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

Bible Questions and Answers, Part 61
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 70-33

AUSTIN DUNCAN: Welcome back.

JOHN MacARTHUR: Thank you. Thank you. (Laughter)

AUSTIN: The inquisition continues, Pastor MacArthur. It's time to tighten up the screws this week and really get to the hard questions.

JOHN: (Laughing) Okay.

AUSTIN: No, not really. I like my job. I really enjoyed last week and I think the people did as well just from feedback that I heard from folks. We talked a lot about the church, about this church in particular and it was a blessing to hear you talk about how things were when you first came, and how the Lord has blessed this church. And that's obvious to all of us because we love this church and we're grateful for it. You talked to us a lot about things that were innovative at the time, but biblical, like church discipline and membership and instituting a biblical understanding of baptism here. And as we closed our time last week, you compared what's happening in churches today. You talked about folks thinking about church in a selfish way, talking about...you said...they sought the church as a dispensary to meet their needs—and talked about them seeking really just their personal preference in trying to find a church.

Why don't we start this week by you telling us what is a church. How do you find a church? What makes a church a church?

JOHN: Well, I think the simplest definition of a church is that it's the gathering of genuinely redeemed people for the purpose of worshiping the Lord. That's what it is. Not only worshiping the Lord collectively on Sunday, but worshiping the Lord as a way of life, giving glory to God, giving honor to God. As we closed out last time, you're reminding me, I acknowledged that church has been flipped on its head. The church exists now to satisfy man, to satisfy my needs, my desires, my preferences, the kind of music I like, the message I want to hear. Maybe it's health, wealth, prosperity, you know; maybe it's a salve for my personal pain in life. And you hear people talk about that a lot. But the church is simply a gathering of the redeemed people to practice what they're going to do forever in heaven. And that is they're going to worship and honor and glorify God and that is the direct by-product of knowing Him. And the more you know about God, the better able you are to worship Him.

And there's only one source to know about Him and that is the Word of God. So why do we relentlessly, unapologetically, continuously, enduringly, unequivocally teach the Word of God here? So that you will know the God you worship. And the better you know Him, the more able you are to worship Him and give Him glory. And that's the reason we exist. This is not about you; it's about Him. It's about setting you aside: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me." I mean, that's the call to salvation—self-denial. And as I said last time, we have literally flipped the church on its head in this generation. And the church desperately works to figure out what people want and give it to them.

In fact, you could sit with pastors and hear a discussion about why you shouldn't worship, or why you shouldn't teach the Bible because unbelievers don't want that. Marginal people don't want that. Fleshly people don't want that. Disobedient Christians don't want that; so we need to give them what they want. That is primarily what the market-driven church does. It's pretty simple. Every means that we can find to worship God becomes the mandate for what we do.

AUSTIN: So if you have that kind of a definition of church that it's not just a human institution based on human wisdom and human plans and human strategies, how does that impact the way you think about where to go to church?

JOHN: Well, first of all you want to find a people who are—to borrow the old hymn writer—"Lost in Wonder, Love and Praise." You want to find a people who are worshiping God in Spirit and in truth. Not who are having an emotional experience; not who are being hyped up by sophisticated lighting, you know, in a nightclub kind of environment, and singing kind of schmaltzy, emotionally driven songs. You want to find a people who know what worship is. And how do you know when you've found people who know what worship is? Because they can actually sit quietly, meditatively, and take in the reading of the Word of God because they love the Word of God, because the Word of God informs their worship, it's the God of the Word that they love, it's the God of the Word that they worship. They can't get enough of Him. And they will actually sit as you do, week after week, month after month, year after year, while I expound nothing but the Scripture. I don't do anything to entertain you. I don't do anything clever. I just open the Word of God and you take it in and you feast on it because it lifts your heart, does it not? It elevates your soul. It lifts you to praise and adoration and worship and obedience and holiness and virtue.

So you can call certain experiences in the contemporary church worship and it would have been the same twenty or thirty, or fifty, or a hundred years ago. There would have been things called worship that really weren't worship because they weren't informed by sound doctrine, a love of the Word of God, feasting on the Word of God, which really informs that true kind of worship.

So what are you looking for in a church? How do they handle the Word of God. And does the Word of God appear to be the absolute priority in everything? Not the personality of the preacher, not the

cleverness of the preacher, not the spin that's fun to listen to, not the programs that they have, you know, whatever clever programs churches might have. But you really ask one question, What do they do with the Word of God? You know, ministry is a very simple thing. Take the Word of God and give it to the people. Perfect the saints. And this is the tool to perfect the saints. You perfect the saints so that the saints can do the work of the ministry and minister to each other and build the church and then go out and reach the lost and evangelize them and add to the church. But it all comes out of the Word of God.

