

[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 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 life.

I receive your forgiveness and ask you to be
my personal Lord and Savior. Thank you for saving me.

Amen

[VALERIE BONILLA]

I was saved when I ran out of excuses. I ran out of logic. I ran out of reasons to explain why MY way was better. I prayed, I invited Jesus in, I declared him my Savior and let go of my tight hold on my life (the good and the bad). And only when I released myself to the one true God, did I realize that He had been holding me all along.

This isn't my first baptism. My parents, being God-loving and truly wanting to dedicate my life to Him, baptized me when I was a baby in their Catholic Church. And I am so truly grateful to them for introducing me to a Christian faith.

Growing up Catholic, I loved attending Mass (I still enjoy it). I remember visiting beautiful churches and marveling at the "bigness" of it all. God was always on high, and I would recite my prayers and generally feel good about my religion. However, it wasn't until my adult years that I realized that my faith was more about the "story" of Jesus rather than a relationship with him. As I grew into adulthood, I found myself trying to have a conversation in prayer. I wanted someone to answer back. When I didn't feel I got an answer, I stopped talking.

When my husband and I got married, we were finally ready to explore churches and find somewhere to grow in our faith. I think that is when we also were tested the most. As my husband shared at his baptism, into our first year of marriage I became pregnant. We were excited, scared, and overwhelmed at the prospect of welcoming a new member to our family. We shared the news with our parents and thought about the future. We didn't expect to learn that somewhere at the end of that first trimester, our baby's heart would stop beating and we would have to wait until eternity to meet him or her. That could have been the end of my search for God. Lucky for me, it was the beginning.

Shortly after that hardest of times, we went to our first service at South Bay Community Church. That Easter service still stands out to me as one of the most memorable of my life. I felt tears flow from my eyes the entire time, both from my own pain, but also from hearing with fresh ears that the pain Jesus suffered on the cross was for ME. I didn't have a choice when I lost my child, but God sent His only Son to die for ME. For MY sins. It blew my mind, and I couldn't fathom how He could love me that much when I was so unworthy. That day I prayed that Jesus would enter my heart and

my life and help lead me towards healing. He answered me with a beautiful son a year later, and a second just over a year and a half ago.

That first Easter with SBCC was over six years ago. I had no idea that it would take me THIS long to finally submit further to His will for me. I will admit, I am VERY stubborn. I wanted Jesus, but I also wanted things MY way. With blessings I thanked Him, and with hardships I blamed myself and took it upon myself to make things right. I remember at many vulnerable times, I prayed fervently but I also hesitated to completely give myself over to Him. I didn't admit that this relationship is a two-way street. That I needed to change MYSELF to be able to be obedient to His will. So, I started listening.

Over the last year, I've felt the Spirit starting to move in me. I sometimes hear the words, "Pray. Pray NOW. Say THIS. Don't wait." I've found it is often when the other person needs it most. I've also heard, deep within me, to let go of my pride and let God's will be done. So I prayed to be humbled, to allow myself to obey God. To follow the Spirit where it led.

This summer I believe my life has changed to be what God intends it to be. I allowed myself to speak more freely to God, to not hold back. I share everything with Him, and ask Him to help guide me. And thank GOD he has! I feel that despite so many challenges...loss of loved ones, work demands and stress, family health issues... the Lord continues to bless me and my family. Every obstacle we've faced have been turned into blessings. I've seen miracles in the smallest, and biggest ways possible. For example, after years of feeling that we'd never be able to join a life group due to other obligations, we took a leap of faith and the Lord removed the road blocks (and we are so grateful!) Daily life, even with all the obstacles thrown at us, is made so much better by this renewed faith. Without Jesus at the center, I would be stressed, miserable, and angry. But right now I feel energized, peaceful, and comforted in the fact that I am building an ETERNAL life by following Jesus.

I'll admit, I am still a baby Christian. I don't spend enough time diving into the Word or sharing Jesus with others. But God will provide those opportunities to me. I want to fulfill the Lord's desire that I praise Him and teach my children to know Him and love Him and bring Him into their lives. I want to encourage my family and friends, even those who know that Jesus is their Savior, to build a relationship with Him. But most of all, I want to continue to be humbled. To realize the absolute privilege it is to be allowed to practice my faith and be able to share it with others.

I am a work in progress. But I am committed to doing the work, to growing, to developing, and hopefully, to lead others to follow the Lord. And I know, deep down in my soul, that by making this commitment today I will begin a journey that will continue to change my life. And when I one day return to heaven and meet my maker...I will thank Him. I will fall down and thank him for all the ups and downs, the triumphs and tragedies, because it is all those that led me to a deeper relationship with him. Because I am from Him, and to Him I will return.

But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”
Jeremiah 17:7-8

[FAITH CANLAS]

I was raised as a Catholic and went to a Catholic church every Sunday. Like most kids I never paid attention. I didn't want to be there. I didn't understand any of it and I thought it was boring. A couple years later my mom had started going to a Christian church. She was the first one to be saved in our family.

Before I accepted Christ I wasn't much different than I am now. Of course my behavior and the way I see things have improved. Before I'd rarely to never pray or devote any time to Him. I would often always yell and get mad easily. When I would speak to my friends I often cursed.

The summer of 2015 my mom told me to go to one of the youth nights at her church. I didn't want to go, but I went anyways. I enjoyed it so I started going every Friday. I went because I enjoyed the people. I didn't go to hear the word or grow spiritually. Then I eventually started going to their Sunday service.

