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Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Don Green. I feel like I'm at the principal's office. What did I do this time?

Spencer. The kids submitted a lot of questions. Some of these are tough, some of these are tougher. So we'll just jump right in here. We know that the Trinity is one being, right, in three persons, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, but only Jesus became the human being, right, so that tells us the difference between a person and a human being, so can you explain the difference between, rather go into details about the difference between those two things, a person and a human being.

Don. In human terms, we use the terms person and human being in an interchangeable way. There's 100 persons, 100 human beings in this room, you know, 100 persons in the room. We use those terms interchangeably, however when it comes to the person of God, we have to understand that the term person is used in a different way, in a way that doesn't have a human analogy. The person of God has a single undivided essence, however there are what we call three persons in that essence that are all fully God, that all fully share the essence, and yet there's a distinction between Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the easiest or the simplest way, it's not easy, the simplest way that I know to explain it is that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit each have a sense, an individual sense of existence within the Godhead that distinguishes them from one another while they are still fully sharing the essence, fully equal, and each one is fully God. And if that sounds difficult to grasp and understand, you can take heart, it took about 400-500 years of church history for the best theologians in the church to start to articulate this. I think the key to answering that particular question is to understand that the word person when it's used in reference to the Godhead is used differently than it is when it's talking about individual men.

Spencer. So are there any safe analogies to use when talking about the Trinity?

Don. No.

Spencer. Okay.

Don. No, there's not and, by the way, to be able to study this a bit further if you're interested, you can go to our website, do a search in the sermon page for "Trinity." I've

done a number of messages on this where it's explained more. I have a very lengthy paper that I wrote many years ago about the history of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity so there's a lot of access there. You know, in answering the question, you know, are there any analogies to use, people talk about, you know, God is like an egg, there's the eggshell, the white and the yolk, or God is like water, you know, steam, liquid and ice, all of those analogies fail for reasons that I explain in the messages and that's what we should expect. God is unique, God is above our understanding, God's greatness is unsearchable and we should expect that the very essence of who God is is not something that we can reduce to an easy, simple, human analogy. If we could reduce it to something simple, then, you know, he wouldn't be God and he wouldn't have the greatness that causes us to worship him.

Spencer. So in that greatness, was God ever made?

Don. No. No. God is eternal. God had no beginning. He will have no end. There is another thing for us to see that God is not like us. We have birthdays and we can trace back to the exact time that we were born. God has no birthday because he had no beginning and this is just another aspect of the greatness of God. I'm glad it's like that. You know, if I were just a preacher of moralistic themes and just trying to badger people into improving their behavior a little bit, I wouldn't stay in the pulpit very long because it wouldn't be worthwhile, but to proclaim the excellencies of a God who is far above me and infinitely better than I am and infinitely greater than I am, that's a privilege that helps me get up from morning to morning.

Spencer. So you just mentioned that you wouldn't be a pastor if God wasn't as great as he is, what did make you want to be a pastor?

Don. Well, that's a good question. My desire, and I know one of the children asked this, I don't know, I truly don't remember which one, my becoming a pastor was a process that evolved over a period of time. I became a Christian when I was actually in my first year of law school at Indiana University. Prior to that, I had no desire for God, no desire for the Bible, but when the Lord saved me and I was born again and made a new creation, I had all kinds of new desires and I immediately started reading the Scriptures and understanding them and, you know, it was the greatest thing in the world that I had ever seen was to be able to read the Bible with understanding, and that caused me to want to study the Bible more and more. And so the pursuit of my life as I grew in my studies, as I went to seminary and all of that, the preeminent goal was to understand the word of God better and to be able to study it for myself and to be independent in my handling of the Bible, and then the desire to become a pastor kind of grew from that but it was secondary to a desire for God's word. And I know that there are younger people, younger than me which is just about everybody in the room, right, these days, this is painful to realize, you know, when it comes to people wanting and thinking about pastoral ministry, in my opinion it should not start with a desire that, "Oh, I just want to help people." You know, that's not a good reason to go into ministry, that you want to help people. There's a lot of professions that you can go into to help people. You could go into the medical realm and that would be good. Or you could go into some kind of social service realm and help

people and that would be good. But that's not what drives a man of God in ministry. What drives him is a profound reverence for God and a profound love for his word and ministry is about, first and foremost, serving the God who saved you, proclaiming the Christ who saved you and then everything else flows from that, and if you're proclaiming the Christ who saved you, you'll incidentally help people and you'll introduce them to the Gospel and to the kingdom, but it needs to be a God-centered focus in pursuing ministry first and foremost, the human aspects of it flow from that, they don't drive it.

