

**Mr. Roby:** Today Dr. Spencer is here to share with us his background and his personal testimony. Hello Dr. Spencer, it is good to have you here.

**Dr. Spencer:** It's good to be here.

**Mr. Roby:** We've known each other a long time, and I'm looking forward to the series you're going to be teaching us. But first, I think it would be helpful for our listeners to learn more about you and your personal testimony. Let's start at the beginning – what was your childhood like?

**Dr. Spencer:** I would describe my childhood as being one where religion played no significant role whatsoever. I don't remember ever going to church as a family, other than for a wedding, and there were never any meaningful discussions about God, the purpose of life, or anything like that. I would describe both of parents as generally honest and hardworking, and it was expected that you would work hard and be honest, but there was never any serious attention paid to eternal issues. No discussions about what happens when you die or anything like that. I don't remember my parents making specific comments about religion, or about people who believed in God, but I definitely grew up with the idea that a Christian, or any other religious person, was about 50 cards shy of a full deck, or had been brainwashed as a child, or had been through some terrible experience and used religion as a crutch to help them out. I had all these stereotypes in my mind. I went to church once with a friend in college, but it was a charismatic church with people jumping up speaking in tongues and it scared me. Other than that, I don't believe I ever attended a church service outside of a wedding or funeral until I met Patti.

**Mr. Roby:** It's pretty amazing what God has done for you. Not only are you at church every Sunday now, but you're an elder and minister here at Grace Valley.

**Dr. Spencer:** It is definitely amazing, and I suspect that people who knew me when I was young would be shocked to say the least. I myself am shocked. The first time I ever attended Grace Valley Christian Center, after my wife started attending, I was so angry after hearing Pastor Mathew preach that I had the proverbial smoke coming out of my ears. I was extremely offended and angry. I would have gotten up and walked out on the sermon if it were way not too socially awkward to do so. He spoke as though he were preaching absolute truth, not just his opinion, and that is what offended me so deeply.

**Mr. Roby:** How did you go from being offended and angry then, to real saving faith?

**Dr. Spencer:** Well, the fall of 1991 was a time of great change in my life. I had just finished working 75-hours a week, pretty much 52-weeks a year for five years to build up my research program at UC, and my application for tenure was submitted, which I was fairly confident it would be approved. So, I was at a point where I was re-evaluating my priorities in life. Patti had been attending Grace Valley Christian Center for a while, and I really didn't like that. My motive for examining my faith had nothing to do with seeking after God, it was nothing quite so noble. I wanted to be able to tell my children why the things they were being taught at Grace Valley were wrong and to decide whether or not I would continue to allow them to attend; I didn't want them being brainwashed.

**Mr. Roby:** Brainwashed is a loaded term. So, what did you do?

Dr. Spencer: Well, I started to do a lot of reading and thinking, and there were a couple of people in the church that I spoke with. At that time, I would have described myself as an agnostic but, like all agnostics, I lived as a practical atheist. I ended up spending the next nine months or so reading and thinking about God, the Bible and the gospel. I would have told you at the time that I was searching for truth, but I was really trying to convince myself that my agnosticism was the truth. I now realize that calling myself an agnostic was an intellectual smokescreen to avoid discussing, or even thinking about, God. Fortunately, God used this time to cause me to see the glaring problems with agnosticism and atheism. In fact, by the summer of 1992 I had come to a very uncomfortable place. I was convinced that God must exist, but I was absolutely not willing to accept that he was the God revealed in the Bible. I had all sorts of arguments for why that God was unacceptable to me.

**Mr. Roby: So, you knew there was a God, but you weren't ready to submit yourself to God as he has revealed himself in the scriptures.**

Dr. Spencer: Yeah, I think that describes it well. But then, I received a letter from the man who had married my wife and I and with whom we had become good friends. I had had a number of conversations about God with him over the years, but these had always just been of intellectual interest to me. But that August, in 1992, as I was in this very uncomfortable place, my wife and I had visited his family and he and I had another one of our long conversations. I then sent him a letter with some of my questions and his letter was in response to mine. Anyway, the day after it came, on September 10, 1992, I read the letter first thing in the morning and it troubled me deeply, although I didn't really understand why. He didn't answer any of my questions about God directly, but just said that he sensed they weren't the real issue. He spoke about who Christ is and what he did and confronted me with the question "Who do you say that Jesus Christ is?" I didn't know what to do about those thoughts, and I had a busy day ahead of me, so I set them aside and went on with my day.