One day, during the year of 2016, my cell leader asked me if I wanted to go to encounter and I said yes just for the sake of it. Encounter is a whole three day event. The pastor and a few other leaders would share short messages. The revelation of the cross was one of the messages. During the message they showed a few clips from the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. They passed around the crown of thorns and two big needles. It was a moment of prayer and communing with God. That's when I accepted Christ as my Savior. I learned a lot about God and the bible through encounter. I felt safe and refreshed in some way.

After I accepted Christ as my Savior I was more careful with how I spoke to people. I try to devote more time to Him than I did before. At times I'd still get mad easily, but not as much as I did before. My obedience towards my parents have improved, but it's definitely something I'm still working on. If I hadn't accepted Christ as my Savior I'd be completely influenced by the ways of this world. I'd be in constant arguments with everyone. Always thinking negatively. I'd probably never be happy. It's definitely a great feeling to know that I am saved.

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12

[RYAN GARCIA]

While writing this testimony, I tried to think of everything in my past that got me to where I am today. All the hurt, all the sadness, all the pain, but also all the joy, all the love, and all the happiness. But I believe that I should leave all of those things there because the person you see before you, ready to get dunked into this pool like Blake Griffin dunking on Pau Gasol, (all jokes aside) is not the same person that I was before coming to SBCC. I will give you all a little introduction of myself and my walk of faith and how God has brought me here. Taking a look into my religious life, my whole life I was a catholic and my family was the traditional "pray the rosary and go to Church every Sunday" family. I went to St. Margaret Mary K-8, then Bishop Montgomery, minus my year and a half at El Camino, and I am graduating from Marymount California University in Palos Verdes in May 2018. I always believed in God, but I didn't have a relationship with him and followed what everyone else did. While at Elco in 2014, I attended a Christian bible study and learned so much and it left me with questions about Catholicism and Christianity that were unanswered. I told them that I wanted to know that my goal was not to convert, but just to learn more about God and grow my relationship with Him, but after a while of trying and not succeeding in converting me, I was pushed to the side for more promising prospects and that left me feeling sad, upset, abandoned, and much more.

Kalie and I went to SBCC a few times since we started dating in 2012, but never came consistently. Her family friend, Todd Hoshiko, invited me to come to his Wednesday night small group. I let him know that I wanted to learn more about God, but did not have interest in converting, and he said "of course man! We aren't trying to convert you, we just want to grow together as brothers in Christ!" I always had my guard up because everyone I met was so nice that it left me thinking that it was all fake, due to past experiences. One night at my basketball league, I dislocated my knee and tore the ligaments behind it. Not being able to play in my Thursday night league, I started going to College Group on Thursday nights and this is where my fire was lit. Everyone who knows me decently, knows that I am a huge fan of Steven Furtick because it was "Crash the Chatterbox" that we went through in college group and it was that study that spoke to me and sparked my flame to pursue being the best Ry and best follower of God that I can be.

If I can attribute my being here today to anything, it is these three things: God, the community at SBCC, and those who have had pushed me to want more for myself and to continue trusting in and relying on God.

First of all, God is the reason. Anything that has happened in my life, negative or positive, I have realized that God did that to shape me into the person that I am today. I learned to always trust in God because He knows where he wants you and where you are going. We just have to be patient and know that we are exactly where God wants us to be. Second, after attending this church since November, I realized that everyone at this church is here because of many reasons, but the main one is to worship God with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. I have never felt more safe and more at home in a place of worship than I do when I am worshipping and praising God's glorious name with this community. I realize that the love I receive is so transparent and people just want to love me and show me God's love, and I can't put into words how amazing it feels to have that. Third, I have many people to thank so please forgive me if you are reading this and aren't in here, because I am sure you deserve to be, but I do not know if Pastor Gary would want me to give a shout out to all of you because that's a lot of paper that would be used! But, Kalie and her family: I thank God every day for blessing me with people who encourage me to do the right thing and to just continue worshipping God's name through the good and bad, and truly just loving me. Being in a relationship with someone who wants to pursue a relationship with God before all else, makes me want to pursue a relationship with God before all else as well. To the leaders of the groups that have guided me: thank you Taryn and Donna for keeping me strong and helping me see that I am where God wants me to be. To Pastors James, Gary, Davy, Greg, and Caleb: Whether it be mentoring and guiding me, or calling and texting me when I needed guidance, I am here and ready to publicly proclaim my faith for God and you all have played an integral part in this. To the Legacy kids and leaders: thank you for keeping me accountable. It is easy to stumble and stray away from God, but being able to see you guys every Sunday and talk during the week makes me want to be a better leader and a better Christian for you all. To the men who have been keeping me strong: Arlainio, Art, Ernie, Steve, my Men's Fraternity group, Men of Faith group, etc: I love you guys and thank God that I am blessed with such great role models. Finally, a few brothers who have been instrumental in guiding me, loving me, and keeping me thankful to God through the good and the bad—David Ike, Colin Yee, and most especially Todd Hoshiko: truly words cannot explain how much of an impact

you've made and continue to make in my life. I thank God every day for blessing me with brothers like these that are literally after God's own heart and for continuing to help me pursue that same objective.

And so I end with these last pieces of advice for anyone who is or isn't a believer of God:

- You will always have good times and bad times, but through it all, praise God because He is so amazing and glorious and we do not deserve His grace, but we received it by Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. He truly knows best and if what are feeling low, just remember that God only gives the toughest battles to his strongest soldiers.
- I always tried to control my life and carve my own path and it never worked because I believed that I could do it alone and I can't. Don't try to handle everything by yourself. Let God take the lead and follow Him.
- If you ever feel alone and not loved, come to SBCC and talk to anyone because I know that anyone in this community would gladly listen to you, pray for you and love on you.
- If you ever want someone to talk to, you can contact me and I will be there for you 24/7!