Spencer. So these next questions require some preface to get into, so we're going to turn to Isaiah 20 and this question when it came in, I had to look it up because I honestly didn't understand the question. So in Isaiah 20 there's a series of verses here, the first six or eight verses here talk about Isaiah going without clothing, and the question is, "Why did God tell Isaiah to go without clothing for three years?"

Don. Yeah, in Isaiah 20, you have to remember that Isaiah was a prophet and prophesied beyond his own people to other nations as well. The context of this was that Isaiah was being his own, what's the phrase that I'm looking for? He was being his own object lesson, to walk around in just his undergarments. He wasn't vulgar and completely absolutely without clothing but it's just a reference to the fact that he was in his undergarments. To walk about like that was shameful and what God says in that, in verse 3 of Isaiah 20, is that, "Even as My servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot," you see, there's a distinction. If he was utterly completely without clothing, there would be no need to say that he was barefoot because that would be included in the broader term. So there's a distinction there. It says it was "as a sign and token against Egypt." It was going to be an object of shame to Egypt in verse 4, and so what they were seeing in Isaiah was the shame that was going to come upon the nation of Egypt as a judgment for their sin.

Spencer. So he really did walk around like that for three whole years to teach the Egyptians?

Don. To be a sign. Yeah, to be a sign to Egypt and it's a striking analogy whether it was absolutely 24/7/365 or it was periodic. You know, I haven't studied it closely enough to know but it was certainly enough to make the impression on the people who saw him and it stood out.

Spencer. Definitely stood out. The question comes in without the reference, right, and so I had to go search even looking to find it, to figure out what the question was about, and similarly the next question...

Don. Yeah, and you've got to be careful with the Google search on that one.

Spencer. Yes, that's true. Similar, the next question asks, "Does God really keep a bottle of our tears that he talks about in Psalms?" And it's Psalm 56:8. It says, "You have taken account of my wanderings; Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?" So the question is, "Does he really keep a bottle of our tears?"

Don. It's not a literal bottle with literal liquid in it, it's simply a figure of speech, a metaphor that the Psalmist is using to indicate that God remembers our tears and he, you know, he doesn't lose sight of our sorrows, and it's an expression of the sympathy that he has for us, that he knows when we're sad, he knows when we've wept, and he doesn't forget that. It's an expression in some ways of his omniscience, that he knows everything about that. It's not like that there are seven billion bottles of tears in a cabinet in heaven that have tears in them, but rather it's simply a poetic way of expressing the fact that God remembers our sorrows and has sympathy on us in them.

Spencer. That's a lot of bottles. I'm just picturing all of those bottles, you know, in this massive cabinet. That's an awful lot of bottles. So who is your favorite queen in the Bible?

Don. My favorite queen in the Bible? Was this an adult or a kid question?

Spencer. Ah, this was a kid question.

Don. Okay, just to clarify, just to clarify that. You know, when I think of queens in the Bible my mind goes to Queen Esther and I haven't taught through Esther either here or anyplace else, really, and I need to. I'd like to sometimes but I just, you know, I think she's one of the magnificent heroines of the Bible as she risked her life to plead for the Jews in front of a king that had said that he was going to destroy them, and God vindicated her faith, God protected the Jews and used her to facilitate their deliverance and so when I think about queens in the Bible, my mind goes to her.

Spencer. It's kind of a twofer, not only is she a prominent character in the Bible of her historical countenance, she has an entire book named about her.

Don. Yeah, there you go.

Spencer. The next couple of questions, I wonder if we should ask Dr. Snelling these but the questions are how do we explain creation to someone who believes in evolution and they are constantly citing all these different scientific facts and, you know, the world's billions of years old and that sort of thing? How do we have those conversations with them?

Don. I'd like to start further back on that question because what's at stake is far more than scientific facts of a scientific disagreement or argument, because when you approach it that way, you might be assuming that we're both equal partners in the pursuit of truth. That's not the case. A couple of things that I would want young people to understand is, boy, this could get long but I'll try to keep it simple. You need to understand that there is nothing that you can do, humanly speaking there are no scientific facts that you can quote, there are no clever arguments that you can make that will guarantee that someone will embrace creation as you do. There's two reason for that, biblically speaking, why that's an impossibility.

