

## The Power of Your Story (Part 2)

by Bayless Conley

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley

Hello friend. Welcome to the broadcast. I'm going to be sharing something today that I believe is transformational, and it's something that is easily understood but not often done. We're going to be looking at a story about the apostle Paul and then applying it to our lives. And oh, what a wallop this thing packs. What a punch it packs. So I want you to get ready because I believe this literally can change your life.

Hello, friend. I want to share with you, from Acts 9, a bit about the apostle Paul's conversion. And I want you to listen carefully because I'm going to share something that I actually have not heard. Almost no one ever talks about what I'm going to share with you. But we come to Acts 9:1. It says,

<sup>1</sup> Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup> and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Now Paul, later on talking about his lifestyle, he says, "I brought them bound." He says, "I put my vote for Christians to be put to death."

When Stephen, the Church's first martyr, was stoned to death, all the guys that threw the stones, they laid their outer garments at the feet of someone named Saul. He said, "Look, I'll watch over the clothes. Take your coat off. Make sure you can get a good throw and kill this guy dead."

This guy Saul, he hated Christians. He hated the Church. He was a religious zealot. And so, now he gets letters from the high priest, so he can go to another city and put believers in jail and condemn them to death. It says, in verse 3 (Acts 9:3-5),

<sup>3</sup> As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. <sup>4</sup> Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" <sup>5</sup> And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

Which was an old saying that basically you're doing something that you can't progress in. It's not going to do you any good.

A goad was a sharp stick you would use to prod animals as you herded them. And kicking against the goads means, hey, you're just in for trouble if you keep going the direction you're going.

## The Power of Your Story (Part 2)

And I think it also means that Saul had a witness in his heart that there really was something to Christianity. Maybe when he held everyone's garments when Stephen was stoned, the Bible says, "Stephen's face; it shone like the face of an angel. And the words that he spoke, he spoke with such wisdom that people were cut to the heart."

Well, Saul was there. He heard Stephen preach. He heard Stephen talk about Jesus. He saw the heaven's glow on Steven's face. And so, maybe just this thing, "kicking against the goads," it's more than just, "Hey, stop persecuting the Church." It may have been an inward thing for Saul. That he's got this thing, it's true, but he's pushing against it, pushing against it. It's hard for you to kick against the goads.

And some of you, you may know, you wouldn't be watching me right now if there wasn't something in you that was saying, "Hey, this thing is real." God's trying to get your attention, and I want to tell you, it's hard for you to kick against the goads. Stop resisting that inward witness that the Spirit is giving you that Jesus Christ is real.

The story goes on. It says (Acts 9:6),

<sup>6</sup> So he, (that is Saul), trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

You know, those are two good questions to ask when you first get saved, "Lord, who are You? And, what do You want me to do?" You'll spend the rest of your life discovering a progressive answer to those two questions. Lord, who are You?

You become progressively more acquainted with who the Lord is, the wonder of His person, and then progressively, step by step, God leads you into what He wants you to do with your life. And there are different seasons. So, great two questions.

And every day after this, Paul's whole life revolved around the unfolding answer of those two questions.

Then the Lord said to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

And so Saul goes into the city, and he can't see for several days. He doesn't eat anything; he's fasting. And meanwhile, God speaks to a disciple named Ananias. Says, "Look, there's a guy named Saul in the city on such and such a street. He's praying. You need to go to him." And Ananias remonstrates. He said, "Lord, I've heard about this guy. He has Your people thrown into jail, and he persecutes them." And the Lord said, "No, he's a chosen vessel to Me, to bear My name before kings, before rulers, and I'm going to show him what great things he has to suffer for My sake."

So, Ananias comes in and says, "Saul, the Lord that appeared to you, sent me to pray for you." He prayed for him. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. Scales fell from his eyes. He could see again. He arose and was baptized. And then he spent certain days with the disciples there in Damascus. And Saul begins to teach, and he grows in strength. He begins confounding the Jews that are there from the Scriptures, that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God. And it's really quite a story.

Now, shortly after that, he ends up going to Jerusalem. This is what I want you to begin to see. This is Acts 9:26, and it says,

## The Power of Your Story (Part 2)

<sup>26</sup> And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him . . .