Be strong and stay rooted in God's love:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” Matthew 7: 24-27

[MICHAEL GIBBS]

I grew up in a Christian home. My family attended church (most) every Sunday. I was involved but not really interested.

I had always felt that I was different. I did not fit in with most any group. I did not fit in with the Chess Club, the Debate Team and even in sports, I was good enough but did not like the “team” atmosphere.

I grew away from that lifestyle and started pursuing other idols. Drugs, alcohol, women and money drove me for most of my young life.

I knew that something was missing but I did not know how to get it. I tried the church, I tried the temple, I even chanted with Buddhist Monks. Nothing changed.

On November 28, 1986 I crashed and burned. My wife had left and taken my son with her. My parents had given up. The only friends that I had were drinking buddies. It was Thanksgiving evening and I was alone. I said my first honest prayer; “God please kill me or cure me cause I can’t go on like this anymore”.

By the grace of God, I found my way into a 12 step program. I learned that I had to trust a power greater than myself. A light-bulb, a doorknob anything but myself. This was a crack in the door that I was able to step through.

Although hesitant, I attended church with my wife. I was under some sad protest while there. One Sunday, for some reason, I opened my ears and was able to hear. This was the same God that I had been praying to for years. I decided I better start reading the Christian “Big Book”.

My life has been transformed by the love of Christ. I still occasionally feel that I don’t fit it. I question quite a bit. I know that I don’t have all the answers and that in time, more will be revealed. But, I have never been happier and at so much peace with life. I know where I fit in now. All I have to do is show up.

*“Come to Me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28*

[STEVE JUNG]

Before I accepted Christ, I was raised in a Christian environment since childhood up through my years of adulthood. I would attend church and bible school every Sunday, and partake in Christian events and conferences. And now, the only difference between today and then is that I'm beginning to take every word of God seriously.

For well over the past 30-odd years of my life, I've experienced peaks and valleys in my faith where there were times I was convinced Jesus was my Savior and my heart was on fire for Him. And yet, other times Jesus was nothing more than a mythical figure to me. It didn't take long to figure out that the cause of those experiences of such high and lows in my spiritual walk was correlated with the highs and lows that tied to my personal needs and desires in this life.

The greatest obstacle for me from truly accepting Jesus as my Lord and Savior wasn't science or philosophy, honestly. Instead it was this inner nature that desired to control my own life and the decisions that came along with it. In fact, being told that Jesus is my Savior and that God is my Father infuriated my sense of independence and self-reliance. I'd say on a subconscious level, I tuned it all out because I didn't come up with it first.

But one day I got married. Not only did marriage break down my pride in the slowest and most painful way possible (and it still does today), I also found myself becoming more balanced, and wiser in every facet of my life. So I started to meditate on that experience, and noticed whether it'd be through a personal relationship, or being in the armed forces for example, putting aside one's own selfish needs and desires and substituting another's in place of your own almost always felt right, more often than not.

Yet still, I didn't necessarily surrender myself to Jesus, but to my wife. My wife, who does her best to stay strong in her faith, has repeatedly reminded me, ad nauseam, that I need to love Jesus more than her, and she cannot be with a man that doesn't feel the same. And every time I heard that it struck a nerve in me, and I felt disturbed by her comments. Disturbed because I had no desire to know Jesus passionately like she did, and opening up the bible felt like opening up a dictionary and reading it from front to back.

About a month ago, however, I came to a sober judgment and I made a personal decision to truly accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior. She showed me the film based on Lee Strobel's *The Case for Christ*. And not only was

the film well produced, but the way it showed how relentless Lee Strobel's autobiographical character tried to disprove Christ's claim and his resurrection was authentic and admirable. The amount of evidence that he found in favor of Christ's resurrection, let alone for his existence spoke volumes to me because I felt what Lee felt, to a lesser degree.

My road to accepting Christ has been a long and gradual process. I realize though that the very same nature that kept me from accepting and knowing Christ can still keep me from growing spiritually with Him- basically, I will fight this nature for the rest of my life. But C.S Lewis sums it up best for me by saying, "Jesus Christ was either a liar and a lunatic, or He was who he said he was."

So far from what I've experienced, there's no other person in history that diagnoses the human heart best like Jesus does. Surrendering myself to Him is a passive and frustrating way but it is authentic and it feels real. If faith was a non-passive, and active chore, I can dutifully go through the motions without giving an ounce of my soul. But through a process of passivity, he captures all of it.

*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17*

[AVA MARSH]

My name is Ava Marsh and this is my story of how I came to know Christ.

My whole life, I had been going to church, but I didn't really think that God was important and because I was so young, I couldn't understand who God was and what He had done in my life. One of the problems that was keeping me from a good relationship was the sin problem. I would always get in trouble, at school, at home, and at church, and I felt like that was keeping me from a good relationship with my Savior.

Without God in my heart, my life kind of felt empty. I would go to church, but in reality I had no idea what they were talking about. To me, there wasn't really a purpose of going to church and it became boring for me. Then I moved to California and started going to South Bay Community Church. After listening to the first message, I realized that I was loved by God and I chose to believe in God and live my life to serve God. I felt like I should change my life to a way that would please God.

After going to the Junior High Winter Retreat in 2016, I realized that God was so amazing, and that I should really use His ways to do good things, like serving in KidzKrew. After I decided to change my life, I started making my lifestyle changes so I can use my life to please God. I started to dive into God's word and started learning more about God. I joined a worship workshop that was going on for junior high and high school students at our church. Through the worship workshop, I really learned how to worship my Savior in a very meaningful way. It changed my life. When I started the school year, I made a fresh start to everything since I was living in a new school and new place.

God helped me to become a whole different person. I tried to glorify Him in what I did every day. I really feel like God has done so much in my life. I am proud to say that I believe in God, almighty, my Savior.