First of all, in Romans 1 it says that unbelievers see the creation of God and they suppress the truth. They deny the truth. They dishonestly suppress it and come up with something else. They are biased in their heart against the truth and specifically against the truth of creation. The Scripture couldn't be anymore clear about this. Let's just look at it for a moment in Romans 1. It says that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven," this is verse 18, "against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." They hold it down. They squeeze it out. They don't want anything to do with the truth, "because that which is known about God is evident within them," they know this in their heart but they deny it anyway because "God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks." Think about it this way, you're a young person and you love these things and you want someone else to join in your love for the things of creation that you've come to understand and that's a good and noble desire, but understand this, is that if they reject the testimony of God about the reality of creation, you need to understand it's going to be very easy for them to reject what you say as well.

And let me go a second point at the risk of offending some friends in the audience here. That's okay. I'm really not, in one sense I'm not interested in trying to convert someone to become a creationist. That's secondary. What I want to convert them to is Christ. They need to be converted to Christ and so when someone is hard against the things of God, I want to go straight to the Gospel and not argue scientific information with them because they've already established that they'll throw that out in their bias. You say, "Oh, you've got information on, you know, on scientific matters? I can throw that over my shoulder just as I do everything else." There needs to be a worldview collision, there needs to be a collision of authority and ask the question, "What is your authority for what you believe? My authority is the word of God. My authority is Jesus Christ. And what's your authority?" And you have to engage it at a higher level, a more presuppositional foundational level than just the facts of creation.

Scripture says in Hebrews 11 that it is by faith that we know that God created the world. Let me look that up and quote it as well accurately here. In Hebrews 11 it says it is, "By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible." And faith is a gift of God. They need a work of God in their heart to be able to convert them and to open their eyes to what the truth of creationism is, and that comes after their eyes have been opened to Christ and that God has brought them to a saving faith in Christ.

And so I just think it's important, Spencer, to keep our eyes on the ball and to know what is the most important issue. If all I did was to speak to somebody about the facts of creation without introducing them to Christ, I would kind of be missing the point of what is most important for them to be aware of, and I think it's helpful for the young people who ask this question to understand that there is no magic argument that you can make, no magic facts that you can make that will overcome the wicked disposition of someone's heart against God that causes them to reject creation. They reject the evidence of God

Scripture says plainly, and so they're going to absent a work of the Spirit of God in their heart, they're going to reject what we say about it also.

Spencer. So would you say it's less important to correct them about creation and more important to point them to Christ instead?

Don. Yes. I would say that and there's a couple of things that I would say. One is that I have a couple of messages that I would recommend, series of messages, "Why do we believe in God?" I think it's important for children to understand the five elements that undergird that message. Why do we believe in God and where has God made himself known? It's important to know our own position, and also "Why do we believe the Bible?" And the point here is to bring the discussion to a point where we are talking about by what standard we determine what is true. That's the question. By what standard do we determine what is true, it's either my opinion, these experts are reliable, or I've submitted my mind to the word of God and to the authority of Jesus Christ. That's the collision of worldviews that I'm looking to invoke. You know, I'm grateful for the ministries that advance the argument of creationism and the people that do the scientific work that make that happen. That's not my particular focus and that's okay, you know, I just think it's important to realize that we cannot convert people to Christ through an argument about creation, we need to bring the Gospel to bear on their conscience and the Gospel that Christ died and rose again for sinners just like you and you need to repent and come to him in faith. That's the discussion that I'm looking to have, you know, and that's what I try to make my ministry about.

Spencer. So we are presupposing the truth of Scripture over everything, over these other arguments around creation and scientific fact?

Don. Yeah, that's exactly right and we're presupposing it on the basis of an authority that is outside us. We're presupposing that based on the authority of Jesus Christ. And that is true, Christ is the ultimate truth, "I am the way, the truth and the life." There is no higher authority to appeal to than Christ and Christ affirmed the authority of the Old Testament, he prepared the way for the New Testament, and so in Christ we have the ultimate authority. He has made that, revealed his authority in Scripture and that's where we have to make our argument. You know, when I'm talking with an unbeliever, my primary goal is to get them to open the Bible and to read it for themselves because that is where God makes himself known. It is the word of God, it is the Gospel of Christ that the Spirit uses to work in a human heart. If we've just kept our Bibles closed and talked about other issues, you know, we've left the person no better off than they were when they first met us, and nothing has been done to address the sinful, evil, wicked, hostile disposition of their heart against the God who created them.

Spencer. So with your Bible still open, can you walk us through the differences between pre, post and amillennialism?

