

THE JESUS CLUB

INCREDIBLE TRUE STORIES OF HOW GOD
IS MOVING IN OUR HIGH SCHOOLS

BRIAN BARCELONA



Chosen

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Brian Barcelona, *The Jesus Club*
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This book is dedicated first to the Lord, for all He has taught me and all He has allowed me to be part of.

Second I want to dedicate this book to my amazing wife, Marcela, for her constant encouragement and the love she has shown me, always pointing me to hear God in everything I do, and to my beautiful daughter, Zoe, who I know will change her nation one day.

CONTENTS

	Foreword by Nick Vujicic	11
	Acknowledgments	13
	Introduction	15
1	..... Summer of Change	17
2	..... God Shows Up	33
3	..... The Jesus Rallies	43
4	..... From Six to Six Hundred	63
5	..... Set Me Free	79
6	..... Jesus Loves Gangbangers	89
7	..... Encounter with a God Who Heals	105
8	..... Prayer Would Be Restored	117

CONTENTS

9	The “323” Dream	133
10	God, If You’re Real, Touch Me	147
11	Follow Me	161
12	God Loves LAUSD	171
13	The “Above All, Love” Assembly	185
14	The Cost	195
15	Night of Hope	205
16	Message to the Church	215

FOREWORD

THE STORY OF HOW GOD HAS USED Brian Barcelona in high school campuses through One Voice Student Missions is one that has changed the lives of thousands of students across the country. I personally have seen and believe that now more than ever there is a window of opportunity that we must seize to reach the youth of this nation right where they are every day. The awakening of local churches to reach youth is happening like never before, and everyone is asking, “How do we reach the next generation?”

One Voice Student Missions is wisely and strategically using the local church as a focal point to sponsor the mission field where the Good News still can be shared. While that window remains open, now is the time of salvation and discipleship! This book is one I would recommend you read—to get inspired but also to realize what is possible and that you can live out these stories in your city campuses as well. You will be moved and

FOREWORD

challenged, not to just sit back in the church seats as “consumers,” but to be moved, to *go* and *love* students unconditionally. If you’re a student, pastor or leader, I encourage everyone to see this model and book of testimonies as a way that we as the body can be unified in our vision to see Jesus lifted high for all to see!

Nick Vujicic, president, Life Without Limbs

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I WOULD LIKE TO THANK DAD AND MOM and Grandma Arlene for their support and love. Where would I be without the prayers of my grandma and the love of my parents?

Papa Lou Engle and Mama Therese, thank you for always being godly examples and teaching me to believe God and never take anything less than revival in my generation.

My pastors, Netz and Lourdes, thank you for the time you have invested in me, always teaching me to do nothing but from prayer. You have been the greatest example of leadership to me.

Grandma Willi, the woman who dared to believe America would be saved, thank you. The many talks and love and support changed my life forever.

And last but not least, my One Voice family. Thank you for the time and countless hours you have spent with me going to these high schools and living out these stories. Thank you for your sold-out lives to Jesus and your incredible friendship. This would never have been possible without you guys.

INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of the classroom in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next.

ANONYMOUS

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE MANY VIEWS OF Jesus. Some have been taught He does not exist; others say He is a historical figure only. Others validate His existence but deny His power as alive and active today.

I want to share with you the story of the Jesus students are meeting in their high schools: the Jesus who touches their lives; the Jesus who heals their families both spiritually and physically; the Jesus who saves them from hell right in their gyms and auditoriums and theaters during lunchtime, every week; the Jesus who is not afraid of the separation of church and state; the Jesus who goes beyond four walls and a pulpit to the school grounds and classrooms.

INTRODUCTION

In the next fifteen to twenty years, I believe we will see and hear amazing new voices that God will be using in nations throughout the world. When asked where their salvation took place, their response will sound like this: “I got saved in a gym on a campus during lunch.” When asked the name of the speaker, they will reply, “I don’t know. All I know is, I met Jesus.”

I have heard stories of people who met Jesus in church, and others who met Him at a Christian conference, and still others who met Him on the streets. This story is about students who met Jesus in a Bible club.

The Jesus Club.



1

SUMMER OF CHANGE

17

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IT WAS A HOT SUMMER DAY IN JULY 2009. Little did I know that the youth gathering I was heading to would change my life forever. The bus ride felt normal. Our church youth group was laughing and sharing crazy stories as we drove the bumpy road to Santa Cruz, California, to a huge weekend event with some of the best Christian bands and speakers from across the country. This gathering was called Spirit West Coast. And in no way was I prepared for what God was about to invite me into.

For the previous year and a half I had been enjoying the simple fact that I had met Jesus and was free from my life of brokenness. I loved reading my Bible every day as I learned more about who Jesus was. Though I was only sixteen when I was saved, I fell instantly in love with God and wanted to do all He had for me to do. I made it my goal never to miss anything my church was part of, whether a prayer meeting, a youth night or a conference. I felt a sense of urgency within me not to miss His voice.

