

Josh Smolinski - Spiritual Bio

Growing up, I spent a lot of time with Christians. I was raised in a Christian home, went to a Christian church, and attended a private Christian school. Even though I had accepted Jesus, I felt like I was just meeting one of the many requirements tied to the idealized example of Christian life that was expected of me. I never felt the peace, presence, or guidance of the Holy Spirit because investing in spiritual growth never seemed as important as just "looking the part". It also seemed like when the people in my community were struggling to meet the expectations of a Christian life, they chose to struggle privately and expected me (and my family) to do the same.

I transitioned to public school in my early teens, and at first it was a complete culture shock to see my peers and their families openly struggling with issues like divorce, substance abuse, and incarceration. But as time went on, what I really saw was people who were living authentically and who, despite their challenges, seemed so much more free. Throughout high school and college, the more time I spent outside my Christian bubble, the less I wanted to go back. By the time I reached adulthood, I had almost completely walked away from my faith.

It wasn't until a series of personal setbacks in college that I started turning back toward God. I ran into John Emery, who I had first met years ago on a mission trip in high school, and he invited me to Harbor. What I found there was a community of people just like me; people who had wandered, struggled, but were finding their way back to God.

Over the last decade, I've worked to piece my deconstructed faith back together. I accepted Jesus into my life, wholly, unconditionally, and without thought to image or expectations. This time I did feel the peace, presence, and guidance that came with that decision. I was baptized at Harbor in 2013 and over the years I've learned to listen to the Holy Spirit, to trust God's plan for me, and to surrender my will, little by little. I met a wonderful woman who loves Jesus and compels me everyday to be more like Him. I've seen God move in my life in unexpected and incredible ways, and I've lived in a community where I've experienced authentic, Christ-centered love amidst great joy and great suffering.

I'm humbled to be asked to serve with the elder team at Harbor, and my hope is to pay it forward. I want this community to feel the peace that surpasses all understanding. I want to help Harbor continue to be the place that I needed it to be when I first walked through the doors; a place where all people, no matter how broken or how lost, can find their way back to God.

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28 (ESV)