Don. Now that was not a kid's question.

Spencer. That is not a kid question. You are correct. It's a big kid's question, I'll say it that way.

Don. Yeah, well, all I want to say about this, I have a message that I did during the Covid response called "What happens next?" and that's a really good place to go for that. The millennium literally means a thousand years, and premillennial, postmillennial and amillennial relate to the position of that thousand years in relationship to the return of Christ. Our church is premillennial, pre meaning before, meaning that we believe that Christ comes before his one thousand year reign on earth. Amillennials and postmillennialists see things much different. Postmillennialists believe that the church is going to successfully evangelize the world and that there's going to be a broad conversion to Christ that takes place throughout the world population, and then Christ will return after that time. Amillennialists have, there's different varieties of it but basically they see the millennium taking place between the first coming of Christ at his birth, life and death and resurrection, and his second coming at the end of the age. They don't believe that there's going to be a literal reign of a thousand years of Christ on earth.

And here's the thing that I like to say. I'm a convinced and committed premillennialist but we need to understand that we need to hold these doctrines about eschatology with a humble mind. There are great great Christian men throughout the course and in current existence who have held to postmillennialism. These men are not fools. They are not idiots. A man like Lorraine Bettner who's one of the great Reformed theologians of the 20th century was a postmillennialist. I can't understand how he came to that point but I know he wasn't an idiot. You know, I tried to fight my way through his book on the millennium and it just kind of, I don't know where this is coming from. Same thing with some of our best friends in theology are amillennialists. And so we just need to be careful about not being too dogmatic on things that good men see differently. We can hold to our position without making them an unnecessary source of division in the broader body of Christ.

Spencer. So would you say these are not hills to die on effectively?

Don. Well, I don't know that I, I mean, truth is truth and so, you know, I want to contend for the truth. I make a distinction in my mind between a guy's view on eschatology versus his view on the deity of Christ or his view on justification. And another thing that I'll say, I might as well get in all kinds of trouble here, I don't really care, you know, I just don't care at this point in my life, some of the men that were the staunches advocates of premillennial theology lived very immoral lives. You know, the mere fact that someone's premillennial doesn't mean that they're a godly person. And one of the things about when Scripture speaks about future events, you really need to understand this, it is always making an application that points people to the present call to holiness in their lives.

So for example in 2 Peter 3, he's talking about the day of the Lord, 2 Peter 3:10, "the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." Okay, that's an eschatological passage of great import and what's the

implication that he draws from that? Verse 11, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God." And so what kind of person ought you to be in godliness in light of these realities of eschatology that are taking place? I think I still have in my files at home, there was, this was 20 or 30 years ago and this just illustrates the total bankruptcy of mind and biblical theology that some people have when it gets to these things, I have in my files at home a brochure for a prophecy conference that was being held back when. Three or four days, multiple multiple speakers, all kinds of topics about, you know, what kind of salami are they going to eat in the millennium, that kind of thing. I'm being ridiculous here. But there was just all of these esoteric questions about different aspects of future events. Not one speaker, not one topic was addressed to the ethical impact of eschatology on the life of the believer, and every place that Scripture talks about it is followed by an exhortation to holiness.

And it just shows how people have the wrong perspective. For some, there's just a morbid curiosity about wanting to know what's going to happen without any interest in applying it to personal holiness in their own lives. That's not the right way to handle biblical eschatology and a good discussion of eschatology is going to call people to holiness as a result of it. Christ is coming back. Christ is coming to judge the world. That means you ought to be living in a holy and godly way. That's all over the New Testament. Christ said, you know, when he was talking about in Matthew 25, he was talking about his return and his response, his application of it was, "Be on the alert for the day and hour is coming at a time that you don't know." And so there's just this call to watchfulness, to holiness that is the mark of biblical eschatology and, I think, an easy point of discernment to see what, you know, what a guy's emphasis is when he's talking about these issues.

Spencer. So you've outlined a little bit about why you became a pastor and some of the study that goes into that, can you walk us through the steps that you go through to write it or prepare a sermon?

Don. No.

Spencer. No?

Don. No, I can't do that.

Spencer. Okay.

Don. That's proprietary information.

Spencer. Fair enough. So we'll just have to imagine what it looks like.

