

The Woman at the Well

by Bayless Conley

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Interesting fact. You have to promise not to start googling this or looking it up during service if I tell you, though, because I want you to listen to the message, but interesting fact. I never heard the gospel until I was in my 20s. My mom and dad never told me but actually on both sides of the family there were a whole bunch of preachers in generations before, circuit riding Methodist preachers. My great, great grandfather pastored a Methodist Church in Grafton, West Virginia. In his church the holiday of Mother's Day started there, in my great, great grandfather's church. A woman, well you can look it up after service, but a woman who was a member of his congregation actually started the holiday. So, that's where it started. I think the whole world should be paying me royalties frankly. Cumulative over the last whatever 150 years. Anyway, are you ready for the Word? John's Gospel, the fourth chapter. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we just settle our hearts down, and we give You our undivided attention. All of the stuff going on in our lives, all the issues that we have to face, and things we have to make decisions about, we just leave them outside of this sanctuary where we are with You. Lord, we pray that You would individually speak to our hearts as well as to us corporately as a church. I pray that You would lift, instruct, and comfort by Your Holy Spirit today. Jesus, above everything, we pray that You would be glorified.

If you agree, say "Amen." In John 4, we are going to look at the story of a woman. I think it's pretty appropriate for Mother's Day. As the story begins, you'll find that we move from something very natural to something supernatural. The story opens up in John 4:1–3 NKJV. It says,

¹ Therefore, when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John ² (though Jesus Himself did not baptize, but His disciples), ³ He left Judea and departed again to Galilee.

Now, it begins with the word "therefore." As you probably heard, whenever you find, in the Bible, the word "therefore," it's very important that you find out what it's therefore. This "therefore" refers back to the third chapter of John, where the Pharisees were actually alarmed at the amount of people who were coming to Jesus to be baptized. They even exclaimed there in the third chapter, "Everyone is coming to Him!" We knew they were eaten up with jealousy, and even at that juncture of Jesus' ministry, they would have done Him great harm if given the opportunity. So, Jesus exercises some natural common sense. He leaves. He doesn't stand and say, "Well, the angels will protect Me from this persecution." No, Jesus leaves, which is exactly what He taught His disciples in Matthew 10:23a NKJV

²³ When they persecute you in this city, flee to another.

Leave. We should avoid persecution unless—Everyone say, "Unless." We should endeavor to avoid persecution unless:

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- A) it causes us to violate our conscience.
- B) it causes us to be untrue to the gospel.
- C) it causes us to sin in any way.

So, we're to just avoid persecution. Do as Jesus did. Just avoid it and leave unless it's going to cause me to violate my conscience, cause me to sin in some way, or to be untrue to the gospel. Well, then, sometimes persecution is unavoidable. When it is unavoidable, God has much grace in reserve laid up for His children. He will strengthen us, give us wisdom, help us get through it, and do what we need to do. So, Jesus heads to Galilee, where they had friends. As they are on their journey towards Galilee, suddenly, Jesus senses a nudge from the Holy Spirit. We read in John 4:4 NKJV,

⁴ But He needed to go through Samaria.

Well, actually, from a natural standpoint, He didn't need to go through Samaria. In fact, any good Jew, when traveling from Judea to Galilee, would avoid going through Samaria. They would cross over the Jordan River, and they would usually add at least a couple of days onto their trip to avoid any interaction with the Samaritans. They would go around the area of Samaria and enter into Galilee up higher. They avoided the Samaritans as much as possible because they considered them as an inferior and religiously corrupt group of people. You see when the Assyrians conquered that area of Israel many centuries before, they displaced all of the people and carried them away captive. They replaced all of those people they took away with other conquered nations, people from other nations they conquered, and they put them now in the land of Israel. Any of the Israelites who remained intermarried with these people from foreign nations. Those were the Samaritans. They were people who had intermarried with other cultures and races. The pure Jews looked down upon them. And it's interesting because the Samaritans did believe in the God of Abraham. They did believe in the law of Moses, and interestingly enough, they believed in the coming Messiah, but they completely rejected all the writings of the prophets and all of the Psalms. In essence, they had cut themselves off from a fuller knowledge of God. But Jesus has this nudge that He needs to go through Samaria. We pick it up in John 4:5–8 NKJV.

