

**THERE IS**

**ALWAYS HOPE**

**MY STORY OF REDEMPTION AND TRANSFORMATION**



**BAYLESS CONLEY**

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HOW GOD RESCUED ME FROM DRUGS AND DESPAIR

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## INTRODUCTION

My life is an amazing story of God's unfathomable grace. When I think of the depths to which I fell—and all the trouble I got myself into—it's a wonder I am even alive today!

Day after day, month after month, and year after year, I fell deeper into the abyss of drug and alcohol abuse. I was desperately searching for truth, for meaning to my life, for any answer as to why I was here. But nothing satisfied. Nothing filled that void. And nothing gave me the answer I was looking for—until that day in 1975 when I was confronted with the truth by a courageous 12-year-old boy. Through him, I met the living Christ and my life was changed forever.

If today you find yourself searching for the meaning to your life, if you wonder why you are here, or if you struggle to fill that empty void in your life, then I encourage you to read

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on. What you will discover is the story of a journey filled with drugs, alcohol, and looking for truth in all the wrong places . . . a story ending in rescue by God's love and grace at my darkest hour.

It is a story of hope—eternal hope. A hope that can be yours today.

## THE EARLY YEARS

The story of my childhood is a lot like that of many kids raised in the 1950s and '60s. I was born in the city of Long Beach in Southern California and raised as a normal Southern California kid.

I was into sports, especially baseball. But when I entered junior high school, my life began a slow descent. First, I started smoking cigarettes with some local kids because I thought it looked cool. And then I started to drink because I thought that looked cool too.

I can remember getting up in the morning as a thirteen-year-old kid, drinking, and then going to school drunk. I can also remember going to school at times with a terrible hangover, which pretty much became the norm for my teenage years.

As time went on, I began to drink more heavily and do things I thought were cool—

even though they were so damaging to me personally.

At one time, I was a very good baseball player, and like a lot of kids my age, I dreamt of playing professionally. So when I entered the tenth grade, I tried out for high school baseball. After making the team, I had my head shaved, which was required in those days for anyone participating on a school team.

But just before the season started, I was playing basketball and hurt my knee after leaping to catch a long pass while running down the court. I landed on one leg at a bad angle and tore one of my ligaments in half. I ended up having major surgery, but that injury ended my sports career. After the surgery something happened to me.

## THEN THE DRUGS STARTED

While I didn't realize it at the time, my "dream ending" surgery served as a catalyst that propelled me even further into that downward spiral. An outward sign of that change was my decision not to cut my hair for the next seven years.

Shortly after that, I tried pot for the first time. The first joint I smoked that evening on my high school property led to a whole lot of other drugs. I started to smoke hashish and take LSD, speed, and barbiturates. Occasionally, I snorted cocaine.

On top of that, my drinking increased. In fact, I began drinking all the time. It was not uncommon for me to just ditch high school for the day and go get stoned. It basically became my way of life—partying, chasing girls, and getting stoned.

About that time, a friend who lived up north in a little commune began to invite me to spend time with him. I thought it was so cool because I would hang out with all of these older guys for a couple days, buy drugs from them, and drink and get high with them.

One day someone recommended a book to me about certain Native Americans who were searching for spiritual truth and breaking into the spirit realm through the use of drugs. He urged the use of “organic” drugs like peyote, jimsonweed, and a bunch of other “natural” drugs.

I had already used a lot of these “organics” along with my normal chemical drugs and alcohol consumption. But with the encouragement of this new book, I began to favor the organic drugs above all others, although I never stopped using other drugs or drinking. When I think of it now, it seems insane, but I used to sit in class after eating a bunch of jimsonweed, hallucinating until I was barely able to function.

It may sound crazy, but even while I was using these drugs I was earnestly on a spiritual trek,

looking for the truth. Numerous times, I went out into the desert with a group of friends. We would find an isolated place to camp and then all of us would get high and try to somehow get in touch with the spirit world.

It wasn't unusual for a dozen of us to wander around the desert after doing a bunch of jimsonweed or eating a bunch of mushrooms or peyote. We would spend hours in the middle of the night wandering around a bunch of rocks, looking for answers. It would be hilarious if it wasn't so sad—to think we would really find truth among a bunch of desert rocks!