Don. Well, my answer to that question today is different than it would have been 20 or 25 years ago, just restricting my answer to the New Testament. You know, over the course of the years, I've had opportunity to work through the entire Greek New Testament so I'm drawing upon a base of work that I've done over the course of many years in the past that

naturally informs everything that I do in the pulpit. I prepare my messages sometimes months in advance, sometimes years in advance I'm preparing my messages, drawing upon simple basic resources, some things that are more intermediate, some that are very technical, that really only mean something to someone who knows the original language. So I'm drawing on a wide variety of resources over a period of time that also is drawing upon the years that I've spent in ministry. There's not like there's a to-do list that I follow that goes through, there's just a whole course of information going through my mind that informs what I prepare at any given time.

So I couldn't tell you, for example, how long it takes me to prepare an individual message because I'm preparing it over time, and after you've been in ministry for a while, that starts to play to your benefit. So for example, to flip the example on what you do, you're an IT specialist. If I were to try to solve a computer problem, it might take me, I probably wouldn't even try to do it because it's new to me and it's foreign to me and it's things that I'm not familiar with. For you in your position, you can go in and you can solve that in five minutes based on all of your accumulated knowledge. And so if we can flip that back, it's kind of how it works for me. I'm drawing on a lot of different streams of study that I've done over the years that produce what I do on Sunday morning. Now if I was teaching a class on how to teach men to prepare sermons, my answer would be a little bit different but in terms of helping them develop their own approach, but for me things have kind of developed over time in a way that, you know, that I don't even really think about the process as much as I just do it and, you know, hopefully the Lord blesses it.

Spencer. So you mentioned studying the Greek and I know from past conversations that you used to teach New Testament Greek back in California. Do you find the Greek is helpful to you when preparing a sermon? And I mean that to distinguish that from it would not necessarily be helpful for me to try and learn Greek and then read Scripture. It's more for a pastor.

Don. Yeah, that's very true. I often have been approached over the years by people who wanted to study Greek and wanted, you know, "Can you teach me Greek?" And I always discourage them from pursuing it. To master the Greek language takes years of study which most people don't have the opportunity, the time to do, and they can't act upon it and use it in any meaningful way, and even at a seminary level, 90% of the guys who study Greek in seminary do not use it in any meaningful way in ministry. And so I just know in advance that people that are asking me that question are just setting themselves up to, one, waste their time ultimately in the big picture of things, and secondly, a little bit of knowledge can be a dangerous thing. People think they know more than they really do after they've studied a year or a couple of semesters of Greek. You think you know a lot when really you study more deeply and you realize you don't.

So I just try to protect people from that. I think that unless you're going into ministry, the Greek language probably isn't the best use of your time to study, and that your time would be better spent studying matters of historical theology or systematic theology, things like that that can root you more deeply in the meaning of Scripture than in particular things about the Greek language that you really don't have a context to be able

to put together. I don't mean to discourage anyone in the room by saying that, I really don't, it's just true and I think I've got a perspective that I'm entitled to an opinion on it.

Spencer. Do you think that's true of Hebrew as well?

Don. Yeah. Hebrew even more. John MacArthur in one of my favorite lines of his, he had a seminary student ask him one time, he said, "Can you give me insight into studying Hebrew?" Embellishing what he said just a bit, he said, "I'd be happy to do that for you." He said, "The secret to biblical Hebrew is to get out of it, to finish the class, to just survive it and then to get on with your life." It was something like that. My experience with the language is like that. Greek came much easier to me than Hebrew did and proved to be more fruitful in study of Scripture than Hebrew did.

Spencer. So to build on that, as a part of the preparation do you listen to other pastors and their messages as you've recommended to some of us to listen to, say, S. Lewis Johnson, or some others? Do you listen to any pastors and their messages while preparing?

Don. I don't listen to sermons so much. It's not time efficient for me. I greatly prefer to read so I'll print out sermon transcripts from S. Lewis Johnson or other people like that. I'm much more of a reader than a listener. In my preparation for the 10 Commandment series that I have coming up hopefully next year sometime, I listened to Phil Johnson's series, I've been listening to his series on the 10 Commandments that way just because his material on the 10 Commandments isn't in print as far as I know. For the most part, I'm reading authors instead of listening to men, and part of that is just that when I'm reading a guy who's dead now, for example, and reading his works, some of the guys from Princeton or reading Martyn Lloyd-Jones or James Montgomery Boice, these guys, I know how their ministry came out. When I see a snapshot of their thought in works that they did on the passage that I'm studying, let's say, I know the trajectory of their ministry and how it turned out. Some of these younger guys, I don't know how they're going to turn out and you have these young guys that were flashy like Josh Harris, forgetting his first name, is that the right name, Josh? Yeah, you know, big, you know, and he had a big name and sold lots of books and all that, and then he apostatizes completely and renounces the faith. I don't have time for that and so I just prefer going to guys that were mature, that were established. They ran the course, they finished the race, and a crown of righteousness was laid up for them. Those are the guys that I want to learn from and it's easier to find them in the books than in podcasts. You know and look, you know, I say that as a guy with a couple of different podcasts, you know, and it would be really easy for someone to say, "Well, that means, you know, what does that mean about listening to you?" Well, you know, touche. But, you know, you teach and let the Lord determine your audience.

