

"I did not know that you ever thought of me," she said.

"Then certainly I have need to beg your pardon," I said. "I must have treated you very impolitely if you did not know that I ever thought of you."

"Oh no, sir; you have never treated me impolitely."

"And certainly I never will. But permit me to ask you, are you willing to converse with me about eternal life?"

"I am not religious," she said, with a downcast and solemn look.

"And do you mean to live and die that way?"

She made no answer. I paused for an answer, as long as I thought I could, without embarrassing her feelings; but no answer came. I continued, "You say you are not religious. Would it not be wise and well for you to look into those things that would secure to you the favour of God and everlasting life?"

She gave no answer. After another pause, I said, "You think of this subject I suppose, sometimes?" She made no reply.

"Are you unwilling to think of it?" No answer. "Are you unwilling to have me speak to you about it?" No answer. "Perhaps this time is not agreeable to you. Would you prefer to have me call at some other time?" No answer. "My dear girl," I said earnestly, "I did not come here to embarrass you, or annoy you in any manner. I love you, and wish to do you good. But if you prefer it, I will leave you at once. I will not intrude myself upon you, or intrude upon your attention a subject to which you do not wish to lend your mind."

"Why sir," she said, "I am glad to see you."

"Why, then, will you not talk with me?"

"Indeed, sir, I do not know what to say."

"Pardon me, my dear girl, I do not wish to embarrass you, or blame you; but certainly you could answer me some of the questions I have asked. Now allow me to ask you again, do you think much on the subject of your salvation? or have you any concern about it?"

She made me no answer. After a painful, but brief pause, I continued, "I beg you to speak to me. Say anything you think or feel; I assure you I have no feelings towards you but those of kindness and respect. I will treat you politely and kindly. But, my child, your silence embarrasses me. I am afraid to

say another word lest I should hurt your feelings and appear to be rude and impolite."

"You may ask me," she said, with a forced smile.

"Then," I said, "are you giving any serious or prayerful attention to your salvation?"

"No, sir, not at present."

"I thank you for the answer. But let me ask, do you not think that you ought to attend to it earnestly, and prayerfully, and without delay?"

She did not answer, but appeared quite confused. The blood mounted to her cheeks. I pitied her.

"Believe me," I said, "I do not mean to confuse you; but why do you not speak to me, and tell me your feelings plainly and freely? I will hold all that you say to me as confidential as you wish."

"Well, sir, I will," she said, "but I know you will not like it."

"No matter for that," I said.

"I do not wish to oppose you; but I do not think it would do any good for me to attend to my salvation, with my present feelings."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "I do not understand you."

"I mean," she said, "that I have no particular anxiety about being saved; and I do not believe it would do any good for me to seek it, till I have some greater anxiety about it."

"And are you waiting for such an anxiety?"

"Certainly I am."

"Do you expect to get it by waiting? Do you think it will ever come to you?"

"I do not know," she said, very sadly. "I used to hope so; but I have waited for it a long time."

"Does the Bible tell you to wait for it?"

"I do not know if it tells me to wait. But it speaks of conviction, of broken and contrite hearts; and Christian people speak of awakenings, alarms, and distresses of mind, and influences of the Holy Spirit, with those who are led to Christ. And you preach such things, as if these were the beginning. And if I have none of these, how can I begin to seek God?"

"Did you ever hear me preach that one should wait for these?"

"Yes."

"No, never! my child."

"Yes I have, I am sure."

"Never, never! I preach nothing like that."

"I remember your text, sir; and you always preach the text: 'On Thee do I wait all the day.'"

"Yes; and in that sermon I told you that waiting *on* God was one thing, and waiting *for* God was quite another. The first was right, and the last was wrong. We wait on Him by such things as prayer. Did I not tell you so?"

"Yes, sir; you did."

"And do you pray?"

"No."

"Then you do not obey my sermon and wait on God."

"How can I, with no conviction?"

"How do you expect to get conviction?"

"I do not know."

"Do you know and feel that you are a sinner against God, and not reconciled to Him?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you know that you cannot save yourself, and you need Jesus Christ to save you?"

"Yes, I *know* it," she said, with a very significant accent upon the word know.

"Then you have some conviction."

"You may call it conviction, if you will; but I have no deep impressions."