⁵ So He came to a city of Samaria which is called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. ⁶ Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. ⁷ A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." ⁸ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.

Now, if Jesus was following an impression given to Him by the Spirit, the moment He saw this Samaritan woman, He knew what the Father was up to. Now, some people would argue, "No, no, Jesus knew from the beginning. I mean, He's the Son of God. I mean, He knew before He ever started what God was up to." I want to disagree with you. Now, I know Jesus was the Son of God. He's a hundred percent God, but He's a hundred percent man. As a matter of choice, He limited Himself when He was found in the fashion of a man. He lived as a man anointed by the Spirit, having to lean upon the Spirit and look for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I mean, I know He's a hundred percent God. God is omnipotent, correct? Well, Jesus is not operating in omnipotence here. He was weary from His journey, and He sat on the well because He was tired. My friend, omnipotence doesn't get weary. So, He's obviously not operating in some omnipotent factor here. Neither is He operating in omniscience. He's being led by the Spirit, and He has this sense that He needs to go through Samaria. Now, suddenly, it becomes clear. Listen to this from Philippians 2:6–7 NETP, speaking about Christ,

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⁶ Who though he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature.

Other translations say that He divested Himself of His rightful privileges. He emptied Himself. Hebrews 4:15 NKJV says,

¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.

He can sympathize because He completely identified with us. The Scripture says that Jesus was tempted in all points like we are. It's not a sin to be tempted. It's a sin to give in to the temptation. He never gave in. So, you can never say, "Well, God, You just don't understand. What do You know about it?" No, He knows. He knows by experience. It's like the father and his son looking at this ant hill. The ants are scurrying around. The boy says, "Daddy, what are the ants thinking? What does it feel like?" Dad says, "Well, son, I suppose the only way to really know is you'd have to become one of them." That's what God the Son did. He became one of us.

So, He comes to the well, and He meets the one who He has a divine appointment with. Then suddenly, He understands. The Bible talks about this small, still voice when God speaks to us. The Scripture says that for those who are born of God, the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit. There's just an inward witness, an inward impression sometimes. I think sometimes it's almost like a whiff of perfume on the breeze. It's there, and then it's gone. And the more that you pray, the more you wait on God, the more you'll be sensitive to that. It's not that God is not leading His children, we just make so much noise up here all the time. We always have the radio on. We're always scrolling on our phones. We never get quiet. We're sort of out of touch with our own spirit. That's the part of us God speaks with.

I remember when the twins, Rebecca and Spencer, were small, probably four or five years old, I promised to take them to the mall to go to a particular store. We get into the mall, and I have one hand with Rebecca on one side, and on the other hand, I have Spencer. We're walking. They know exactly where the store in the mall is that we're going to. I know exactly where the store is. So, we're on our way, and we're walking. I suddenly had this inward nudge. It wasn't much. I said, "Kids wait. Just give me your hands." We switched the other way. They go, "Dad, this is the wrong way." I said, "I know, just go with it." I just felt I needed to walk in the other direction. It was strange, and I was thinking to myself, "God, is this You?" But I'm walking, and they're going, "Dad, the store is that way." I said, "Come on."

We walked for about a minute, and all of a sudden, I heard, "Bayless." I look over, and there's this café. They have tables outside, and Pastor Ed Smith is sitting by himself at a table. He goes, "Bayless, come sit down." So, we sit down. I introduce Rebecca and Spencer to Pastor Ed, and he says, "I was just praying, and I feel like the Holy Spirit has really put it on my heart that our church (Zoe, is the name of this church) is supposed to be involved in ministry and missions work somewhere in Africa, but I don't have a single contact on the African continent." He said, "Do you think you can help me?" I said, "Well, Ed, it just happens that right now, today, I have a Nigerian pastor staying with me. He has an enormous church in Onitsha, Nigeria. He has 200 other churches under his network that he's created, and I'm going to set it up so you and my friend Paul, the Nigerian pastor, can get together." We set it up. They got together. It opened a great door of fruitful ministry for Pastor Ed and for his church then. Now, at one point,

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I just had this need. It might seem crazy, but I just felt the need. I needed to go in a certain direction. Then, when I got there, it all opened up to my understanding of what God was doing. And so Jesus has this inward need to go through Samaria. He arrives and suddenly realizes there is this divine appointment. Jesus continues to break tradition, continues to break down cultural barriers, and social norms. He spoke with a woman alone, and not just that, it was a Samaritan woman. No proper Jewish man would have done it, but Jesus did it. John 4:9–15 NKJV,

⁹ Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, “How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.