Spencer. So for the readers out there, do we have transcripts of your messages? I know we have the audio.

Don. Yeah, there are transcripts of every message that I've ever preached except for the messages that I did in the late '90s in Agape Fellowship, but everything I've preached

since 2003 at Grace Community Church and here at Truth Community Church is available in transcript form, you know, wherever... I had such a funny line and I couldn't pull it out, wherever....

Spencer. Transcripts are sold?

Don. Yeah, wherever transcripts are sold. On the SermonAudio website, on the Truth Community website you can find those transcripts. They're all available within days after I preach. For me, I just find it to be a lot more efficient way because I can read a transcript in 10 minutes as opposed to listening to an hour audio message and having to take notes at the same time.

I just want to say, I'm very blessed to do what I do. You know, I look back, you know, these Q & A's give me an opportunity to say things that I didn't say. If there's one or two or three of you that are in the audience or listening to this later that have aspirations for ministry, you know, I'm in this position in message preparation, it was a deliberate process. You know, I deliberately devoted a decade of my life to study before I did any teaching. I don't think you'll mind me saying this but Phil Johnson when he went to Grace Community Church, he was at Grace Community Church for 10 years before he was even asked to teach a Bible study. This is Phil Johnson, I mean, the great Phil Johnson. He was content and patient to wait, you know, until opportunity came. The goal of a guy who desires ministry and who loves the word of God and aspires after a teaching ministry, it should not be to teach at the first possible opportunity. What he needs to do is he needs to study, he needs to read, he needs to spend time to go deep into God's word and to understand it rather than trying to start an audience right away.

Josh Harris, I'm not picking on him, I don't know the man and I'm sure I never will after some of the things that I'm saying here tonight, but he was in his early 20s when he was publishing his book, you know, "I kissed dating goodbye," and he was a pastor far before he was ready for that. There's a reason that church leaders are called elders. There's a reason that elders are responsible to be able to teach sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. You don't just fall out of bed one morning with that ability. There is a long course of study and preparation that takes place and my point is, is that for any young man that comes across this that has a desire for it, be like Ezra and set your mind to study the word of God, to practice it, and then teach it, and not to try to reverse that sequence just because you're in a hurry to have an audience. That is not the way to handle the word of God. And you pursue it and you study it without any promise that you'll ever have an audience or a pulpit of your own. You just pursue it for its own inherent worth and because that is the passion of your heart is to know the word of God. As Spurgeon said, "If your call from the Lord be a real one, you will not long remain silent. As surely as the man wants his hour, so surely the hour wants its man." And our responsibility as men who want to study the word of God is to study and understand it and let God take care of whatever opportunity comes from that, not to manufacture our own opportunity because we're not patient enough to wait for the hand of God to give it to us. I feel pretty strongly about these things. I don't know if you can tell or not.

Spencer. No, that's a good thing to have in a pastor, I think. I think we would be disappointed if you didn't feel strongly about studying the word and then turn around and teaching it to us. I think we would all be distraught by that.

Don. Yeah, and you know, Spencer, just to build on what you just said, Scripture warns men against wanting the office of a teacher. You know, James 3:1 is very clear and specific about this, "Let not many of you become teachers because as such we will face a stricter judgment." I'm blessed to do what I do but I quiver, I quiver at the responsibility I have before God for all of the teaching opportunities that I've had. You know, I can't imagine how strict the judgment is going to be against me and all I can do is cling to Christ as I anticipate that because I know that I've fallen short of what God has given me.

Spencer. But I think, I mean, that's part of why you study, right, is to be prepared for that.

Don. Yeah, until you study to prove yourself a workman who does not need to be ashamed, 2 Timothy 2:15, handling accurately the word of truth, you know, and you work at it. It's, you know, it's hard work. You know, it's glorious work but it's not easy.