**Mr. Roby: And I understand you had a life-changing experience later on that day.**

Dr. Spencer: That's definitely a true statement. That afternoon I was driving across the causeway into Sacramento to run an errand, it was a beautiful fall day and I was driving along listening to music, and all of a sudden I got very cold and felt pressure all over, almost like when I used to scuba dive, especially if you went down to a 100 feet or so. At the same time, I had all of the questions I had been dealing with about God boiling around in my mind and, although I didn't see any visions, it was as though Christ were standing in the middle saying "Who do you say that I am?" I was crying and wondering what was going on; I honestly thought that maybe I was going crazy. I also thought that I might get in an accident, so I pulled myself together and went on with my errand. Then, on my way home an hour or two later, again on the causeway, the same thing happened again. Much to my own surprise I found myself saying out loud – I would say against my own will, "Jesus, I want you in my life." And the minute I said that, the pressure and cold stopped, the thoughts boiling around in my mind stopped, and I stopped crying. Now I really had no idea what had happened. I honestly thought that maybe I had just lost my mind.

**Mr. Roby: That sounds kind of like a Paul on the road to Damascus kind of experience. Then what happened?**

Dr. Spencer: When I got home that evening, I wasn't sure what had happened, but I wanted to talk to my wife about it and go over the letter with her. But I had firmly resolved in my own mind I was not going to say anything about what had happened on the causeway, because we had discussed Christianity a number of times over the years and I would challenge her faith and play devil's advocate with her, so I didn't want to get her hopes up that I had become a Christian. I was quite confident that I would come to my senses in a day or two. However, I did want to talk with her about the letter I had received.

But, we went up and had dinner with my mother in Woodland that night and when we got home it was hard to get all of the kids to bed. It was one of those nights when as soon as you thought you had them down, someone would pop up and want some water or something. By the time we got them all down she was falling asleep. So, when I said that I wanted to talk, she didn't really want to, but I said we needed to, so she said "alright", and I told that I had received this letter. She said, "yeah, I know, I saw the envelope." And I said, "well, I want to read it to you." So, she said "OK", but was expecting me to launch into an attack on Christianity I'm sure. So, I started trying to read the letter to her and started crying so hard that I couldn't read. And she said, "I can read it", and I said, "no, no, I need to read it", so I pulled myself together enough to read it. And then, when I finished it, in spite of having firmly deciding not to say anything at all to her about what had happened, I even went further and found myself saying "I think I became a Christian today." It was like the words popped out of my mouth in opposition to my own will. And she was kind of sitting there, waiting for the other shoe to drop, thinking that that was just the start of one of my attacks or something, and so she didn't receive that right away the way you might expect. But, to make a long story short, we ended up spending the whole night talking and praying; it was as if we had never known each other before and were on a first date or something.

**Mr. Roby: The change you're describing makes me think of Revelation 21:5, where God says, "Behold, I'm making all things new." That's what really happened, isn't it?**

Dr. Spencer: It really is. And I think one of the things in this story that I always return to in my own mind because it clearly indicates the difference between somebody who has and has not been born again; is a few days before this experience, I had been reading a passage in the New Testament. I don't remember which passage, I wish I did, but I remember thinking "This makes absolutely no sense, no thinking person could believe this." And, the morning after this experience, which was September 11th, I sat down and read that passage over again and even though I don't remember the passage, I distinctly remember the feeling; I thought, this makes perfectly good sense. I couldn't even figure out why it didn't make sense before. It was just a complete mystery to me as to how it didn't make sense before. It's kind of like when you're doing research and you work on a problem and work on it and you can't quite figure it out, it just doesn't make sense, and then something finally clicks, and now you can't even reconstruct in your mind what it was that was so hard to understand before.

