

## Chapter Two

### *The Journey*

I was born in Wilmington Delaware in 1967. I was raised as an only child in a nice family, but in the absence of God. My parents had religious backgrounds, but chose to let me decide for myself later in life. There were several reasons for this but they are not important to the story. Modern aspects of religion had turned them off. I grew up not even thinking about or really hearing of God or a “god”. We did not attend church, discuss the Bible, or talk about God. God was abstract, distant, unknowable, and irrelevant to everyday life. The world around me testified to this in everyday.

My maternal grandmother was my only occasional experience with God, but this was extraneous and without real meaning to me. This was not her fault since I simply did not understand. She would pray before holiday meals to “Heavenly Father”, but that was the extent of it. I do recall a Bible being in the house and even paging through it, but I really didn’t know what it was about. She would talk now and again about the Lord, but I did not understand. When I was bad she told me “The good Lord will punish you.” I cannot recall ever going to church. In fact I considered it normal not to go since this was all I knew. She went all of the time though leaving us at home on Sunday mornings.

As the years passed by I had a great childhood with many friends, a nice house, great parents and *The American Dream*. God was not on the scene in anything I heard, saw, or learned from the world. I graduated high school in 1985 some eighteen years later. In my senior year I went on *The Ski Trip* with a friend. It was with a Christian group, but I didn’t know it. I thought I was going skiing. Everything seemed normal until the first night when we got to the ski lodge. My friend and I were separated, and I was suddenly surrounded by about six people. They descended upon me in a very uncomfortable way. At first I didn’t know what was happening. It was really weird. They were asking me about my religious beliefs, but I really didn’t have any.

We ended up debating Genesis. I fought it tooth and nail. I knew I was right since I had been taught evolution in school for years, and I was going to have a biology major in college. I had even written a term paper on evolution: *Lucy The Missing Link* between man and ape. If man had been created and not evolved then I would have been taught this in school. If there was even a controversy then both theories would have been presented. When we studied evolution in school no one ever mentioned creation. There was never any talk from a single student that there was another theory or that they objected. This was also the case later in college.

The sudden poof-poof creation of Adam and Eve was ridiculous anyway. The trip ended with me thinking these people were a bunch of kooks, and I was glad I was not religious. I would now stay away from these people in the future. I went home and told my parents who confirmed that some people were religious fanatics and a little crazy and aggressive. I then dismissed it and went on with my life. God was not even on the radar screen.

I can truly say I never thought about Him. My best friends were Jewish and we did not discuss religion at all. I don’t think religion or “God” ever came up in my school years except for that one

episode. We were all too busy studying, having fun, and living our lives. God was clearly portrayed as irrelevant in school since He was never mentioned. Silence is not neutrality. I never saw anyone reading or talking about the Bible either. "God" might be mentioned but never Jesus Christ.

I knew people who went to church, but there was no mention of Jesus Christ or the Bible. I never saw a single person in school ever reading or possessing a Bible. If Jesus was a part of their lives then He was never mentioned or discussed in any public situations. People went to church. It was all about going to church. This included people who went to Christian schools. The connection between church and daily life was never manifested to me in their lives. The things that went on were far from Christian.

I attended many summers at a Christian summer camp, but there was no religion or mention of God there either. On Sunday there was a generic worship service that the campers suffered through. Once again the things that went on there were far from Christian. The Bible and Jesus Christ were never mentioned.

I then went to college at Penn State University. I transferred in one year to the University of Delaware to be closer to home after a *Heart Attack*. God was still not someone who entered my mind. I was a biology major planning on medical school. I do specifically recall one specific event when I did think about God. I have never forgotten this event even though it was only a blip in my life. I was in a cellular molecular biology class studying a simple form of regulation for turning on and off a gene in the DNA that made a simple protein. The design of how this worked even on a simple organism was awesome. For at least two to three days I thought it must be an intelligent design. The process was too calculated and engineered to be explained by evolution or chance.

If you would have asked me about God before or after this event then I would have had the same response. God was someone I thought existed in an abstract way. It made sense that He existed somewhere and likely had a hand at least starting life and then evolution took over under His guidance. There was nothing more tangible or concrete about Him. God was not knowable or active in our world. In a sense He was not real. If He was then I would have heard about it. If the answer to God had been discovered then the news, school, or someone would have made it known to me. Instead it was all religion with many groups fighting and believing different things so that everyone lost and no one was right. I never saw or heard of personal relationships with Jesus being except on *The Ski Trip*, but they were kooks.