But in my heart, I was crying out for the truth. I was looking for something that would satisfy the emptiness I felt. And I can't tell you how many times God spared my life over the course of those years. All I can say is somebody had to have been praying somewhere!

For example, on more than one occasion, I passed out at the wheel of my car while driving, even on the freeway! I should have been another drunk-driving statistic, but somehow, miraculously, I was never hurt.

On another occasion, I went with a friend up into the mountains on one of our little spiritual treks. We had packed a bunch of organic drugs in our backpacks, along with quarts of beer. We didn't bring any food—just beer. Once we got up in the mountains, we began drinking and taking the drugs. After getting pretty high, we started wandering around and found an old miner's cave.

This cave led into the heart of the mountain and we began walking into it without thought of the consequences. We had a flashlight, which helped, but after about fifteen minutes we started walking into water. We took off our shoes and kept going. After a while we were trudging through almost waist-deep mud with the water above it nearly up to our necks. I still shake my head in amazement when I realize that our noses had been barely above the water and the roof of the cave right over our heads. How we kept from drowning, I will never know.

After what seemed like hours, we could finally see a little pinhole of light ahead of us. When we got to the source of the light, we had gone all the way through the mountain.

When we emerged on the other side, we were covered with a sticky red mud and were utterly exhausted.

We definitely had not been in our right minds to do something so dangerous.

As if that wasn't insane enough, we turned around and went right back through the cave!

There was another time I shouldn't have survived. It was at a place in the Southern California mountains called Big Bear Lake. I was there with a bunch of friends and again we had cases of beer and a load of chemicals.

The first night I drank about a dozen beers and smoked hashish. In my wisdom, I decided to walk out on the frozen lake at about one o'clock in the morning. Two other guys thought that was a really cool idea too. So we walked out into the middle of the lake where the ice ended and just started grinning at each other. Then one of my friends started to jump up and down on the ice!

Within moments, he fell through. Then I fell through, followed closely by my other friend.

We tried desperately to get out of the bone-chilling water, but the ice would break every time we grabbed the edge and we would plunge back under.

We started to panic because this went on and on and on. No matter what we did, we couldn't get out. We just plunged into the water again and again. All of a sudden—I don't even remember how it happened—all three of us were lying on top of the ice!

We began laughing as we headed back to the cabin to dry off and drink some more beers. As I look back now, I truly believe angels pulled us out because somebody somewhere had a burden to pray for us. God very graciously spared our lives.

Over and over, I pushed the limits. It became more and more obvious that my life was out of control. I was regularly taking several different kinds of drugs together, just trying somehow to kill the aching void I felt inside.

I remember one time in particular—I was probably around eighteen years old—when I

started the night off by taking a hit of LSD. But that wasn't enough. So I went into my room, smoked some hash, and then came back out to watch some TV.

But that still wasn't enough, so I took another hit of LSD and went back to my room and smoked some more hash. After about thirty minutes, I went back to the hash pipe again—a short journey that I made about ten times that night.

At one point, I got up and went into the bathroom. As I was looking in the mirror, all of a sudden, the whole room went “zooooom” and seemed to shrink along with me down to miniature size. Right away, I knew I was in trouble and in that instant, I started losing control.

I don't know if you will understand this, but I totally lost control of my emotions and my thoughts. And I started to hear voices. I ran into my bedroom, but the whole room was on fire—or so I thought—and those voices just kept getting louder. And there was this horrible screaming. I really thought I was in hell.

At that moment, the voice started saying, "You're going to be in an institution in a straitjacket and this will never stop." I was terrified. Absolutely terrified. Things escalated until I was so out of control that I took a large knife, ready to end my life. In fact, I came within moments of committing suicide.

That night I experienced what it might be like for a person to exist forever in hell. The Bible says a person who is eternally separated from God *loses* his or her soul. That person has no control anymore. This is exactly what I experienced that night. It was sheer terror and absolute torment.

I knew I was really in trouble and had to get out of the house, so I went out for a walk. The next thing I remember is becoming aware that I was down the street in a neighbor's yard. As I got up off their lawn, I had a mouthful of grass and my hands were full of grass. I don't know for how long, but I had been eating grass from the neighbor's lawn like a cow. You know you are not in good shape when that happens!

That night I swore I would never again in my life take LSD. Never. Other drugs were fine, just not LSD.



## MY FAMILY LIFE

You might be wondering what kind of home I was raised in and what was going on in my home when I got into drugs and alcohol.

