Good afternoon everyone. My name is Bailey O’Brien. I’m very humbled and grateful to be here before you today.

I was diagnosed with terminal cancer 7 years ago at 20 years old, but by God’s grace you can see that I’m still here, and I’ve been cancer-free for over 6 years.

I’ll start by taking you back to when I was about 4 years old. Before starting preschool life felt perfect – I got to spend all day with my mom and my brother, and I always felt happy and safe. I wanted to keep things that way. But eventually, as does everyone else, I had to start school. I remember lying on my mom’s bed thinking about how I didn’t want to go. I thought, “This is the first step to the rest of my life. After this I’ll have to go to elementary school, then middle school, then college, then I’ll get married and have kids… but I’d rather just live at home with mom and dad forever.” It sounds funny, but in reality I felt afraid. I fought really hard to avoid going to preschool, and on my first day my teachers had to peel me off my mom as I cried hysterically, not wanting to let her go. I didn’t want to be separated from my mom. I was a bit socially awkward, not really wanting to make friends. I was a bit afraid of people and the world, in general.

The rest of my life I pretty much felt the same on the inside. I was shy, awkward, not really confident in myself – kind of a nerdy outcast. Eventually, somehow, when it came time for college, I mustered up what felt like a lot of courage to me, to move 4 hours away and play on a division 1 sports team. By God’s grace I had been offered enough of an athletic scholarship to be able to go to Boston University to dive on the varsity swim and dive team. Just like when I started preschool, I cried when my parents dropped me off at college. I was still afraid of meeting new people, making friends and doing things on my own. And I didn’t seem as capable as most others were able to handle the stress of college life.

After my parents left I missed the comfort of my home and my family like crazy. I didn’t feel that I could relate with my teammates because they seemed cool, confident, and talented and didn’t seem to struggle with making friends or classes and practices like I did. I felt overwhelmed by social, academic and athletic pressures, calling my mom and crying on the phone probably every day. I also binged on food, gaining almost 20 pounds in two months. My mom was worried I would make myself sick with stress, so she prayed, asking God to give me a scare so I would gain a better perspective and relax a bit.

By November I started dating a guy in one of my classes and he became my new source of confidence and comfort. It was in that same month, however, that I discovered a suspicious mole. I had it biopsied and when I went home for Christmas break I found out that it was cancerous. At the time I knew nothing about cancer and had no idea what was ahead. I didn’t know if I would need surgery or chemotherapy; if I needed to be afraid or if I would be fine; if I would live or die.

After having surgery I found out that the cancer had spread to my lymph nodes, which meant that it was pretty serious. I went through conventional treatments including surgery and immunotherapy to help prevent the cancer from returning, however, and my doctor was confident that it wouldn’t come back. Unfortunately my doctor was wrong and it did come back, again at stage 3, just as I was about to start my senior year. By then I was doing well academically and athletically and I was really saddened that I would miss out on what I had hoped would be my best year yet. I was the strongest I had ever been, I had learned new dives that I wanted to compete and I wanted to see what I was capable of. But I didn’t get that chance.

Since the cancer had returned, the chance that it could return again within the next 3-5 years was greater than 50%. If and when it did return, it would likely take my life. I was depressed, thinking I might not live a lot longer. But I didn’t have any major dreams or goals and wasn’t really a passionate person, so I just kind of accepted my fate. I thought I’d just try to “live it up” and enjoy myself as much as possible during the time I had left. I was no longer dating my boyfriend and I had made a lot of friends by that time, so I hung out with my friends, often going to parties and getting drunk. Again, I had no major thoughts about God, except that when I died if He loved me He would probably let me into heaven. Growing up I was taught at church that if my good works outweighed the bad, then I would go to heaven. I believed I was mostly a good person. But just to be sure, I thought that when I got to the very end of my life I would confess all my sins to God so I could be forgiven.

Shortly after finishing radiation I went to Hawaii with my teammates for a training trip. Just a couple days into my trip, however, I felt a little bump under my chin that none of my other teammates had.

