

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

### **John MacArthur's Life Testimony**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-33

JOHN: Hello, John MacArthur here, and for the next hour or so, I'm going to be doing something you won't often here me do. To start with, I'm not going to preach. In fact, I've stepped away from the pulpit and out of the Bible-teacher mode, and I'm actually in the studio here at Grace To You for the purpose of candidly sharing with you a little bit about myself, my testimony, maybe what makes me tick.

I, as you know, have studied and taught the Bible now for more than 35 years and in that time I've formed some strong friendships with the congregation of Grace Community Church and friends like you to whom we've ministered through the years on Grace To You. And as we've studied Scripture together, our hearts have certainly been knit together by shared passion for God's truth. It's not uncommon to meet someone in person for the first time, they've listened to me on the radio for decades and their first remark is, "Well, I feel like I know you." I hear that all the time. And at the most fundamental level, they do know me because they know my heart. And that's what comes through in my preaching.

But like any pastor, there's also a more personal side that some folks appear to be curious about, legitimate areas about which a pastor can and perhaps should open up. I don't naturally gravitate toward those things because my own desire is for people to learn to love the Scripture in the glories of Jesus Christ and not me. Bits and pieces of my testimony though certainly have found their way into my preaching over the years. And it's occasionally that I refer to myself, but it's pretty rare to string it all together and talk about my upbringing, my family, the influences and experiences that have shaped my life and ministry.

So, with some reluctance, I admit, but with the urging of several friends, I've agreed to spend some time today with my dear friend, Phil Johnson. He's here to sort of interview me and ask the questions that I hope you'll find interesting and helpful, questions of a more personal nature. And in addition to being Executive Director of Grace To You and my senior editor, Phil is a pastor, Bible teacher, conference speaker and theologian in his own right. Apart from my wife and children, Phil knows me about as well as anyone and as you'll hear, I don't think he'll back away from asking some tough and interesting questions.

Frankly, at this point, I'm not sure where he's headed or what he'll ask. That said, Phil...welcome, my friend.

PHIL: Thank you, John, and it is a privilege to be here. I know you don't like to talk about yourself and so let's ease into this and I'll get you to talk a little bit about your ancestry. It's well-known that you're a fifth-generation pastor. Tell us about your grandfathers and the heritage of all those pastors in your background.

JOHN: Sure, well my Dad, obviously, is still preaching and teaching the Bible in his ninetieth year and has been doing that for about almost 70 years now. And was for many of the years, those years, a pastor and evangelist. His father, my grandfather, Harry MacArthur, was a pastor. He was converted in his twenties. He worked for the Canadian Railway...Railway in Calgary, he was chief telegrapher in those days and was converted to Christ and called to ministry. So he left Canada, came down to California. Attended the Bible Institute of Los Angeles and was trained as a pastor and then went into pastoral ministry. And, of course, I only knew him as a pastor. And so I used to, as a child, listen to my grandfather preach. And his wife, my grandmother, had a father who was a pastor in Prince Edward Island on the east coast of Canada. And his father was a pastor back in Scotland. And so,...

PHIL: Wow, so it goes back not only five generations, but across at least three countries.

JOHN: That's right.

PHIL: Do you have clear memories of hearing your Grandfather preach or...

JOHN: Yeah, I was a child...he died when I was about ten. But I had heard him preach in numbers of times before he died.

PHIL: Do you think his style had any influence on you? Do you remember anything?

JOHN: No, I don't think so. He was more of...he was more of a sort of a textual preacher, he would...he would give a text and then he would tell some stories and he liked to read a poem. He was very evangelistic. A little bit of a different style.

My Dad took it a little different direction. My Dad became more of a Bible expositor, he wasn't a textual preacher, he was more of an expositional preacher. And so I picked up on my Dad's pattern of preaching.

PHIL: Hum...amazing. Now I've heard you talk about your Grandfather and when he was dying, I believe it was your Grandfather who said he had one more sermon he wanted to preach.

JOHN: Yeah, my Grandfather was just really a relentless preacher. That's all he ever wanted to do. That was his passion and his love. He...he preached relentlessly, not only in his church but all over the place. He was one of the people in L.A. who started a whole movement of boys' clubs across Los Angeles and was very involved in the development of a very extensive ministry and he would travel

around and preach at those events. He was a part of a Baptist association where he was preaching here and there and everywhere. He was a sort of in-demand speaker. And so he was...he was always preaching. And he had prepared a sermon even though he was very ill. He died in his fifties of cancer. They were trying to deal with his cancer in those days in rather unsophisticated ways.