¹⁰ Jesus answered and said to her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” ¹¹ The woman said to Him, “Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? ¹² Are You greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?” ¹³ Jesus answered and said to her, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to Him, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.”

Now, this is such a setup. She doesn't really know where He's going with all this yet, but He has her attention. Jesus takes full advantage of the circumstance and the setting to talk to her about salvation, which is the only thing that will quench and satisfy her deep thirst. He says, “Look, if you drink this water, you're going to thirst again. It'll never satisfy that deep inner need that you have. But if you drink the waters of salvation, you'll never thirst again.” These living waters that Jesus used by way of analogy to talk about salvation. He's called it the gift of God. In other words, it can't be earned. It can't be merited. It must be received by faith. You don't pay for it. It's a gift. Isaiah 55:1–2a NKJV says,

¹ “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?”

In other words, you're spending your resources, your internal resources, for something that will never satisfy. It will never take care of that deep inward need. So many people are continually, in their lives, running after things they think will satisfy and somehow satisfy that deep inner need, but it never works. Friend, only Christ can quench that spiritual thirst. Nothing else can do it. Drugs and alcohol won't do it. Someone says, “I don't understand how somebody could get into drugs so deeply or drink so much.” A lot of times, they're just trying to numb themselves or medicate because there's this crazy missing piece to the puzzle. There's this inner aching void that they don't know how to fill.

Some people honestly experiment with drugs because they are trying to find answers. I was from that generation where we experimented with a lot of hallucinogenic drugs, and in part, we were looking for answers. But, friend, it's a dead end. It's a dry well. It will never satisfy the inward thirst. Money and things, human success, some people think, well that's it, if I can just get more stuff, if I can just make more money, somehow that's going to do it, but it never fills the empty place. It's just a temporary fix. Sex and relationships are just a Band-Aid. It'll never satisfy that deep inner need. Philosophy and learning, at best, all of those things, and a hundred more

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are just a temporary fix. This woman has been trying to satisfy her thirst for a relationship with God with something, and Jesus is about to expose it. We read on in verses 16–18 NKJV,

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷ The woman answered and said, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You have well said, ‘I have no husband,’ ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly.”

She has tried to fill that inner void by running from man to man to man to man. I'm sure she thought every time, “Maybe this one's going to be it. I think everything's going to be okay with this one.” It's satisfied for a little while, but again, that inner thirst, that emptiness is there again. Finally, she just puts aside all pretense, and says, “I'm not even going to bother with a marriage thing anymore. It never lasts anyway.” She was a marked woman. She was ostracized. She was an outcast. That's why she was there. Actually, the hour it speaks about was noon. The hot part of the day. First, she's there alone. The women never went to the well alone. It was a dangerous thing. They always went in a group, and they would go in the early morning when it was cool. She's there in the hot part of the day by herself. Why? Because none of the other women would have anything to do with her. Because they knew what she was about. She was ostracized. She was rejected by everyone else. We read on from this point. In verse 19, this is after Jesus said, “Go get your husband.” He says, “Yes, you've had five. The guy you're with now, you didn't even bother to get married.” Verses 19–26 NKJV,

¹⁹ The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. (Notice He steered the conversation back to salvation and eternal life. He said,) ²³ But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. ²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The woman said to Him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When He comes, He will tell us all things.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am He.”

