slowly began to see God transform my heart. I remember the verse that I highlighted on my first day of reading. It fit my situation exactly and I will never forget the impact it left on me. It was Romans 8:18- "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." When I read this verse, I realized that God changed my heart, my perspective, my lifestyle and even my friends. I started making the conscious decision to pursue the friendships that would guide each other closer to God.

I've come to understand that my faith is my personal relationship with God and isn't automatically passed down from my parents. Making my faith my own was the best decision of my life. Now, I have bible studies with my closest friends, and we FaceTime often to share our prayer requests and go over what God is teaching us in our devotionals. I thought I knew what I wanted when I was seeking temporary happiness, but after reaching lows I couldn't imagine, God met me when I needed Him most. I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins to save me and give me a joy that can't be found anywhere else. Baptism symbolizes my dying and being raised again in new life just as Jesus Christ died and rose again. I'm choosing to be baptized because I want to proclaim the goodness of God in my life and share the joy I've found in placing my identity fully in Him.



MATTHEW YI

My life before truly believing in Jesus wasn't exactly filled to the brim with sin, but it obviously wasn't perfect, either. First, I have been brought up in a Christian household, so I have known who Jesus is basically my whole life. For example, my parents sent me to Kidz Krew when I was in elementary school, where I half-heartedly tried to learn about God. But the lessons were very basic and repetitive, and my mind quickly wandered to more interesting topics like video games. Second, I tried to be a nice kid, but I did it for the wrong reasons. I felt that if I was kind and helpful, my parents, teachers, and peers would like me more. Thus, during recess at school, I always carried my friend's lunchbox for him as well as my own so he would be thankful for me. And in class, I frequently raised my hand to answer my teacher's questions to earn their approval. Of course, these actions weren't necessarily bad, but I did them because I wanted to boost my own self-image, not to glorify God.

I truly started to believe in Jesus during my first retreat in middle school ministry. At the retreat, many distractions such as video games and school were taken away, and I was able to focus on God. I listened intently to the messages, learning about how Jesus died for our sins, and we should follow Him in response to that. The basic truths that I had overlooked in Kidz Krew were repeated to me, but this time the words felt more powerful. I then watched how my peers and advisors poured out their hearts to God during worship and realized how great and loving He is. He sent His perfect son to die for us imperfect people just so we can spend eternity with Him if we choose. In response, I prayed and repented of my sins, asked God to forgive me, believed in who He is, and thanked Him for everything He did for me. I had made these prayers before, but this time, I felt like I really meant it.

After the retreat and up until now, basically everything went back to normal as I was flung back into school and life. However, my actions

and motives have changed. I now make it a point to listen to the messages whenever I go to church, compared to when I was at Kidz Krew. Next, I've learned that I should be kind to people not to glorify myself, but to glorify God. One way I do this is that instead of making inappropriate comments to fit in, I try to use my words to lift others up. Even if people don't like me for not acting like them, as long as I'm pleasing God, that's all that matters. Another thing that has changed is my prayer life. I have made an effort to spend time with God every day right after school. I thank Him for the good things that happened and ask Him to help me through the difficult things. I also pray for other people's lives and what they're going through.

Despite trying my best to listen to the messages, glorify God, and pray continually, I still fail several times. I still have a lot to learn and a lot of room to grow. But I know that even as I make mistakes throughout my life, God will be there to pick me back up and put me on the right track. Most of all, I must strive to follow Jesus because of everything He has done for me.





SERVICE TIMES:
SATURDAY 5:00PM
SUNDAY 8:30AM, 10:00AM & 11:45AM

2549 W 190th Street
Torrance, CA 90504
(310) 532-4673
southbaycommunitychurch.com