To be perfectly honest, I lived in a normal home. My mom and dad were good people. They provided for the family. I can't slight them in any way. While they didn't know God, they were basically good parents.

But I can say that there were broken hearts in my home because of my choices. My parents received calls from the high school about my behavior and all the trouble I was getting into. My mother cried herself to sleep night after night. As a teenager, there were times when I wouldn't come home for days, and my mom and dad had no idea where I was—or if I was alive or dead. If I did come home, it would be two or three o'clock in the morning. I would sleep until two o'clock in the afternoon and then start drinking and partying all over again.

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I remember coming home in the middle of the night and finding my mom crying. It was obvious she had been doing so for a long time. I think that was what really tore at my dad's heart the most—seeing what my lifestyle was doing to my mother.

## MY RELIGIOUS UPBRINGING

I was raised going to church on Sundays. My mom, my sister, and I attended fairly regularly, although my dad never went to any church.

The services were conducted in Latin, which made it very difficult to get anything out of it (unless you spoke Latin!). All of the time I attended I never heard the gospel. I never heard that I could know Jesus and that He could change my life.

Finally, at the age of fourteen, I quit going to that church altogether. Eventually, my mother and sister stopped going as well. It was then that my family began a search for spiritual truth. My mom got very involved in astrology and metaphysics, so much so that people came from all over Southern California to have her read their astrology charts.

My parents started going to a metaphysical church and I began reading the Bhagavad Gita and attending a Hindu temple in Los Angeles.

I became pretty intense in my search for truth. I checked out religions one after the other. I even joined in on some channeling meetings where someone would supposedly be taken over by the spirit of an ancient master. That spirit would come into the person and speak and share vast wisdom and knowledge. As I look back at it now, it is clear these people were possessed by demons.

That along with everything else I explored turned out to be a dead end.

## ON THE RUN

I finally came to the point where I knew I had to get out of Southern California. I was sure that if I stayed much longer, I would kill myself. I just couldn't keep up my destructive pace and live for very long.

So I decided to spend a year traveling around. I went to Utah for a while and spent some time in Arizona. Wherever I went, I would work a job for a little while to get some money and then party.

Finally, I went to my dad and said, "Dad, look, I'm going to try to go to college. Will you help me? I need to do something with my life, but I have to do it by getting out of Southern California." I was really trying to turn over a new leaf.

Somehow, I instinctively realized that things had to radically change if I was going to

survive. Something deep within me was crying out to be satisfied and so far nothing I did and nowhere I went ever came close to satisfying that inward cry. I was at a loss and the only thing I could come up with was another change of environment.

I ended up enrolling at a college in southern Oregon. When I got there, I told myself, "Man, no more drugs. I'm just going to quit." I took some with me though, just in case.

Walking across campus on my first day of classes, I ran into a drug dealer I had known back home. Right away, he said, "Hey, Bayless, you want to get high?" My resolution to turn over a new leaf quickly dissolved. "Why not?" I thought, so we went and got stoned.

My drug use intensified and my drinking increased to the point that I was drunk four or five nights a week. This went on for years. It was not unusual for me to start my day with a fifth of tequila only to finish it by early afternoon.

All the while, I was still searching.

The new friends I met at college were not the kinds of friends I needed at that point in my life. I immediately found myself back in the maze of drug abuse that I had been trying to escape.

Remember the night I flipped out on LSD and said I would never take it again? Well, one year later—to the day—I dropped acid again. It was a kind of LSD that we called “windowpane,” the same kind I had been using one year earlier.

This time, though, I took twice as much. We stayed up all night—never went to sleep. I was so whacked out! In fact, I remember sitting up the next morning in the back of my truck, looking out at a big mountain across the valley. I sat there for quite some time, watching herds of buffalo run all across the mountain.

The only problem was there were no buffalo. I enjoyed watching them anyway!

In the midst of this increasing abuse of drugs, deep in my heart I was really looking for something substantial and authentic.

I began asking questions like, “Why am I here?” and “What happens when I die?” They constantly plagued me and I was utterly frustrated. As I look back, I realize there is one significant lesson God taught me. I learned I should never judge people by their outward actions because I don’t really know what is going on in their hearts. They may be crying out to God.