Jesus is trying to help and ultimately rescue her. So, what He does is go to the heart of her problem. He goes right to the thing that she's been substituting for a relationship with God. And she, like so many, when things hit too close to home, deflects and changes the subject. She immediately brings up a religious question. “Well, the Jews say you're supposed to worship in Jerusalem, and we, Samaritan's, say it's here on Mount Gerizim.” Many people, when you talk to them about their soul, will pose some religious conundrum, or they divert by changing the subject and say, “Well, what about the dinosaurs? Where did they come from? Or if God is so powerful, and He can do anything, can He make a stone so heavy that He can't pick it up?” Listen, God deals with impossibilities, not absurdities.

An acquaintance of mine tells the story. He was talking to a minister friend, and the minister friend had tried to talk to this young guy about his soul and salvation. For the young guy, it gets a little close to home. So, he diverts and comes up with what he thinks is this clever thing. He says, “Okay, God is all-powerful. Can He make a circle that's a square?” The guy just looked at him and said, “Look, I'm busy. I don't have time for nonsense, but let me ask you a question. Is that the question that's keeping you up at night? Can God make a circle that's a square? Is that the question that keeps you up at night?” The guy said, “No.” He said, “The question that keeps

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me up at night is this. I pressured my girlfriend to get an abortion. I feel really guilty, and I don't know why." He said, "That's what keeps me up at night." He says, "Okay, let's talk about that." He talked to him about the sanctity of life and how murdering a child inside the womb is really no different than murdering one outside of the womb, but Jesus Christ died for the sin of the world, that sin included, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin and can even cleanse a guilty conscience. He shared with him about the grace of God, the forgiveness of God, and the plan of salvation.

Now, finally, Jesus speaks to the woman. She tries to divert things and brings up some religious conundrum. "Well, what about this and that?" But finally, her heart begins to shine through, and she said, "Well, I know the Messiah is coming. He's going to tell us everything." Who would have thought that this broken woman was looking for answers? What a statement she makes. "The preachers talk about this coming Messiah, that He is going to fix everything." I see her sitting out under some moonlit night, just crying her eyes out, going, "God, what's wrong with me? What is wrong with me? I keep doing the same stupid thing over and over. I'm so broken, and everything I touch breaks. But the priest said that when the Messiah comes, He is going to sort everything out. God, am I too far gone? Could He sort me out as well? Could He fix me? Could He tell me what's wrong with me and how to make it right?" Jesus, through this conversation, has gotten to the heart of things. Yes, He politely answered her question, but again, He brought it back to salvation. And for the first time, Jesus clearly and directly reveals Himself as the Messiah. He had never even spoken like this to His disciples. The first person who Jesus clearly told that He is the Messiah, He is the Savior, was to a woman, a Samaritan woman, an outcast woman, a broken woman. Oh, the mystery and the mercy of God. We read in verses 27–30 NKJV,

²⁷ And at this point His disciples came, and they marveled that He talked with a woman; yet no one said, "What do You seek?" or, "Why are You talking with her?"

²⁸ The woman then left her waterpot, went her way into the city, and said to the men,

²⁹ "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

³⁰ Then they went out of the city and came to Him.

It's interesting to me that she didn't go to the women of the city. I think they really wouldn't have anything to do with her. She went to the men. "Come to a man who told me everything I ever did." I think from that statement she made, it's pretty obvious that the conversation she had with Jesus was a lot deeper, and there was a lot more involved than what John records here. She left her water pot, which she'd used again and again and again to temporarily quench her thirst. Following along with the analogy that Jesus made in speaking to her, she left behind the substitute once she found the real thing. Come to Jesus and leave the water pot of adultery and casual sex behind. Once you taste the living water, you will leave all of the substitutes behind. You'll leave the occult behind, popularity, and power, finding your identity in money and in things. They're all temporary fixes that will ultimately fail you and leave you thirsty. But my friend, Jesus can give you the living water where you will never thirst again once you drink of it.

Come to Him. It amazes me that this broken woman has an encounter with Jesus, and she goes in and literally evangelizes her town. If we would have read on in the story, the whole town comes out. Jesus stays with them, and wholesale, they come to believe that He's the Savior of the world. One woman's story. It's just an amazing thing. I relate to her in a lot of ways. I think that, as someone coming from brokenness and being rescued, I get it. I went to a sort of a memorial gathering for an old childhood friend yesterday. I saw a bunch of people I hadn't seen since high school, some not since elementary school. I wasn't expecting it, but a few of the guys

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asked me to say something. So, I probably, other than his two brothers who were there, had known the guy whose life we're celebrating longer than anyone else.

