

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

An Interview with John MacArthur

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: QA197

The following interview is quite a few years old. But it gives some wonderful glimpses into Pastor John's heart.

Question: What kind of educational background do you have?

John: I was raised in the southern California area, so I attended schools there. My first two years of college were spent at Bob Jones University, and then I completed my college education at Los Angeles Pacific College—now defunct. From there I proceeded to Talbot Theological Seminary to complete my seminary training.

Question: Have you always wanted to be a preacher?

John: I am a fifth-generation preacher. Because my father and grandfather were preachers and pastors, I grew up with a pastor's heart and a pastor's mentality. I saw how my father and grandfather functioned, and I understood what it was to be a pastor. From the time I was very small — five or six years old — I would stand on a soapbox in the backyard and preach to my sisters or anybody in the neighborhood who would listen — and get angry when they didn't respond. I guess I just assumed that I'd be a pastor like my father and grandfather.

But as I became involved in athletics during my college days and found fulfillment in that. I thought that perhaps I'd be a professional athlete. I did have some opportunities to play professionally, both in football and baseball, but by then I had affirmed in my own heart that God wanted me in the ministry. So I chose seminary over an athletic career.

Question: Talk a little about the history of Grace Church and your association with it.

John: When I left seminary I worked in a church with my dad, and I taught at Los Angeles Baptist College, which is now The Master's College. At the same time I traveled a lot and preached at youth conferences and special meetings. I knew that I needed experience in preaching if I was going to be effective in a church ministry. Then I joined the staff of Talbot Theological Seminary and spent two and a half years preaching all over the country — an average of 35-40 times a month.

At the end of that time I was asking God to open a door for me. At that time the pastor of Grace Community Church had just died of a heart attack. And the pastor before him had also died of a heart attack. I think by then they might have been saying, “I don’t care if he’s good; just get him young!” So after I had preached here one Sunday night, I was approached about candidating, and eventually I came as pastor. The church had 450 to 500 people at the time. It was a strong church in terms of personal relationships and love, and there was good leadership. There was also a wonderful youth program. It was an exciting, energetic and wonderful church even then, although there were not nearly so many people.

Question: What were you committed to, and what did you end up doing in those days?

John: I had said that I wanted at least 30 hours a week to study. I believed that Ephesians 4 says the pastor’s job is to perfect the saints, and that comes about through the Word of God. I thought that possibly the other 10 to 15 hours would be used in visitation and so on. But the men said, “We’ll take care of the visitation, because James says visitation is pure religion. Everybody does that.” But, of course, what you anticipate and what really happens are two different things. I found that my “other 10 or 15? hours turned out to be another 30 in addition to the 30 I already had for study — I never sacrificed that.

Question: What is your philosophy in building a church?

John: When a reporter asked me once if I had a great desire to build the church, I told him, “No. I have absolutely no desire to build the church. That’s not my job. Jesus said, ‘I will build My church,’ and I would rather not compete with Him. I simply want to allow Him to do that through me in a small way in one location.”

As I see it, my calling is to know God. I do not study the Bible to get a sermon. Instead I approach the Scriptures this way: I have an insatiable hunger to know what the Bible means so that I will know how I can live to glorify God. My ministry is to spend my whole life finding out what the Bible says. And at the end of the week, when I’ve discovered the truths that have been there, I get to share them with the rest of the church. That is a ministry that overflows out of the relationship that I have with the Lord, which comes from the study of His Word. That overflows from my life and touches the lives of those in the congregation. And as we grow together, out of that comes the nurturing of leadership.

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