

Lane Byron heads to West Texas to pursue his dream of playing college baseball. From his very first night in the Texas Panhandle, Lane began a lifelong journey to discovering direction, meaning, and purpose for his life.

Red Dirt Redemption

By Todd Howey

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/13545.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

RED DIRT REDEMPTION



TODD HOWEY

Copyright © 2024 Todd Howey

Print ISBN: 978-1-959620-30-3

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-779-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2024

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Howey, Todd

RED DIRT REDEMPTION by Todd Howey

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024917363

Front cover artwork provided by Keva Richardson.

EIGHT

Saved from Hell Again

Coming back from dinner, I saw Preacher Man walking down the hallway carrying a Bible. I thought to myself. “Oh crap! He’s having Bible study tonight.” He was knocking on doors, inviting everyone and anyone to attend. I quickly slipped into the bathroom to wait him out, hoping he would pass on by because I did not want to go. After a few minutes, I peeked my head out to see if the coast was clear. I didn’t see him, so I lightly tip-toed to my room. When I walked in, he was sitting on my bed talking with Dennis. “Strawman, how goes it?”

“It’s going, Preacher Man.”

“I gotta ask, Straw, what do you keep in your closet that requires a lock and chain?”

“Somebody has been sneaking in the room and stealing my clothes. It’s the weirdest thing. I think they have a key to our room. It’s worked so far. They don’t take any of Dennis’s stuff—just mine. I guess I’m their size.”

“Hmmm. That is weird. Hey, Dennis is coming to Bible study. Why don’t you tag along?”

“Well, I planned to study tonight. I have an exam in psychology Friday.”

Throwing a hat on his head, Dennis laughed and said, “Study? Whatever, Lane. You can come study the Bible for an hour. It might help you pass that test.” He just sat there, not saying a word. I could tell by the look on his face he knew I had no plans to study that evening.

“How long will it be Preacher Man?”

“You’ll be back here in an hour, Straw.”

“Sure, that’ll work. I’ll tag along.”

I was surprised Dennis was so adamant on going. Neither one of us even had a Bible. I got the feeling that Dennis was expecting something big to happen.

We worked our way down the hallway as Preacher Man knocked on a few more doors but had no takers. I felt silly standing in the background, almost embarrassed that I was going.

Walking into the dining hall, to my surprise, McWilliams was there along with Grande and a few other players. There was a study lounge in the foyer, so everyone settled in on a few couches and chairs.

McWilliams looked up, gave us a nod, and said with a laugh, “Good to see you boys here. You gonna need a little God in your life to survive this team.”

Grande smiled and said, “Amen to that.”

It turns out Preacher Man did not lead the Bible study. A guy named Glenn who worked for a local church in college ministry was in charge. Either way, from the get-go, I was intrigued. The area in which Glenn stood was dimly lit by a lamp with a large, white light shade setting on a table behind him, illuminating his blond hair. Whenever he turned his head, it looked like it was glowing. He certainly had my attention.

He talked about eternal life, forgiveness of sins, and living a life with purpose and direction. “We should try to lead a life pleasing to God. If we do that, then we can depend on his

blessings, grace, and forgiveness. He will never leave you no matter what you've done or what you will do."

I had a knot the size of a grapefruit in my throat when he finished his lesson. That's when Glenn went around and asked each of us a question. "God has a beautiful plan for your life. Do you think you're a living God's plan for your life today?" he asked.

We all got the same question, but it received different answers. Going around the group, our answers varied from, "Yes, I'm trying to," to "Nope."

He then followed up with another question: "If you were to die tonight, are you 100 percent sure you are going to Heaven?"

There were eight of us there. He got five yeses, two noes, and one "I'm not sure."

I was a no.

He told us to bow our heads and he closed in prayer. Glenn didn't speak for about thirty seconds, allowing time for his questions, and our answers, to sink in.

I peeked through my fingers covering my face and I noticed Grande's shoulder bouncing up and down. He was crying into his hands. McWilliam had his hand on his shoulder, lightly patting him.

Dennis's head was not bowed. He was looking straight ahead with a blank stare like he was searching across an ocean for land.

Preacher Man was whispering a prayer to himself; I am certain my name was mentioned.

Glenn broke the silence and said, "If you want to live God's plan for your life and be 100 percent certain you will be in

Heaven when you die, then repeat this prayer to yourself. It's just that simple. Keep your head bowed:

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness. I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow you as my Lord and Savior.

In Your Name,

Amen”

“Amen!” shouted Preacher Man. We all looked up and laughed. He knew God had shown up, and he wanted to put an exclamation point on it.