**Mr. Roby: That's certainly one proof of a changed heart. Was there anything else you can recall that was a dramatic, immediate change after coming to faith?**

Dr. Spencer: Oh, absolutely. I was your classic Type-A personality faculty member and I would wake up, oh 2 or 3 times a week, at 3 or 4 in the morning with my mind boiling around with all the things I had to do that day, and then the mind spinning would turn into the stomach knotting and I would be forced to get up and go into my office at home and start working on those things. And, I still wake up early fairly often, but not once in the 25 years since that day have I awakened in that same state of anxious agitation.

**Mr. Roby: Well, speaking of Type-A faculty mentalities, a lot of your resistance to Christianity came from a settled atheistic viewpoint that stemmed, in part, from your scientific background. Tell us a little bit, please, about your education and professional background.**

Dr. Spencer: Alright, when I was a kid, my father had his own company, called Electro-Magnetic Filter Company, he was an electrical engineer, and I worked for that company from the time I was 13 or 14 on in the summers full time, along with some other jobs, like working at a gas station when I was in high school. When I finished high school, I actually didn't want to be an engineer because I didn't want to be like my father, who was a workaholic, so I started college as a history major. After a couple years of college however, I was working as an electronics technician to help pay for school, and it dawned on me that having a degree in history wasn't nearly as good for a career as having a degree in electrical engineering, and that I liked electrical engineering even more, so I switched my major to electrical engineering. And then I worked as a technician and a non-degreed electrical engineer while I finished my bachelor's degree at San Jose State, and then I went to work full time as an engineer in industry. But, after a few years of that I realized that I wanted to understand more, and the place I was working had a lot of PhD's working there, and I also saw that they were doing things that were more interesting than the work I was doing, so I decided to go back to graduate school. And I was fortunate enough, actually through a miraculous intervention of God, to get into Stanford University and to go on to get my PhD there. I did some consulting during that time as well and, when I finished, I interviewed both in industry and academia, but my original reason for being a history major was that I wanted to teach, so it occurred to me that maybe I would like teaching. In fact, I had taught at a junior-college-level tech school for a while when I finished my bachelor's degree, which was actually where I met my wife. And so, anyway, I accepted the job at UC Davis and started as a professor there in 1986.

**Mr. Roby: You've mentioned the job of professor at UC Davis, what, exactly, does that job entail?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, I was a professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, which means that I taught courses, both undergraduate and graduate, and also did research and supervised graduate students. My particular specialty, in case anyone is actually interested, was analog circuit design, mostly for digital communication systems. At any rate, I took that job in 1986 and worked there for a number of years. For a five-year period I held an endowed professorship, and I also served as vice-chair of the department for three years. In any event, looking back, I can clearly see how

God providentially guided me to this position at UC Davis and then, eventually, to Grace Valley Christian Center.

**Mr. Roby: Amen. Having been saved in 92, how did you become an elder then at Grace Valley?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, that again is a long story of course, and I don't remember the exact year or anything, but certainly my first five or six years there I was just a young Christian and had an insatiable appetite I would say to read the Word of God and study it and so forth. And then, somebody at the church recommended that we bring in a particular person as a speaker, in what ended up being the beginning of what we called our Faith and Reason series. This person was going to come in and speak about scientific evidence for the existence of God, which we thought would be a good outreach to the campus, and I was kind of the spearhead for bringing this person, and then the elders came to me, in fact Associate Pastor Rev. Buddingh' came to me, and said that the elders had decided it would be a good thing if I would teach an adult Sunday School class to prepare people for this guy's coming. And so, I ended up teaching an adult Sunday School class that was really kind of on science, to prepare people for the sorts of things he was going to talk about. And then I think it was about a year or two after that I was asked to teach something else, and Pastor thought that he saw some ability there, and so I ended up teaching adult Sunday School and then eventually became an elder, and then through a longer sequence of events again, ended up retiring early from the university in order to work at the church as a lay minister and an elder.

**Mr. Roby: It's truly incredible to see how God has used the same scientific background that initially helped you to suppress the truth, to now help you declare that truth. Thank you for sharing your conversion story and background with us. And I'm certainly looking forward to our future sessions, where we'll have an opportunity to hear from you on What the Word of God says.**

Dr. Spencer: Thank you, I'm looking forward to it as well.