(No wonder)

. . . and did not believe that he was a disciple. <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. <sup>28</sup> So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out.

So, Barnabas, who's also known as the son of encouragement, sort of takes Paul under his wing and says, "Look, guys, Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus," and told them all about it and said, "Jesus, spoke to him." "All right, Barnabas, how do you know that?" He wasn't there. Obviously, Paul has been sharing his story. He shared it with Barnabas. Barnabas shared it with them and had an impact on the disciples and the believers there in Jerusalem.

And so, Paul was not reticent to share his story. He was quick to tell about his encounter with Jesus. And we actually move 25 years into the future. Acts 22. Paul is back in Jerusalem, and he has been arrested, and he gets everyone's attention.

The Roman, I think it was a centurion there, allowed Paul to speak. So, Paul's got everyone's attention. There are all these angry Jews that have been trying to pull him apart. And he begins to speak to them in the Hebrew language. And again, this is 25 years after his conversion experience, and so they get all the more quiet when they realize he's speaking in Hebrew.

And this is what Paul says in Acts 22:6,

<sup>6</sup> "Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me. <sup>7</sup> And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' <sup>8</sup> So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.'

So, 25 years later, what is Paul doing? Saul of Tarsus, the apostle Paul, what is he doing? He's sharing his story. He's still talking about his conversion experience. He's talking about that first encounter with Jesus Christ. Really interesting.

So, we march now a couple more years into the future. This is probably 27, maybe almost 28 years after his conversion experience in Acts 26. And he's actually before King Agrippa now. And he says this (Acts 26:12–15),

<sup>12</sup> "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, <sup>13</sup> at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. <sup>14</sup> And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' <sup>15</sup> So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'

## The Power of Your Story (Part 2)

All right. Twenty-seven years after his conversion experience, now he's before a king. You think, "Okay, Baby, you need to lay out the doctrine now. Man, you need to teach a good five-point sermon." No. He launches into his testimony.

He launches into his story. Until the end of his life, Paul is telling his story.

Now, I just want to take a few minutes and share a bit of my story with you. I've been saved 47 years, something around that now that I've been walking with Jesus.

And if you come to Cottonwood Church, you'll still hear me sharing my story often. Forty-seven years on, I'm still talking about my Damascus road experience.

So, hey, sit back, grab a bit of popcorn and let me tell you a little bit about myself.

I was raised not too far from where I'm sitting right now. I'm sitting in this little studio, this office studio here in Southern California. And when I was five years old, we moved into this area. And I was a pretty average California kid. I got into my share of trouble. But things kind of started going south when I turned about 13. I started drinking pretty heavily as a 13-year-old. In fact, sometimes, I would get up in the morning before school and get drunk and then go to school drunk as a 13-year-old. I can remember as a 13-year-old sitting in classes, having a terrible hangover, that's just not a good way for a 13-year-old to live, but it was pretty much my steady diet of action.

And then, when I was 16, somebody introduced me to drugs. And the downward spiral really progressed at that point. I started doing drugs big time. If you could put it up your nose, if you could swallow it, if you could smoke it, I did it. And it kind of went from bad to worse to worse. I mean, heck, I was taking stuff like hog tranquilizer, if you can imagine that. I took a horse tranquilizer. Just crazy with drugs. And on top of that, I was still drinking heavily after all of those years. And that had only gotten worse and worse and worse.

And I remember one night I had taken way too many drugs, I mean, way too many. And I was hallucinating and had a really, really bad experience. And I came to my senses. I was on my hands and knees in someone's front yard. And I had a handful of grass, and I had a mouthful of grass. I'd been pulling grass up from their yard and stuffing it in my mouth. And I thought, "Bayless, you got a problem. If you don't get out of the neighborhood . . ." Now, I'm just a teenager still at this point. And I've already lived in a few different states. I had moved away when I was a young teenager and lived in the back of a truck for quite a while through a winter. And I'd lived in a few different places, worked a lot of different jobs off and on. I'd have a job for long enough to get some money, and then I'd quit.