And he came back and he prepared to preach, but he became too weak to preach and so he was on his deathbed, virtually. And my Dad and I went in the room, my Dad has recited the story to me many times, I probably wouldn't remember it all, although the scene is vivid in my mind, I wouldn't remember the conversation. And he asked my Grandfather, you know, "Is there anything I can do for you, Dad?" And you wouldn't have expected...you know like, "Fix my pillow," or, "Get me a drink of water," or something.

And he said, "Well, I just want to preach one more sermon."

Well, there's no way you could arrange for that to happen. He was just too weak and he was dying. And...but he had prepared a sermon and, you know, that's like fire in your bones, like Jeremiah said, you get one in, you can't get it out, you know. You need to deliver your soul. And so he was very exercised about that. And the irony of it all was that he had prepared a sermon on heaven, and the sermon was called, "Heavenly Records."

And my Dad asked him, "Where are your notes, Dad?"

And he told him they were in his little study in the house. It was at his house that he was dying. And my Dad got his notes and they were fairly extensive notes and so he printed them up and distributed them at his funeral, which occurred a few days after. And so everybody that came to the funeral was given a copy of "Heavenly Records," so I always like to think that my Grandfather preached on heaven from heaven.

PHIL: Yes.

JOHN: He was so true to the end that he even preached a sermon after he was gone.

PHIL: Amazing. Now your Father has also been an author. And he had...he still has his own radio broadcast.

JOHN: Yes, he's...he's...my Grandfather started a program called, "Voice of Calvary," which was a weekly radio and television program. We did live television in the days of "Beany and Cecil," you know, when television first started. Live television every Sunday night. But my Dad preached on the television and that's where I started preaching, too, early on, some of the Sunday night TV programs. But my Grandfather started the "Voice of Calvary" radio program something like 65 years ago and my Dad's first role was to play the theme song on the marimba.

PHIL: Huh.

JOHN: And so he would beat out the theme song and my Grandfather would come in and do the preaching. And my Dad took over that program and has kept it going, it's probably on twenty....twenty-five stations now, even some on the east coast, mostly on the west coast, a weekly program in which he deals primarily with apologetics, defending the faith. That's always been his passion. Teaches a Bible study every Sunday in the First Baptist Church of Eugene, Oregon where he once was pastor. And goes to his office every day to answer the mail and writes his monthly newsletter and just kind of carries on his ministry.

PHIL: Amazing stamina.

JOHN: In his ninetieth year, he's a great example of, you know, running the race to the very end. He's following the pattern his Father set for him.

PHIL: When he took over as speaker, did he offer to let you take over on the marimbas?

JOHN: That would have been a disaster. I could have played the ukelele, but not...

PHIL: Tell us a bit about your childhood. Where did you grow up? Was it here on the west coast?

JOHN: Yeah, I was born...I was born down in Los Angeles at St. Vincent's Hospital, which is still a functioning hospital in the city. My Dad, at the time, was pastor of a Baptist Church down in Manchester area of Los Angeles, now would be the South Central Los Angeles, known as Watts today, a very different cultural situation down there, but my Dad was pastor there when I was born, first child born to he and my Mom. And through the years he migrated for a little while into evangelism. And that was in the fifties. So he had an extensive ministry. And in the years of his evangelism, for a little while we lived in Philadelphia and we lived in Chicago. I was very sick in Chicago with Rheumatic Fever, which left me with a residual heart murmur that by the goodness of God eventually healed itself, probably through my athletic activity.

But I have some vague memories of living in Philadelphia. I think mostly because I was in the first grade there in a little school. But apart from a few years in Chicago and Philadelphia, lived my whole life in southern California.

PHIL: And...in fact we said you don't like to talk about yourself, but when anecdotes about your life tend to find their way into your sermons, it seems to me that a lot of them are stories about how you got in trouble. Did you have a streak of mischief in you as a child?

JOHN: Well I would like to think of it as curiosity, Phil.

PHIL: (Laugh)

JOHN: I do have a great curiosity. And I love to see what things would do if I did this, or that to them. Or, I mean, I don't know, one time my little sister was...my little sister, Jeanette, was in her little playpen in the kitchen, it was really cold and she kept say, "I'm cold, I'm cold," she was about three and I was about five or six. And so I took the pillows off the couch and put them in the stove, in the oven. I didn't know, I just stuffed them in the oven and turned the oven on.