After the trip I came home and saw my doctor in NY. My doctor biopsied the bump in her office and came back quickly with the results. It was again melanoma. I felt blindsided. It was back only two weeks after my treatments, nowhere near the 3-5 years we expected it to come back. I was frustrated that after all I had been through with my treatments and surgeries, losing half of my ear and missing out on my best year in college, it was as if it had all been for nothing; I was back at square one. My doctor ordered a full body scan, which I had that night. The next day my sister drove me back to Boston for my first class of the spring semester.

I expected to hear from my doctor the next day with the results, but she never called. So two days later I went to my morning classes and came back to my dorm to pack a bag and head home. When I walked into the lobby of my dorm I saw my mom and sister there. They said there was a snow storm coming and felt safer with me riding with them instead of on the Chinatown bus. They seemed happy, so I didn’t question them too much.

I brought them up to my room, packed a bag and said, “Let’s go,” when my mom told me to sit down. I realized the real reason they were there. My mom proceeded to tell me that the scan confirmed the cancer under my chin, as well as possibly 6 other tumors in my neck, lung and spine. Worse than that, I didn’t qualify for the most promising drug that held most hope for a cure, because I didn’t have the right kind of gene mutation.

All of a sudden, I thought my life was over. I got up and paced around my room. Then I leaned over my bed and looked out my big window with a view of the Boston skyline. I tried to imagine all the doctors who were out there and all the options they had for me. But I had some of the top doctors in the country, and I knew that none of them offered the hope I was looking for.

After just a brief moment however my mom told me how her long-time friend encouraged us to pursue more natural, alternative treatments that could help me with fewer or no side effects. She believed 100% that I would be cured, we just had to research and figure out what would be the best choice for me.

By that time I was ready to hear what she had to say. I had tried everything my doctors told me to do, but it hadn’t seemed to help.

After getting my terminal diagnosis a few people lovingly approached me to talk about God and asked what I believed about Him. One of them was my high school diving coach, whom I had gone to visit. After talking a little while he said, “We’re hoping for the best, but let’s say, worst case scenario, you don’t make it. Do you believe that you’re going to heaven?” I got uncomfortable at his question and with a roll of my eyes I said, “If I’m going to hell I’ll find out when I get there.”

My coach then tried to reason with me about the existence of God. He told me how he thought the human body was so amazing that it couldn’t have been created by chance. He told me about the human eye, something like, how there are a million nerve endings in the eyes that have to match perfectly with other nerves from the brain when fetuses develop in the womb. While I found the human body very intricate, I didn’t think that proved God. When he asked me how he could pray for me, I said, “Pray that I make the right decision regarding my cancer treatments.” I left feeling grateful for his support and prayers.

Another person who talked to me about God was a motivational speaker who had just come to my school to inspire the athletes. I was inspired by his message of working hard, staying positive and never giving up, and knew I needed to do as he said. After my coaches told him about my situation he graciously reached out to me. I was nervous when we first started talking but he was very nice and encouraging and told me that he believed I was going to make it. With all the people doubting my healing, his words were a breath of fresh air.

At some point in the conversation he asked me if I believed in God. I told him I wasn’t sure. -- To be honest I didn’t really know what I believed about God. I had never put much thought into it because if He were real I didn’t want to turn my life fully over to Him and give up the things I liked that I knew were sinful. And I still felt I had time to get on good terms with God and repent. --

I told him about some of my doubts, like, “How could a loving God could allow such terrible things to happen to good people?” I told him about a friend, an only child who lost his dad in middle school, and whose mom was dying of cancer. He agreed that it was a tough question and he didn’t have all the answers. But he still had faith in God and encouraged me to pray for a miracle and keep praying. So I did - I began praying more frequently, asking God, if He were real, to please give me a miracle.

After a few weeks of researching and vising with different doctors, my mom and I spoke with an American scientist who worked at a hospital in Mexico. The hospital offered treatments that weren’t legal in the US, including a strict and rigorous diet and detoxification routine called the Gerson Therapy, a mixed bacterial vaccine called Coley fluid, a vaccine made using my own blood, high dose vitamin C, another treatment called Laetrile or B17, and some vitamins and supplements.