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." John 10:27-28

[JEFF MO]

My life before Christ was for my own good only. I barely thought about the others but myself only. I pursued my own happiness instead of helping the others. In workplace, I liked to show off my performance instead of being a good team player. I was arrogant and rarely care about what people real need. I thought being a Christian was to go to church, read bible, pray to God and someday I can go to heaven when I die.

I left my former company in San Jose and moved to Los Angeles. I thought I can find a job right away, however, I got rejections one after another and I felt very frustrated. At this critical moment, my wife suggested me go to South Bay Community Church to make friends. Without too much thought, I followed her suggestion and this decision became the turning point of my life.

Pastor Gary was on stage and for the first time I realized how simple and applicable God's message could be. I started to learn God's lessons from Sunday service like God's Design for the Modern Family, Modern Myths About Marriage and Seeing Through the Bars. I also attended Men of Faith group and that's where I experienced the true meaning of gratitude and humility.

Now I look at things from a different perspective. I find the joy to make the others happy instead of pursuing my own happiness. In work place, I put the others before me and proactively take ownership. I do not take everything for granted and do feel grateful. I became hungry to know what the Bible said for I know God's wisdom can turn my life challenges into life lessons.

Therefore, I want to follow Him with all my heart.

“A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” John 13:34

[TERRY MURA]

As I reflect on my life before I accepted Christ, I grew up as a very unhappy and angry person. I never felt that I was living up to my parent's standards, that I wasn't smart enough. I felt that I wasn't athletic enough, good looking enough, strong enough, popular enough, good enough. I had very low self-esteem.

On the outside everyone saw me as a happy-go-lucky person. But on the inside I was hurting. I started drinking and getting high at a very young age. My parents never knew because I was good at hiding it from them. I went through high school pretty much either drunk or high. It was a miracle that I actually graduated. After high school I started to hang out with a different crowd. I stopped getting high and only drank occasionally. Inside I was still not happy and felt empty. I just went on with life.

Eventually I got married and had 2 kids. I couldn't be happier being a dad. My kids were my world. Then my marriage started to fall apart. After 10 years of marriage we ended up getting a divorce. I was crushed at the fact that now I would become a weekend dad. Living alone now I fell into a pretty bad depression.

This came right before the holidays and I started hating the holidays. Being alone on the holidays until it was my turn to see my kids. Now I was becoming angrier with myself. I would call myself a failure. All the while I still kept up the act that nothing was wrong when I was with other people. To hide all the hurt, I turned to alcohol. I was drinking and getting drunk every night. The only time I didn't drink was when I was with my kids. But as soon as I dropped them off I headed straight to a bar. I was one of the lucky ones. I never got hurt or hurt anyone while I was drunk or driving drunk. I drove drunk more times than I should of. And only by the grace of God, not only was I kept safe, but so were all the other people that I could have hurt while I was driving drunk. This went on for many years.

I started dating my current wife Tracy and pretty much stopped drinking. We got married and had an amazing son. Life was good. I became happier. But we both needed something more. We both realized that we needed Jesus in our lives. Not just for us, but also for our son Trent. We wanted him to grow up with good values and morals. But where should we go to find this? We tried 1 church and went there for a little while. We didn't find a good connection with that church so we decided to try SBCC. We came towards the end of the Revelations series. What a shock that was. That

series was a little much for us to walk into. Especially since I was raised a Buddhist. Coming to a Christian church was an eye opening experience for me. I had no idea what to expect.

I recently started reading the Bible. My brother-in-law was coming over weekly to teach us more about the Bible. Now I look forward to learning more. I feel more at peace and want to learn more about the Bible and Jesus's teachings. I want to be a person that my kids will one day look up to. I would like to one day spread the word and to make others feel the love of Jesus. My goal is that I am able to get my other 2 kids and my parents to find Jesus to be saved.

The feeling I have inside since I have found Jesus is amazing. I cannot fully describe these feelings into words. But I would love for others to be able to find this amazing feeling. I feel truly blessed now.

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the Glory of God.”
Romans 5:1-2

[MONICA & ZEPPELIN PIZA]

My name is Monica Piza I accepted Jesus into my life as my Lord and Savior. Before Jesus I was lost and blinded by sin. My walk with Jesus has been a long one of healing, growing, and maturing. I'm a work in progress never truly arrived but the experience with Christ is an amazing journey.

There's a scripture that says the Lord will separate the sheep from the goats. I'm tired of living as a goat. A Christian who shows little love, forgiveness, or charity to fellow man.

My baptism is an act of professing my faith to the world without fear and truly understanding my identity in Christ Jesus and the purpose of living a life of love. Sum up the commandments: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and love thy neighbor as thyself.

My son Zeppelin Piza will be baptized. He is 9 years old. He accepted Jesus Christ when he understood at the age of 7. He wanted to get baptized two years ago at the beach but he was scared of the waves. Two weeks ago he asked if he was going to heaven or hell. We discussed Jesus as his personal Savior. The only way to salvation is believing Jesus Christ died for his sins. He's grown up in a Christian home. He desires to go heaven. He wants to be baptized. He is born year 2007 and outwardly professes his faith in 2017.

"...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" Matthew 22:37-39

[PAUL SPURLING]

I was raised in an era where parents at the time thought it important that their children attended church or temple (mostly Catholic and Jewish demographics in my town), but not always for the right reasons. Growing up in Massachusetts we attended a Congregational church, which I now know was more of a community gathering spot than it was a church on fire for Christ. I attended Sunday school through the 8th grade, was given a Bible for “graduating,” and then was able to attend services with my parents in the main sanctuary. Very seldom was the name of Jesus or His atoning work on the cross mentioned during the services. He was an example to live by, but the need to accept Him as Lord and acknowledge Him as my personal Savior was not preached or taught. Biblical principles and prayer were not practiced in my house, and my parents were in a constant battle with each other. They later divorced which solidified my belief that “religion” had not helped them, and it made me more certain that my time spent at the Congregational Church had been a waste and its teachings hypocritical. I grew up believing that worldly pleasures and brief periods of internal peace were as good as things were going to get, so that is how I lived my life.