During my college years I did attend church two or three times with a girlfriend and her family when I visited. We went to church, and I felt very out of place. I didn't know how everyone knew what to chant or say at the same time. I really didn't even know what was going on beyond praying to God. I just went with them and got through the service. It was the proper thing to do, and I had great respect for her father and family. I did notice most of the kids just went through the motions.

I remember once a disheveled bearded man with a giant cross on campus. He was yelling and screaming at the students as they walked to class. He said we were all going to hell unless we let Jesus Christ save us. No one listened. He was a kook. I think campus police took him away.

In my senior year of college I took some drama classes. I had a theater minor which I enjoyed greatly. I went to see the play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. I went alone. For some reason I cried during the

play and part of the way home. I did not know why at the time. I thought I was weird and didn't tell anyone.

Two of my roommates in college went to church regularly, but we did not discuss the details of their faith. They were sincere and reverent, but I simply blocked it out. God was important to them, but I did not understand this. They never pressured me either which I liked. I didn't really think about their church attendance since most people were recovering from hangovers on Sunday. I just didn't think of the world related to God in anyway, shape, or form. I was living my life, having a great time, and preparing for medical school. There was rarely a sense from anyone I encountered that was religious that God was real and alive. It was just a belief system that they chose to follow and this made sense.

College had also clearly taught me that God was abstract and unknowable. No single religion could be called correct. The answer was unknowable, and thus we should respect what everyone else believes. I agreed with this philosophy, and even took a course on philosophies of religion. There were too many religions in the world for there to be an answer. If God was real and tangible then man would have figured it out over the centuries instead of dividing himself with many different theories.

My summers during college were spent at the beach. I was a life guard and disc jockey. I still never thought about God. He did not exist in my world, since I was busy living life. This consisted of going to the beach, partying, drinking, chasing women, and working. It was all about me. I did very well in college and graduated Magna Cum Laude. I entered medical school in 1993.

My four years in medical school were pretty much the same except the beach, drinking, partying, and women were gone for the first three. I was in a book twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. I did very well in medical school. I had a great memory and was able to read very quickly with great retention. I graduated first in my class. I remember being disliked for my success in medical school. This was foreign to me since I never experienced this in college.

I was learning about how the human body worked. It was awesome and absolutely amazing, but it did not trigger thoughts about God in any concrete way since I believed in evolution. Evolution does not bring to mind any connection between man and God. Medical school is all about the human body, but there was no mention of God or creation in anything I was ever taught or read. If God had any role in the human body then He was left out of the one place you might expect Him to come up. He was irrelevant in medical school. Silence is not neutrality. I didn't realize how much of an impact so much silence was really having for all those years as *Engravings On The Heart*.

My thoughts were natural because any connection was an abstract, distant, or unknowable God. I was too busy studying all the time to become a doctor, and I lost my college girlfriend I mentioned earlier to these studies. My life was consumed with medical school. God was the last thing on my mind. If you would have told me I needed Him I would have laughed and told you to take a hike. There was nothing I had seen or experienced in twenty four years that made God necessary or desirable. Everything that the world had taught me from the schools to the mass media had etched this into my view of the world.

I did have a few friends who went to church, but I also knew them well enough to know what really goes on and is important. There was never any mention of the Bible or a relationship with Jesus. Church did not impact daily life or behavior behind closed doors.

I met my wife in the third year, and was married a little over one year later. We got married in a church. We met with the pastor twice for “marriage lessons”. The pastor was a very nice man. Church to me at this point was a place to learn some lessons about life but nothing more. Again there was never any indication of a reality to it all. The pastor was not concerned about my relationship with God or lack thereof which reinforced His unimportance. If Jesus was alive and knowable why wouldn’t he tell me when he knew I didn’t believe?

We were married in 1993, and I began my internship in Internal Medicine. I was basically annihilated for one solid year with nothing but work, work, work. There was no time to think about God. I never even considered Him and He never came up in the hospital. Even though people were dying no thought or discussion of God or an afterlife ever took place among doctors or nurses that I witnessed. God for all intents and purposes did not exist. In the hospital dead was dead.

Why would I have thought about God at this point in my life anyway? My only two experiences were negative and even a pastor failed to witness to me. I was doing well and on my way to a successful career. I was married and had a great wife with a great family. My parents were proud of me and life was going great! Society certainly did not embrace God or send the message that He was real and alive. College taught me there is no absolute truth. Truth was relative to your belief system and society was absolute.