So you ask one question, How do they handle the Word of God? Do they handle the Word of God accurately? Paul says to Timothy—the old Authorized that I love—"Study to show yourself approved by God, a workman need not to be ashamed because you rightly divide the Word of truth." I mean, that's the bottom line. Preach the Word, divide the Word of God, or cut it straight, analyze it, teach it accurately. That's what you're looking for. And then you're looking for a church where their commitment to the Word of God is undergirded by personal integrity so that you know that the people who are teaching you the Word are living by what they're teaching.

AUSTIN: What do you say to somebody that their preference is a small church? You know, I hear that all the time: "I want a small church; I prefer a church that's little." This is not a little church.

JOHN: No. But I think God probably likes little churches better because He made more of them than He did big churches. So I don't have a problem with a little church. I just have a problem with a small mind in the pulpit. I don't have a problem with a little church. Look, some of the greatest preachers in the history of the church preach to a very small congregation. Some of the finest, noblest, gifted, capable preachers that have ever come out of this church, gone through seminary and gone out are pastoring a hundred people, seventy-five people, a hundred and fifty people, two hundred people, forty people—gifted, committed men. It isn't about that. But there are advantages to a large church, obviously—the enrichment of family, the enrichment of a children's ministry, youth ministry and all that. And, you know, I read an article many years ago that says you can have a hundred acquaintances in your life, about a hundred acquaintances. You have maybe outside your family, one, or two, or three, really, really close friends. And then you have a few more acquaintances, and it goes out. You know, if you're in a church of a hundred, you've got to take the hundred that show. If you're here, you can pick your hundred. So that's certainly...I would see that as an advantage. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's true.

JOHN: But let me answer that question another way. Why are there more people here? Why are these people here? Why are they here? They're here not because....(Laughter)

AUSTIN: I don't ask any questions tonight. I told you that really early on.

JOHN: Well, I'll answer it for you. (Laughter) They're not here because of the size of the church. They're here because of the priority of the Word of God. That's why you're here. That's why they're here. That's...I know, that's why you're here, yeah. (Applause)

AUSTIN: So it's about having the right priorities in finding a church.

JOHN: Yeah. Look, in reality, this is Los Angeles. What's the population of Los Angeles? Ten million people? How many have we got here tonight? Two thousand? I wouldn't say we put a big dent in the city since there are nine million, nine hundred and ninety-nine, and on and on, that are not here. So relative...that's a very relative statement.

AUSTIN: Sure.

JOHN: I can't build the church, I can only do what God's called me to do, and then He builds the church as the body is built up and edified by the use of spiritual gifts and ministries and mutual love and the one-anothers, and then have an effective impact and witness. The gospel spreads and the Lord saves whom He will by the power of His Holy Spirit and adds to His church. So to say this is a big church and something else is a small church is maybe relative to the city, or relative to the location. It's never been about that to me; it's always been about faithfulness. And so that's what you look for in a church. It's not about so much the style as it is how they handle the Word of God.

AUSTIN: That's really helpful. Let's talk about this church and a little bit why we do what we do. There's many people here who are new to our church. If you've been at our church for let's say less than five years, raise your hand. Less than five years. That's probably the majority of people. And so they probably catch on pretty quick around here.

JOHN: Why did you come here?

AUSTIN: I came here to go to seminary.

JOHN: Did you?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JOHN: How long ago?

AUSTIN: Eight years ago. Okay. The questions are supposed to go this direction. (Laughter)

JOHN: But I think you're an illustration.

AUSTIN: Honestly, I could have gone to any number of churches. Seminary guys say there are a lot of churches.

JOHN: Well, that's what I'm saying. You moved from Indian country, Albuquerque. Yeah.

AUSTIN: Yeah I did.

JOHN: And you came here.

AUSTIN: But honestly, it was an easy choice for us because we loved this church immediately as soon as we were here. Because....

JOHN: Why did you love this church?

AUSTIN: We love this church because of the teaching at this church. We love this church because of the congregation. We love this church because they have biblical theology. We love this church because they baptize people in water and church discipline people in sin. We love this church for a thousand reasons.

JOHN: Because it was biblical.

AUSTIN: Yeah, absolutely.

JOHN: I'm just making a point.

AUSTIN: And...I mean, that was the joy of our hearts and it's still, you know, why we love this church. I mean, Merilee and I absolutely adore being...just being a part of this. I can't believe you let me work here. I just like to come here on Sunday and worship.

JOHN: See, I wanted to hear all of that, and you never mentioned my name and that's very important to me. That's very, very important to me because everything that you talked about is based on this book. (Applause)

AUSTIN: You're why I came to the Master's Seminary. (Laughter)

JOHN: I don't even teach at the Master's Seminary, except occasionally. I'm sorry; I got you off track.

AUSTIN: No, thanks for that. It's 'cause we're not wearing ties that's throwing me off. It's in the bylaws, I think; we're supposed to wear ties.

JOHN: We changed the bylaws.