The researcher we spoke with believed I had a greater than 60% chance of success on this therapy. Based on the information he gave us and his brilliant explanation of how it all worked, it made a lot of sense to my mom and me. We felt it was my best shot.

But at the same time, how could we trust that this was the way to go? We had never met this researcher and we didn’t know anyone who knew him - maybe he would take advantage of our desperation and just try to take our money? But he didn’t seem like the type. He seemed very compassionate and spent several hours with us on the phone. I couldn’t find a good reason not to trust this guy and his methods. I also knew I couldn’t not do anything, because it would be much worse. **The risk of not trusting him was greater than the risk of trusting him.**

Terrified but resolved, my mom and I left for a 3-week stay at the hospital in Mexico. Crossing into Mexico was terrifying as we left our clean, comfortable, shiny home country and entered into a dirty, impoverished place where we didn’t speak the language. When we arrived at the hospital we were disheartened at the appearance, which looked nothing like the fancy hospitals in the US. It was also cold and a bit dark inside. We got there on a Sunday, so most of the doctors weren’t there, and there were only a few other patients around. But we found that the doctors and staff were warm and friendly, and we felt safe in their care. The diet and treatments were difficult but bearable, and by the time I left I could no longer feel the lump under my chin. I continued my treatments and diet at home, and after another 3 weeks had a scan.

I went to the appointment for the results the day before my 21st birthday, feeling cautiously optimistic that the rest of the cancer in my body was shrinking like it did under my chin. A couple people came in to ask me questions before the doctor finally came in to talk to me himself. He asked all about my diet and treatments in Mexico, and for a while was pretty quiet. He went to the sink to wash his hands, dried them, then rested against the cabinets with his chin in his hand, as if deep in thought. I couldn’t wait any more so I finally asked him what the results were. It was clear that he had trouble understanding how it had happened or believing that it was true. But he gave me the incredible news; according to the CT scan, there was no sign of cancer in my body.

It was one of the most emotional moments of my life, and I broke down crying. I felt incredibly relieved, like this huge weight had been lifted from me. I felt free, like I had finally beaten the cancer and I could go on to live my life. I knew I would have to continue with my treatments for a while longer, but I could also at least go back into the world and enjoy the incredible gift of life.

I cried for days, I was so happy. As soon as I could I returned to Boston to celebrate with my friends, and it was the happiest time of my life. I felt like I was floating on a cloud, I couldn’t believe what had happened. But it wasn’t long before I started to feel like life was just the same as it used to be. I felt emptiness, I was irritable, impatient and I argued with my mom over silly little things. It was so frustrating, because I knew how incredibly blessed I was to be alive and healthy; I wanted to enjoy the incredible gift I had been given.

So I started to think about what I needed to do to maintain that level of joy that I knew was possible. I thought, “Ok, I need to not get mad at my mom for stupid things. I need to stay more positive, and not stress over little things that don’t really matter that much.” I realized that relationships were most important in life, even though I wasn’t a people person. And I realized that I needed to be more courageous and do things that scared me, instead of shrinking back in fear as I often did. But even knowing these things I still couldn’t figure out how I could do it and live a good life.

At the same time, I also wanted to know the purpose for my life. While I believed in the scientific explanation of how my body healed, I didn’t know *why* I had gotten the chance to heal while so many others hadn’t. I felt that there must be a purpose for my healing and life; I knew I couldn’t waste it. If I had a purpose, then there had to be a God who had established this purpose. So I wanted to find out if God were real. I started going back to church more often that summer, but the messages I heard didn’t have much of an impact on me and I left the services feeling unchanged.

At the end of the summer I went back to school and attended a welcome back BBQ for athletes. At the entrance there was a table set up for a group called Athletes InterVarsity, a Christian fellowship. While I felt drawn to them, I was also somewhat resistant. I felt uncomfortable meeting new people, especially people who might ask me uncomfortable questions about my faith. But the two girls at the table were approachable and didn’t ask me anything too deep. We talked briefly and after agreeing to join them for one of their meetings, I left to join my teammates for dinner.

