

## Finding God On the Open Road

An Interview with Author Donald Miller

Growing up in the church, serving as president of the youth group, and knowing all of the right "Christian" things to do didn't satisfy Donald Miller. He wanted to know what it really meant to encounter God. For him, at the age of 21, that meant taking a road trip which would change his life.

In his book, "Prayer and the Art of Volkswagen Maintenance," Miller shares the true story of a three-month journey across America in a beat-up Volkswagen camping van. Miller and his friend, Paul Harris, left all that was comfortable, packed a few possessions into their bags, and hit the road -- with only \$600 between them -- in search of a deeper and more meaningful understanding of their faith.

"It's really a soul-searching book from a guy who's been through the system," explains Miller. "The system produced confusion -- not honest, authentic relationships in Christ. Not that I blame the system, because I think it's a good system. It's just that there's a downfall to it."

"I just came to this point in my life where I had been raised in church, knew all the things to say and all the right moves, and parroted the people who were getting the attention at my local big church," continues Miller.

"I was a believer, certainly, but I came to a point where I was asking myself, 'What of this is true? If I'm in a worship service, and I'm feeling some emotion while we're singing, is that a spiritual experience? If I'm listening to [music], and the same thing happens, is that a spiritual experience? What does it mean to encounter God?'"

It was that very question that literally drove Miller and Harris to hit the road. "I had a strong sense that God wanted me to leave Houston," says Miller. "But we didn't know when we left that we wouldn't be coming back."

### Turning Points

Two weeks into their journey, Miller and Harris found themselves at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. They had hiked for nine hours to get there, and they were tired and weary.

Miller recalls, "It was at the bottom of the Canyon where I cried out to God and said, 'God, you know the way I feel physically is the same way spiritually. I'm begging you, do something.'"

Later, their van broke down outside of Las Vegas, Nev., and Harris decided to pray about their situation. "He says one of these real vague prayers," says Miller, reminiscing, "and I just interrupted him and said, 'God, we need a mechanic, that's exactly what we need because we don't know what we're doing.'"

Within seconds, a car came over the horizon and pulled off to help them. Miller recalls, "The very first thing out of this guy's mouth is, 'I'm a mechanic, maybe I can help you guys.'"

"God revealed himself to us in countless ways, and that is something that has never left me," says Miller. "I now know the difference between jumping through mechanical hoops and having an authentic relationship with God."

He warns, "They can look the same." The difference, he says, is in the motives behind our actions. "The older I get the more my theology becomes conservative and my outlook on life becomes merciful," he explains. "I have a stronger idea of what is sin, and yet I'm much more merciful."

### No Turning Back

After two months on the road, Miller and Harris ran out of money in Oregon, and spent another month living in the woods, working at a cattle ranch to make extra money. They

another month living in the woods, working at a cattle ranch to make extra money. They both fell in love with the area and live there today.

In Portland, Miller has started a small publishing company, Coffee House Books, which will be releasing several home-school textbooks. He is also one of the contributors to [RoadSearching.com](http://RoadSearching.com).

He has two pieces of advice for anyone inspired by his book to take a road trip. "[First] make sure your parents are cool with it," says Miller. "I got really angry with one girl at my church because she and three girls went to California on a road trip and camped in the woods -- based on my book! I was like, 'You're nuts! Do not do this.' I was praying for them the whole time. And [second] take anything but a Volkswagen."

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