My use of organic drugs—and my search for truth—continued to intensify. During that one year in college, my life completely revolved around getting high, spending time with friends, chasing women, drinking, and taking courses like Eastern Mysticism and American Indian Religions.

At the same time, I started associating with some people who were practicing witchcraft. I met a man whom everybody was afraid of. He was casting spells on people and manipulating and controlling them. We became good friends.

In my search for truth, I thought that the answers I was looking for might be somehow wrapped up in power he wielded. But every

time he had a girlfriend, it would be just a couple of months until she would slit her wrists and try to commit suicide. Those same spirits that operated in his life affected everyone else around him. It soon became clear that I didn't want what he had.

But more and more, I attracted these kinds of people. Things just got darker and darker, worse and worse.

Amazingly, many people thought I had it together. They would come to me for answers all the time. They thought, "He's really into nature. He seems like he's so collected. He must be tuned in to some important spiritual truth." It's pretty unbelievable now, but people were coming to me for counseling all the time. They had no idea just how miserable and empty I was on the inside.

I can still remember a guy asking me some pretty serious questions about the existence of God and our purpose on earth, as he candidly shared with me about some of his deepest disappointments and fears in life. We were both smoking pot and drinking beer at the time, while standing in someone's backyard

as an enormous party raged around us, but somehow he came to the conclusion that I could actually help him! I babbled some clever-sounding advice to him, all the while thinking: “These aren’t too different than the questions I’m asking myself! If I’m further along in the journey than you, it can’t be by much.”

## JESUS ON MY MIND

After one evening of hard drinking and drug consumption, I woke up the next morning extremely depressed—so depressed that I decided to take a walk in the park not too far from where I was staying. I couldn't get Jesus off my mind as I walked. It was like a broken record that kept playing over and over.

I tried to think about something else, but my mind kept coming back to the name of Jesus. Now, you need to understand that I didn't really know who Jesus was. I thought He was an Eastern mystic, someone who had studied mysticism in the pyramids of Egypt. Seriously! Somebody had told me that He studied in the pyramids and I believed it.

I thought I was, perhaps, Jesus Christ reincarnated, or Judas, or someone in between the two. But no matter what I did, I couldn't stop thinking about Jesus. Finally, as

I was walking along a trail, I stopped and said out loud, "Okay, I will think about Jesus."

I continued walking and ended up in a children's playground. It seemed like there were hundreds of kids running in every direction.

Suddenly a young boy walked by me, hands in his pockets. He never even looked up. He was maybe eleven or twelve years old and looked like he was either American Indian or Mexican. There was something about this kid that really struck me, but I couldn't put my finger on it. I knew whatever he had was good and wholesome. It was something I didn't have in my life.

I watched him walk by. And then I literally got up on my tiptoes to watch him until he disappeared out of sight at the other end of the park. I thought, "What does he have? What does that boy have that I don't?" I just shook my head and went back to thinking about Jesus.

I walked on the trail for another quarter mile, went down a steep bank to a secluded

area where no one could see me, and found a place next to the creek. I sat on a big rock and started throwing sticks into the water as I continued thinking about Jesus. About ten minutes later, I heard something and looked up to see the same boy sliding down the opposite creek bank on his rear end. He sat on a rock right across from me, no farther than ten feet or so.

He looked at me and said, “Hi,” but I didn’t answer him. Now, you have to imagine this scene. There I was with hair down past my shoulders, a long red beard, pants that had holes with my boxer shorts hanging out of them, and ripped-up elbows on the sleeves of my shirt—that was standard garb for me in those days. And here was this boy trying to engage me in conversation, and all I could think about was Jesus.

He looked up at me, picked up a stick, and threw it into the water close to where I was sitting. There was this sort of silent communication going on. And then he broke it by asking a question that nearly gave me a heart attack. Quietly, he asked, “Do you know Jesus?”

I about fell off my rock! My first thought was, “This kid thinks I’m Jesus.” I really thought that! I told him to come over to my rock, and he jumped across the creek and sat down next to me. His first words to me were, “Isn’t He wonderful?”

For the next twenty minutes, this 12-year-old who introduced himself as “Guy” did nothing but talk about Jesus. He talked about Him like they were best friends. I had never heard anyone talk that way in all of my life—and I felt like I was listening to a wise old man who knew so much while I knew so little.