I went to my first meeting of this fellowship where we read from the Bible about Jesus. For the first time, I gave Him a chance and considered all the historical evidence about His life. I was interested in the miracles He performed, how He had acquired such a huge following and drastically changed the lives of His disciples and spoke with authority. I was comforted and amazed by what the Bible said: that God was everywhere; that He knew everything; that He was all-powerful, patient, kind, forgiving and loving; that He offered eternal life with no more suffering in heaven, etc.

I was even more drawn to Jesus after a guest speaker came and changed the way I thought about God. I had always thought of God as looking down on me and others for what we were doing wrong, since that was the message I had gotten from the churches I had attended up to that point. But this guy said that according to the Bible, God doesn’t wait for us to become perfect before loving us. He loves us all the time, and when a person trusts in Jesus as the payment for their sins, God sees them as totally perfect in His eyes. There is no longer any guilt or shame! Because the blood of Jesus covers them, their sins are no longer counted against them. They become totally blameless, no matter how they mess up, because the Bible says that we are saved by grace through *faith*; it is a gift and *not* as the result of works, that no one may boast. That was awesome to me!

I wanted to believe in this wonderful God, but I still found it hard to trust Him when I couldn’t see or feel Him. I met with the fellowship’s leader and she asked me how she could help me. I told her about my doubts, so she asked what I thought about God working through people, like when someone says exactly what you need to hear at exactly the time you need to hear it. I thought ok, that could be true. But, it wasn’t enough.

Then some time later I had a thought about my cancer treatments, how they were similar to Jesus. The world in general rejects alternative cancer treatments and dismisses them as quackery. Yet, when I had run out of options and the world had no hope left for me, I gave the alternative treatments a chance. I tried them and found them to work. Others had also tried them and been cured of their cancer or lived longer and higher quality lives than their doctors expected.

And so, like my treatments, Jesus was mocked and hated and rejected and most people don’t give him much of a chance (including myself for a long time). But maybe the world was wrong about Jesus too? Why couldn’t He be the Son of God? Who was I to say that I knew everything about the universe and that Jesus wasn’t really God? My experiences had humbled me and made me question what I believed was true and why, and to think for myself.

As I sat at my desk in my dorm listening to Christian music one day, I knew I couldn’t go on not knowing what I believed, as I had done for so long. Whether Jesus’ claims and the Bible were true or false, that would make a world of difference in how I lived my life. I had to decide what I believed.

I still had questions and doubts like even some of my other Christian friends did. But I always came back to Jesus and the evidence of His deity – He really did live and attract an incredible following. He clearly loved people. Many people witnessed Him perform miracles, heard His claims to be God and saw Him alive after He willingly died on the cross. And His disciples died proclaiming the good news of salvation through Him. I really wanted this hope too. What did I have to lose? Really nothing. But what did I have to gain? So much! **It was like deciding to go to Mexico. The unknown was scary; but the risk of not trusting in the hope I had found was greater than the risk of trusting.**

I came to my decision. I decided I would take the leap of faith and put my trust in Jesus as the full payment for my sins and let Him lead and direct my life. In my head it went something like, “OK! I’m going to take this leap of faith and live like Jesus is real. Let’s see what happens!”

While a bit unsettled because of my doubts, I was also very excited and happy to have found such hope and amazement in God. Because I trusted that God was real, that meant that anything was possible. It meant that I had a friend who was always close by, who would guide me and make me feel safe and provide comfort when I felt afraid. I could talk to Him, the Creator of the universe, any time I wanted, and I didn’t have to be afraid of people or worry about what they thought of me.

As I walked out my room and began living out my faith one of the first things that changed was I began to feel joy, instead of emptiness and negativity, because God loved me. I began waking up in the morning feeling more peace, instead of fear and loneliness, because God was with me. I felt hope, instead of doubt and hopelessness, because God had good things in store for me. And I felt thankfulness, rather than bitterness and burden, for life, because my life had wonderful purpose.