When I was eighteen I dropped out of college and entered the USAF, where I remained for the next 20 years and 23 days. During that time I traveled the world, had wonderful experiences, finished college, and met truly wonderful people. I also came to realize that the ones who truly made the most profound and lasting impressions on me called themselves Christians. The way they lived their lives and treated others seemed appealing, but I did not really understand what they were and what they believed. This set me on the path of studying and researching Christianity, which led me to become more confused than ever. Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists, Catholics, Baptists and myriad other “religions” professed to be Christians. Where did that leave me?

Now recognizing that the Holy Spirit was watching over me, directing me and had a plan for me, I came to know a wonderful Christian family when I was stationed at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, CO. They attended the First Presbyterian church in that city, and I went with them every Sunday. I was now 27 years old and began attending a single’s Bible study at the church on Wednesday nights in addition to attending Sunday services. Being a scientist by education and training, I felt that by adhering to the scientific method I could get an answer to what I was seeking. While

this might seem like a positive step I was still a non-believer and the studies I attended, which were all Bible-centered, sounded like gibberish to me. Also, as I came to know, you cannot REALLY understand a book unless you know at least something about the author. However, I digress...

After attending the study for a few months I met a lady that I liked a lot from the study who invited me to a weekend Bible retreat in the Sangre de Christo Mountains of Colorado. Great, I thought. I get to spend a whole weekend with this woman. If you are reading between the lines, which I am certain you are, I did not accept this invitation with the purest of intentions.

When we arrived I realized the accommodations were set up with the girls on one side of the camp and the guys on the other. The only time we got together was during the day and early evenings when different Christian speakers spoke on different topics, Christian bands performed, and we sang praise songs. So, I was a captive audience. I had nothing else to do except sit there and listen. At about 3:00 p.m., a pastor whose name I do not recall came to the podium and laid out salvation, pure and simple, and told us we all had to make a choice. If we did not accept the free gift of salvation then a default decision was already in place – eternal separation from a great and loving God. I cannot tell you that the words made the difference or if it was just the chosen time the Holy Spirit brought all my knowledge and experiences together that solved the equation for me. I cried like a baby when he made an altar call. A woman I have never seen before or since put her arms around me and cried with me. But I still did not get up and move to the altar. She finally pulled me to my feet and led me up front to the altar where I confessed my sins to Jesus Christ and asked Him into my life, as Lord and Savior, along with possibly 20 – 30 other people. My life has never been the same since. Where I had lived a good, decent life up to that point, respecting people and trying to do the “right things” when decisions had to be made or actions taken, I now knew that Jesus was my Lord and Master and that all the good things I had ever done were, in the eternal scheme of things, worthless. I was just a miserable sinner saved by grace. Not for a second will I even suggest that my walk with the Lord has been smooth sailing but I know, I dead solid know, He is with me, lives within me, and loves me each and every minute of each and every day.

The next definitive growth phase of my Christian walk began 25 years ago after a bicycle accident left me with a broken neck. After it I spent six months in a halo device, after having had extensive surgery. I did not work again for a year. Since that time I have had three more surgeries, worn more halos and missed protracted periods of work. While I think all these

setbacks probably would have made a non-believer hate whatever god they may have believed in, if any at all, my experiences deepened my faith and I know more than ever that the Holy Spirit carried me through those dark days.

I often think of the Biblical Paul and the afflictions he dealt with, especially his “thorn in the flesh.” I am in pain or discomfort 24/7 and have been over all these years since the accident. But do I wish it had never happened? Not for a second. I realize that my trials and tribulation have led me to lean on Jesus even more, and I believe my accident and its results are my testimony. People ask how I deal with the limitations and the pain, and want to know if I am bitter about the things I could previously do that were taken away. With a smile on my face I tell them no, and have the chance to talk about the great Healer of hearts, bodies, and souls. No matter what my pain level is on a given day, or the difficulties I encounter at work, I always go to sleep and wake up with a smile on my face because I know that “today is the day the Lord has made. Rejoice and be glad in it.”

And six years ago God put my wonderful Regina in my life. Yes, she is much younger than I, both in age and the duration of her walk in the faith, but soul-mates we are and happier than I have never been. I look forward to the future with her and our lives at SBCC.

I have lived a rich and blessed life and done things that few people will ever have the chance to do, know things that few people will ever have the chance to know, and gone places where few people will ever have the chance to go. But I count it all as worthless in the face of my salvation.

This is just a snippet of the things and experiences I elected to put into my testimony. And if I made this any longer I would probably have to bind it and make it a book. Suffice it to say that as I am much closer to the end of my life than the beginning, and with all the mistakes I have made in my life

I cling to Philippians 3:13-14, “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.” (NASB).

*“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with
my righteous right hand.” Isaiah 41:10*

[ANGEL SUH]

I grew up in a Christian family – my dad being a youth pastor and my uncle the church pastor for a Korean United Methodist Church in Torrance. So I always knew Jesus. I was baptized when I was 13 years old with the sprinkling of water on my head. But as I grew up and went on to college, my spiritual equilibrium was challenged with classes like philosophy and meeting people in other religions. However, I came to know Jesus spiritually at a retreat called Antioch Connection and I think that's when I was really touched by God's grace.