Finally he said, “Come on. I want you to meet my mom.” We got up and I followed him across the park. We came to two little girls playing in the grass and a lady asleep in the grass. When we approached, she woke up sort of wild eyed—I can still remember the patterns of the grass imprinted on her cheek. Her son was standing there with a big smile on his face as if to say, “Look what I found!”—referring to me.

I thought she was really nice, so I talked to her for a little while. Finally she said, “Bay”—

my nickname back then—“come to our house for dinner.”

I said, “Lady, I don’t even know you. I don’t think so.”

She said, “Really, I want you to come to our house for dinner.”

But I refused and started walking away. As I was leaving, she told me her address. I just walked away and thought, “Strange day, strange people.”

About two weeks later, something told me I needed to find that house. I suddenly had this overwhelming desire—I didn’t know where it came from—to visit these people. I remembered the address, so I got into my little pickup truck and found the street. I parked my truck and started walking down the sidewalk, looking for the address. All of a sudden, I heard someone calling from a second-story window, “Bay, oh, Bay, over here.” I looked up at her and couldn’t believe that she had seen me.

When I got to her house, I realized they had dinner ready. And they had a place set for me. I said, “You knew I was coming?”

They said, “Yeah. The Lord told us you would be here today, so we’ve been waiting.”

I said, “*Who* told you?”

She said, “Jesus told us you would be here tonight, so I’ve had dinner ready and we’ve been waiting for about the last half hour or so for you to arrive. We knew you would be here.”

Now, I used to have this habit of latching on to people’s eyes when I talked to them. I would go eyeball to eyeball with them and refuse to let go. I would get right in people’s faces—invading their comfort zones—because I really was looking for the truth. I had learned that you could tell a lot by looking into someone’s eyes.

So, at that moment, I got right in her face and said, “Who told you I was coming?”

She said, “Jesus.” And she just stared right back at me.

I sat down to dinner and for the entire evening this Christian lady named Ramona and her kids talked to me about Jesus. The first time I ever heard the gospel was that day in the park and then that night at their house.

After a long evening together, I still wasn't convinced this was the truth I had been looking for. I had to think about it, which I did. But I still continued doing drugs and drinking all the time. My life was still out of control.

In fact, there was one pretty scary incident that took place several weeks after my dinner at Ramona's house. I was hanging out one day with some friends when a girl I knew showed up with a bunch of "magic mushrooms." She had been up in another part of Oregon picking the mushrooms, which were extremely hallucinogenic.

She brought me an envelope full of them. Now, I had been using them for years and I knew how much I could take. And in that envelope, there was enough for about ten people to trip out on. True to form, I ate all of them myself.

A little while later, things began to get really, really weird all of a sudden. The mushrooms hit me like a tidal wave and I knew I had to get out of there. My friends could tell something was wrong, so they wanted to know where I was going. I just told them I had to leave.

I figured that if I went to the park and sat down for a while, everything would be okay. Well, I went to the park, but I was hallucinating and things kept getting worse. In fact, they were so bad that I tried to just close my eyes . . . but that only made things more frightening. No matter what I did, it was bad! It was one of those times when I had absolutely no control. It was such a sorry state for a human being to be in!

I was a pitiful sight as I walked down the street, terrified by what I was seeing with my eyes open and terrified by what I was seeing with them shut. I decided to walk down the street with my eyes squinted, not quite shut and not quite open. It was still really awful!

Somehow I made it through the night. How? I really don't know.

After that night, things went progressively downhill. I didn't see much of Ramona or her kids and I began to hang out more with a friend of mine who had been born in Mexico City. He had become my best friend while we were in college.

Eventually, I went down to Mexico with him to stay with his family for several months. When we got there, I was blown away—it turned out that his father was very wealthy. Their home was an entire floor of a large apartment building.

It was truly unbelievable. I had never lived in such luxury. Many of his friends were from the elite families of Mexico City, so I often found myself in the company of rich kids. I remember one party we went to at what I can only call a mansion. As we walked down a long hallway, I saw many enormous rooms—some that would seat scores of people at elaborately decorated tables and others that were used for entertaining guests—most of which, I think, no one ever used. The hallway emptied into a huge, domed room with elegant chandeliers, a pool table, sofas, and, oh yes—a giant

swimming pool that was halfway surrounded with birdcages built into the walls. I'd never seen anything like it.