I began thinking about the past while I repeated the prayer to myself. You see, this wasn't the first time I'd been saved from Hell.

When I was about twelve years old, Dad took my younger brother Brad and me to church on Mother's Day. That was what Mom wanted, and my dad wanted to make my mother happy, so we loaded up and went to church as a family for the first time in a long time.

Not only did we attend church, but my dad took it a step further by joining the church that same day. When the altar call was made, my dad grabbed my mother's hand and whispered, “Follow me, boys.”

My brother and I were quickly pulled to the side by a man wearing a green, short sleeved leisure suit with so much aftershave on it made my eyes water. He thought I was crying from joy. He produced a pamphlet from his pocket with a drawing of a stick man screaming in pain, surrounded by red flames. On the other page was a stick man with a happy face, wearing a halo and sitting on a fluffy, white cloud. The text read: *Our options? Do you want to burn in Hell or go to Heaven?*

Brad and I both agreed that Heaven looked much better. He asked us if we wanted to be saved so we would not burn in Hell. We both said “yes” without hesitation.

The man rolled through the Sinner’s Prayer, almost verbatim to the one Glenn shared. Then he marched us out in front of a church full of complete strangers and announced that we had accepted Jesus into our life. We were born again! Hallelujahs and amens echoed throughout the congregation.

Ten days later my brother and I were baptized, washing away all the sins a twelve- and nine-year old can have. Unfortunately, it didn’t stick, but it made Mom happy. I didn’t even have hair under my arms yet, so finding Jesus was not on my “to do” list.

My first experience from being saved from Hell was manufactured and prompted by stick figures and ignorance by a pushy preacher seeking numbers and not souls. My experience in the dining hall was different, though. It was real, emotional, and legit; it was *authentic*. I was a prisoner of my sin who was set free. Most importantly, it was a decision I wanted to make with my own free will.

My life has not been the same since reciting that short prayer.

Glenn stood and said, “One last thing, guys. Always remember that God is in the redemption business. Nothing is too big for him, and there is nothing you cannot overcome with his help. He makes all things new. He is your redeemer, and he is faithful and true.”

Leaving the dining hall that night at WPU, I did feel different. I felt a sense of hope and purpose about life that I did not have a few hours earlier. I felt redemption. Thus, I’d had what was without question an undisputable “spiritual experience,” one I did not see coming. It was my choice, not fright shared by some old man in a cheap leisure suit who tried to scare the hell out of me.

I chose to follow Jesus that night when I realized he had already chosen me even before I was born.

Sunday evening following the Bible study, Dennis stumbled into the room without a shirt on showing off the red pellet marks that covered the right side of his rib cage. He had been peppered with 12-gauge buckshot when a friend he was pheasant hunting with fired their shotgun in his direction at close range. After closer inspection, I determined that seven pellets had broken the skin and were still lodged in his body. I recommended he go to the emergency room. He refused, so I dug them out with a plastic fork and knife. Sitting on the edge of his bed inspecting his wounds, Dennis blurted out, “Straw, I gotta get my shit together. That Bible study has really got me thinking. I don’t like school. I’m flunking almost every class. Maybe this is not where God wants me to be? Baseball is the only reason I am here. All I want

to do is hunt, fish, and play baseball. It's hard doing all three at the same time, especially when you gotta go to class."

"Class does get in the way at times," I responded. "Dennis, you might be able to go pro, you're that good of a player."

"Maybe, maybe not, Lane. All I know for sure is that I will never pass biology, so what's the point? I just don't think this is where God wants me. I've always wanted to drive eighteen wheelers. I know that sounds silly, but that's what I want to do. I would think God needs truck drivers just as much as he needs baseball players. My dad has been shoving baseball down my throat for years. Maybe I should just go home and start over. Just trust God. What do you think?"

"That's a lot to unpack, Dennis. But I felt something tonight as well. It was real for sure. I feel like this is exactly where I'm supposed to be more than ever. Here at this school with these teammates, having this conversation, even having Buzz as a coach. Thing is, I gotta get it together also, Dennis. Just like Glenn said, God makes all things new. But if you're not here for the right reasons, then maybe God is telling you to leave. That's a tough one, but it's your life, so live it the way you want."

Pulling his sheet over his head Dennis replied, "Maybe God brought me here just for tonight. Just to get me back on track. If he truly has a plan for my life, then he saw this coming a long time ago. Well, at least I won't burn in Hell now, so I got that goin' for me. Good night, Straw."