"And are you waiting for such impressions before you will do anything; and when they come do you mean to seek God?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you may wait for ever!"

"Oh! I hope not!"

"Probably you will! Such deeper impressions seldom come by waiting for them. How long have you been waiting for them already?"

"About five years, sir."

"And have you gained anything in those five years, any deep impressions?"

"I do not know that I have."

"Will you gain anything by waiting five more years?"

"I am afraid not," she said, sadly.

"And I am afraid not," I said. "You may wait on till you have just waited into the grave, and your waiting will do you no good!"

"What shall I do?"

"Seek ye the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near."

"What! with my present impressions."

"Yes; with just your present impressions."

"I do not believe it will do any good."

"Perhaps not. But five years waiting has done you no good; and you have no reason to think that five more would do you any. You have tried waiting; and now I want you to try seeking, as the Bible tells you."

"I would seek the Lord, if I thought it was possible with my present feelings."

"It is possible. I am confident you would not seek in vain. I know you are deceived. I know you are acting contrary to the commands of the gospel. I know you are putting your own wisdom in the place of God's wisdom, which calls upon you to seek the Lord now, today. But you are waiting for conviction. Now, I beg you to hear me, and treasure up what I say. I have several things to say to you. Will you hear me?"

"Most willingly, sir."

"1. Remember that God never tells you to wait for convictions, or anything else. He tells you, 'Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation.'

"2. You have no occasion to wait for any deeper impressions. In my opinion you do not need them. You have impressions deep enough. How deep does a sinner need impressions to be? What does he need to know and feel, in order to be prepared to come to Christ? I will tell you: he needs to know that he is a sinner, that he cannot save himself, that he needs Christ to save him. That is all, and you have all that already.

"3. Deeper impressions never yet came by waiting for them without prayer and without seeking the Lord, at once, today.

"4. Your duty is to turn from sin and the world to Christ, at once, today.

"5. If, after all, you do need any deeper impressions, I will tell you how you may get them, and you will get them in no other way. You will get them just when you aim to do as God bids you, to repent and flee to Christ wholeheartedly. At present you are excusing yourself from all this, by the false notion that you do not have enough impressions to be able to do so. You do not, this moment, feel condemned for neglecting God's great salvation, because you think you cannot attain it till you have deeper convictions. This is your excuse; and it is all a deception. But if you do need deeper convictions, you will get them when you aim to

come to Christ. Then you will find that you have no heart to do it, no will to do it, no readiness to deny yourself, and renounce the world, and then you will begin to see what an undone and helpless sinner you are, and how much you have need to pray for God's help, as you are not doing now. This is the way to gain deeper impressions if you need them, and the only way. Five years more of waiting, or fifty years, will not give them to you. This is all I have to say."

I left her. About three days after this I called on her again, and found her in a very solemn and sad state of mind. She said that on thinking of what I had told her, she believed every word of it, and tried, with all her might, to do as I had exhorted her. She read her Bible, and prayed, and the more she tried to give up the world, and give God her heart, the more she found that her heart would not yield. She said she "could do nothing with it." She said she did not believe there was ever such a heart so opposed to God. She said she never knew before what a sinner she was, and did not believe there was any possibility of her ever turning to God.

I told her, "Jesus Christ is able to save you." She replied, "I suppose He is; but I do not think He ever will!" As she said this she appeared deeply solemn, and was overcome with her emotions, which choked her utterance.

"Jesus Christ," I said, "is more than able to save you; He is *willing*."

She lifted her eyes upon me with a despairing look, and said, "I wish I knew that He is willing."

"You do know it," I said. "His word tells you so. 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls' — 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink' — 'Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely' — 'Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters' — 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.'"

"Oh!" she said, "I will try to seek God." I instantly left her.

Not long after (a few days) I called upon her, and found she was calm and happy in hope. She said that all her trust was in Christ, and that she

thanked me for what I had said to her. "You opened my eyes," she said. "When you came here that morning I did not intend to talk with you; and when you began to ask me, I was resolved not to tell you how I felt. And if you had not made me tell, and had not almost forced me to attend to my salvation, I would have waited for deeper convictions all my life. But sir, I think you were wrong when you told me I did not need any deeper convictions. At that time I knew almost nothing of my heart. I never found out how much it was opposed to God and His demands, till some time afterwards, when I resolved that I would become a Christian that very day."