AUSTIN: Yeah, that's good. That's good. Let's talk about for those of us who are new here why we do what we do. Let's walk through a Sunday morning. Why do we meet on Sunday morning? Lots of churches have convenient times to meet, so you can watch football all day on Sunday. Why don't we have a Saturday night church?

JOHN: The Old Testament established the seventh day of the week, which is Saturday, to commemorate that God rested, and that was the Sabbath. After the resurrection, Jesus rose on the first day of the week, that's our Sunday. And from that time on in the New Testament, the church met on the first day of the week to commemorate the resurrection of Christ. And you never find them meeting any other time throughout the rest of the New Testament—first day of the week, first day of the week.

Even after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to them—you remember—on that first day, and that established that day. And it became known as the Lord's Day, and you find in Revelation chapter 1, John says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day." And it actually got that name, the Lord's Day. And, you know, through the history of the church, the idea of resting shifted from the old Sabbath to the Lord's Day. I'm not a Sabbatarian. I don't believe we are mandated to keep the Lord's Day as some kind of don't-work day, as it was in the Old Covenant.

AUSTIN: You work pretty hard on Sundays.

JOHN: Well yeah, but it isn't even that. It's...don't let anybody hold you to a Sabbath...Colossians 2. Don't let anybody hold you to a new moon. All those are shadows. The substance has come. Christ has come. He is our rest. We've entered into rest—Hebrews 4, Hebrews 5. So we don't have to keep the Sabbath as such. And then to have prescriptions about not walking and not working and all of that kind of thing. But...but it is the Lord's Day, and it became known as the Lord's Day. And from the beginning in my life as I began to think about ministry, I wanted it to be the Lord's Day and that's why it was so important throughout the history of the church that the church met Sunday morning and Sunday night so that they literally bracketed that day with worship. That literally defined that day. The worst possible scenario for me would be to have an hour-long service in the morning and that was it, so that everybody could bail out of church an hour after they walked in the door and go do whatever they wanted the rest of the day. That doesn't really grasp the essence of what it is to set aside a day that is devoted to the Lord. And that's why from the very outset, to this very hour, we have a Sunday morning and a Sunday evening to train people to bring them up that this is the Lord's Day. It isn't the Lord's Hour; it's the Lord's Day.

And I've...you know, I've been very resistant to say tacking on a Saturday night service to accommodate people who don't want to acknowledge the Lord's Day. I don't necessarily want to accommodate that. I'm grateful to be in that long line of faithful men who have upheld the Lord's Day for the life of the church, and that's a very important thing to me. So this is the day the church has met since the resurrection, and that's why we meet on the Lord's Day. And, you know, we've been accommodated in that by our culture for many years. I remember when nothing was open. I remember at Grace Church when nothing was open on Sunday. I'm talking here, this church—down the street, stores; nothing was open. Everything's shut down. There weren't any games going on for kids and families and activities and that, of course, all changed and now Sunday is virtually like Saturday. There's basically no difference. And so the church had to fight to keep that.

Or you could just cave in and say, "Okay, you know, you can schlep in on Saturday night, get your hour of service over, and then you can have all day Sunday to do what you want. But I'm doing everything I can for the sake of our church and for the sake of *the* church to say we desperately need in this world a day given to the Lord to sit under His Word, to worship with His people, to learn to love each other, to serve each other, pray together, to sing together. This is a world that is very difficult. We need all of this that we can get. (Applause)

AUSTIN: It's a compelling reason, I think. So you walk in here on a Sunday morning and I think anyone would notice that this church is different in its atmosphere and tone right off the bat than in many other churches. There's something serious about this place on Sunday. Something heavy. How would you...I mean, is that something that we've built here? How do you explain that kind of...it's not a...it's not a silly place. Nobody walks in here and expects comedies.

JOHN: No, well, what is the most serious thing a human being would ever do in his or her entire life? Worship. There isn't anything more serious than that. We have a society that doesn't know what serious is. We have a society that doesn't even know what formal is. We used to have Master's College graduation here. We had to stop because they turned this place into an absolute circus. All the crazy aunts and uncles came in here with bull horns, frog horns, screaming, yelling, acting stupid because they had never been to a formal event in their life. You know, we have a society that's so casual, so informal, that knows very little about anything formal. And I'm not just talking about formality for its own sake. But they take that same casual mentality over toward worship and they create a church service that's at that same level of casual attitude.

I've always believed that coming to worship you need to come thoughtfully, prayerfully, contemplatively, meditatively, with an open heart and an open mind, eager to hear the Word of God. This isn't about entertaining you. This isn't about making it as easy for you as we can. This isn't about as comfortable and as informal. This is the most serious thing you will ever do is come when you come on a Sunday morning to worship God.