PHIL: (Laughing)

JOHN: And, of course, when I could smell them, I figured they were warm enough to put in her little playpen so she could get warm. And I took them out, and they were on fire on the back.

PHIL: Ooh.

JOHN: And when I pulled them out and realized that, I just kind of flipped them and they landed inside the playpen and so I...my mother says I went in the bedroom and said, "You better get up," it was early in the morning and they were in the bedroom, I said, "You better get up because Jeanette's on fire." And my Mom's jaw dropped and my Dad says, "What are you talking about?" But having lived with me for six years, they realized there could be some truth to the statement. And they came bolting out to the kitchen and sure enough, these pillows are going up in smoldering flame and they grabbed her out of there. And I don't know, I was really just trying to help, Phil...I...

PHIL: (More laughing) Pretty helpful.

JOHN: One time my Mom says that I...I wanted to see...I got a dozen eggs she had bought and I lined them up in the hall and broke them all with a hammer, just one at a time, whack...whack...whack. You know, I don't know why. It wasn't that I was particularly disobedient, I was spanked so often I learned the consequence of that. There was just something about Things seeming to be curious and wondering what might happen if I did this or that, you know.

PHIL: Yeah, and I've heard one story about how you played traffic cop.

JOHN: I did. That was really dumb. There was a big intersection near where we lived and I went down there and we were playing as kids, and I guess somebody suggested that I should be a traffic cop. And so I went out in the intersection and started stopping people, holding up my hand one way and the other way, and I turned one side and held up my hand and it was my Dad who was aghast and got out of the car and threw me in the car and applied some serious discipline when I got home. But, you know, they were always kind of shocked at the range of things that I was interested in doing and I would take any challenge that anybody would give me. I don't know why, but...now remember, I

was pretty little when those things happened, probably before I was ten years old.

PHIL: How old when you did the traffic cop?

JOHN: Probably seven or eight. Yeah.

PHIL: That's pretty bold. That same kind of boldness, I suppose, you still have today.

JOHN: (laughing) Yeah, it's better directed, I think.

PHIL: (Also laughing) So I'm sure your parents must have prayed for you.

JOHN: Yeah, my Mom says she did. I had bicycle accidents frequently, split my head open. You know, I don't know, I sometimes would slide down the drains to get in the flood control and drainage systems and, you know, I don't even know why I'm talking about those things except that my Dad always tells those stories, they're like family legends. You know, if you only knew the real guy. I just think I was filled with curiosity and I...I think that's one of the reasons why I give so much time to the understanding of Scripture and so much time in trying to understand God's Word. I...I just have this curiosity which I think the Holy Spirit has directed in a fruitful way into my interest in Scripture.

It also...it also impels me to read a lot cause I'm curious about so many things and I find them helpful in my ministry, as well.

PHIL: How old were you when you first recall sensing your need for Christ?

JOHN: Well I always believed the gospel. I don't ever...I don't ever remember a time when I didn't believe the gospel. I mean, it was so wonderfully modeled by my Mom and Dad, it was so consistent. They were exactly at home what they were in the church. And what my Dad was in the pulpit he was in the house. And Christ was always very wonderful to me and inviting to me. And my Mom and Dad lived out their Christian life before me. And so, I never rebelled against it. I always knew I needed Jesus to be my Savior.

But there was an incident when I was about nine or ten. I had gotten involved in some vandalism because some kids had kind of prompted me to do it. My Dad was actually preaching in another town and he took me with him for the week of evangelistic meetings and some kids vandalized a school. And they happened to be, one of them happened to be the pastor's kid and so he drags me along, you know, my Father takes me to spend the week with this pastor's family with him. Anyway, I get involved in this thing. And they did some stuff in the school and I came back and I was...I felt terrible and frightened by it. And I sat down on the steps with my Dad...as a result, I don't know...remember the exact time sequence, but I said, "You know, I think...I'm not a good boy and I need the Lord to forgive me." And that was sort of an initial prompting. And I remember my Dad praying with me on the

steps that the Lord would save me. There may have been other times that I brought it up, but that one stands out in my mind. And as to whether I was actually converted at that time, I don't know. Again, in the years following I never rebelled, I was always responsive to the things of Christ. But I don't know that they were really the dominant matters of my life and the priorities that early.