I woke up the next morning and Dennis's side of the room was cleaned out. The only thing he left behind was his box of

unopened prophylactics and a note taped on the mirror that read, “Later gator.” Like a thief in the night, he was gone, and so were most of my clothes.

I guess he liked my style.

A few months later I received a phone call from Dennis’s mother. She informed me that Dennis had enrolled in truck driving school. He wanted to drive big rigs, something he had wanted to do since he was a child.

She said baseball had run its course, and he no longer loved the game. “Dennis’s dreams don’t involve baseball or college anymore, and I am okay with that,” she said.

“His daddy was really upset with him for walking away from baseball, but he got over it. Dennis told him that it was his life and he wanted to live it on his own terms. He told his daddy that he believed God was taking him in a new direction. How do you respond to that?” she asked.

“Well, ma’am, Dennis is a great guy and I’m gonna miss him being around. He made me laugh. I could tell that baseball was not that big of deal to him, though. I don’t think he was having much fun at it.”

She also said that she had been doing some cleaning and was going through his closet and found two cardboard boxes full of neatly folded clothes and four pairs of shoes that were all too small for him. My name was scribbled on the inside collar of two sweatshirts along with a few Western Plains baseball t-shirts. She assumed Dennis had mistakenly grabbed them on his way out the door when he left in the middle of the night. I immediately put

two and two together because the entire semester I was having clothes, hats, and shoes stolen out of my room. At the time, I could not figure out what was going on. It was bizarre. Dennis and I even conducted a stakeout trying to lure the thief in. But after talking to his mother, I realized that it was him who was stealing my stuff right out from underneath my nose.

She realized that also during our conversation, but neither one of us said a thing. She asked for my address and said she would ship them to me. I never quite understood why he took them in the first place.

Before she hung up the phone, she asked, “Lane, did Dennis find religion there?”

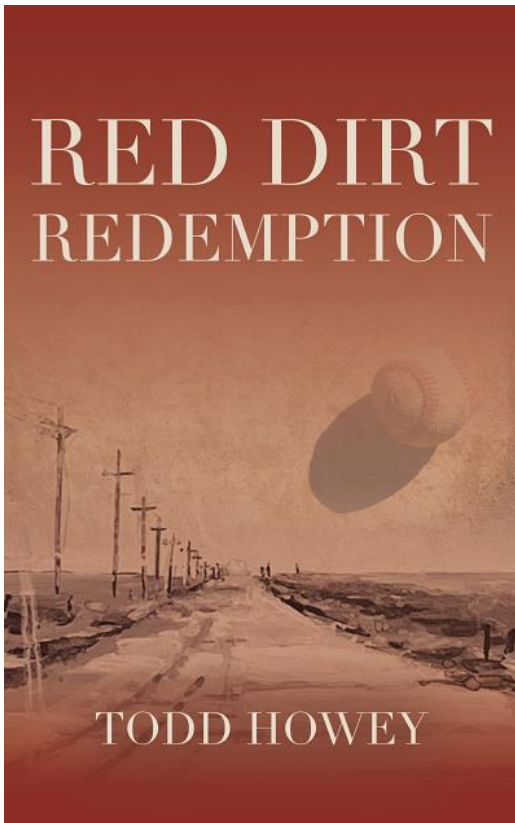
“Oh, I don’t know Mrs. Doppler. We went to a baseball Bible study together one night. I think we both might have found something we were missing.”

“Hmm, I thought something had changed in Dennis, in a good way. I am prouder of him now more than ever. Goodbye, Lane.”

After hanging up, I could not help but laugh about her finding my missing clothes in Dennis’s closet. It made no sense to me; we didn’t even wear the same size. Maybe he had a reason why he stole from me. Maybe he couldn’t help it, who knows? But he didn’t do anything with the clothes, so it made me think he knew it was wrong and felt regretful. I guess we all have our silly little secrets.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Todd Howey is a former high school athletic director and college baseball coach who played baseball at the college and professional level. Known for his authentic and logical approach to writing, he is the author of *Unconditional Coaching*; *Five Things Coaches Want Parents to Know*; and *Be a S.P.U.D. – Same Person Up or Down. Down*. You can find more information about Todd by visiting www.coachhowey.com. His weekly column, *Under the Stetson*, appears every Friday at www.brownwoodnews.com.



Lane Byron heads to West Texas to pursue his dream of playing college baseball. From his very first night in the Texas Panhandle, Lane began a lifelong journey to discovering direction, meaning, and purpose for his life.

Red Dirt Redemption

By Todd Howey

Order the book from the publisher Booklocker.com

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/13545.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**