So what do we do? We try from the beginning with a serious opening out of the Psalms or some part of Scripture to call you to worship from the Word of God, and then the choir calls you to worship in some elevated, beautiful, almost classic sense which lifts you and elevates you. This is our music; this isn't the world's music. They have nothing like it. They don't sing like this. They don't play like this. This is our music. This is apart from the world, not only in its lyrics but even in its form. We read the Word of God because we're told to do that until I come. Paul says to Timothy, read the Scripture, read the Scripture.

I remember John Blanchard, an English evangelist, who spent I think half his time in England and half his time in the southern part of America, traveling in Baptist churches. He came here and preached for a few days years ago, and he said, "Grace Community Church is the only church I've ever been in in 25 years in America where anybody read the Scripture." I was in shock. The only church you've ever been in where anybody read the Scripture? But we're told to read the Scripture. It's important for me not only to see myself as a prophet, to speak the Word of God, but as a priest to bring the people before God. And that's why I pray, that's why there's the pastoral prayer, which is not a prayer about, you know, issues of life and somebody's illness and all of that, but it collects the congregation and brings them from the Word of God into the presence of God and asks God to cleanse them and wash them and prepare them for worship. It's intended...that prayer is intended to make you think about worship, to make you think about what the Scripture says God has done. And I think I said this sometime. I don't know what the format was, but we do adult church. Did we talk about that last time? Yeah, we do adult church here. This isn't a junior-high event. Even our junior-high kids come to adult church. There's a time to have fun, but there's a time to be lifted up to serious things.

And yet there's a joy here. There's a ready joy here. I mean, they have laughed easily, readily. Their hearts are open. This isn't stuffy because there's a real joy there. There's a real love and affection for these truths, and they weep when they need to weep. They'll think deeply when they need to, and they'll laugh when it's appropriate. There's reality here. But I think one of the reasons we use older music is because it is the legacy of the church. It's the historic legacy of the church; that's our music. When you write something that's that good or better, we'll sing that too, as we do very often with some of the great stuff the Getty's have done and some of the things that have come out of Sovereign Grace and others that we sing tonight.

When the music written today reaches the level of that kind of doctrinal clarity and beauty of form, we'll add it to the stockpile and pass it on to the next generation. But that's our music. And we don't need this place to sound like a rock concert. That's not our music; that's not our world. So the reason things are the way they are is because it's intentional on our part.

AUSTIN: So everything that we do here is purposeful and centered around truth, including the songs that we sing.

JOHN: Yeah, and I think...I mean, just think of the sequence. You're called to worship. The choir in a beautiful way quiets your heart, calls you to worship, and then you worship. You sing, you sing, you sing, and you've offered praise to the Lord, a few hymns. Then it's time to sit down and hear from God. And read His Word and have a fresh revelation of His Word. And when that's done, it's time then under the power of that understanding of that Word to lift you up before God now that your mind is saturated with His Word. I read ten, fifteen, twenty verses that dominates your mind. Now your mind is ready to be lifted up to Him. So we have a time of prayer together from that vantage point of having heard Him speak, bring you into His presence and then the worship continues. We give you an opportunity to give because that's an act of worship. And then comes the Word of God. And, you know, years ago people would say to me, this was a common question, "How does your church worship when you preach for so much of the time? You take up so much of time for preaching, how do your people worship?" And my question is, How do your people worship if you don't take up that much time to teach the Word of God? On the basis of what do they worship? The more I tell them the truth of the Word of God, the more...the more fuel is poured on their worship.

So that's the process. And even at the end—and this might be helpful to people—some people have said to me, "Why don't you, you know, do something at the end to have an invitation or...."

AUSTIN: Yeah, there's things our church is missing like altar calls.

JOHN: Altar calls, yeah. So look....

AUSTIN: What meaneth this?

JOHN: Yeah. Look, all I can do...my responsibility is to make the truth clear. God's responsibility is to change hearts. I stop at the point of clarity. The Word convicts. The Spirit convicts. The Word clarifies. The Spirit clarifies and illuminates. People have said to me, "You know, you don't make a lot of application." No, that's right, I don't make a lot of application. But I do make a whole lot of implication.

AUSTIN: Help us understand the difference there. What do you mean by application?

JOHN: Well application is some specific, some specific situation in which this truth could be applied.

AUSTIN: Give your wife a Teddy Bear.

JOHN: Yeah, give your wife a Teddy Bear. Try this...tomorrow. Next time you run into somebody and they ask you this, try this.

Look, that's the Holy Spirit's work. My job is to make...is to bring the Word of God to bear on your heart so powerfully, so clearly, so convictingly that you feel the weight of that Scripture. You feel the burden of that Scripture. And you walk out feeling the burden of that Scripture, the Spirit of God will then direct its application. Too much application misses the point for most of the people. I can't find universal application unless I say universally pray; universally, you know, give out the gospel. But we all know that. So I think it's far more important that people understand a passage and that passage has its own weight. It brings a huge weight on the heart when the passage is made clear. And that's the divine weight. That's the weight of glory, in a sense, if I can borrow that expression. That's all I'm after.

