

Good morning

When pastor Roger asked me to share my testimony, I was very anxious and nervous as my public speaking skills are not at the top of their game, even though I did take speech 101 in the past couple of years, a class I know pastor Roger aced from what I can tell.... but more importantly, excited at the same time because I get to share my story with the congregation that contributed so much to the person I am today and so before I begin I just want to thank all of you for your continued love and support of me and my family at this Church.

Most of you have known me since I've attended this church since I was four or so, but for those who don't, My name is Jena, I am 22 years old, and am going into my senior year of college at Sonoma State. I first accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior once being confirmed through this church at age 13.

I have been participating in sports my whole life, giving me a platform to share my faith and play for an audience of one.

My career started with soccer first, which only lasted two short years. My career in soccer was short-lived as I tend to turn red in the face during any type of exercise, making the other soccer parents ask my mom if I was on the verge of passing out because of it. This, with the combination of cardio required, sadly ended my soccer career and my baseball career was able to begin.

I started playing baseball with the boys, and my two brothers, John and Ben, at what is known as Valley Christian Athletic Association, or VCAA, located in Encino at the age of 4.

I saw my faith transfer from prayer in these pews to the pitcher's mound before every game I played, sometimes being able to lead it, with our hats off of course. My faith only grew stronger through the role models, consistency, praise and sportsmanship that aimed at glorifying God in every day, game, or friendship gained at VCAA.

As I continued to get older, I learned that sports was a platform for me to excel and feel competent in, as rewards such as trophies, all-star teams, and peer approval was given to those who played up to the competition. I played a year at Northridge Little League to prepare myself in softball prior to entering High School. That year I hit my first homerun and was introduced to different types of teammates and coaches that held different priorities in their lives, such as competition and future college scholarships, not holding God as a top priority in their participation and state of mind. I became more well-rounded and understanding of a variety of people as a result, keeping these friends in my prayers as they might be led astray from being disciples of God. Let's just say the environment was different from VCAA, but prepared me well for high school.

As softball became more serious in my life, it was easy to look past the fact that God was behind every thought, action, and accomplishment that I thought I had control upon. I would put God in the back of my mind and my batting average as first priority. I thought to myself, I'll thank God later, right now it's time to take in the sights and sounds of my successes.

I would continue attending church throughout high school and go through the motions, as if it was a routine, not a time to spend with the one pathing my path at the time.

High school went by, and I decided to go to junior college, Glendale College specifically, where I would end up earning my Associates degree in Health Sciences and have a historical season in softball with the program. That year I had made life-long friends and earned both academic and athletic honors that I will cherish for life.

At the beginning of my second year at Glendale, I committed to Sonoma State on a softball scholarship. I went into my sophomore season with excitement, having the insurance that I would be playing competitive college softball at a university. I had reached my dream, a dream that I was chasing ever since I started playing. God had granted me a blessing that I will be forever grateful for.

Half way through my sophomore year at Glendale, my team and I had a double header, or a two game day against Bakersfield College. I played my regular position for the first game, catcher, and we ended up beating them by a large margin. So, my coach offered to give me what we thought would be a break from my knees, to put me in outfield the next game, a position I rarely had played before in my career. The first game ended and I went to go take some practice reps in left field to get ready for the second game. As I was throwing a ball in, my left knee hyperextended underneath me and gave out, making a snapping sound, accompanied with the worst pain I hope to never experience again in my life. Before I knew it, I was on the floor grasping my knee and wanting this pain to disappear. The athletic trainers came out and examined me, which was only the beginning to a long road to recovery to hopefully one day return to the field. All I could think about was my scholarship and what would happen once I informed my coach of the news and if my future would still exist at Sonoma.

I felt selfish, as I turned to God in prayer after putting him in the backseat for so long in my life. I would say so many prayers asking him to give me what I wanted, what I thought I "deserved" at that time in my life. I felt this guilt in the pit of my stomach, much like the guilt I would feel once I would push my brothers into the pool without their permission, except this was a guilt that ached with me for months.

What was going to happen? What was Coach Bridges going to say? Would I still get the scholarship? Would I be the same player? The stress was unreal. I focused so much on myself and my future, but little did I know that this was all apart of God's plan, his promise, his way of opening my eyes to what I was blind to for so long.

Coach Bridges, the head coach at Sonoma State, told me to get the surgery and attend Sonoma the following fall, under the impression that I would be diligent in my rehabilitation program to be healthy and play the following spring season. Prayers went up and tears were shed, as I knew God had bigger plans for me, and he wanted to utilize me as his disciple.

I went through with the surgery on May 17th, 2013, went to physical therapy that summer and continued to pray for recovery and rebuilding my relationship with God. Tears would sting my eyes while falling asleep because of the pain, lying in my bed, with my entire left leg locked out in a huge brace, throbbing, and the pain meds wearing thin. This was only the beginning of the journey.