Then I got married to a Korean guy and started going to a Korean church. I didn't fully understand the sermons as I was brought up with mainly English so I felt I wasn't growing in my spiritual life. So I started looking for English speaking churches and found a church in P.V. There I was introduced to water baptism and I said to myself I want to do that someday, just not now. I went back to my husband's church because I didn't like going to church by myself every week but again found myself not growing spiritually. So eventually I found myself at South Bay Community Church early this year and fell in love with Pastor Greg and Gary's sermons. I have been coming with my older daughter Lauren. But she'll be off to college soon. I didn't go to the baptism orientations and thought I wasn't ready to be baptized yet, but Pastor Gary convinced me during his sermon last week to do it now. I hope this will mark the start of a life committed to Jesus and that I will be able to stand firm without disturbing my spiritual equilibrium, whether alone or not.

God has always been there for me, protecting me and proving for me. He has always picked me up when I fell whether it was a family member's death or losing my job. I have been blessed in many ways. Thank you.

*“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for
and certain of what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1*

[DELANEY VARGAS]

Before I accepted Christ, being a Christian was something that I never really thought much about because the majority of my family is Christian. So, it was just a regular part of our family life to be treated as a Christian.

But, over the last couple of years one of my aunts (my Mom's sister) became a big part in my decision to because she always sent me fun, kid Bibles and Christian books, DVDs and music CDs. Now that I am older I can make more of my own decisions and I am happy I get to make this important one.

Even though I was always raised as a Christian, I never really understood what it meant to be a Christian, until now. This is why I want to get baptized. I am thankful that Jesus gave his life for the forgiveness of our sins, and I want to do my best to live my life in a way that shows my appreciation.

"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me."

Revelation 3:20

[MACKENZIE VARGAS]

When I was a little kid, I didn't understand, or know very much about Christianity. Now that I am older and have learned more about Christ and the Bible I am able to appreciate what Jesus has done for us.

After inviting Christ into my life, I started to read my youth Bible that my aunt gave me a few years ago and began to ask more questions about Christianity. In addition, my family often watches documentaries about the Bible in order to learn more about the history of Christianity. I also watch different movies about people living their lives with and without faith and how it affects their lives.

Since I've decided to accept Christ, I feel like if I hadn't taken this step, my life would be missing something important, and I wouldn't feel as protected as I do now. Believing in Christ has allowed me to live a happy life knowing that there is someone watching over me and keeping me safe. Having faith makes my life feel complete. I feel ready to be baptized because I understand now that Jesus died for the forgiveness of our sins, so that we can have eternal life and I want to live a life that honors His sacrifice for me.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." Romans 1:16

[KAREN VARGAS]

Before I accepted Christ, I lived by the motto that “everything happens for a reason.” I didn’t necessarily attribute that sentiment to an overt belief in Christianity, or in Him. My life was always busy with the day-to-day dealings of marriage, raising children, work, etc. I never really stopped to think about my faith and the role it played in my life. It was something that I took for granted. Although my parents and their siblings were born into Buddhism by virtue of my grandparents’ beliefs, they all raised their own children to be sort of “de facto” Christians. Over the years, and to varying degrees, my extended family members—including my parents and sister—have formalized their commitment to Christianity.

When my Dad was diagnosed with terminal cancer, I saw how much comfort his belief in Christ brought him. I began to realize that I have also relied upon, and cherished my belief in Christ when I was at my lowest points in my life, as well as when I was at my happiest points . . . that my belief system was not just about “everything happens for a reason,” after all. But, I still needed a few more years to mull things over in my mind.

My children are now on the doorstep of the dreaded teen years. I also feel like each day seems to bring a new potential hazard or worry in the world. I have begun to wonder how I could have made it this far, and how I will continue to soldier on, without my continued reliance on having Christ in my life. I haven’t always made the right decisions, but I do know that the mistakes that I have made have been forgiven because of Him. As such, I feel that I am now ready to make the commitment to living my life in a more mindful manner as a Christian.

*“I love the LORD, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy.
Because he turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live.”*

Psalm 116:1-2

[REGINA VISOCCHI]

Growing up in the metro Detroit area as a first generation Italian, everyone I knew was Catholic. Together we experienced the sacraments in the designated order – baptism as an infant, first holy communion in the second grade, reconciliation in the fourth grade, and confirmation in the ninth grade. We celebrated afterward at a local Italian restaurant with a big dinner, Cassata cake, and gifts. I even remember dressing for my communion a month early to sit for photos that would be distributed with thank you cards. I went to church with my family every Sunday and attended catechism classes on Tuesday. As far back as I can remember, I “believed in God” and did my best to be a “good person.” In junior high and high school I played a part in the Passion play every Easter and did all sorts of volunteering with the youth group (the senior citizens prom being an annual favorite). Even in college I rode my bike to the student parish (which was located across the street from a fraternity house) and attended service while others watched football games. At the age of 21, I completed another sacrament in the Catholic church – marriage. Despite marrying a man who took me to church every Sunday, I soon found myself to be “unequally yoked.” After four years we divorced, and my mother requested I have my marriage annulled by the church. This was an incredibly painful process that took three years. During that time I decided to become more involved in the church as a Eucharistic minister. My experience distracted me, but did not bring me closer to God. In fact, I became further distanced knowing that I was technically breaking a Catholic tenet by taking communion before my marriage was annulled.

Needing a change in my life, I moved to Tucson and took a middle school teaching job. I visited three local Catholic churches and did not feel at home at any of them. In fact, I felt embarrassed at one mass because the Eucharistic minister would not serve me communion. Only after looking around the church did I realize I had to bow and resolved the standoff.