I shared with them, among other things, that I was the person who introduced him to illegal drugs. I shared a story about being at a concert. He didn't know it, but we baked a whole bunch of pot into a little cake. He ate about half of it. I spent half of the concert out in the foyer, trying to talk him down. I shared a bit of that and then talked about how I sort of went from bad to worse personally, but Jesus straightened my life out. Then, I went back to share Christ with him the same way that I had shared drugs with him. At one time, I did have pretty major league problems with substance abuse and alcoholism. Nobody had ever told me. There were no Christians in my family. As I shared earlier, in our past history in the family, there were a bunch of preachers, but my dad had never mentioned it. My mother never mentioned it. I never heard the gospel. I was living up in Oregon at the time with a whole lot of problems. A girl had given me some drugs, and the purpose of giving them to me was I was supposed to distribute them. They were for sale. It wasn't a lot. It was enough for maybe ten people. But pretty true to fashion of the way I was living, I didn't sell any of them. I took them all at once myself. I had a pretty close brush with death that night, one of many.

Somehow, I ended up living through the night. In the morning, I was feeling super lousy physically, emotionally, and every other way. I decided to go to a local park. It was the strangest thing. I'm there. I'm walking down this sort of steep hillside that leads into the park. I found myself thinking about Jesus. I never heard the gospel. To me, I thought Jesus was a guru, and I thought He'd learned magic in the pyramid. Somebody told me that. That was literally what I thought. So, that's what I'm thinking about. But over and over, and I'm going down this trail. I couldn't get my mind off the subject. I stopped. I looked up in the air, and I said it out loud into the air. "Okay, I'll think about Jesus." I walked down to the park, where there are kid's playground areas, and kids running everywhere. A little twelve-year-old Mexican kid walks by. He had a pair of cowboy boots on. He never even looked at me. When he walked by me, something brushed over my spirit. There was something about him. It was very good, very wholesome, and very different. I intuitively knew whatever it was that I was seeing about this kid; I didn't have it. It was so strange. I literally got on my toes, and I watched that kid until he disappeared, going the other direction. I said, "What the heck was that?" Anyway, I walked back into this park. It turns into just sort of virgin forest back there. I went maybe a mile back into the woods there. I went down a steep embankment, and I sat next to this creek. I couldn't be seen from either side. I'm completely hidden from view.

Now, just get the picture. I look a little different than I do now. I hadn't had a haircut in seven years. I had quite long hair. I had a long beard. I'm sitting there throwing sticks in the water, and I'm thinking about Jesus. Jesus, the guru, Jesus in the pyramids. About ten minutes later, I'm sitting there, and I hear a noise. That same Mexican kid comes sliding down the opposite creek bank, sits on a rock across the creek from me, and just stares at me. I throw a stick in. He throws a stick in the water. He goes, "Can I ask you a question?" "Okay." He said, "Do you know Jesus?" Now, honestly, my thought was, because of the way I looked, I thought that this kid must think I'm Jesus. He jumps across these rocks, and he sits next to me. He looks up my face and says, "Isn't He wonderful?" He starts talking like Jesus is alive, and that he knows Him. Well, he's freaking me out. Then, he says, "Come on. I want you to meet my mom." So, I follow this kid across the park. His mother is asleep on the grass. She wakes up, and he's like, "Look what I found, mom." And I talked to them for a while, and she's more weird than her son is. She says, "Come to our house for lunch." I go, "I don't think so, lady. Nice meeting you guys." I just walked away, and I'm thinking, "I'll never see these people again. They're weird." As I'm walking away, she shouts her address at me. I blew it off. Two weeks later, out of the blue, this

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overwhelming desire just kind of settled on me like a blanket to find their house. I remembered the address.