Spencer. So in teaching, we know that the elders, one of the qualifications of being an elder is to be able to teach, and while we have three elders currently, do we think that we'll add elders just knowing that the necessity to teach is there and, like you said, almost just the nervousness or the quivering reaction of that stronger judgment, do you think that will cause men who are capable or are qualified to say, "No, I don't want that"?

Don. Well, I think if God has gifted a man to be an elder, the man will want the office. He'll desire the office. Scripture says if any man desires the office of an overseer, it's a good thing that he desires to do. And to be an elder in a local church of the size of ours, it doesn't require a seminary education or anything like that. You know, I think what the elders are looking for men who take advantage of the teaching opportunities that are in front of them and so, you know, is a man somehow teaching his own family? Is he leading his wife? Is he leading his children? This is all written in Scripture. If a man doesn't know how to lead his own household, how will he manage the household of God? It's very simple for a man to take what he's heard from on a Sunday morning or a Tuesday evening, distill it down to the level of his children, and teach at that level and to lead your family and develop your family, and men who do that, you know, you're faithful in a little thing, God provides you other opportunities that expand over time.

Looking long-term, sure we want more elders. I want to see elders grow up from within our body, so to speak, to be raised up from within our body and, you know, and I think that we've got a number of men who are on that track, who are on that trajectory. An elder is not simply someone who wants to teach and wants to be recognized as a teacher. There's a preliminary aspect, a preliminary character quality about an elder that I talked about to the men a year or two ago. I don't want to hear about anybody wanting to be an elder and wanting to teach at Truth Community Church that doesn't have a preexisting manifest love for the people of God. You know, you teach out of love for the people of God and it grows from that. You don't teach independent or apart from that. And so, you

know, elder leadership is going to come from men who have proven that they love the church enough to be here consistently, and that somehow they're manifesting a fact that they have a love and a care for the people of God, they want to help the people of God in any way that they can, and those things all come together in a package that only, you know, only the hand of the Lord himself can put together. The Lord makes elders. The Holy Spirit makes elders. We don't just appoint ourselves to that office.

Spencer. So in that same line, those who are wanting to study the word deeper, we had for a while you were teaching the systematic theology, I think those were on Saturdays, I think?

Don. We did them for a while.

Spencer. At the time did them for a little while. Are there other messages or resources that we could be consuming, for lack of a better term, in addition to reading, just simply reading Scripture? I know the simple answer is just read your Bible, but it's deeper than that.

Don. Yeah, it's much, it's much deeper than that and the book that I've taken to giving out to men is the original edition of James Montgomery Boice's systematic theology called "Foundations of the Christian Faith." I like that. I read it a couple of years ago, a year or two ago, and I think it's just a very accessible, meaningful, significant volume that is accessible, not too technical for guys that are at the level of many of the men in our church. A great way to go. And reading systematic theologies is a really important endeavor in Christian life. I wish someone had said this to me a long time before I figured it out on my own, but reading systematic theology lets you see truth from a global perspective and you get to see individual truths in proportion to other truths about the system, the doctrine that Scripture teaches.

So for example, to give a negative example of this. We were at a church in Chicago many many years ago. I don't even know if it's still there. It may be, it may not be. When we went there, they had just within the past 3-4-5 years, they had just finished something like a 26 week series on the prewrath rapture of the church. Now I want to tell you, if you're teaching 26 weeks on an obscure take on a particular aspect of eschatology like that, you've lost all sight of balance in your ministry, and you have made a great mountain out of a molehill of your own making and that's not healthy, and reading good systematic theologies will help you see things in proportion and help you bring the right emphases to the right doctrines at the right time.

So James Montgomery Boice, he's a very important writer to me. He's been very influential to me. John MacArthur said one time when James Montgomery Boice was filling his pulpit and John was introducing him, he said, "I recommend all of his books to you without qualification." And that's just about exactly right. He's a very valuable author, former pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. He went home to be with the Lord far before, you know, at a young age. I think he was 60. That was a loss to the church that we didn't get another 20 years of his ministry before the Lord took him.

Spencer. So could you give the title of that book again? I think I wrote it down correctly but I want to hear it again.

Don. Yeah, "Foundations of the Christian Faith," I believe it is.

Spencer. Oh, yeah, see, I didn't write it down correctly.

Don. To get the original version, you have to go to AbeBooks.com. Get it, you buy that used rather than the revised version that costs like \$50 and has all kinds of study guides and things like that in it. I like the original version. Sometimes publishers publish these revised versions, revised editions just to make more money off the original content.