PHIL: So you're saying...are you saying it would be difficult for you to put your finger on when your conversion took place?

JOHN: Yeah. I've never been able to do that. And it doesn't bother me. I think I'm one of those kids...I was one of those kids that never rebelled and always believed. And so when God did His saving work in my heart, it was not discernable to me. I went away to high school and for all I knew, I loved Christ, I was part of the ministry of the church. I went away to college and I wanted to serve the Lord and honor the Lord. I was certainly immature. But at some point along the line, I really do believe there was a transformation in my heart, but I think it may have been to some degree imperceptible to me because I didn't ever have a rebellious time, I didn't ever revolt against, you know, the gospel or not believe. And I guess that's...in some ways that's a grace act on God's part. So that all that wonderful training found some level of fertile soil in my heart and none of it was wasted.

PHIL: Right. So you went to college. You went to a Christian college.

JOHN: I did. My Dad wanted me to go to Bob Jones University. I didn't want to go. I wanted to play football and baseball and basketball. They didn't have any athletics.

PHIL: Was it difficult giving up sports? I mean, that was a priority.

JOHN: Oh it was very difficult. It was very difficult. I mean, I...in my high school days I basically, you know, lived to compete. And...

PHIL: How many sports did you play?

JOHN: Well, I played in high school, football-baseball-basketball and I ran track, I was a sprinter.

PHIL: And from what I hear, you did excel in football.

JOHN: Well I got a lot of scholarship offers in basketball, football, even baseball.

PHIL: So you turned down scholarship offers in order to go a school with...

JOHN: With no athletic program.

PHIL: Now you said you traveled with a quartet and sang and preached. Did you enjoy preaching in those days?

JOHN: Yeah, but I was really bad at it. I mean, I didn't know how to do it right and I...the first time I preached, they took me to a bus depot in Spartanburg, North Carolina...or, South Carolina. And they dropped me off, these older students, I was a first-year student, and they said, "You go in the bus depot and get a crowd and preach."

PHIL: Wow!

JOHN: And so they did, they dropped me there and I went in there, had my Bible in my hand and I walk in to this bus depot and there's... a lot of people in those days travel by bus. I'm in there and I'm looking around this motley bunch and so I just started preaching, you know, a gospel message. And you could just see people looking at me saying, "The poor kid, he looks intelligent, it's so sad, you know, he's got some kind of defect," or something. And I thought, "You know, this doesn't make any sense at all. And so I did it for about ten minutes and then I walked out the door and I went down the street to a kind of a dance hall where they're having a high school dance or something and I just sat outside and witnessed to kids as they went in and out. Which I thought was much more sensible but...I mean, that's where I first got my start preaching. And then sometimes I would go to some mission to preach, or go down to some base where the military were to preach, or some school to preach in a chapel, or something like that. That's where I started.

PHIL: So after two years at Bob Jones University, what happened?

JOHN: Well, the short version is I transferred to Pacific College for a number of reasons. One, they had recruited me like crazy for football. And they would take...the second reason, they would take my credits from Bob Jones which were not transferable to any place because they were a non-accredited school.

PHIL: So you didn't have to start over.

JOHN: I didn't have to start over. I had an opportunity to go to USC and play football there, but they wouldn't take any credits. And so I thought, "Nah, I can't go back and do my whole education."

So, they wanted me badly to play football, they had developed a pretty extensive football program. They had a great basketball program and baseball program. And they wanted me to participate in everything, which is what I had waited to do. I had been through a horrific car accident after my freshman year. I shouldn't have survived. I should have been dead. I was thrown out of a car going 75 miles an hour. I survived that. That's one of the reasons I went back the second year, I felt like the Lord was dealing with my heart. And it was during that summer of my first and second year that I really knew that I was called to the ministry. And that particular call to the ministry was so firmly established, I thought, "Well maybe that's the reason God sent me there the first year, I'll go back the second year." But after the second year, it was apparent to me that that was not taking me anywhere

I needed to go.

What I am grateful for is ten units of Greek the first year, and six more the second year. So after two years, I actually had already under my belt sixteen units of Greek which equipped me for my emphasis on the New Testament. But then I went to Pacific College in order to participate in athletics because they would take all my credits.

PHIL: Now tell us about your car accident, because I know that was pivotal in your life.