And then it's up to the Spirit of God to take that where it's going to go. I stop short of manipulating people because I could do that. I mean, I could try to do that and I could manipulate them externally, but then I'm sending confusing signals because they may not be able to tell the difference between what they did because I told them to do it and what God is doing in their hearts. So, the idea of getting people to come forward and come forward and do all of that...you know, people have come to Christ in those kind of settings, and they do come to Christ. But a lot of people have the false conviction and the false assurance that they came to Christ when they didn't. So I think application is the work of the Holy Spirit. I just...there's the message; if you don't know Christ, you need to cry out to Him to save you. We're here to serve you. That would be what I think is a biblical approach.

AUSTIN: The imperatives and commands that come from this pulpit are biblical ones. You're not telling us what to do; the Word is telling us what to do.

JOHN: Look...yes, again you're back to the same thing in preaching. The weight of Scripture on the heart, the truth in the hands of the Spirit is what moves people to action. I can't follow you around and make you do little things. I can't. I can't chase you through all those little applications. But I can bring the weight of Scripture to bear.

AUSTIN: That's really helpful. Our church doesn't have altar calls. Our church doesn't have a drama team, I noticed.

JOHN: Yeah, you know why? Because this isn't a theater. And we don't do fiction. We do reality. I don't want to mix that. Yeah, I know there are preachers who like to, before their sermon, have some theatrical drama. I don't need theater; I don't need artificial; I don't need an act. This is reality. This is the truth. (Applause) Thank you, both of you. Yeah, I don't want....(Laughter)

Well, look. I mean, you wouldn't know what to do with a drama team. Somebody coming up here acting out something would be a long way...you say, "Why do you do it?" "Well, it makes great points, it's stimulating, it makes a great point." Does it make a better point than this? The drama is here. The power is all here. It's not in fiction; it's in fact. Does that make sense to you?

AUSTIN: It makes perfect sense to me. Yeah, I'm asking these questions for the sake of others, I promise. (Laughter) I'm a poor actor, anyway. So....

JOHN: No, no, that's a very important point that you made because there are preachers who are, I guess, acting in some ways. People ask me, "Do you think about gestures? Do you think about your voice? Do you think about your posture? Do you think about how you shape words?" Answer: absolutely not. I never think about anything except what does this verse mean. That's all I ever think about.

People have said, "Do you practice your sermon before a mirror?" If I practiced my sermon, it would not be before a mirror, but I don't even understand that. I am completely oblivious to what's going on. I have no concept in my mind about how anything is coming across or what I'm doing. I have one driving passion, and that is to make this passage clear. And whatever happens with my hands or whatever else, and I don't go very far, I'm kind of a talking head. But I think if I start parading around, then that's distracting. So I just stay where I am. But I'm unconscious of anything but the clarity of Scripture. That's the whole battle going on in my mind, I'm thinking about only that and nothing else.

AUSTIN: Let's talk more, a little bit more about preaching and what you do up here. There are preachers who wait for the Spirit's inspiration to speak to the congregation, and that's kind of their version. What do you do to get ready for a sermon?

JOHN: Well, what would happen if that came on Monday?

AUSTIN: We'd be in trouble.

JOHN: That would be a problem. No, I'm not. I don't...I know there....

AUSTIN: You could listen to a lot of unprepared preachers all over the world in lots of churches. You are not one of those men.

JOHN: Oh yeah, I heard a guy being....

AUSTIN: If you've got stuff in your Bible every week.

JOHN: Yeah, I heard a guy saying, somebody said, "How do you get your sermons up?" He said, "I don't get them up. I get them down." Really, spare me. If you're standing up here hoping something comes down, that's a bad situation. So, it's about preparation. I'm not looking for inspiration, and you're not looking for inspiration, what you're looking for is preparation. When I came to the pulpit this morning to preach that passage out of John, I had been thinking about those ten verses for months. I had been reading as extensively as I can read about those things and about the doctrine of

regeneration and soaking it in, and soaking it in, and soaking it in, and then there's kind of a filtering process where the Lord allows me to put it together hopefully in a sensible, reasonable, logical, understandable way. And I have that written on about ten little half sheets. All you guys know the little sheets I use. Nobody ever does any preparation for me. Nobody ever sees anything that I do. I do it all in my little study at my little desk looking out my window with my Bible and my books and my pen. We talked about that last time.

AUSTIN: We didn't talk about it with them.

JOHN: No, we didn't talk about it with them?

AUSTIN: No, no, and you're I-pad savvy, but you write all your sermons with a pen.

JOHN: I write with a pen. I write with a fountain pen and the reason is....

AUSTIN: It's not because you're 200 years old. And you're not...you purposefully use a fountain pen.

