

# COAST

# TO COAST



Believe on the  
Lord Jesus Christ  
and you shall be  
saved - Acts 16:31

***SPIRITUAL  
LESSONS  
from a  
BICYCLE  
SEAT***

# BRYAN RATLIFF

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BRYAN RATLIFF

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*In the Beginning . . .*

## INTRODUCTION

**I**n June 2015 I was blessed with the opportunity of a lifetime—to lead a unique mission team from Clearbrook Baptist Church across America on a bicycle. The twofold purpose of our adventure was to increase gospel awareness throughout the United States of America and to raise money for the building fund of Clearbrook Baptist Church. We left Roanoke, Virginia, on May 27, 2015, to travel to San Diego, California, to begin our cycling journey. Our team cycled approximately 3,000 miles, from San Diego to St. Augustine, Florida, in thirty days. Along the way, we ministered in several churches and communities, fulfilling one of the two reasons for this excursion—to raise gospel awareness throughout the United States of America.

Our missions team consisted of eleven members. Kevin Dunbar and Howard Martin were our drivers, navigators, and mechanics. Dave Schultz, Greg Parsons, Aaron Wallace, and I were the cyclists. David Schultz (Dave's son), Mindy Wallace (Aaron's wife), Hannah Shank, Elisabeth Shank, and Andrea Glover were part of the support team, helping us with photography, videography, cooking, laundry, shopping, and just about everything else. It was a blessing to see God at work in each of the team members on this trip. At some point, each of them shared their testimony of salvation on the trip and how God changed their life for all eternity.

There are three major cross-country routes listed by the Adventure Cycling Association. They are called the Northern Tier Route, the TransAmerica Trail, and the Southern Tier Route. The Northern Tier spans across most of the northernmost states and is just over 4,000 miles long, from Washington to Maine. The TransAmerica Trail begins in Oregon and spans to Virginia and is about 4,000 miles long. The

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Southern Tier starts in San Diego and ends in St. Augustine, Florida, and covers approximately 3,000 miles. Even though it was going to be a little warmer than the other routes, our team decided on the Southern Tier because it was the shortest and was more achievable with our timeline.

This book shares some of the incredible encounters experienced along the way, as well as spiritual lessons gleaned through our fantastic voyage. The Lord has placed it upon my heart to write a book about this epic ride and tell how God worked through us to spread His Word to those who crossed our paths. All royalties and proceeds from this book will be donated to the Clearbrook Baptist Church's building fund. As a token of my appreciation, all who support the cause will receive via email my thirty-day devotional e-book for free by going to [www.pastorbryanratliff.com](http://www.pastorbryanratliff.com) and filling out the form.

*An Idea Is Born . . .*

# CHAPTER 1

## How It All Began



### THE HISTORY

Growing up in the States, riding a bicycle was a favorite pastime for me, just like it was for nearly every child. When my family would go to Douthat State Park for vacations, I would always take my bike to ride along the trails and to the swimming area. Other than that and occasionally riding to a friend's house during the summer, I didn't ride much, though. I can honestly say that I probably had not ridden 3,000 total miles on a bicycle up to that time in my life.

I've always been active. Playing sports and working out have been my hobbies, but cycling never crossed my mind until after college. After returning home from Bible college and becoming the pastor at Clearbrook Baptist Church, I began going to the gym to play basketball. It was a great way to get a cardio workout. Those pickup games were a ton of fun, but they'd always get heated. Some of the guys were playing like it was the Final Four championship game, and I was like, "Bro, I'm just trying to get some cardio in." Honestly, I was tired of getting elbowed and rolling my ankles, and I was ready for another way of getting in a cardio workout.

That's when it hit me. *Just ride your bike.* When playing basketball, you need to rely on others, but cycling can be done without anyone else and at your convenience. I loved that concept. As a minister, I don't have the luxury of always having a routine schedule. I was living

in my parents' house at the time, and I went to the basement and discovered three old Walmart mountain bikes. After analyzing each of them, I chose the best one, but I quickly realized I should just buy a new one. I wasn't ready for a bike-shop purchase, so I went to Walmart and bought a Genesis twenty-nine-inch bike—just the right thing for the streets and trails. I figured that would be a good investment to see if it was worth getting into.

Since I spent the majority of my rides on the road, I wanted to switch from mountain bike tires to some hybrid tires. I'll never forget walking into the bike shop for the first time. It was like bicycle heaven—until I looked at the price tags. Then it became more like bicycle purgatory. Nonetheless, I showed one of the staff members my mountain bike tire and expressed interest in buying some hybrid tires. They showed me exactly what I needed, and it was far less expensive than I had thought. I was amazed at how much faster I could go on the roads with the new hybrid tires.

Zooming down the back roads of Boones Mill, Virginia, on a Walmart mountain bike with hybrid tires at over 40 mph without a helmet probably wasn't the safest idea, but it sure was fun. After continual recommendations from friends and family, I finally bought a helmet. For the record, since that purchase I have always worn a helmet when I ride. Wear your helmet, kids; it will help keep your noggin safe. Needless to say, I was bitten by the cycling bug, and cycling became a standard routine in my cardio workouts. Several of my friends at Clearbrook Baptist Church enjoyed riding bikes too. I began to use cycling as an opportunity to have some fun, get some exercise, and enjoy the camaraderie with fellow believers.



