

The Power of Your Story (Part 1)

by Bayless Conley

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Hello, friend. So glad to have you with me today. I am going to be talking about the power of your story. Did you know there are individuals in the Bible that Jesus actually told them to go tell their story? The apostle Paul told his story again and again. We're going to look at that, and then I'm going to share with you a bit of my story. So put your seatbelt on. Put your crash helmet on, and away we go.

One of the things that I love about the Gospels is the stories. In fact, the whole Bible is filled with the stories of people, people like you, people like me. They faced similar things. In some cases, they faced dissimilar things, but we see God intervening in their stories, God intersecting their lives. I mean, they're on their way to hell, God intersects their life, and they're on their way to heaven. There's destruction and depression and illness, and God intersects their lives, and it turns the other direction toward blessing, and health, and peace.

And I want to tell you God can intersect your life, my friend. I don't think it's a coincidence that you are watching me right now, that you're listening to my voice. No, it's not a coincidence. And yes, I am speaking to you. There's a God in heaven that knows your name, and He wants to intersect your story so that you can go and tell someone else about the mighty things that He has done for you.

I sit here today in front of this camera coming into your living room, or to your hotel room, or wherever you might be watching or listening to this from; your mobile device. And I just want to tell you. I sit here as a trophy of God's grace. If not for His mercy and His intervention in my life, I would not be here.

Sometimes I think to myself it's pretty much a miracle that I lived long enough to get saved. The way that I was living, the crazy lifestyle that I had, the many near-death experiences that I had due to my own foolishness and the foolishness of those around me.

The Bible says, "A companion of fools will be destroyed, but he that walks with wise men will be wise." Well, I used to be a companion of fools, and I shared in destruction to a degree, but God had mercy on me, and here I sit.

There is an amazing story in Mark 5. It's one that you may have heard about, perhaps you haven't heard about it, but it's about a demon-possessed man that lived in the tombs. And I know some people right away think, "Oh, well, that's just like Bible times." No, my friend, demons are real. Demon powers are real. I think today, we dress them up, and we'll put someone maybe in a psych ward, and really the problem is spiritual, it's not just some emotional problem, or some physical problems, something wrong with the brain. That may be the case, but it is not always the case.

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And we have this man here. It says “they,” talking about Jesus and the disciples. Mark 5:1

¹ Then they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gadarenes. ² And when He had come out of the boat, immediately there met Him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, ³ who had his dwelling among the tombs; and no one could bind him, not even with chains, ⁴ because he had often been bound with shackles and chains. And the chains had been pulled apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces; neither could anyone tame him. ⁵ And always, night and day, he was in the mountains and in the tombs, crying out and cutting himself with stones.

That’s a pretty dramatic story.

And again, you may be thinking, “Well, yes, but I’ve never seen anything like that.” Well, I have.

As a young Christian, I had moved down to Mexico. I was involved in mission work. And we were helping an evangelist put on a crusade in a rural area. And literally, they kind of carved away the side of this hill, made it flat, and put these cinder blocks with wooden planks on them. I think it maybe seated a thousand or so out there. And an evangelist would come, and he would preach every night. And the evangelist happened to be a friend of mine.

Well, one day, there was a guy up on the top of the hill. It was during a daytime session. And he started throwing huge boulders down into the crowd. And throwing boards with nails sticking out of them down to the crowd. And he was jumping up and down like a wild ape. It turns out his name was Jorge, and he was demon-possessed. He was up there. I still distinctly remember there was one woman in the crowd. She was very pregnant. She got hit with a big board with a nail in it.

And this guy is dancing around like a wild animal, throwing stones and big boards with nails in them down into the crowd. And somebody looked at me and said, “Bayless, go take care of that.” And I thought, there must be another Bayless around here. But they were talking to me. And I’m a young Christian, but I have read in the Bible about evil spirits. And I have read in the Bible that Jesus said, “These signs will follow those that believe. In My name, they will cast out demons.”

And friend, I am a believer in the name of Jesus. So I marched up to the side of the hill, and there was this guy. Man, his teeth were pointing north, south, east, and west, and I think they were sharpened. And he is slobbering, and he’s got a board with a nail in it. I mean, he’s going crazy. And I just pointed at him, and I said, “In the name of Jesus, sit down.” Boom, he hit the ground, and he sat down. I went over to him, and I laid hands on him. I commanded the demons to go. And you know what? They went.

Now, later on, talking to him, I actually had to talk to him through an interpreter. I asked him if he knew what heaven was, if he knew what hell was, and we talked to him about Jesus. He said, “I know what hell is.” I’ll never forget his answer. He said, “It’s like being burned constantly with a fire but never being able to see the fire.” Yeah, that kind of stuck in my mind.