In 1994 I became a resident in Dermatology at Duke University Medical Center. I worked very hard for three years fully consumed by learning Dermatology and being married. Once again things were going as planned. My life was consumed by marriage and residency training. God had no place, time, or thoughts with me. The modern paradigm of life was to be successful and do as well as you could.

Now my wife was raised Christian, but she had not been going to church either. She was busy with a pharmaceutical job. She tried to get me to go a few times, but I refused. Why should I go? What did I need? Church was something that they wanted me to do, but the ultimate truth behind it was absent. I wouldn’t have believed them anyway about “being saved”, but it’s an important point that even my own family and wife never brought it up. It all revolved around getting me to go to church. Church was the focus with its religion. It was clear to me that man was just being religious and it served no purpose for me. I could do something much more useful on my Sundays like sleep in, recover from a hangover, play golf, or mountain bike.

We moved to Apex, North Carolina in 1995 and bought a house during my residency. My wife tried a church one day. The next week she got a call from a woman she met. The women wanted to meet with her. They went on a walk in the woods and the woman tried to corner her about her beliefs and Jesus Christ. My wife thought it was really weird and got out of there. “I told you they are a bunch of kooks.” I said. This turned her off as well. God was still not even on the radar. He was further away if anything.

I graduated from Duke in 1997 and joined the faculty as a skin cancer surgeon and fellow. In 1998 we took a trip to visit my wife’s father in *Marco Island*, Florida. We had our first son. Her family was concerned about the child, and we had questions about the baby being baptized. It was our understanding that a child should be baptized or it might go to hell if it died. Baptism could “save” a child by this ritual.

We met with the minister of her parent's church who told us it wasn't necessary and did not save the child anyway. He said this idea of salvation from baptism was completely unbiblical, but a common misconception. If it is performed at all it should be an outward sign of a commitment to raise the child Christian. I recall very specifically asking him his opinion on the millions of people in the world that do not believe in Jesus Christ. Did he feel they were wrong and he was right? I had a real problem with these questions. I was convinced that no "loving God" would condemn these people. I thought maybe everyone was right and we all believed in the same God in different ways. This is what society had taught me in the age of tolerance. He was very clear that they are lost. He explained that is why there are thousands of missionaries all over the world, but I didn't buy it. This reinforced my viewpoint that religion was foolish man made nonsense.

My wife's father had two members from his church come to talk with us that night. I knew they were coming. I will never forget the knock on the door. I didn't at the time understand, but when I heard the knock and saw the door open I had an intense feeling that God was knocking and coming to see me. I didn't know why I felt this way, but it was real. When the door opened it was like something entered the room. It was very strange but real. For about two days I thought that maybe this was a sign. I had no reason to feel this but whatever happened made me agree to buy a Bible and start reading it when we got home. My wife bought an "NIV Study Bible". We were supposed to read together every night.

It started off strong three nights in a row, but then it faded, at least the together part. I did, however, keep reading at night while she slept. Something was drawing me to it, but I quickly hit a road block with the creation story of Adam and Eve. I didn't believe it for a second. It must be a parable, a made up story meant to teach about how life in general formed. I was a doctor, a scientist, and I knew the laws of nature. There was no way anybody could ever convince me that this was true.

The same thoughts occurred when I got to Noah's Ark and the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus. These were just ridiculous fairy tales invented by simple people thousands of years ago who were ignorant and didn't know any better. The intelligent man of 1998 knew for certain that such things were impossible. I would have debated this with anyone to the death. I had all the proof, and they had nothing except their belief that it was true. No proof at all. Fools!!! I had science on my side and they had nothing but faith.

That same Sunday we tried a nearby church. People were singing and holding their hands up in the air. This was weird. I was out of that church, and the whole thing ended right there in 1998. I was now certain I had made the right decision. I had found more weirdoes, foolish fairy tales about miracles, and people appearing from nothing by some God. I was done with it for good. I knew I was right. I was a doctor, number one in my class, a scientist, a scholar, and I knew better than these fools. I wouldn't sit in church to appear good or follow society's definition of righteousness. I refused to do it just to meet people or make business contacts even though *many* people encouraged me for this exact reason. They were giving me the honest off the record "side benefits" of church.

It's important to note I still knew nothing about Jesus or the New Testament. My wife agreed the church was a bit strange and so we were happily in agreement. After all, we were successful, making good money, had a nice house, a son, and great jobs. We had no need for church or religion especially since all of our experiences were weird. Religion had been tested out and it failed for us. We had some friends that had found "more normal" churches that delivered a "low key" message, but we

were not interested in any of it at this point. We were good people in a nice neighborhood, and I was then very busy starting a new private practice. It was all quickly forgotten.