My time in Mexico was a time of extremes for me. On the one hand, there were lots of girls and no shortage of money. On the other hand, we would go out into the mountains and stay in poor Indian villages where we would buy mushrooms and organic drugs from the Indians.

Those were the kinds of extremes that were my life's dream. At one moment, I could be running around with girls and all these fancy people, and in another moment I got the organic drugs and the spiritual dimension I searched for in nature.

There was one village in particular called San Pedro that had a little church. But it was a mushroom church. Guys would take mushrooms, sit inside with candles burning, and get visions. One day we went out to the end of the town with the mayor's daughter (we were buying our drugs from her husband) to a tiny shack that was maybe twenty feet by twenty feet. The mayor joined us and we began

to drink a local alcoholic drink called *pulque* and bought some mushrooms.

The next day, the shack was jammed with people and when they saw me, several said, “You’ve been here before.” I’ll never forget it. “You’ve been here before.” They told me that my spirit had traveled there before, and of course, I ate it up. You know, the devil will fill you with pride as long as you believe lies.

It was like a dream come true for me to be able to hang out with all these super rich people and drink expensive liquor, smoke the finest pot that Mexico had to offer, and then go out to the mountains and get high as I associated with the local Indians.

But I was so miserable. I was so empty. And I was being attacked in my mind by spiritual forces. I learned the hard way that when you do drugs like that, you open yourself up to the spirit world—and it is real! I began having experiences that I didn’t like and it finally got to the point that I wasn’t much fun to be around. In fact, it became obvious through several comments made that my best friend began to hope I would go away.

I can still remember sitting up every night on the elevated floor of that apartment building, opening the curtains, and looking for hours over all of Mexico City. I would sit there by myself every night, drinking a bottle of wine and looking out over the lights thinking, "There's got to be more to life than this. What's the answer?" I learned later that Ramona and her family had been praying for me during that time. Even though they hadn't known where I was, they had faithfully prayed for my salvation.

One night, as I sat looking at the lights, the thought suddenly struck me, "I've got to get out of here." So I told my friend that I was going to leave and go back to Oregon.

Within hours, I had packed my little pickup truck and started my drive back to Oregon. My stay in Mexico was abruptly cut short. I took one six-hour break to rest and stopped a couple other times, but I was determined to get back as quickly as possible. I didn't even really take time to eat. Of course, I did drink beer all the way back.

When I arrived, I had to find Ramona and her family as quickly as possible. I found out they went to a Pentecostal church, so I drove there immediately. When I walked in the back of the church that evening, Guy, the 12-year-old, saw me and came running back to me. He gave me a huge hug!

From that night on, I began to spend more and more time with them and learned about Jesus. I had been on a search for years—a search for truth. I had gone to the Mormon Church, visited Hindu temples, spent time in metaphysical churches, and gotten into Yoga. I had been searching for truth through drugs, trying to get outside of my body to experience true spirituality. I had done everything I could think of—but the very last thing on my list was Jesus and Christianity. I thought it was for wimps. In my search for truth, Jesus had been absolutely dead last on the list of the things I wanted to look into.

But as I began to weigh what I was hearing from Ramona and her family with all the religions and spiritual stuff I had investigated, it became clear to me that Jesus was who He

said He was. I even started telling my friends, “You know, I think Jesus is real. I think the gospel and this stuff they are telling me about Jesus is true. I really think He is the Son of God. I think He is it.”

The people who I thought were my friends started persecuting me. They said, “Oh, how can you say that? What about the Pygmies in Africa? Are they going to hell? And are you saying that all of the Hare Krishna’s are going to hell? You think your little Jesus is right?”

I didn’t have answers for them, but I knew something was happening in my heart. Man, was it ever a time of turmoil for me!

One night I was staying at a house with some friends when I decided to go outside. It was a cold night, not a cloud in the sky. I lay down on the hood of my pickup truck and started talking to God. After a while, I began yelling at Him: “God, if Jesus is really Your Son—if this is true—You’ve got to show me. If it’s true, what about this?” And I said something about the Pygmies or something like that. Then I said, “If it’s true, what about this, what about that?” And it was like heaven was silent, like

brass above my head. I started to cry and I said, "Forget it," and went back into the house to go to sleep.