Spencer. So I do want to shift gears just a little bit.

Don. Is this the cat question? Ask me the cat question.

Spencer. The cat question.

Don. Ask me the cat question.

Spencer. So the cat question, so and Cora has been waiting for that, I'm sure. To give it away, it's my daughter's question. So we know that you don't like dogs, how do you feel about cats?

Don. I could give a flippant answer to that but the question reminded me, I'm a little more partial to cats than dogs even though I wouldn't have a pet cat these days. I grew up with cats. I know how to make cast purr and they don't bark like dogs do. There's a lot to recommend a cat over a dog, in my opinion. Seeing the question reminded me of a little kitten that I had when I was a boy. This is a true story and my affection that I'm expressing here is genuine for the memory that little kitten. My memory isn't clear on how I came to have this kitten but, you know, just this little handful of cat had developed and somehow learned how to climb up my leg, I'd have jeans on and it would crawl up on my, it would climb up my legs without scratching me, and then it would jump onto my shoulder and sit on my shoulder and then I'd go ride my bike all over town with this little kitten sitting on my shoulder. That was just cool that the cat had the wherewithal not to scratch me as it was doing this and then it would just snuggle up to my neck as I was riding my bike. And so I've got better memories of cats than I do of dogs.

Spencer. That is not what I expected you to say when I was asking the question. I just, I figured that it would be similar to the dogs.

Don. Yeah, and see, I knew that and so sometimes it's good in things like this to throw a curve ball to the interviewer as well.

Spencer. Mission accomplished. Well done. So I do have one last question then I'll give you the final word if we need to wrap up. So in the last Q & A, you mentioned growth in the leadership, I think you described it as wrapping arms around, you know, our body, has much of that changed since then and can you give us anymore details?

Don. I'm not in a position to give anymore details but behind the scenes I think we're making progress to make that happen. It's at a sensitive point right now where I can't violate confidences and compromise things, but I'm very encouraged. I think that 2021 is going to be a very exciting year for our ministry and, you know, it's going to enable us to provide just a completely different level and depth of pastoral care than what we've been able to do under our current limitations. I'm very excited about it but I'm not able to get into details just yet.

Spencer. So do you have any final statements you wanted to give us and share with us? Any final thoughts?

Don. First of all, thank you for doing the interview. Spencer prepares really hard for this and he works through, he's very conscientious about it and it shows in the way that you conduct the interview. I appreciate that. You know, you're a delight to work with on these things.

I just want to reemphasize, I try to say it some but I don't know that I say it often enough, just, you know, what a blessing it is to have the congregation of Truth Community Church as, you know, as the pastoral charge that the Lord has given to me. You know, we have a mixture of old and young, new believers, mature believers, there's just a sweet spirit to this church. I'm very well, you know, I feel very loved and supported and I greatly appreciate that.

And one thing, I'm glad you asked this question because I wanted to make this point. Paul said in Ephesians 6, I believe it was, I just want to lay out an invitation to some of you to in terms of the way that you think about your elders and about, you know, the guy that preaches. In Ephesians 6:18 Paul said, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints," and he said, "and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak." You know, I know that I have a congregation that prays for the elders, that prays for me and I appreciate that, and I just want to encourage you that the way that you enter into prayer for the pulpit is a way of sharing in the, you know, sharing in a very meaningful way in the ministry, to enter into the burden of it in prayer. There is a joyful, glorious burden to it but it is a burden to carry, you know, to preach the word, to preach it sometimes when there's not much external response, to preach it when you're pleading with God for conversions and conversions don't seem to come and you just keep waiting on the Lord and keep praying and, you know, that's a burden on my heart. I can understand, I think, a little bit why Paul would say that is that he wanted the people who loved him to enter into that burden with him so that he could rise above his natural

abilities and his limitations, rise above them, speak boldly the way that he should and to see Spirit-given results to the preaching that he does. And that's what, you know, every pastor needs that, every board of elders needs that, but, you know, to the extent that you love this church and you support us, I'm grateful for that. You know, keep praying as you do and excel still more to enter in and to, you know, to stand alongside the pulpit in a way with your prayers that would be, you know, worthy of the majesty of the word that we seek to proclaim.

I need, I need that help. I need that spiritual support. I need that happening in private to make what we do in public of any effect. If the Lord doesn't come down and bless the word, you know, as we sing in one of our hymns, all is vain unless the Spirit of the holy one comes down. Brethren, pray and holy manna will be showered all around.

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