So, I find the street. I parked my truck, and it was a steep incline. I parked at the top, and I'm walking down looking at the house numbers. Here she is, her name is Ramona. She's hanging out of a second story window. They all call me "Bay." They're going, "Bay, Bay, up here." I thought that was pretty weird, but it got worse. I got up there, and they had dinner ready or lunch ready, and they had a plate set for me. She said, "We've been waiting for you. The Lord told us you'd be here today." I used to have this kind of bad habit. You know how we have personal space and it's just when somebody gets too close in a conversation, you know you're going like that? I used to always invade people's personal space. When she said, "The Lord told us you're coming." I got about this far away from her face, and I looked at her and I said, "Who told you?" And she leaned in even closer to where her nose almost touched my nose. She said, "Jesus told us." I said, "Okay." I started hanging out with that little family and asking questions. I'd like to say that I gave my heart to the Lord right away. I'd like to tell you that, but I didn't.

I actually moved to Mexico. I was living in Mexico City and got involved in a fair bit of illegal activity, among other things. In fact, I was thinking the other day. At one point, I had transported quite a bit of illegal drugs in my vehicle down there. I didn't know it, but some of the drugs had fallen down. I had sort of like this bed thing, a bunch of the drugs, or some of the drugs, had fallen down in there. So, I drove all the way through Mexico with drugs in my truck. I got stopped and searched by police like three times before I got out of Mexico. They never found it. I remember I got on the other side of the border, and I found out. I went "Oh no!" But I'm down there and we have everything that I think in life is going to make me happy. There were lots of girls. There were lots of drugs, plenty of cash, and I'm absolutely miserable. I can't stop thinking about this kid, his mother, and about what they told me about Jesus. So, I told my friends down there, I said, "I'm leaving." They said, "When?" I said, "Now." I went and bought a case of beer. I went on a beer fast for the next three days. I drove 3,000 miles and drank a case of beer while I drove from Mexico City all the way back to Ashland, Oregon. I found that family, and I began to ask a lot of questions. Honestly, I had some unanswered questions that literally plagued me. I didn't have answers to certain things. Some of them were social justice things and other stuff. "Well, if it's true, what about this?" I didn't have answers. I would tell my friends, "I really think there's something to this Jesus." And they go, "Oh, yeah, well, what about this? Or what about that?" "I don't know." I was so frustrated.

I was staying with some friends back in the hills. They actually lived in an isolated home that they built along this dirt road. I went out one night by myself, laid across the hood of my truck, and it was the first time in my life that I ever prayed. I said, "God if this is true, if all this stuff about Jesus is true, if He is Your Son, if this whole gospel thing is true, what about this?" And I asked one of my questions. And I listened and looked up at the stars, but nothing. I started to cry. I asked God another question. I said, "What about this?" Nothing. And then I got mad. I started to yell at God. I yelled another question. I yelled two or three more questions, just yelled them. I listened, and nothing. By this time, I'm crying. I wiped the tears off my face, slid off the hood of my truck, went into the house, and fell asleep on the couch. The next day, something amazing happened to me. God spoke to me. I don't know how I knew it was God, but I knew intuitively. I heard it in here. He said, "I want you to go to Ramona's house." She's the mother of that kid. I knew it was God. I knew it. So, I'm driving my truck over there. I come in. I'm standing in the kitchen. They're all packing up to go somewhere. I said, "Where are you going?" She said, "We're going to the next town over in Medford to a street mission." I'm standing in their kitchen. God speaks to me a second time, standing there. And I heard it in here as clearly as I've ever heard anything in my life. He said, "I want you to go with them."

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You would think that the second time a man has ever heard God speak, he would obey, but I argued internally. I said, "I don't think so." I said, "God, I'll tell You what. I'll make You a deal. If they invite me, I'll go." Just said it in my heart. Immediately, Ramona wheels around, points at me, and says, "Bay, will you go with us?" I said, "Okay."