Anyway, Jorge wasn’t too different. And he was known in the villages in the mountains there, that mountainous area where we were, as a demon-possessed guy. He didn’t live in a home. He was wearing ragged clothes, and he was a menace to everyone, as this guy in Mark 5 was a menace to everyone that came his way.

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And so, this guy, they've chained him. They've hunted him down like an animal many times. They've subdued him, put chains and shackles on him, but he pulls the chains apart. He had this supernatural strength. He breaks the shackles. But now, Jesus and the disciples arrived by boat, and this demon-possessed guy runs out. Verse 6 says (Mark 5:6–8),

⁶ When he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him. ⁷ And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me."

⁸ For He said to him, "Come out of the man, unclean spirit!"

It goes on. As the story unfolds, this guy didn't just have one demon; he had one controlling demon, but a whole lot of other unclean spirits in him as well. Jesus cast those evil spirits out of this man. They went into a herd of swine, about 2000 pigs, that ran down a steep hill and drowned in the sea. It was quite an event. And it says in verse 14 (Mark 5:14–15),

¹⁴ So those who fed the swine fled, and they told it in the city and in the country. And they went out to see what it was that had happened. ¹⁵ Then they came to Jesus, and saw the one who had been demon-possessed and had the legion, sitting and clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid.

And we read the other Gospel stories; we find out this guy didn't wear any clothes either. And so, he's naked. He cuts himself with stones. He torments everyone that comes around there. Everyone's afraid of him. He's got this supernatural strength, and now he's clothed. He's sitting. He's no longer agitated. And he's in his right mind.

My friend, Jesus can put you in your right mind.

And if you're watching me right now, maybe you can relate to a story like this. I would suspect that there's someone watching me that when I said demons are real, you know what I'm talking about. You've messed around in the occult. You've messed around with witchcraft or whatever, and you've gotten yourself into a heap of spiritual trouble. Listen, let me tell you, Jesus Christ is bigger than the devil, and He can set you free. You can be free from that oppression. You can be free from those voices that you hear all the time. Jesus Christ loves you. In fact, in His mighty name, I say, "Be free and be free now."

You can be like this man, sitting at peace, clothed, and in his right mind. And everyone that was afraid, the people came out, they saw, they knew who this guy was. They were in awe. And then they thought, well, man, we've lost quite a bit of income here. And all these pigs have drowned in the sea. And they asked Jesus to leave. It says in verse 18 (Mark 5:18–19),

¹⁸ And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. ¹⁹ However, Jesus did not permit him . . .

That's an interesting thing. Now, I get it. Man, if Jesus sets me free like that, I want to be with Him.

Now, thank God. Now, He is here, present with us by His Spirit, and we can be with Him. But Jesus then was limited to one geographical location at one time. He's already got 12 disciples.

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He had another 70 that He had trained. And Jesus didn't permit him, but He did tell him to do something. I want you to listen to this.

¹⁹ However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you." (Mark 5:19)

I love one translation. Jesus said, "Go and tell your story." There's power in your story. It says,

²⁰ And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled. (Mark 5:20)

Decapolis literally was a region of 10 cities. This guy went through a region of 10 cities, and apparently, everybody in that region knew him, and he began to tell them how Jesus had mercy on him and what the Lord had done for him. Go home to your friends, go home to your people, go home to those that know you, and tell them how the Lord has been merciful to you. Tell them your story.

Imagine what that must have been like. People that had known him, that had seen him. How did he get in this state? I don't know. Maybe he started messing around with the occult and ended up demon-possessed. Maybe there was some traumatic event that happened to him that broke him down emotionally and opened up a spiritual door in his life. I don't know. We're not told. But we are told the results, and everyone either by word or by sight had known of this guy, that he's a wild man, that he cuts himself with stones. He cries out day and night. He screams, and he wails like a wild, wounded animal. He can't be bound with chains. Everyone is afraid of him. And suddenly, he shows up, and he's not naked, and he doesn't have a wild look in his eyes, and he is not covered with filth. His hair is combed. His beard is combed. He's clean. He's got a smile on his face.

Did he have a family? I don't know. Maybe he did.

I imagine him if he goes and knocks on the door and the children run screaming, his wife runs screaming. He says honey, yes, it's me, but I've been set free. A man named Jesus had mercy on me. The demons are gone. Sweetheart, it's me. Please come to the door. I don't know. Maybe that was part of his story.

People that he'd grown up with, people that he'd known, he went and told throughout Decapolis, a region of 10 cities. He told them about the mercy of Jesus. He told them about the power of Jesus. He told them his story. Maybe he shared what it was like living in the tombs. Maybe he shared the dark thoughts that he had and how he didn't have control over his own body. Maybe he told all that. And maybe he shared about the moment that he heard the voice of Jesus say to the demons, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit." Oh, what a thrilling story it would've been.