Within Spirit West Coast were smaller events, such as Ammunition Conference, which was led by a good friend

of mine, Pastor Jeremy Johnson. The name did it justice. Every session seemed to spark something powerful in my life. I was hungry to learn from the experiences of the men and women who spoke from the platform in that huge white tent, wondering in my heart if I, too, would ever have stories like theirs.

With more than a thousand high school and college students listening to speakers and enjoying the different bands, the question ran through my mind quite often of whether or not God even noticed me. But the first night I found myself weeping during the altar call, watching as students made their way to the front for prayer. God was encountering me, and I was feeling passionate about the salvation of my friends and family back home.

Up to this point in my life, I had never felt a calling to go into high schools and talk about Jesus; I only wanted to see my friends saved. I was trying to find ways to serve Jesus faithfully—reading my Bible every second I could and loving the people He put into my life. Oh—and leading worship for our youth group was my favorite. All the worship songs that seemed old to some of the other kids were new to me, seeing as I had not been saved long. My faith felt so fresh and alive I could not imagine the flame ever being snuffed out.

The next day, with the afternoon session finishing up, I felt the need to be alone with God and try to talk with Him about my life. As the band began playing the last song, I got up quietly from my seat in the front and made my way toward the few empty chairs at the back of the tent. I was hoping no one would notice me and

think I was not interested in joining the worship, but the urgency in my heart kept my feet moving.

Once I sat in the back and started to talk to God, my heart began to beat faster than normal. Within seconds I noticed that everything around me—the worship team and their instruments, the natural shuffling and movement of so many people clapping and singing—began to quiet down as if someone was turning down the sound of life. As I simply waited to see what would happen next, I heard God speaking clearly to me within my heart. His voice was gentle yet filled with power.

As I listened closely the Lord said, *Brian, I want to release a movement that will save the high schools of America. And I want to use your life to do it. This movement will take your city. It will take California. So goes California, so goes the nation.*

I felt almost shocked. I had no words, but tears flooded my eyes and spilled down my cheeks. The realization that I was a new Christian came quickly to try to rob me of the words God was speaking to me. Plus, I was just eighteen now! How could God entrust me with such a thing?

I was weeping uncontrollably, my hands covering my eyes and my head bowed in awe of God. I felt my heart being filled with the faith that I would need if I were to walk the long road the Lord had just laid out in front of me.

God continued to speak: *The movement I am about to release is going to restore prayer in the public schools again.*

At once everything went back to normal. I could hear the joyful singing and shouting of a thousand young people worshipping God.

I sat in the back of the huge white tent and continued to cry, overwhelmed at what I had just heard. I knew it was God. It was like a stern order from a general to a soldier, yet His words also felt like a father asking his son for a favor. Even though the moment was intense, I knew one thing to be true: I had a choice whether or not to obey. God had interrupted my life, and I could let it remain an interruption or let it become an invitation.

But even if I chose to obey, would God really use me in His plan to bring revival to America's high schools? How would I even approach such a thing? Campuses were not a passion of mine. Nothing in the natural world led me to think God was going to save high schools. There was also nothing in the natural that led me to think God could possibly use me to help do it.

I stood up still dazed by what had taken place and yet surprised that no one else seemed to have heard what I had heard. I had only a vague blueprint from God, since He had left out the many details of my journey. I knew that He wanted to save high schools and that He wanted me to have a role in it.

The only high school campus I had any connection with was the one I had just graduated from a year earlier—Elk Grove High. It made sense to think about starting there.

So as soon as the worship ended, feeling excited yet a little afraid, I found one of my friends, an older guy

whom I trusted, and began to tell him what had just happened. With passion and excitement, I poured out word after word of what God had said.

He listened and seemed careful not to quench my passion. Here I was, after all, this teenager telling him that God was going to save every high school in America. I realized at that moment that this assignment from the Lord might not affect others the same way it had affected me.

When I finished pouring out my heart, he looked at me with a smile and said simply, “If God told you, do it.”

I knew he was right. Despite feeling a little alone and not understood, I said yes to God that day in that tent and in my heart, not knowing that my yes would lead to thousands of students being saved. I didn’t go kneel at an altar or answer a preacher’s call to ministry. But that day I accepted an assignment from heaven. It might have been given to many others who might not have said yes, but I did. And though it was a weak yes, it would show much fruit in the years to come.

As the weekend gathering continued, my friends and I hung out hearing all kinds of Christian bands. When the last song was finished, we headed back to our campsite for the saddest part of the trip: packing our things and going home. As I gathered my clothes and belongings, I kept thinking of what would come next. It was still summer but school was soon to start.