So, we go to this street mission. There's a little Pentecostal church sort of putting on a service. I mean, the room is filled with homeless people, drug addicts, and alcoholics. I'm quite comfortable in this crowd. They're going to have testimonies. I have no idea what that means. I've never heard the word before. And this little lady, she's tall and wide as a fireplug, gets behind this big wooden lectern. She almost disappeared. And instead of giving a testimony, she starts to quote word for word the first question that I'd asked God the night before back in the mountains lying across the hood of my truck. Then, she shared the answer from the Scriptures. I started to cry. A guy gets up after her. He quoted the second question, almost verbatim, that I'd asked God on the hood of my truck and then shared the answer from the Bible. Another person got up. They quoted the questions that I yelled at God. Literally, almost word for word, quoted my questions and then shared the answer from the Scriptures. By this time, I'm absolutely undone. I realized I'd been set up and that the whole thing is true. They gave an invitation that night to anybody who wanted to accept Christ. One person went forward. It was me, and I cried uncontrollably for a long time. In fact, this guy just held me, some stranger. I cried into the stranger's chest for a long time. I couldn't stop. They put their hands on me that night. From that day to this day, I've never had another illegal drug in my body. From that day to this day, I was set free. I just want to tell you that Jesus fixes broken people.

Jesus heals broken hearts. Every human being has a deep inner thirst. We try to fill it with everything in the world. We run from man to man, from woman to woman, to drugs, to extreme sports, to philosophy, and to everything under the sun. At best, they're a temporary fix. They're a Band-Aid. Only Jesus can give you the living waters. Salvation only comes from Him. He died on the cross for the sins of the world. He was raised from the dead on the third day, and if you'll put your trust in Him, you can receive that gift of salvation. It's not about rituals. It's not about some endless list of things you're no longer allowed to do. It's about a relationship with God. I don't think it's a coincidence we're together here today. I know that for some of you, your mom said, "Oh, the only Mother's Day present I want is for you to come to church with me." You're here because of Mama. Way to go, Mom. But, working behind the scenes, there is a God in heaven who knows your name. He knows your story, and He loves you. More than you'll ever comprehend. He loves you, and He wants you to know Him.

I want to pray a simple prayer with you. All I can do, though, is give you the words to that prayer. But if you'll tie your heart around the words and be sincere, then it means something. If you'll speak those words to God, He'll hear you. You could say, "Bayless, you wouldn't be saying that if you knew what I've done, the people I've hurt, and the sins I've committed." Friend, God knows. Jesus took all of those sins, and He nailed them to His cross. He stands before you with His arms open wide. He will not reject you if you'll come. I'm telling you, He can give you a new life. It's so radical Jesus called it being born again. You get another chance.

Why don't you bow your heads and close your eyes? I'm just going to count to three. If you want to pray this prayer and ask Jesus into your life, turn from your sin and turn to Him. Or if you're a backslider, somebody who knows the truth, maybe you loved Jesus as a child or as a teenager, but for whatever reason you started hanging around with the wrong crowd, or whatever happened, you know if He came back today, you wouldn't be ready to meet Him. Prodigal son, prodigal daughter, I have great news. God is not mad at you, but it's time for you to come home.

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The longer you stay out on the perimeter, the harder your heart will become, and the more difficult it becomes to turn your life in the right direction and to come back.

Now is your opportunity. Today is the accepted time, the Scripture says. This prayer is for you too, prodigal son, prodigal daughter. It's time to come home. One, in a moment, I'm going to ask you to lift that hand. Just consider it an outward reflection of your heart. Your heart is reaching up to God. Your hand is just reflecting that. An act as simple as lifting a hand can help your faith begin to go in the right direction because the Bible says faith is expressed through actions. I'll acknowledge any hands that are up. You can put them down then, and I'm going to lead everyone in a simple prayer. Two, it's your moment. We're going to pray. Three, if you want in on the prayer, put your hand up. All across the auditorium and out on the plaza as well. Just put it up. Hold it up high. Jesus died openly on that cross for us. I'll never be ashamed of Him, never. Awesome, there's lot of hands all around the room here. All right, go ahead and put them down if you would. Let's pray. Turn your heart to God. Tie your heart around these words. Just say,

Oh God, with all of my heart, I come before You now. I believe You are kind and merciful. I know it because You sent Your Son to die for me. Jesus, thank You for going to the cross in my place. Thank You for paying my debt. I believe You were raised from the dead. Jesus, right now, I give You my life. All I am and all I have, I put it in Your hands, Jesus. And I receive You as my Lord. And from this moment forward, I'm Yours. It's in Your name, I pray. Amen.

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