And I just decided, "Man, I'm leaving, and I'm leaving for good." And I thought to myself, "No more drugs. Man, I'm going to an early grave if I don't quit this." And so, I decided to try college and went to a college. I live in California. The state that sits above California is called Oregon. I found a little college there. I got accepted to the college. And again, I made the decision in my life, no more drugs.

Now, I did take a little stash of drugs with me in case I had a weak moment, just in case. So I kind of put those away in a secure place. And I get up to the college, my first day on the college campus, I'm walking across the campus, and I think, "Okay, new people, new life, new Bayless, this is awesome. I'm turning over a new leaf." And I hear, "Bayless?" And I turned around, and it was a drug dealer that I'd known here in Southern California. He says, "What are

## The Power of Your Story (Part 2)

you doing here?" I said, "Well, I'm trying college." He said, "Well I moved here a little while ago." I said, "Really?" He says, "Yeah, you want to go get high?" I said, "Sure."

So, we went and got high. And my vow to do no more drugs lasted all of about three days. And I started getting high regularly, still drinking like a fish. And on top of all that, I started hanging around some people that were practicing witchcraft. Now, I was also involved at the time in different Eastern religions because, believe it or not, I was looking for God. I was looking for answers. I'd never had a Christian tell me the gospel story, not once in my whole life, up to this point. No one had ever shared with me that Jesus was alive, that He died on the cross for the sin of the world, that He had been raised from the dead. No one had ever told me that.

Now, I did believe there was a person named Jesus. I thought He was sort of a guru. In fact, I got it in my head somewhere that He had learned mysticism in the pyramids in Egypt. And that He came, and that's how He pulled off all those parlor tricks there in Israel. And that's just sort of what I believed about Him. But I thought He was a good person. Maybe somebody to model your life after. But I didn't know He was the Son of God. No one had ever told me that.

And so, I'm looking into all these different things to try and find God, to look for answers. And every one of them was like digging a dry well. I never hit water. It was a dead-end alley. And so, the drugs got worse and worse. And associating with people that are casting spells and doing witchcraft. My friend, that's just not a good combination. And I found myself in a really deep dark place.

And I remember, one night, actually one afternoon, a girl had brought over an envelope, and it was filled with drugs. And I was supposed to distribute those drugs to 10 people. But instead, in pretty typical manner, I thought, "What the heck?" And I took it all myself. To put it mildly, I had a really bad night. I barely lived through the night. Somehow I survived.

And the next morning, I was so depressed. I was so depressed. And yet, in my heart of hearts, I'm looking for the truth. And there was a park. I was living in a town called Ashland in Southern Oregon. There was a park there called Lithia park. And I decided to walk down to the park. And I was just feeling super depressed and weak from what I'd done the night before. And I'm walking down this hill, this sort of like zigzag trail to get down to the park. And I found myself thinking about Jesus. And for those of you that are old enough to understand the analogy, it was like a broken record. I know some young people, you have never played a record in your life. But sometimes, if the record had a scratch in it, the needle wouldn't get past it. And it would go to that point and go (*sound effect*) and do it over and over and over and just get stuck at one point on the record. And that's what I felt like was going on with my mind. And now, again, you need to realize I'm thinking about Jesus, the guru. Jesus, the good person. Jesus, the teacher, the mystic. But I can't stop thinking about Jesus.

And so, I stopped in the middle of that trail. I'm by myself. There's no one else around. I looked up in the air, and I said out loud, "Okay, I'll think about Jesus." And I kept walking down the trail. I'm thinking about Jesus, thinking about Jesus. And I can't get Him out of my mind. And I come to this kid's playground area. There are kids running everywhere. You just kind of wouldn't pick one out. And as I'm there, this little Mexican boy walks by me. He's maybe 12 years old, had his hands in his pockets, a pair of cowboy boots on. And he walked by. He didn't even look up at me, but when he walked by me, something brushed over my spirit. I realized this kid had something right.

