

Autobiography of Bjarne

I was born into a religious cult and grew up inside it. The people there called themselves Christians, but what I experienced had little to do with love. We were taught that a child's will had to be broken so that God's will could work in them. Almost any means was permitted to achieve that.

My childhood was marked by mistreatment and abuse. When I look back today on the first twenty years of my life, I can hardly remember anything else. Many years later a man put into words something I had never dared to say myself: my father had abused me. He worked as a building contractor for farms, but behind the facade of an ordinary family lay a world full of fear and injury.

In spite of everything, I already knew as a twelve-year-old that Jesus Christ loved me. At thirteen I officially gave him my life, although I believe that decision had already been made in my heart earlier. At fifteen I was baptised.

Even as a teenager I developed a strong will to survive. While the mistreatment continued, I founded my first company at the age of seventeen. It became successful. Very successful, in fact. Although my competitors had been in the market for decades, I managed to grow the business so far that I was later able to take over one of them - without ever taking out a bank loan.

At twenty I began to observe the people around me more closely. Something struck me that shook me deeply: the people outside my religious community often seemed more loving, more honest and friendlier than the Christians I knew. So I decided to turn my back on faith.

Yet that same year something happened that would change my life again.

One night something appeared in my room that I can only describe as a sphere of light. I was filled with a love I had never experienced before. For me it was clear: Jesus Christ is real.

Paradoxically, that experience led me back into the cult. I was convinced these people had to be the only real Christians.

For the next five years I worked full-time for that community. Then, at twenty-five, I fell from the roof of a church building in Norway. The doctors were appalled when they learned that the community was not even willing to pay for my flight home to Germany.

Even so, I held on to them.

Back in the Netherlands I had access to my own house again, but I could not live there. My brother was struggling with a severe drug addiction and stood at my door almost every evening demanding money. The relationship with my family was difficult and draining.

During that time I met a young woman who offered to let me sleep on her sofa. At first there were no romantic intentions whatsoever. Nevertheless my father wrote me a letter explaining that I would go to hell because I was living with a woman.

That was the first time I seriously asked myself: is this really God's love?

Slowly I began to realise that the community I had grown up in had passed on a completely distorted picture of God. There, people did not even believe that Jesus is God. Jesus was regarded merely as an especially good man whose sinless life we were supposed to attain by our own effort.

That way of thinking destroyed me from the inside.

As an entrepreneur, by contrast, I developed a different view of people. I never hired anyone because of their qualifications. I was interested in character. If I liked someone and trusted them, I adapted the tasks in the company to their abilities. For me, people mattered more than numbers.

Yet despite my professional success, something crucial was missing: my identity.

At twenty-five I decided to become an atheist. I worked hard at no longer believing. Until my thirty-first year I tried to live without God. I began using drugs and practised yoga for seven years. Outwardly I was a logical thinker. Inwardly the longing for truth remained.

At some point I began listening to Christian music again.

Something was drawing me back.

During that time I met a former girlfriend again. She called herself a Christian and was a vegan like me. The relationship developed quickly. Only later did I realise that she was involved in witchcraft. She even claimed that the Holy Spirit approved of certain sexual practices.

Deep in my heart I knew that this was not God's voice.

The relationship became increasingly violent. The closer I came to God, the worse the violence became. I once said to a pastor: "If I go home now, she will kill me."

He advised me to stay anyway.

And in the end that is exactly what happened.

During a violent confrontation, I died.

I saw my body lying on the floor. At the same time I was moving upwards. At first everything was dark. Then I stood before God.

The first thing I said was: "You do not exist."

And God answered: "But I am here."

Then I said: "I do not like you."

And God answered: "That does not concern me at this moment. I love you so much."

Later I asked him: "Please give me Buddha."

God's answer was simple: "Unfortunately, he is not here."

As a former IT specialist with a great interest in digital forensics, I searched for a long time for an explanation for what I had experienced. But I can only say one thing: heaven was more real than anything I have ever seen on earth.

That experience changed my life completely.

At the end of 2012 I sold my largest company for a single euro - including all its employees. I wanted to make sure that nobody lost their job and that the company culture was preserved.

Today I work only about one hour a week in the IT sector, mainly on medical emergency and communication systems. That one hour is enough to cover my living costs.

The rest of my time I devote to people.

For years I have cooked for homeless people. Always for twenty-five. Whether five come or thirty - there is always enough.

I lived for several years in a caravan and later in a motorhome. There I met thousands of people and spoke with them about Jesus Christ.

Today I work as a pioneer for an international evangelistic movement in the Netherlands and Belgium. We bring the gospel from house to house.

When I look back on my life, I do not see my companies, my travels or my near-death experience as the most important thing.

People have called me a prophet. Others called me a businessman. Others again a pastor.

But the highest identity I have ever been given is this: I am a child of God.