"And did your resolve bring you to Christ?" I asked.

"Oh, no! not at all. It did me no good. My heart would not yield. I was opposed to God, and found I was such a sinner that I could do nothing for myself. My resolutions did me no good; so I gave up all and just cried for mercy. A while after that I began to be at peace. I do not know how it is, but I have done nothing for myself. Indeed, when I cried for mercy, I had given up trying to do anything. It seems to me that when I gave up trying, and cried to God, He did everything for me."

She united with the church, and has lived in fellowship with the saints ever since, a useful and decided Christian woman.

There are multitudes in our congregations who are just waiting, while they ought to be acting; who have a sort of indefinite hope about the aids of the Holy Spirit yet to be experienced, while they are pursuing the very course in which they will fail in attaining any such aids. This young woman would probably have been led to Christ five years before, had it not been for her error about waiting for deeper convictions.

Sinners who think they must wait, think wrong. They must work, if they would have God work in them. There can be no salvation without obedience. And there is not likely to be, with any sinner, a true sense of his deep need, until he earnestly intends and resolves to obey the gospel.

"For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon Thee" (*Psalms 86:5*). □

Ichabod Smith Spencer was born in 1797 in Rupert, Vermont. He was educated at schools in the upstate New York region, and converted at the age of 18. He became a school teacher, and his fame as a teacher and administrator grew to the place that he was soon in great demand. In fact in 1830 he was called to be President of the University of Alabama, and in 1832 the President of Hamilton College of New York. He refused both because by this time the Lord had called him to preach. He was called to serve as colleague-pastor of the Congregational Church in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1828. This was the very church made famous by Jonathan Edwards.

Spencer's ministry at Northampton from 1828-1832 was remarkably blessed with conversions. More than 250 in those few years came to Christ under his ministry, and he wore himself out in the work. For health reasons alone he resigned that demanding and large ministry in 1832.

He refused a call to the Park Street Church in Boston at this time, the largest in New England, because of his tender health. Later in 1832 he accepted the call to the Second Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn, New York. This was a church planting effort with no building and about 40 people. He remained at this post the rest of his life, thus spending 22 years at this church. By the time of his death in 1854, the church had grown to be one of the largest and most influential churches in all of New York State.

Spencer was a true shepherd. He placed upon himself the demand that he would make a home visit for every member of his church every year, which he did all 22 years. These visits were not for social but spiritual purposes, and were rarely spent in vain. It is said that he averaged more than 800 appointments with souls every year.

Fully committed to the doctrines of grace, he was a gifted preacher, and his sermons were effective in awakening many sinners; yet it was his personal ministry that was most mightily blessed by God as he dealt individually with inquiring souls. □

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE #1

by Ichabod Spencer

WAITING FOR CONVICTION

There was a young woman in my congregation at one time, about whom I felt a real interest, and had for a long time sought an opportunity to speak with her alone on the subject of her salvation. But she was very reserved. She seemed entirely disinclined to any conversation on the subject, so much so, that I could only ask questions, and she answered only in monosyllables, or not at all.

I had some acquaintance with her, as a neighbour and friend, but little as a minister. She appeared to me to possess more than an ordinary share of friendliness and intellect. I had often noticed that she gave strict attention to my sermons, yet she never showed any real concern for her soul's salvation.

When I thought of her good sense, her candour, her kindness of feeling, and her sobriety, I was surprised that she did not seek God. She was now passing by the first years of her youth, and it pained me to think that they were gone, and that she was now entering the years of her womanhood, a stranger to Christ. I resolved to see her in private, and aim to overcome her obstinate reservation.

I called at her house and asked for her. As she and her mother, both at the same time, entered the room where I was, I was obliged to say to her mother that I desired to see her daughter alone, if she would be so kind as to grant me that privilege. "Oh, certainly," she said, and left the room.

I then said to her daughter, "I have called on purpose to talk with you on the subject of your salvation, if you will allow me that privilege."

She did not answer. She cast her eyes downwards, and seemed confused.

"I hope you will not consider me to be intruding," I said, "or impolite; but I have long felt a deep interest in you, and have desired an opportunity to talk with you freely and confidentially about your duty to God."