But the next day, something amazing happened. God talked to me. I don't know how I knew it, but I just knew it was God. He said, "I want you to go to Ramona's house." So I got in my truck and drove to her house. When I got there, they were packing everything up and getting ready to leave. Seeing them about to leave, I doubted what I had heard and thought, "Oh sure, that was God telling me to come here!"

So I asked them where they were going. They said, "Well, we're going to Medford to a mission there. We're going to share the gospel with street people, derelicts, and alcoholics." God spoke to me again in that moment and said as clearly as I've ever heard any voice in my life, "I want you to go with them."

Now, this was the second time I had ever heard God speak to me and I argued with Him. In my heart, I said, "I don't want to. I'll make You a deal. If they invite me, I'll go."

Just as soon as I had that thought, Ramona whirled around and said, “Bay, come with us.”

I said, “All right, I’ll go.”

When we got to the mission, I sat on the front row with all the street people. I looked a little odd with my sweatshirt, skin-tight bright-orange pants with big yellow stripes down the side, and a pair of boots. I sat on the front row with an attitude that said, “All right, bless me if You can.”

They began with something I had never heard of before they called “testimonies.” The first person up was a lady. She quoted the first question I had asked God the night before as I lay on my pickup truck, and then she shared the answer from the Bible. Next, a man got up and quoted almost verbatim the next question I had shouted at God from my pickup truck. He proceeded to share the answer from the Bible.

Three or four people got up after that and every one of them quoted the questions I had shouted at God the night before. By this time, I realized God had set me up. All of a sudden,

I began weeping and sobbing as I sat there on the front row, thinking, "My God, this is real." I was weeping uncontrollably for about thirty minutes. I couldn't stop crying. Suddenly, I realized that the God of heaven was interested in me. He had arranged that whole evening just for me.

That night I gave my heart to Jesus Christ and since then, I have never put another illegal drug in my body. I was set free by the power of God in that moment.

Now, I have to admit that I still drank heavily for about two weeks, but slowly I lost my desire for alcohol. And one day, while sitting behind the Cheshire Cat, a little store that sold imported beer and wine, I had a remarkable experience. I had purchased a six-pack of imported German beer, which I fully intended on finishing off. But as I started drinking my second beer, I suddenly said, "I don't need this anymore." I poured it and the remaining four bottles in the trash. Then I went home and poured the alcohol I kept there down the toilet. From that moment, I was set free from the power of alcohol.

## THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE

After being an alcoholic for so many years—  
and after having a major league problem with  
drugs for most of my teen and early adult  
years—God had miraculously delivered me.

## FAMILY RESTORATION

Coming to faith in Jesus Christ changed my life in more ways than one. In Jesus Christ, I found the answer I had been looking for—but at the same time, my new faith brought a lot of persecution. I lost about half my friends because I didn't compromise—the other half got saved. I made it clear to my friends that I was going on with Jesus. I didn't care who it separated me from or identified me with. I had spent a lifetime searching for what turned out to be a relationship with Christ, and I wasn't going to be ashamed now.

I can remember walking down the street and seeing one of my closest friends coming toward me. When he saw me, he crossed to the other side of the street and pretended he didn't see me. And I lost my girlfriend. I had talked to her about going to church and in turn, she gave me an ultimatum: "Look, it's either me or this Jesus thing." So I said, "Bye-

bye, honey.” I was not going to give up Jesus for anybody.

When I came to Christ, I had been living above a bar. I had rented the room from a girl who was one of my old party friends. When I got saved, she kicked me out. She told me, “I can’t have you around here anymore until this religious fanaticism is gone.” I had begun carrying a Bible with me most of the time and I regularly talked about Jesus. To her that was a fanaticism that she would not tolerate. So I was out on the street, but God took care of me.

I hadn’t seen my family in four years. I had stepped on their hearts and hurt them so badly, devastating any relationship that was there. Things weren’t right between us. What I didn’t know was that my mother had been saved just after I had become a Christian—and God wanted to make things right.

One night at a Full Gospel Businessmen’s meeting, I saw an elderly couple that I knew, Fred and Eva. Eva had known the Lord since she was a little girl. She had walked with God for more than sixty years and I so respected her. When I walked over to Eva to say hi, she

grabbed my hand and started to prophesy to me. She knew nothing about my family situation, but she said, “Things are not right between you and your family. You’ve got to go home. God says you have to go home. You’ve got to go home!”