## THE INSPIRATION

Since June 2011, our church has experienced growth. We continually praise the Lord for each of the individuals who have put their faith in Christ and have joined our community of believers. The auditorium at our church will seat a maximum of 220 people, but when 150 people are present, it feels pretty crowded. Throughout the past few years, we have discussed and done many things to help promote growth, but our long-term goal was to construct a new building. I began to brainstorm ideas for fundraisers, and I came across some interesting individuals who had used cycling to raise money for charity.

Back in 2014 while listening to Pastor Greg Locke preach on his church's YouTube channel, I heard about his epic ride across America in ten days. He averaged about three hundred miles a day. His cause was to raise money for his church. I thought this was an amazing idea, but I wasn't willing to try doing it in ten days. I decided to reach out to him through email. He graciously and generously offered some advice. While most cyclists discouraged me about my idea of cycling across America in thirty days, he was one of the few to offer encouragement. What inspired me the most about Pastor Locke was the similar vision we shared: he was a fellow pastor seeking to raise finances for his ministry, and he rode across America for his one-year cycling anniversary. My thought was, *If Pastor Locke did it in ten days, then I can do it in thirty.*

As I continued to research, I came across a celebrity named Phil Keoghan who rode across America in 2012. He rode 3,500 miles in forty days, from Los Angeles to New York City, to raise awareness of and funds to benefit the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. In nearly all the cities where he stopped, Phil spoke at meetings to help raise awareness for his cause. Since he was a celebrity, I didn't have the luxury of reaching out to him, but he had posted a documentary about his adventure. I watched it several times, studied it in depth, and modeled our trip after his. The most inspiring part about Phil's journey across America is that he did it at the age of forty. I was twenty-six years old at the time and told myself, *If a forty-year-old can do it, I can do it too.*

While surfing YouTube for other cyclists who pedaled from coast

to coast, I came across a lady named Angeline Tan. Her documentary, *Angie across America: Official Documentary*, was incredibly inspiring. In June 2014, at the age of thirty-five, Angie rode four thousand miles in thirty-nine days. She averaged about a hundred miles a day. She didn't set out to raise money for charity, but her story inspired others to dream big. She's known for saying, "If in your heart you believe, you can achieve."<sup>1</sup> She also wrote a book about her adventure that tells more about her journey across the United States. After learning about her story, I told myself, *If Angie can do it, then so can I.*



## THE IDEA

After hearing about Pastor Greg Locke, Phil Keoghan, and Angeline Tan, I was extremely inspired to set out on an adventure to pedal across America. However, planning a trip like that is easier said than done. In the summer of 2014, I was leading a mission team to Concord, New Hampshire, to help a recent church plant. It was during that trip that I first suggested the idea of a unique mission trip across the United States of America via bicycle. The team members thought it was a really cool idea, and they seemed very interested. We continued ministering in New Hampshire, and I began to seriously contemplate the logistics of what, in some ways, seemed an insurmountable task.

There were already a few individuals from the church with whom I was riding regularly. We tried to ride once or twice a week, but it didn't always work out. It was a fun time of fellowship for each of us. Dave, Greg, Aaron, and I would cruise around the roads of Roanoke riding old,

<sup>1</sup> Angie attributes the quote to Napoleon Hill: "Truly, as Napoleon Hill inspired me when I was 10, whose quote is the bedrock for my crossing America in 2014, and which continues to hold true for my upcoming race in Ireland: 'Whatever your mind can conceive, and your heart can believe, you can achieve.'" <https://www.angieacrossamerica.com/blog/transatlantic-way-race-race-around-ireland-june-17-2016>.

## How It All Began

beat-up Walmart bikes, and it was a blast. Greg was the only one who had a nicer bicycle. During those rides, we began to discuss riding across America. Honestly, riding across America for cyclists is what hiking the Appalachian Trail is for hikers. The vast majority of the discussion is just a dream. It rarely ever turns into reality.

I cannot remember why we went out to eat at Rancho Viejo, but I remember each of us being there. Cycling across America became one of our go-to topics. It was about the only thing we could discuss. During that meal, I remember asking Dave, Greg, and Aaron if they would join me if I planned the trip across America. To my surprise, each of them said yes. Even though they said “Yes” out loud, I’m sure they said in their hearts, “There’s no way he will plan it.” To their surprise, I planned it.

Because the Ladies Fellowship had raised a lot of money for missions and had done so much for our church, I thought it was a good idea to present the idea to them and hear their thoughts before bringing it up in a business meeting. After much preparation, the day came when I presented the official idea to the Ladies Fellowship group at church. I shared with them how our mission team would ride from San Diego to St. Augustine to raise gospel awareness and to raise money for Clearbrook’s building fund. After much discussion and numerous questions, they agreed to support the idea. We also discussed it in our deacons-and-trustees meeting, and the trip was officially voted on in the fall of 2014. To my surprise, our church unanimously voted to support it.

I was ecstatic about it, but I was nervous too. *What if we don’t raise any money? How will we pay for the expenses? Where will we stay? Will any churches be willing to host us? What if the other guys end up not being able to go? What will we eat?* All these questions and many more will be answered in the pages to come. I am very excited to tell you about this trip and how God taught us some great spiritual lessons along the way.