Paul and I had started to see each other before I left California, and he came to visit me five weeks after my move. He suggested I search for an Evangelical Free Church, and together we visited The Journey for the first time. To this day I am in awe of the sign given to me by God – beginning my Christian journey in the right place. Instead of the short homily in a Catholic mass, the sermon preached by the pastor was much longer. Instead of following a strict calendar set by the Vatican, we worked our way

through worship series – some based on topic, some based on a book in the Bible. Our pianist had an amazing voice, and I began to become familiar and comfortable with the worship songs. In October (for my birthday), Paul bought me a Bible. I called him one day after service to tell him how much the sermon spoke to me. Pastor Jim talked about the difference between RELIGION and FAITH. At this moment I realized I had been following a religion my whole life and was beginning to experience faith.

A year later, I moved again (to Phoenix) and began the church search. After about half a dozen churches, I decided to check one out near my apartment. I parked and realized I seemed to be late as I walked in (which is very rare for me). After one service, I knew I had found my church home. Confused however, I checked the service time when I got home – the church I was planning to attend was a half a mile down the same street! That was one driving mistake I never did regret. A month before I left, I went on a hike with the women of the church. We had great fellowship, and I regretted not getting involved sooner. A year later, I moved again (to Castro Valley, CA) and began the church search. Sound familiar? Paul and I visited churches near and far (one an hour away), and he was satisfied with one in town. Instead I could not stop thinking about the church I ran past every day. The next Sunday (and every other for the next two years), we attended Redwood Chapel. I even found myself volunteering at Vacation Bible School and pulling weeds in the church parking lot – the latter of which led to some enlightening conversation with the head pastor. Unfortunately, Paul was transferred to Los Angeles. He “commuted” for a year while I stayed up north.

Finally I arrived in Los Angeles on 01 July 16. I had no job, and we were renting a room. We were attending a church in Palos Verdes but planning on finding a true church home later. After a month, the woman we were staying with suggested it might not work much longer. We then moved into a hotel, and I continued my job search. In short order I got hired, and we bought a house! Both events were such blessings, but I was having an incredibly difficult time acclimating to my new job. The anxiety and depression made it difficult to get out the door in the morning, and I lost weight in the first month. We started attending SBCC on Sunday at 9 am (Soona being the first joyful face every time), but we attended Saturday service the night before move-in. Pastor Gary spoke about the mountains and valleys in our lives – about how we must put our faith in the Lord during difficult times. The next morning at 8 am, we met a nightmare – our home had flooded the night before, and we began what ended up to be a two and

half month insurance claim. At this point, we both reflected on the sermon we had heard the night before. For the first time in my life, I put it all in the hands of God. The next weekend we met Ernie and Donna who prayed for us in the lobby after service. The weekend after that, Ernie introduced me to Pastor Caleb telling him we worked together! I wanted to cry just being associated with someone since we knew no one when we moved. The longer we attended, the more I felt at home. Sermons about EGRs helped me face coworkers. Messages about grace made me thankful for every day. Slowly I gained the strength to face a day at work and the patience to visit our construction site of a home every night. In December we moved in, and I knew God had gotten us there. Soon we began attending Tuesday night prayer service. Only then did I realized an entire group prayed for me when I put a request in the collection. It warmed my heart beyond belief to know that, and I look forward to the fellowship and prayer every week.

Unlike many Christians, I cannot pinpoint the exact day and time I became a believer. However, only over the past year have I really understood the extent of what it means to believe. Now I know that Jesus took on all of my sins and died for me. Now I know that I was born with a sinful nature, and only Jesus is without sin. Now I know that the grace of God is free – nothing I say or do will influence whether or not I can receive it. Now I know that this life is short but eternal life in heaven is where I will spend all of my days with Jesus and be united with all those I love.

*“But Christ is faithful as a son over God’s house.
And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage
and the hope of which we boast.” Hebrews 3:6*

[EDMOND WONG]

I grew up in a home where religion was not a priority. My mother was Catholic and my father was Agnostic. I attended church mostly on holidays, but I was never forced to actively practice Catholicism. My parents raised me with good values - stressing the importance of living a moral and ethical life, focusing on family and friends and pursuing a career to make a difference in the world. Growing up, I was agnostic – I did not disbelieve in the existence of God, but I did not believe that God and religion were necessary to explain our existence and purpose in life. Throughout my youth, I watched many of my friends be forced to practice religion with resentment or indifference, with only very few who actually believed. Many of them engaged in smoking, alcohol, drugs, sex, materialism, greed, prejudice, hatred and betrayal. It seemed so hypocritical to me that they would indulge in these sinful acts, while simultaneously proclaiming that they were religious. To me, religion did not seem necessary to live a moral and ethical life. I believed that I only needed myself, to make the right choices, to live a Godly meaningful life.

I worked hard to achieve success – I did well in school, attended an Ivy League university and became a physician. However, it was a very difficult road with much struggle and suffering. I was humbled by the superior intellect and determination that existed beyond the protected walls of my home town. During my struggles, I made many mistakes, but I quickly realized that failure can be your greatest teacher, so I embraced the pain and suffering and constantly searched for enlightenment out of any situation. Aside from my own suffering, I witnessed and shared in the suffering of many friends, family and even strangers. I discovered purpose in aiding and comforting others. These life lessons taught me much about who I am as a person, about compassion and forgiveness and the desire to serve the needs of others. It taught me to acknowledge my weaknesses and failures and to work harder at being a better person and a more compassionate doctor. Yet, no matter how hard I tried, I never felt that I was succeeding in being the best person that I could be.