This fullness I felt poured out into my relationships. I began to feel compassion and love for people, which I hadn’t really felt that before. I came to find out that people like you more when you’re nice to them, so I began making more friends and feeling more loved. I began volunteering more of my time along with my friends to help other people and had a lot of fun.

In the years since then my relationship with my mom has miraculously changed. Ever since I was about 13 we had a lot of tension in our relationship and I don’t really know why, except that I was very self-centered and disrespectful toward her. Things were especially difficult when we were stressed about my health and we shared a room in Mexico for 3 weeks straight. The summer after that I chose to live in Boston because we constantly had conflict. But through prayer and God’s mysterious work and grace in our lives He’s drawn us closer together. Now we have a wonderful, mutually loving and peaceful relationship. I can’t explain how He did it, but He did, and I am so thankful.

I still struggle with many weaknesses, including stress, anxiety, worrying about what others think of me and using food for comfort, but God is helping me draw closer to Him and be more victorious in my struggles. He is using my church family, His Word and His presence to give me assurance that I have everything I need in Him.

So maybe, as I’ve been speaking, you’ve been thinking that our stories are somewhat similar with how you feel on the inside. Maybe you feel an emptiness like I did, that you want God to fill?

If so, that’s God knocking on the door your heart, asking if you’ll open it up and let Him in. He wants to come into your heart to have a relationship with you. That’s why He created you, and me, and everyone else. And we can *know* this to be true because of what God says in His holy and inspired book, the Bible, which tells us everything we need to know about Him.

The Bible lays out the foundation for starting a relationship with God, and if you are interested in having a relationship with God, please listen closely.

First, God loves us and offers a wonderful plan for our lives. He always existed and was perfectly fine on His own. But, He created us to enjoy a relationship with us, and for us to enjoy a relationship with Him. In John 17:3 Jesus prays to the Father, saying, “This is eternal life, that they may *know* You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Having a relationship with God is eternal life.

In John 10:10 Jesus says, “I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.” Living alongside Jesus brings us a great life of joy and fulfillment.

But, unfortunately, we have a sin problem that separates us from God and hinders our relationship with Him and the abundant life He offers. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

But not only do we not experience the abundant life because of sin, but sin also results in an eternal separation from God. The Bible says, “The wages [or payment] of sin is death.” This means that if a person hasn’t trusted in Jesus, when he dies, he will be separated from all of God’s goodness forever in a terrible place that no one likes to talk about, but which the Bible says really exists – hell. This is because God is holy and just and can’t be in the presence of sin.

BUT, here’s the GOOD NEWS! God loves us so much that He provided a way for us to not have to suffer the consequences of our sins. He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, to come to earth and pay the penalty for our sins. John 3:16 says, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Jesus took on the payment for our sins, by dying on the cross, so that we wouldn’t have to.

And the Bible makes it clear that Jesus is the only way we can get to God in heaven. In John 14:6 Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

So, how exactly do we get this eternal life and accept Jesus’ death on the cross for our sins? Ephesians 2:8, 9 says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith. And that not of yourselves, it is a gift. Not a result of works, that no one may boast.”

It’s by **faith**, by believing in Jesus that we are saved. And John 1:12 says, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.” By faith (believing or trusting) we can receive Jesus into our heart and become God’s son or daughter.

Just like I did that one day sitting at my desk at Boston University, you too can make the decision to trust in Jesus and receive the gift of His payment for your sins. If you do, you will become God’s child and start a relationship with Him that will never end.

I will say a prayer that you can pray along with me if you’d like to open the door of your heart and invite Jesus to come in and forgive you of your sins. You can repeat it a phrase at a time silently in your heart or out loud. If you’d like to trust in Jesus’ death on the cross for your sins please pray this prayer along with me to invite Him into your heart…

Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I now open the door of my life and receive you as my Savior and Lord. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of the throne of my life, and make me the kind of person You want me to be. Amen.

If you’ve prayed this prayer I’d like to know so I can pray for you. Or, if you have any questions and would like to talk that would be great as well. ☺ My email address is contact@baileyobrien.com.