I ventured off to Sonoma in early August, anxious for a new beginning but calm at the same time, as I knew God was walking with me, as he always had. Fall workouts began, and let's just say Sonoma State Softball works harder than any team on campus, let alone any other team in our CCAA conference.

As a new player on any team, you want to impress the coaches and your teammates with your work ethic, but still rehabbing my knee, it wasn't possible to balance both and keep up with those who had two healthy knees to run and play on. I would call my parents crying, saying how much I thought the team thought I wasn't working hard enough or how much I hated that I couldn't show them the true player I was and was striving to recreate after my injury. I would pray for peace of mind and acceptance of those who I was wanting to impress. I would pray for God to use me in ways that he saw fit in my unique situation.

I was pushing my body to limits it couldn't sustain, so much that I ended up tearing my ACL for the second time in October 2013 while shuffling on a throw so much that my knee gave out once again. I had to get a second surgery on February 27th, 2014, and rehab throughout that 2014 spring season, summer, and fall until I was able to return to softball this past year. I guess you can say that I like to learn the hard way, at least that's what my Mom tells me.

That following October, Our team drove to St. Mary's College for two fall games to prepare for spring. I had gotten cleared by my surgeon a couple weeks prior to that weekend, and I was a bundle of nerves that morning in our pregame warmup, not due to the game but because I didn't know how my knee was going to hold up. The line up was called and I was not starting, something I was okay with as butterflies were flying wild in my stomach. Six innings came and went and I paced back and forth in the dugout until I got the call to pinch hit in the seventh inning. This was it, the moment all my prayers were leading up to, almost two years of physical therapy, 18 months of doctor's appointments, approximately 500 days working out in the training room and studying hard in the classroom was here. I grabbed a bat, stood on deck waiting for my first at bat to reintroduce me to an old friend, the game.

I took a deep breath walked up to the plate and stepped into the box like I had done a million times before. I told myself to relax and swing at whatever looked good, as there was no need for pressure with my fresh, new knee. The pitcher winded up, I loaded back, her arm released the pitch, I ignited my arms to start my swing. Contact was made and the I started running. I glanced up and tracked the ball leave the park, it had sailed over the right field fence. I had hit a home run, one of many in my career, but this one was different, this one was special. I rounded third and stepped on home plate, giving that one to God. My coach was proud of me, as were my teammates, and nothing could have topped that moment. That homer in signified all the people supporting me, the sacrifices I had made in rehab, and perseverance personified, all under the grace of God. I of course called my mom after that game and she screamed in my ear, but it was definitely a special moment. We concluded our season with a bang, making school history by going the furthest Sonoma State Softball had ever gone before- to super regionals- it was a season that will be hard to top.

The bible says in Colossians 3:23 "23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men." I would write this verse on my arm before every game, with a sharpie. My purpose in this life is not just sports, that does not define me, my purpose is to use the gifts God has given me and work in his name.

During my first year at Sonoma, I joined an on campus group titled AIA, or Athletes in Action. We met once a week and participated in activities that provided fellowship with fellow SSU students. It was open to anyone who wanted to join, not just athletes, and focused on glorifying God in all that you do, on and off the field.

This was when I grew in my faith with God. I joined fellow athletes and listened to guest speakers, pastors at nearby churches, and was able to share my own story with them, sharing my testament with them as well. This group had allowed me to find a church in a town called 360 church of Petaluma, where I was able to find my groove and really take up a worship service that allowed me to grow in my faith and experience Christianity in a church that had so much love and acceptance that felt familiar to CCN.

I am also surrounded by teammates who are devoted Christians, as we would pray before games this past season, carpool to church on Sunday's, and read daily devotionals together, especially either my roommate Mandy, who's very thorough in our late night talks that keeps me up til sometimes one o'clock in the morning when I have an eight o'clockclass the next Morning, so long sleep!

I know I still have more growing to do in my faith and relationship with God, it will always be under construction I like to think. But I realized that the pressures and pain this world puts us through are temporary, and that God is forever. I'll look back at this chapter in my life and wonder why I strayed away from God so much and how a God like ours can grant forgiveness to those who simply ask for it.

Since I redshirted my first year, I was able to gain another year of eligibility to spend attending Sonoma, as the NCAA gives student athletes just 4 short years to compete in their sport. This extra year has allowed me to use it towards earning my B.S. In Kinesiology and was a blessing in disguise as God had given me another year of paid education. Upon the completion of my Kinesiology degree, hopes of pursing either nursing or physical

therapy will be pursued thereafter. No matter what the challenge or earthly matter that I will face in this life, I know God walks with me and I will work in his name in whatever he has in store for me.

Thank you for listening to my testimony, it has been an honor to share it with a congregation that has supported me through it all.

Thank you