JOHN: Yes, because it runs out of ink, because it runs out of ink. And when it runs out of ink, I have to stop and I have to fill it. And almost everything that I say to you that is memorable and important to you has come out of my meditation. If I...I think all great preachers write their sermons. They don't slap them together on a computer because you can cut and paste something, print it off, get up and preach it, and it's never been through your soul. And you haven't meditated on it.

I have a chair that goes two ways. My chair goes up, and I study. And it goes back, and I think. Some student said—well, you were there—this student said, "Where do you come up with this stuff? Where do you come up with it?" I said, "I think, I think." And, you know, I'm not the brightest guy. I'm really not; I'm not. You know, I went through school. I never let my books get in the way of my education. I just, you know, but I sit back and I meditate and I think about it. And I use a fountain pen for the first notes that I take, and then I refill it and refill it. And I have about six little bottles of ink, and then I write another draft and then I mark it all up. And then I take out a little felt-tip pen because I need something that dries fast once I do the final form, and I write everything out. And then Saturday I come after that again and I mark it up and bring those notes here.

Now sometimes I get through them all; sometimes I don't. But that's essentially the process. And I would say this, we talked about this with the guys at the seminary, slow in preparation is better. It's not how fast you can slap the material together from all kinds of sources which computers allow you to do. It's how long can you meditate until you have clarity and until you've really thought these things through. And you will remember this because you teach in the preaching labs in seminary that it's so important to continually ask the passage questions, and that's what I do. I just keep asking questions, questions—What does this mean? If this means this, then what about that? What about that? How do

I illustrate that? What other passages could I use? How could I broaden that? How could I enrich that theologically?

I just keep firing questions at it and answering them in my own mind. So that's a process that takes a long time, and I think it's aided by using a pen because it's slower, and slower is better.

AUSTIN: Yeah. And I think it's helpful for the congregation to hear that. I'm not asking that as a want-to-be preacher, though I am. It's because I think they hear fountain pen and they think, "What? Ben Franklin? Like...fountain pen?" And I think it's incredible to hear the work that our pastor does for the glory of God and for us in preparing these sermons week after week, and we're so well-served by your preaching and, you know, I think most of us would use your name when we talk about why we come to church here, not because the glory goes to you, but because we're so grateful to God for your ministry of the Word to us. (Applause)

JOHN: Well, and I'm grateful to God for you beyond words and this is what I ought to have done and when I've done this I've only done what I ought to have done. I have to give an account and this is what I believe God's called me to do and it's a joy if I never preached a sermon, what a privilege it's been in my life doing this, studying the Word of God and enriching my own soul.

AUSTIN: And because you love it, we love it. Because it's clear to you, it's clear to us. Three weeks ago when you started this series in John 3, which has been magnificent and helpful in thinking about the new birth, and it's just again elevated in our worship of the God who regenerated us, you said something at the beginning of your sermon. You said something about listening to sermons is work, and you instructed us as to how to listen to sermons. Why don't you talk a little bit more about that? We've talked about the preparation side of preaching. Let's talk about the listening side. Help us be better listeners.

JOHN: You know, there's a way to sort of answer that question. There's probably not a church auditorium this size, or even nearly this size that wouldn't have my face on a screen up here. I mean, if you go to the typical contemporary church, you're going to see at least a ten-foot face of the preacher. That's irrelevant to me.

Where I want you to look is here. So whether you're in the front row or the back row, I want you engaging the text of Scripture, not my face. And that's why we do things the way we do. It isn't that we can't do that. I'm not interested in you looking at a screen. Anybody who goes to those places will tell you they never look at the guy, they never look at the person. You wouldn't either. You look at the screen because it's so huge. I don't want you to engage me. I want you to engage the Scripture. Wherever you sit here, I want you to engage the Scripture. So we open John 3 and I'm talking out of that text, right? And I say, "Go to verse 5, and what does verse 5 say? And what does verse 5 mean?" And then I give you cross references. That's the work of listening to preaching. I'm not an

orator. I don't stand up here and give some kind of oration to which you sit back and give a golf clap when I'm done. That's not the idea. I literally am engaging you with the text of Scripture, and the level to which you engage with Scripture is the level to which it benefits you. But that's the whole process of expository preaching. It...you can sit in the back row here and with your Bible open, you are intimately connected to what's being said—intimately connected to it, because it's here. And I'm just a voice coming out, better heard than seen by far, and you hear that and it makes that passage come alive to you. But the work is, you've got to make that commitment.

AUSTIN: And we're well-served by that instruction, I believe. The fruits of your work here and God's blessing on this place have made for a sound church, a church that loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and a church that enjoys a warm fellowship with one another. This is a sweet and blessed place. The effects of what God has done here have traveled outside the walls in obvious ways, talking to a world-famous author.

JOHN: You sound like you're talking about the church of Thessalonica.

AUSTIN: That's true.