## The Power of Your Story (Part 2)

I don't know how I knew it, but I knew he had something wholesome. And I realized that he had something that I didn't have myself. And I watched him until he disappeared across the other side of the park. And I thought to myself, "What the heck was that? What did that kid have?" And I watched until I couldn't see him anymore. I thought, "How strange." So I walked back through the park, and it actually turns into woods and forest. And I walked back into the forest; I don't know, a half a mile, a mile. It was a long way back there.

And I went down this steep embankment and sat next to the creek. There's this bubbling creek going by. I'm completely hidden from view. I'm sitting on a rock, and I'm thinking about Jesus, thinking about Jesus, thinking about Jesus. And I hear a noise about 10 minutes after I've been sitting there. That same boy, that same Mexican boy, comes sliding down the opposite creek bank, sits across the creek on a rock from me, and just looks at me. And I threw a stick in the water. He threw a stick in the water. We hadn't said anything. And then he says, "Can I ask you a question?" I said, "Okay." He said, "Do you know Jesus?" And honest to goodness, my first thought was, "This kid must think I'm Jesus." I had really, really long hair. I had a long beard. And I thought, "This kid must think I'm Jesus." That was what I thought to myself. I said, "Come here." And he bounds across these rocks and sits down next to me. And looks up into my face and says, "Isn't He wonderful?" And he starts talking like Jesus is still alive. I've never heard anything like this in my life before.

And so, I'm listening to this kid, and he's blowing my mind. And he says, "Come on. I want you to meet my mom." And so I follow him across the park, back into a grassy area. There's his mother. She's asleep in the grass. His two little sisters are playing in the grass. And his mom wakes up. And he's there, like, "Look what I found, mom." And I talked to them for a few minutes. And she says, "We want you to come to our house for dinner." And I thought to myself, "There's no way I'm coming to your house for dinner. You, people, are weird." I said, "Thanks. No thanks." And I'm walking away. As I'm walking away, she shouts the address at me, shouts the address and the street. And I just blew it off, turned my back on them, walked away, and thought, "I'll never see these people again."

Well, two weeks later, I have this overwhelming desire, just out of the blue, came upon me to find their house, and I remembered the address. So I went and parked my little truck in the street. It was an incline that went down. I'm walking down the street, down this incline, looking at the street addresses trying to find it. And here's the little boy's mother hanging out of a second-story window. Now, my name is Bayless, but a lot of people called me Bay back then, and she's hanging out of the window. She says, "Bay, Bay, up here."

I thought, "Now, that's weird." Anyway, I go up there. They've got dinner ready. They have a place set for me. And I said, "Did you know I was coming?" She said, "Yes." I said, "How'd you know that?" She said, "Jesus told us you'd be here today. We've been waiting for you." And I used to have this bad habit. I would sort of invade people's personal space. We've got this sort of space around us, and when somebody leans in too close, it's like, "Okay, you may not have bad breath, but you're too close." And I got right in her face. I said, "Who told you?" And she, almost nose to nose, looked back at me and said, "Jesus told me." I said, "Okay."

So I started spending time with this family, and they started talking to me about Jesus. And I'm considering the claims of Christ. And I'm thinking, "Man, this is too crazy to be true." And I'd like to tell you that I got saved right away, but I didn't. I actually moved down to Mexico City with a friend of mine. So, I'm living down in that great capital city of Mexico. I think at that time, there were 11 million people living in the city. I think there are 25 million people living there now, something like that. It's one of the largest cities in the world. Anyway, I'm down there. We had

## The Power of Your Story (Part 2)

everything that I thought would make me happy. There were lots of girls. There were lots of drugs, lots of money, and I was miserable. Everything I thought would make me happy, it didn't. I'm empty inside. And I told my friend after I'd been down there for quite a while, I said, "I'm leaving." He said, "When are you going?" I said, "I'm leaving now."

And I got in my truck. I actually bought a whole case of beer, a case of quarts of beer. And I drove by myself all the way back to Oregon. It's like 3000 miles, and I didn't eat anything. I went on a beer fast. I just drank beer the whole way. Occasionally I'd pick up a hitchhiker and give him a quart of beer. So I had a little bit of company on the way back. But I drove all the way back to Oregon to find that family. And I found that kid, found his mother, began to ask more and more questions, became convinced that there might be something to it, but I had these burning questions in my heart that I didn't have answers for. And I had some friends, and I said, "Look, I think there's something to this Jesus thing," but they had questions. I said, "I don't know."