And you know, it's interesting because Decapolis is only mentioned one other time in the Gospel of Mark here. It's sometime later, and Jesus comes back to Decapolis, this region of 10 cities after the man has been sharing his story. And interestingly enough, Mark is the only one of the Gospel writers that records this story. In Mark 7:31, it says,

³¹ Again, departing from the region of Tyre and Sidon, He came through the midst of the region of Decapolis to the Sea of Galilee. ³² Then they brought to Him one who

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was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, and they begged Him to put His hand on him. ³³ And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers in his ears, and He spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴ Then, looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said to him, “Ephphatha,” that is, “Be opened.”

³⁵ Immediately his ears were opened, and the impediment of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke plainly.

Now, the last time we read, all these folks in Decapolis, they're saying to Jesus, please go away from us. We don't want You here. They send Him away. But now, when He comes back, people from this region are bringing a man that is deaf and has an impediment in his speech. Could that be the result of the ex-demoniac story?

Maybe they heard him tell about the mercy and the kindness of Jesus. And suddenly, they get wind after all this time that Jesus is back in the area again. And they think, let's take our friend. Maybe this guy was born deaf.

And as I was reading, and doing some studying here, some of the references said that it literally means that he was born deaf and had never heard a word in his life. And so he has an impediment in his speech as well. Maybe it was a separate thing. Maybe it was because he had never heard a sound that he couldn't speak properly. But Jesus healed the man. And again, Mark is the only one that records it. Would we have this story in the Bible if the other guy hadn't shared his story?

My friend, I'm telling you, there is power in your story.

You might think, “Well, Bayless, I don't have this dramatic story.” I may get into it a bit right now, or I may just, the next time we're together, talk to you a bit about my story. But even if yours is not dramatic like this demoniac or perhaps like mine, there's a bit of drama to my story in how I came to Christ. You might be sort of the opposite end of the spectrum that one day you realized you needed a Savior.

And you've done your best to live an upright life, to pay your taxes, to be a good citizen, to be kind to animals, whatever, to be a good father, a good husband, a good wife. But one day, you realized you were lost and undone without the salvation that Jesus Christ provides because the Bible declares all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. And so, you came to Jesus and got saved. Did you know there are a multitude of people that need to hear your story because they're running down that same track? Some of them think, “Well, I'm a good person. I don't try and cheat anyone. I don't lie. I try and be honest in my business. Certainly, if there's a heaven, God will let me in.”

My friend, it's not through our good works that we get to heaven. And someone needs to hear your story.

That's my wife. I came out of a background of some pretty severe substance abuse and alcoholism, and I was involved in the occult and just a bunch of stuff. My wife, on the other hand, she's a farm girl from the Midwest.

She had nine siblings. One of them died as a child, but she still has nine. There are nine of them altogether, nine siblings that are living. A couple of her brothers were career farmers. Her daddy was a career farmer and lived a pretty simple life out in rural America.

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And she tried to be a good person.

But one day, she realized that she was just as lost as someone like me, somebody that had lived a crazy life and done a bunch of stuff wrong and maybe done shameful things. One day she realized that she was lost and undone without God's Son. In fact, I think she was about ten years old, and she had some neighbors that were Christians. They were Baptists. Thank God for the Baptists. Half of the world wouldn't be saved if it weren't for the Baptists. And this precious Baptist family; they would give her these Sunday school lessons from church. They'd be three or four pages long, and there would be Bible stories in them. Janet kept them under her bed as a little kid, and she would read them from cover to cover. And they actually even took her to church.

And one day, they were talking about heaven and talking about hell. Somebody says, "Well, that's not a good thing to share with little kids." Well, friend, heaven and hell are real. Heaven is real. Hell is real as well. And Janet made a decision that day that she wanted to go to heaven, that she wanted Jesus in her life, and she gave her life to Jesus as a 10-year-old girl.

Now, she never had any teaching. She never grew spiritually and ended up going her own way until she was in college. And she had a roommate that was a believer. And her roommate started going to a charismatic Catholic Bible study. And she told Janet, said, "Look, it's a bit different. One week a nun teaches, and the next week this pastor teaches, a local pastor teaches, and the teaching is just so good. You have to come."

And Janet started going. And the teaching was so rich. They were teaching from the Scriptures, teaching the Scripture as the final authority and it's God's Word to us today. And it transformed her life. She rededicated her life to Jesus, and she ended up getting filled with the Holy Spirit.

You know what? People need to hear stories like my wife's story, just like they need to hear my story.

And you sitting there right now, listen, you have a story. It may not be filled with drama and intrigue, but it's your story. And nobody can tell it like you.