JOHN: You know what? That's exactly what Paul wrote to them. "From you has sounded forth." And you are in God and in Christ and in the Holy Spirit, and you're a real church and you're a church that loves—the labor of love, the patience, the hope, waiting for His Son. And how old was that church? How long did Paul spend there? A few weeks?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

JOHN: It doesn't necessarily happen over a long period of time. It could happen in a short period of time. In the goodness of God if a people embrace the Word of God. So yeah, I understand that.

Well, what about outside this church?

AUSTIN: Yeah, things have come from your ministry here, hundreds of books, millions of messages downloaded, at one time given to people by hand with something called a cassette tape. And now downloaded from the Internet, millions and millions of downloads, and just talk a little bit about the scope of that ministry, and that's not something you planned. You didn't have that in mind when you began.

JOHN: Oh no. When I started they were reel to reel tapes, you know. And when we started a tape ministry, it was so somebody could haul this huge machine to a shut-in and put this reel up and put it across and play these reel-to-reel tapes for shut-ins. No.

You know, I've always....

AUSTIN: So that all began to benefit people in the congregation.

JOHN: Well yeah. The tape ministry started purely for people in the congregation and then early on the cassette came in. And we had a guy named Vern Loomis who said, "You know, we could make cassettes instead of the reel-to-reel, and we take them to the shut-ins." And that's what they did. It was for folks who couldn't come, and then they thought, "Well, we'll send them to missionaries." And it was all about our church and our church alone and then other people started saying, "Well could we get a hold of those tapes?" You know, I've said this many times, that my concern is always the depth of my ministry, not the breadth of it. If you take care of the depth, God will take care of the breadth. You offer Him something useful and He'll determine its extent.

I've never done anything. I don't have anything to do with any of that, any of it at all. I don't know if I mentioned this, an illustration of it recently. A man came to see me from Vietnam, did I talk about that? Maybe to you guys, not to them. But this man came to see me from...he's a pastor from Vietnam, and, of course, you remember we lost the war in Vietnam. We bailed on the thing and it went Communist; so all Vietnam is Communist. There are believers in Vietnam, but they can't really have a church as such 'cause it is Communist country. And yet pockets of Christians meet, you know, and rice paddies and little shacks all over Vietnam.

This guy came to see me and he showed me a little box, a little red box about that big, and he said, "I want you to listen to this." He turned it on and there was preaching coming out of it. As it turns out, there are 35,000 of these little boxes that are preaching to little congregations all over Vietnam. And what's in the little box is a chip with 35 hours of John MacArthur's sermons translated into Vietnamese. There are four translators working all the time to translate this because the people go through one chip in about two weeks, and they come back, turn in one chip, get another chip.

Well, I didn't even know anything about that. I never even...and now they're talking about making little boxes in other languages. So again, this is what happens if you preach the Word of God, it knows no bounds. So how in the world can a guy preaching in Southern California possibly communicate with somebody in a rice paddy in Vietnam? If I messed with my messages here to make them sensitive to the culture around us, if I preached the contemporary culture, if I talked to you in sort of Americanese vernacular, if I got caught up in cultural illustrations, I couldn't get my sermons out of my zip code—I couldn't. And I tell this to young preachers. If you can't get your sermons out of your zip code, change them. They ought to be universal. And so that's just to illustrate...that has nothing to do with me. Even Grace to You has nothing to do with me, really. I don't...that's a ministry that, you know, wonderful, wonderful people through the years have carried on since the early years of tape ministry and radio. And the Word just goes forward. And it amazes me; I never cease to be amazed by it.

Everything...I preach here out of this comes a sermon that goes all over the world. I preach here, out of that there's a wonderful lady, same lady forty some years types up every sermon I've ever preached and from those, books come, commentaries come, everything comes out of this pulpit right there. And it has for years.

AUSTIN: It's amazing to think about the effects of the Word of God through this place, and we're blessed to be a part of it. I think that's something that folks don't realize is that all that is connected to your commitment to truth from this pulpit. Talk about some of the impact that your commitment to the nations and how this church has mirrored that commitment, how that has impacted your ministry, and how that's impacted how our church reaches around the globe and outside of these walls.

JOHN: Well, it became apparent early on and I think in our ministry that the preaching of the Word of God wasn't going to be bounded here in America, it was going to go. And it went to the English-speaking world and then it started to jump into other languages. I remember before *glasnost* and *perestroika*, before the Russian empire broke up, that Russian people were translating my books by pencil in spiral-ringed notebooks and sending them back to Russia, the Soviet Union. And so some Soviet Union pastor said, "Would you come? Would you come?" And eventually I came and out of that they said, "Would you train us? Would you train us?" And then a training center comes. And now we have 16, 18. I don't know, we could have 20 in the next two or three years. We're going to send Jim now to Malawi tonight; lay hands on him and he's going to start a seminary with Brian Biedebach in Malawi, Africa because they're asking us to come and train them.

