

BLIND AND CONQUERING THE APPALACHIAN TRAIL

On Nov. 21, 1990, Bill Irwin became the first blind person to hike the entire Appalachian Trail, a rugged wilderness trail that stretches more than 2,100 miles from Springer Mountain, Georgia, to Mt. Katahdin, Maine.



Irwin didn't use maps or compasses or any technology to find his way. He counted on his guide dog, Orient, to take him over hills and into ravines and across rivers.

Irwin had been an angry, driven man with a drinking problem, four failed marriages and battling depression when he began losing his eyesight. A few years later, Irwin became a Christian while attending an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting with his son.

His depression lifted, and his drinking ended as Irwin experienced the hope and joy of salvation. In gratitude, he prayed, "Lord, I'm so grateful for all You've given me and all You've done for me. If there is ever anything I can do as a way of saying thanks to You, I want You to know I'll do it, whatever it is."

Not long after that, Irwin felt God calling him to hike the Appalachian Trail. Irwin wasn't an outdoorsman. He didn't care for hiking or camping. He was out of shape and not very athletic. And he was completely blind by that time. Why in the world would he take on something so risky?

To anyone who asked him for an explanation, Irwin said simply that God had told him to. He would write later about the hike, "The first clear-eyed thing I had ever done was as a blind man when I asked God to take charge of my life."

For Irwin, who died on March 1, 2014, at age 73, the hike was an act of salvation. And whenever he got the opportunity, he quoted the first verse he learned as a new Christian, from 2 Corinthians 5:7: *For we walk by faith, not by sight* (ESV).

The question that begs an answer: How could God use you if you handed over control of your life to Him? Are you stuck in the believing stage, or have you moved on to trusting God?

Understanding the goodness of God makes the difference between believing in God and trusting in God.

– Beecher Hunter