Our newborn son had very bad colic, and it consumed us for nine months. My new job was very busy, and all of our time everyday was completely filled. There was no time or reason to think about God or life's purpose. We were just living one day at a time, and life was great. Our neighbors and friends were outstanding, and our life was on the right track. Religion never really came up again even with our neighbors or friends. Some of them went to church but so what.

Once again many things that went on were a far cry from Christian and make you wonder. You see the outsider sees no signs of any meaning to church in daily life. When you really get to know someone then you can see if their beliefs impact their life. Is it carried out into the world as a guide for daily living? It's easy to appear holy with a suit in church, but another thing to actually live it out.

In 1999 we moved into a much larger house. Money was not an issue, and life was without stress except for our kids. By this time we now had a second son, and our life was busy managing two young children. My goal was to work hard and save as much as I could for retirement and my family. Money could buy security and some degree of control over life. I had achieved what our society taught was the goal for life. I had obtained *The American Dream*.

The neighborhood we moved into was different though. In my old neighborhood everyone was friendly and nice. They were always outside, talking, and interacting like one big family. This was not the case here. When taking a walk some people would ignore you or barely give an acknowledgeable hello. I was in a neighbor's driveway once chatting when a woman came up I had never seen before. She completely pretended I wasn't there. I later found out she was a Christian. I had known it all along hadn't I?! Another one. I was offended at first but really didn't care. Friends had told me that the more expensive the neighborhood the less friendly it was. They were right.

At work there was little talk about Jesus either. Our society had also invented privatization, where you were not supposed to talk about it in public. There was one very nice woman who was a great employee and I liked her a lot. She was labeled "very religious" by another employee and I. We even mocked her reading the Bible every morning at work. "What nonsense" we said. There was one time she went on a retreat of some kind, and that was also mocked. It was a waste of vacation time in our minds. She should have done something fun.

She was the only person I had ever met who outwardly showed her faith. She read the Bible everyday and talked about it. She mentioned "The Lord" and talked about a relationship with Him. It wasn't simply about church but Jesus in her life. She quoted Scripture and talked about how the Bible and Jesus guide her life. Her light was out on a lampstand and everyone could see it even if you didn't believe it. Of course there are many people who simply choose to keep God private, but I can only tell you what I observed in life. If God is real and personal why hide it? Hidden and secret comes across as non-genuine or ashamed. This woman had something different than I had ever observed before even though it did seem weird.

Time marched on until the spring of 2003. I became aware of what I viewed as hypocritical behavior by some Christians. If love is the goal then it was nowhere to be found. The details are not important. When you interpret something in a particular way it's real to you even if you are wrong. I then heard that a child told another child that she was not a "real Christian". Now this bothered me.

When I heard this it was the last straw. I asked the woman at work about it who was very sound in her biblical knowledge. She raised her eyebrows without comment. She didn't have to say anything. I knew what she meant. I announced it to the lab and said if my children and I were going to be judged then I wanted to know on what basis. The important aspect is that this behavior led me to get mad. In my anger I decided to read the Bible seeking ammunition against hypocrisy.

I went out and bought a study Bible right away. I felt like an alien in the Christian bookstore. I even thought about a disguise, but I just got in and out as quickly as I could. I did wear a hat and sunglasses. I knew I would find the ammunition to refute them and prove the hypocrisy of their own faith. I didn't know much, but even I knew "love thy neighbor as thyself."

I will never forget the day I told the woman in the lab I was going to read the Bible. She just looked deep into my eyes. She might have said "good", but I cannot recall. I do remember the look though. I saw a silent excitement in her eyes. It's also critical to understand several things at this point. I had no idea what I would read about except that Jesus, Mary, and the wise men would be in there. I went in with a clean slate and no preconceived ideas about the content. I was on a personal mission. No one else knew except my wife, but even she didn't really know what was going on. I was only in search of ammunition with no interest in Christianity itself. I wanted to read the legal document to find clauses that would support my case.

I also bought a PC Bible of the same version for my computer, because I was embarrassed to be seen with a Bible. I mainly used my PC Bible so no one would know what I was doing. I wouldn't be caught dead with a Bible. I decided to read the New Testament this time, since the Old was a failure. I began to read. This is where it gets interesting.