God will empower your stories. You weave the gospel seeds into it. The Bible says, "How can they believe in Him in whom they've not heard? How can they hear without a preacher? How can they preach except they be sent or unless they go?" We've got to open our mouth, and we've got to tell the gospel story. And you might feel, "Well, I'm not qualified to preach doctrine." No, you can tell somebody about Jesus. You can tell somebody that Jesus saves. You can tell somebody what Jesus Christ has done for you. And it can change their life. God will use it.

When I got saved, I immediately went to all of my friends and told them about Jesus and about what Jesus had done for me. It freaked some of them right out. In fact, I had one friend; he and I got in a lot of trouble together. We actually got arrested together in Nevada one time. We traveled and lived in another state for a while. And we did a lot of drugs together. He was a very, very close friend. And I got saved. And I went, and I shared my story with him. And I'll never forget what he said. He said, "Bayless, if it was anybody else, I could have just dismissed it, but it had to be you." It had to be you, meaning that I know who you are. I know how you've lived because I've known you for years, and I see the change in you, and this is undeniable. And now it's like he's basically saying, now I've got Jesus on my hands. What do I do with this? It had to be you.

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And some of my friends rejected me out of hand. I remember it was my best friend when I got saved, and this is true. We had not been apart for more than a year. We hadn't been apart, excuse me, for more than one day over a year period of time we were that close. We were just together. We did everything together. We traveled up to a mountain in a snowstorm to listen to this lady that claimed that she talked to aliens in flying saucers. We practiced Native American religions together. We did drugs together. We were together all the time, just close friends, and I got saved.

I got saved in a street mission, radically saved, and I shared Jesus with him, and he didn't want anything to do with it. I finally talked him into coming to church with me, and he reluctantly came. I was going to this little Pentecostal church. And, of course, I want to go sit up in the front row. There were people in the front row. I think we're sitting in the second row, but we're sitting up front, and suddenly the presence of God came into that service in a tangible way. And I'm sitting there crying like a child. I'm sobbing as I sense God's presence so thick and so real. And I turn, and I look at him, and he has a look of stark terror on his face. He's looking at me. And suddenly, I realize that he realizes that this thing is real. There's something to it. He sensed the presence of God as well. And it scared him. And he jumped out of the aisle, climbed over a couple of people, literally ran out of the back of the church.

And from that day on, whenever I saw him, he would pretend like he didn't see me. And he would cross the street, go to the other side so he wouldn't have to interact with me. I'm talking about my best friend. He would have nothing to do with me after that point because he realized that this thing was real. And if he was going to deal with me, he'd have to deal with Jesus. And still to this day, and that has been, oh my, 47 years ago, I still pray for him to this day.

Now, that was the reaction of a number of my friends. They didn't want to have anything to do with me. Another group of my friends that came to Christ; they got saved. It kind of divided into two groups. Two of them abandoned me. Half of them abandoned me. The other half gave their lives to Jesus.

I had another dear friend. I talk about doing drugs. Well, it was just what we did. That was the lifestyle I had. We had known each other since high school. He comes over to the house one day. I was living in another state, and I'd gotten saved and came back to California for a while. And he comes over, and he's got a big bag of cocaine.

He says, "Bayless, I got some coke. You want to do a few lines?"

I said, "Man, I don't do that anymore."

He said, "What?"

I said, "I don't do it anymore."

He said, "It's free. I'm not going to charge you anything."

I said, "Look, I don't do that. I'm high on the Most High. Jesus Christ has changed my life."

And I witnessed to him. And he went home. And then I get a call late that night.

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And he says, "Can I come over?"

I said, "Sure."

He comes over, and he says, "I couldn't get away from what you said. I knelt down, and I accepted Jesus."

I said, "You did?"

He says, "Yes, but I had that whole bag of cocaine. I couldn't bear to flush it down the toilet, so I snorted the whole thing."

So he comes over to the house. He says he's accepted Jesus, and he is high on coke. But, you know what? As crazy as that sounds, that was the end of drugs for him.

And he's still serving Jesus today all of these many, many decades later. But the power of your story, I just told him what Jesus had done for me and what Jesus was willing to do for him.

And my friend, you need to know Jesus will change your life. He can set you free from whatever has you bound. He can put your feet on a pathway of blessing and peace, and He wants to do it. You are loved by God. Don't you ever doubt it.

Well, friend, I hope that you got something out of that. And I didn't actually get to the heart of what I wanted to talk about. So, you're going to have to join me next time. I'm going to be sharing a bit of my story and perhaps in some detail that you have not heard before if you have heard any parts of my story before. So, we don't want you to miss it. And until then, I pray that God's richest and His best would be yours always. We'll see you again.

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