It was like God’s presence fell on me out of heaven, and I began shivering like a leaf. So a couple of days later, I sold a guitar in order to get some gas money to get home (I was driving a little ’63 microbus at the time—a cool hippie car!). Before I left, I called my mom. I honestly didn’t know whether or not she would want me to come home. I dialed the number with fear and trembling. She answered and I said, “Hi, Mom. It’s me.” Then I asked her if it would be okay if I came home. She started to cry because God had also spoken to her.

Later I found out that the same evening Eva had prophesied to me, my mother had been at a meeting when a young preacher had stopped in the middle of his message and said, “There’s a mother here. You haven’t seen your son in four years. He’s been involved in alcohol and drugs and then he got into worse things, but his life has been turned around. God wants

you to know He's sending him home, and it's done in the Spirit right now."

My mom told me that she had elbowed the lady sitting next to her and said, "That's my son. That's my son!" When she got home, she had told my dad and his doubtful reply had been, "It would take a miracle." And God did it!

A few days later, I rolled up in the driveway in that old '63 microbus and God restored my family. Each and every one of them became sold out followers of Christ.

## HELP FOR HUNGRY HEARTS

I can say that God has been good to me. He answered the cry of my hungry heart. I truly believe God will move heaven and earth to get to someone who really wants to know the truth. There are a lot of people who say they want to know the truth, but they really don't. But if you are someone today who has a heart to know the truth, then I don't believe you have read this booklet by accident. You have read it by design—God's design. My life is a testimony to the truth that God is a miracle-working God. He *can* and *will* save you.

You may be involved in drugs or enslaved to alcohol like I was. You may be deeply involved in sexual sins. You may be a husband or wife who is cheating on your spouse. Or you may be a very respected member of the community with all of the outward trappings of decency and success, but inwardly you are bankrupt. And there is a deep longing in your heart to

know why you are here and what happens when you depart this life.

The Bible says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The truth is, people just like you and me have become separated from God because of sin, and there is an empty place within each of us. You could call it a God-shaped hole in our hearts.

The only thing that can fill that void is the person of Jesus Christ. I know. I tried every conceivable thing in this world to fill that void. But only Jesus made me whole. And He is eager to do that for you today.

If you have not accepted Jesus as your Savior, I encourage you to pray a prayer like this:

Dear Jesus, I know that I am a sinner and that I am lost without You. I believe You died for my sins on the cross and rose from the grave on the third day, and through Your sacrifice, You paid the penalty for all of my sins. I accept Your free gift of eternal life. Thank You for saving me. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer from your heart, know today that you are a child of God. I encourage you to seek out a church that believes and teaches the Bible and that is actually involved in sharing the good news of God's salvation with a lost world. And may God bless you as you walk with Him each day.



## HAVE HOPE!

God is for you! He loves you. He is with you! I'm hopeful that you've been encouraged by seeing how God has worked in my life—and that your faith has been strengthened as you've discovered how He can work in yours as well. There's always hope in Jesus Christ. And your fresh start can begin today!

**Take new steps of faith and dive deeper into God's Word and His promises to you by visiting [www.BaylessConley.tv](http://www.BaylessConley.tv).**

On our website, you'll find more resources just like this one, as well as archived messages, email devotionals, broadcasts, and blog posts—all to help you stand firm in your faith as you find real hope.

**Check it out today!**





## THERE IS ALWAYS HOPE

**“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” —John 3:16**

Do you find yourself searching for the meaning of life? Wondering why you are here? Struggling to fill that empty void in your life?

In *There Is Always Hope*, Bayless Conley takes you on a journey deep into his past—a past filled with drugs, alcohol, and looking for truth in all the wrong places. And he shares how he was rescued by God’s love and grace during his darkest hour. From Pastor Conley’s story, you will find how hope—and a new beginning—can be yours no matter how desperate your personal situation.

Bayless Conley is a pastor, author, and Bible teacher. His broadcast, *Answers with Bayless Conley*, is impacting lives around the world in many languages on TV and online.

He shares the answers he found years ago when trying to find fulfillment in his own life. After chasing everything imaginable, he discovered true, lasting hope exists only in a relationship with Jesus.

Bayless and his wife, Janet, founded Cottonwood Church in Southern California over forty years ago. They are the parents of three grown children, enthusiastic grandparents, and together passionately pursue life, God, and family.



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