As an adult, I have found myself thinking more and more about religion and God. My brother challenged me to open my mind to Christianity and faith. He shared with me his own journey to find God – he read the major works of each religion, he analyzed their beliefs and basis and concluded that the Christian faith was the only logical conclusion. We discussed the

issues of science and faith, but he never pressured me to believe. I began attending church service primarily to help me understand the faith in order to make my own analysis and decision. With an open mind, I found myself in agreement with most of the sermon messages regarding how to live your life and feeling a sense of peace after each service. What I had most difficulty accepting was having faith in the truth of Jesus as my Savior. Why should we not each be responsible for the sins we commit? Why can't we succeed in living a Godly life by working hard at it. I now realize it was my belief in "religious hypocrisy" that has prevented me from accepting Christ for so long.

It was my own pride in self-reliance that was inhibiting me. I thought that I could succeed in living a Godly life, following a moral code and focusing my efforts on compassion and giving. Yet upon self-reflection, I can see that I still fail to do so even in daily life. I did not want to be like those who claimed to be faithful Christians but who act in contrary, so I did not feel that I could justify calling myself a Christian or that I had earned the right to be baptized until I was walking the path. Now I realize that I failed to understand the essence of Christian faith. It is not the success or failure of living a Godly life, it is accepting by faith that Jesus is my Savior and only He and God can lead me to salvation. God already knows that I will fail, but I had not accepted this truth. It has been my arrogance that has kept me from this gift from God.

Finally, I see clearly that God has been with me my whole life, but I was blind to His hands at work even when it was right in front of me. He was guiding me when I thought I was creating my own destiny. He supported me when I faltered. He kept faithful believers close to me to guide me by demonstrating how to follow His will, especially those that I have respected and have striven to emulate. As a major influence in my life, my brother and sister-in-law live by God's word and their conviction has served as an ever-present inspiration to me and many others, in and outside their church. God blessed me with a wife that I clearly do not deserve. She is a faithful servant to God, yet she accepted me without my conviction in Christ. She never pressured me to become Christian, but had unwavering faith that God would guide me to Him. God has filled me with compassion for others and the desire to serve. I believe that all the choices I have made in life and the path that I have walked so far has been God's will all along. Recognition of how blessed my life has been has convicted me to accept Christ.

This is why I am choosing to publicly commit to the faith and to continue to live life serving God's will. Now when I stumble or feel like I am failing, I

can press on without fear or guilt, knowing that it has divine purpose and trusting He is leading me. I hope to live according to His Word to serve as an example for others, for I never know whose life God wishes to touch using mine.

“There is one body and one Spirit-just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”
Ephesians 4:4-6

[BARBARA WOO]

As National Sales Manager for a cosmetic firm as well as a national fashion publication, there's something irresistible about working in the fashion biz. It seemed to be my identity for many years. Being a trend setter had its drawbacks. A deadline driven position with astronomical quotas put me on edge all the time. Produce. Produce. Sure, you're on top today. But what are you going to bring in tomorrow. The price of success hindered my health. Headaches, lesions on my skin prevailed. Many days, I wanted to scream.

During that time, my husband was given a drug that was diagnosed over the phone by a doctor. Symptoms were very much like hives or shingles. When he ingested the drug, he started sweating and screaming. I called 911. The paramedics came and asked him the typical questions. What's your name? What day is it today? Where are you etc.? He could not answer the questions nor did he recognize who I was. When he was in the hospital, the doctors gave him more drugs. The doctor told me to bring in the family and bring pictures so he could recognize some of the events. My husband's memory had vanished. He did not recognize our daughters or anyone.

That is when I prayed with all my might. My church at the time, SBPC prayed as well. Not only did they pray, our friends came in shifts to visit him and talk to him. I experienced a great deal of pain and loss during that time. However, one of friends started sharing stories with him. That's when he responded and remembered.

I felt the Holy Spirit come into the room and felt a sense of relief. It took months for my husband to recover. I knew God was there. I prayed day and night crying out to God. I didn't know it at the time but my prayers were being answered. That is when I truly believed God was working in my life. Through this ordeal, I learned to trust that God is in control of our lives. I celebrate each day as a gift from God.

Today my husband and I have taken a new passion in acting and we are very thankful we have God in our lives. We attend South Bay Community Church every Sunday and have an amazing support system from the friends we make at SBCC. We trust more in God every day and are full of gratitude for the goodness we find here at SBCC.

"The Lord is my light and my salvation-whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life-of whom shall I be afraid?" Psalm 27:1

[CARISSA WOO]

I grew up in the church but didn't have a real relationship with Him. In middle school, I would attend church with my peers and get that "Camp High" feeling but that feeling would go away pretty fast. God was non-existent in my life in high school, college and a couple years out of college.

Corporate life during the 2009 recession wasn't easy, starting my own photography business wasn't easy, taking care of my sick grandmother wasn't easy and my love life was far from easy. Let's just say I was pretty beat up from life.

During this rough time, I got an email to go to a young adult church event. I emailed the girl that wrote the email asking if we could meet up. I had looked up to her throughout my life, knowing that she was a good Christian and lived a happy and healthy lifestyle. We met up at Panera Bread on 11-12-13 and she told me about "The Good News". I heard about "The Good News" many times before but this time was different. Right then and there I asked God to come in my life.

It was an emotional experience and I felt a huge weight lifted off my shoulders. Things in my life got much better knowing God was on my side and that I could trust in Him. Believing and following God is just like building a relationship. It grows with time.

I found out about South Bay Community through a friend over a year ago and I love the church from the beginning and introduced the church to my parents. They fell in love too. I prayed to God at church to get pregnant and deliver a healthy baby. God answered my prayers as He always does.

I'm excited to get baptized to declare my faith publicly to my friends, family and peers.

*"It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.
He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me
to stand on the heights." Psalm 18:32-33*