And I was staying with some friends in the mountains. There was a little fire service road that went in front of their place, just a dirt road. And I remember I went out late at night, laid across the hood of my truck. If you're in Europe, I laid across the bonnet of my truck. And the first time in my life I ever really remember praying. I looked up into that starry sky, and I said, "God, if all this is true, if Jesus is Your Son, if this whole story of salvation is true, what about this?" And I asked Him a question, and I listened, and I heard nothing. And I started to cry. I asked Him another question, and I heard nothing. I began to yell at God, and I yelled two or three more questions. What about this? What about that? And man, the heavens were brass. I heard nothing. I slid off the hood of that truck, wiped the tears from my face, went in, and fell asleep on my friend's couch.

And the next morning, when I woke up, something amazing happened to me. God spoke to me. I don't know how I knew it was God, but intuitively I knew it was God. I heard Him in my heart. He said, "Bayless, I want you to go to Ramona's house." That was the name of the mother of that boy. And so I went.

And I went to their house. And they're in the kitchen, and they're all packing up to go somewhere. I said, "Where are you going?" They said, "We're going to the next town over, Medford. We're going to a street mission." I'm standing in the kitchen. God speaks to me a second time. And I know it's God. I heard it in my heart. He said, "I want you to go with them." I heard it. And inside, internally, I argued with God. I said, "No, I don't think so." And then I said, "God, I'll tell You what, I'll make You a deal. If they invite me, I'll go with them." I said that in my heart. Immediately, Ramona wheels around and points at me, and says, "Bay, will you come with us?" I said, "Okay."

So, we go. I'm sitting on the front row. The place is filled with homeless people, alcoholics, drug addicts, derelicts. Really, I felt quite at home. And they're going to have a testimony service. I don't know what that means at all. So, there's this giant lectern up there, this big kind of wooden podium. And this little stout woman, she's first. She gets up there. And instead of sharing her testimony, she begins to quote word for word the first question I had asked God the night before, laying across the hood of my truck, all by myself in the mountains. And then, she shared the answer from the Scriptures. And I'm on the front row, and I start crying again.

And then a guy gets up after her to share a testimony. But instead, he quotes the next question, almost verbatim, that I had asked God, laying across the hood of my truck, looking up into the stars. And then he shared the answer from the Scriptures. And then the next person gets up,

## The Power of Your Story (Part 2)

and they quoted the questions that I shouted at God. And then they shared the answer from the Bible. By this point, I am sobbing. I realize I've been set up. It hit me like a ton of bricks, as they say, that the gospel is real, that Jesus is real.

And that night they gave an invitation. I was the only one that responded. And I remember I was crying so hard. And this guy with a big beard, sort of a big grizzly bear type guy, he just held me in his arms while I sobbed into his chest. And that night in that little mission in Medford, Oregon, I gave my life to Jesus. People laid their hands on me and prayed for me. The power of drug addiction was broken over me. From that day to this day, like 47 years, I've never had another illegal drug in my body. Jesus has changed my life.

And whoever you are, wherever you're watching, I want to tell you He can change your life. And if He already has, you need to tell someone your story.

And if you've never opened your heart to the Savior, do it now. It's not a coincidence. This is divine design, my friend. Jesus loves you. He died on the cross to wash away your sins. He was raised from the dead. And if you'll call on the name of Jesus now, He will save you. He will wash you clean. He will change you.

Just from your heart, say, "Jesus, I believe in You. Come into my life and save me." My friend, you won't be disappointed. There's power in that name, and there's power in your story. God bless you.

Thank you for joining me. Thank you for listening to my story. I just have this sense that God has used what we've done today to touch a lot of people. You may not know this, but it's been translated into multiple languages and taken around the world into some 120 countries. And I just want to say thank you to those of you that support us in prayer and with your finances. It allows us to take the story of Jesus and the message of the gospel to people that need it. So, God richly bless you. And we'd love to hear from you.

Copyright © Answers with Bayless Conley