Hours later we arrived back in Elk Grove. I knew something was different. I had never felt love for my city the way I did that evening when we drove in. I had felt

love for people before, but never for a geographical location. Yes, this may sound weird, but it was as if the dirt lot and the park and the high schools now had a place in my heart because this was where God had put me.

And for the first time my heart had compassion and love for the young people in the high schools who didn't know Jesus. My life was ruined for the dreams I had previously, like pursuing music and going to college. Even the dream of driving a nice car didn't seem that important.

My mom greeted me when I got home, so I started telling her everything that God had told me. She stood there listening to all I had to say only to reply with her famous smile accompanied by her famous Mom-saying: "That's good, *hijo*," which is Spanish for *son*.

After dinner I went to my room and began to pray for the Lord's words to come true. My heart was filled with joy yet uncertainty—not uncertainty that God had spoken but wondering how all this would come to pass. How was God going to use my life to reach every high school in the nation?

"Send me to the high schools!" became my prayer. It was almost like a weight on my heart when I thought about the kids who did not know Jesus.

The rest of that summer I contemplated how and when I would start. Since I had no clue what to do or model to follow, I kept praying for Him to guide me. At one point, I actually sensed some direction from God. I was reading in the gospels about how Jesus made disciples and how it took *an action*, not just *a wanting*, on

their part. I knew I had to take the first step. Any step, even in the wrong direction, was better than no step, because I knew if God was this faithful to speak then He would take me the way I needed to go.

I was willing to put aside the wants and desires of my “self” in order to obey the Lord. I was willing to do whatever He asked because I knew He would never ask me to start something He was not going to complete. Since I had not been saved long, I did not have much history with God—both in the sense of serving Him and in the sense of seeing Him coming through in my life. But I did have instant trust that He would never let me down. God would not wait sixteen years to pull my life out of depression and thoughts of suicide and then give me a directive that was way beyond my abilities—just to let me fail.

And as one of the speakers had said at the conference, if you can accomplish the dreams in your heart by yourself, then they are probably not from God. I knew for certain that in no way could I pull this one off.

In the days leading up to the start of school, I stayed faithful and committed to my youth group, leading worship, while still keeping this dream of God close to my heart. That time really prepped and taught me about following the word of the Lord and also about His timing. Faith without works is dead, I knew, but the timing of God would be what allowed the works to show my faith as alive.

I spent much time in prayer and fasting. Since I could not hear Him much about what to do next, I learned

that serving Jesus and walking out what He speaks went beyond my feelings and emotions. It got down to the core of my obedience.

Regardless of how I thought those prayer times were going, God honored them; in fact, I had the sense that the fruit I was to see in the following years might be traced to those times of praying and fasting. I also realized something else: that I needed Jesus just as much as the kids in high schools did. Nothing, therefore, depended on my skill. Everything depended on His willingness to move and my willingness to obey. Fifteen hundred-plus kids at Elk Grove High were about to enter their campus and my mission field. God was sending me on a rescue mission. This venture would not take a week or a month; it would be the start of a lifetime journey.

I grew nervous as the start date of school drew closer. How would I even get back on campus since I had already graduated? And what would I say? I might sound crazy even to the students, let alone the administration. And to top everything off, my parents did not serve the Lord and could not fathom why I would plan to go back to high school during the week instead of getting a job or going to college.

I have to admit that the American dream—which I pictured as a nice house with a picket fence and a savings account in the bank—did not tempt me. I was not after that. I was after making Jesus famous at Elk Grove High.

But even though the “good life” did not tempt me, it was hard realizing that no one understood me. That

season was my Garden of Gethsemane place, meaning I was standing between a silent God and sleeping people who didn't seem to hear me. It was that moment when my will and God's could possibly collide.

I was not one who needed a million confirmations to do what God had asked me to do, but I am not going to lie: When I felt particularly alone, I would ask Him if I really was to go. And His answer was the same every time: Silence.

Gradually I began to understand that I was asking Him if I should do what He had already told me to do. I knew deep down in my soul I was to go. So I finally decided that I would no longer entertain thoughts of not going—which I admit I had been doing.

His silence screamed *Go*.

To help me through those days, I would close my eyes and hear His words again. Over and over I would replay them in my mind as though it were my first time hearing them. By the time school was starting I had readied myself to do all that God was asking of me.

To be honest, He was not asking all that much. All He was asking of me was to go. I didn't have to be good at anything; I only had to be available. All the pressure of performing seemed to go away. Besides, there wasn't anyone in the city of Elk Grove at that time going into the schools and preaching, so it made my job a whole lot easier.

I cannot tell you the exact date that I walked into Elk Grove High, but I do remember what happened. After parking my 1990 Acura with no AC in the staff parking

lot, I went through the blue gates of the school, passing the large metal elk out front—the same elk I had passed many times as a student.