Listen, you need to understand this. The future of evangelism and the impact of the gospel in the world depends on the church. It doesn't depend on high-tech evangelism. It doesn't depend on some strategy. It depends on the churches in the countries of the world. And the churches in the countries of the world are only as good as their shepherds and leaders. And so the most critical thing you can do for the sake of evangelizing the world is to train pastors. And strong pastors make strong churches; strong churches have affected evangelistic outreach. So that's why the strategy has always been...they come to us and say, "We hear what you're saying, can you train us?" So you've done it; we've all done it; we go everywhere. Michael's leaving—When are you leaving? On Wednesday to go to Spain. How many times have you been there? Four times to train pastors, to train pastors. Jim, as we said, is going to Malawi; Kevin and Ron Hendrickson just got back from England and Italy. We're all over the place and what we're doing, we're not going and saying, "Okay, here's our program, you need to buy in." They're inviting us to come and they're saying we want the teaching that can prepare pastors to be effective.

This is amazing. And, of course, God gave us the Master's Seminary and we're just cranking out the guys that can go. And they just keep coming out of the seminary and taking their wives, and if they have children, off they go to the rest of the world. And the goal is to have churches like this,

committed to the Word of God, and then to do what our church does at Shepherds' Conference and in many other ways to train a generation of pastors in our country to be biblical in their ministry so the church can have an impact evangelistically.

AUSTIN: It's tremendous to think that we get to be a part of that ministry as a congregation. Talk...we started with those babies, those precious babies at the beginning of this hour. Talk about how families in this church are blessed to be in the church and how you use a church like this, a church that's committed to the truth, focused on being biblical in everything that we do and say, and committed to reaching the world for Christ. Talk about raising your family here, and I think it would be a good kind of final word, and then we'll send Jim.

JOHN: So a church is a collection of believing people who have gifts from the Holy Spirit and have the responsibility to fulfill the one-anothers—love one another, pray for one another, edify one another, all of those one-anothers. The stronger and more mature that group is, the greater will be their impact, right? That's obvious. And the privilege of raising your family here is that you have so many mature, godly people—who sat under the Word of God for a long time—to come around your children. Look at all these parents who came by with these little ones. They're not alone. They're not going to be doing this challenging task of raising those little ones to love Christ alone. The first time those little guys appear over there in the children's division, there are going to be people who care for their souls, and every time they bring back...well, you know...you've got those little kids. I spent...Patricia and I spent a few hours with some of our grandchildren a few days ago and the question was, "Papa, tell us some parables; tell us some parables; tell us another parable." "Grandma, tell me a story, tell me a story." "Papa, come and pray with me."

Where do they get all that? Well, it's coming at them; it's coming at them from everybody that knows them and loves them and speaks into their little lives. That's the value of a church like this. You can pick up your kids and haul them off to the latest "rock and roll church," but that might not be the safest and most secure and beneficial place for your children. What's going to be beneficial for your children is to have people come around them...we saw in that little video last week...who care for their souls and are mature in the faith and love those little ones and understand what the gospel is and help lead them to the knowledge of Christ. Patricia and I have said this through the years; people say, "Will your children love the Lord? Your grandchildren love the Lord?" Why? How did that happen? I said, "We had them in a good church. We had them in a good church. We weren't the only ones telling them the truth, everybody else was telling them the same thing and they found out that this isn't just our parent's message; this is a message that's coming from everybody.

And I think...given all the evil influences that come on children, young people...I mean, you're working with college kids, and given all the evil influences, I would think you would want your children in a church environment where you're going to have people who really care for those souls—around them all the time, speaking into their lives.

AUSTIN: So you're saying godly parents are not enough.

JOHN: I'm saying godly parents in the providence of God may have to be enough in some circumstances. But....

AUSTIN: Where there is no church, you mean?

JOHN: Yeah. I mean, there may be isolated situations of missionaries in isolated places, and they have to carry the burden on their own. There may be places where you're in a small location, or you're out in the country, you don't have a sound church. But if you have the resources that can come around...this is the body of Christ; that's how it functions.

AUSTIN: And I think you do great harm to isolate your family from that, right?

JOHN: Absolutely. I just don't think you gamble with your children. I want...I want everybody in my children's life when they're growing up speaking to them the same things that are precious to me.

AUSTIN: That's really good. So you're not the only one that believes that, is what they're seeing.

JOHN: And especially in my family because I'm supposed to believe that. I'm the preacher.

AUSTIN: Right. We're so blessed to have this church as a place we can worship together, and we're deeply blessed to have you as our pastor, so thank you, sir.

JOHN: Thank you.

AUSTIN: ...for your kindness and opening up your heart to us...thank you; we're grateful. (Applause)

JOHN: Thank you all; you're very kind. Thank you.

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