Classes were in session, but it was nearing lunchtime. It felt odd to be in school, still in jeans and a T-shirt, and not be a student. At the same time, memories flooded my mind—memories both good and bad.

See, when I had first come onto the campus as a sophomore, I was a professing atheist; a lot of my experiences there reflected my life before I knew Christ. Now I was approaching the same security guards whom I used to cuss out and give problems to. Hoping they would remember the change in me my senior year, and how I was not so rude anymore, I spoke politely, asking to go to the main office. I was grateful that they nodded and replied, “Go ahead,” and let me in.

I had about ten minutes before that familiar school bell would ring signaling lunch. I walked as fast as I could to the front office not really having a plan; I simply talked to the ladies at the front office to see what would happen.

“Excuse me,” I said.

One of the women looked up. “Yes? How may we help you?”

“I’m here to meet with the Bible club.” I knew there was a club because in my senior year I had seen kids with their Bibles hanging out together during lunch.

The woman nodded. “Mr. Brad Schottle is the one you need to speak to,” she replied. “His classroom is in the back of the school, where the portables are. Room

P6. Sign in and take this visitor's pass, and you can head back there."

I knew where those portable classrooms were since my English and math classes had been held there. But I never would have dreamed in a million years that I would be walking toward those same portables with a mission from God.

The bell rang as I pushed open the door and walked back into the bright sunlight. Watching the students pouring out of the portables, whether walking alone lost in thought or chatting with friends and heading for the quad, made me realize for the first time that there was a harvest in high school campuses ready to be gathered. That harvest was *ripe*. It was as if my eyes were opened and I could see the great potential of what the Lord could do.

I walked up the hollow wooden ramp to room P6 and knocked on the door. As I opened it slowly, a medium-sized man with grayish hair looked up from the papers in his hand and greeted me with a smile as I entered the room.

"Can I help you?"

"Hello," I replied. "My name is Brian Barcelona. I want to know if I can speak to Mr. Schottle."

The man nodded. "I am he. How may I help you?"

Now was the moment I had been preparing for ever since God spoke His words into my heart during the youth rally. I began to share with Mr. Schottle how I was a former student of Elk Grove High, and how God had spoken to me. I told him that I wanted to give students

the Gospel, since no one had ever given it to me in my high school days.

I poured my heart out regarding the experience I had had with God at Spirit West Coast. I told him about the word God had given me about the high schools of America. I spoke passionately, hoping Mr. Schottle would see my heart for the campus. I was certain that my obedience in the face of such an impossible task would put the demand on God to fulfill His plan.

When I had explained as best I could, I fell silent and waited. Mr. Schottle wore the puzzled look of someone who has no idea how to respond. And quite frankly, I understood. What would you say if a teenager barged into your math room during lunch one day and started talking about what Jesus had told him?

The silence lasted a bit longer, until he nodded slowly. “Okay,” he said finally. “What if you come once a week and speak to the Bible club?”

I knew in my heart that I needed to be on that campus more than once a week to influence it. How I knew I couldn’t say, but something inside me said once was not enough.

So I replied in a shaky voice, “What if I come twice a week?”

Again he stood silently, looking at me. It was his decision administratively—and he would be the one held accountable. Finally he said, “You may come every week, twice a week.”

A smile that must have looked both relieved and happily goofy spread over my face.

I got the details about which days to come—Tuesday and Wednesday—thanked him, and threw my arms around his shoulders in a hug. I was turning to leave when he spoke again.

“Wait. You have one more thing to do. You’ve got to check this with the Bible club president. Her name is Kendall. She’ll be coming in here in a few minutes.”

“Of course!” I replied—as though I knew I had to meet with her.

Not three minutes passed before the classroom door creaked open and a girl carrying a tuba walked in.

“Hello! My name is Brian,” I said, hoping this was Kendall.

“Hi. My name is Kendall.”

“Perfect!” I said.

She lowered her tuba to the floor and looked from me to Mr. Schottle with some confusion. So I wasted no time. I started to tell her everything I had just told Mr. Schottle.

When my flow of words finally stopped, she asked me a couple of questions and then, after a pause, said with sincerity, “You can speak here.”

I was overwhelmed with joy.

I did hear God! I thought.

“I’ll see you next week,” I said. “Gather as many as you can!”

And then I quickly made my exit. I was trying not to seem too excited, although on the inside I was jumping like crazy.

God had actually opened a door for me to walk through. He had given me a way to reach students—something

THE JESUS CLUB

that only twenty minutes earlier had seemed almost impossible. I had stepped out and He had stepped in.

The next seven days went by fast as I began preparing something to say to the club. But as I woke that Tuesday morning, I knew this was the day that would be written in the history books of my heart.