JOHN: Well, we were coming home after the first year, there were six of us in this little two-door Ford Fairlane car flying down the highway in Alabama. The driver lost control, flipped the car in the air. Basically a single-car accident, because he was trying to pass somebody and got on the other shoulder. I don't know whether he nodded off, or...anyway, tried to recorrect and come back and set the car into a spin and then eventually it flipped. All five kids stayed in the car. Nobody had seat belts in those days, but all five stayed in the car. The car landed on its roof and spun around on its roof without rolling any further. And the reason it didn't roll any further was, my door flew open and when the car rolled over on its roof, my door acted like a right-angle brace and kept it from rolling. I was then sliding down the highway beside the car. I could see it spinning beside me and went about a hundred twenty-five or thirty yards on my back. And I was still conscious in the state of complete shock, but conscious.

PHIL: But seriously injured.

JOHN: Yeah, ...well, I had third-degree burns, friction burns. My back literally was raw down to the bone because, you know, you're going fast down the asphalt highway, so...but I had no broken bones. And I stood up and walked off the highway and I realized I was alive. And I looked at the kids and they started crawling out of the car. And on the front I still had my shirt and pants and belt, on the back...nothing but asphalt all imbedded in there. And so they got me, they took me in a car, a guy in a car took me to Birmingham, which was like a hundred miles away.

PHIL: Oh!

JOHN: They put me...to take me to the hospital and I got in there and they didn't know what to do with all that stuff inside my back. And they decided to try and scrape it out and it was such a horrific agony that they stopped. And then they decided to lay strips of what they called feurisin(?) which is a healing agent for burns all through my back and they wrapped me like a mummy. I had it on my elbows, my hands, my shoulders, my knees, and they wrapped me like a mummy and said, "You know, we're shipping you to California." And so it was all wrapped and then when I got to California, they...I was in for more pain because they decided that that was a bad thing to do so they decided to tear all those strips of stuff that was in my flesh out and it was pretty horrific stuff.

Then I would lie in my bed on my stomach for about three months and let that all heal. At the end of which I really was ready to do whatever God wanted me to do. And I knew by then I was going to preach and teach. And so I ended up that year at Pacific College playing on their football team. Had a great time, played three seasons there...football, baseball, basketball. And that was a fulfillment of something I wanted to do as a kid.

PHIL: Did it get it out of your system, the sports?

JOHN: Oh, I just loved it. I mean, I had so much affirmation and I did it well. You know, if you can sing, you sing. And if you can run, you run. You know, and I could do it so I did it and thoroughly enjoyed it and it became a platform for me to give a testimony witness. You know, I was "player of the week" and I spoke at the Kiwanis Club deal and I just got up and gave my testimony about Christ. And a guy came to me and said, "I know a girl in the hospital who is...her boyfriend shot her through the neck, she's a quadriplegic, she's a head cheerleader at a high school. You know, I hear what you said about your life, would you go and talk to her in the hospital?"

I'm a kid, you know, I'm just in my college...my last college year of football and I went to the hospital. And I saw her come to Christ. And it was so incredible that God could use me to bring this gal who had been a quadriplegic for like a week or two to Christ and she went on, by the way, to marry a Christian guy who cared for her. And I just said, "You know, this is what matters."

So I told my coach, I still have a stack of letters somewhere, an old scrapbook from the football...pro football teams, and I just said, "You know, tell them I'm...I'm not going to play. I know where God wants me." And then I went to seminary. And after my first seminary year at Talbot, I got a call from the Cleveland Browns, they had a great wide receiver named Paul Warfield who had broke his collarbone in the August practice and they needed another wide receiver and my name came up. And I said, "No, I can't, I really...I'm going to stay in seminary and keep doing what I'm doing."

PHIL: So that's quite a dramatic change from when you started college until you got into seminary. Now you're serious about being a student.

JOHN: Yeah, and nobody could believe it. But when I went to seminary after all this and I knew this was the course of my life, it all changed because everything I studied was about the Word of God. Everything I studied came out of the Bible. And I just had an avaricious appetite for all of that. And so I just consumed that and my parents, you know, were justified in all their speeches they gave me about not doing my best because I started to do academically what I probably was capable of doing before. I'm not a genius, by any stretch of the imagination. There were a lot brighter guys than me in college and in seminary. But I had the appetite to dig into it because I loved it and I just had...that's where my curiosity got directed.

PHIL: Right. Yeah. Now you went to seminary here in Los Angeles.

JOHN: Yeah, I went to seminary at Talbot Theological Seminary which was associated with Biola the Bible Institute. And the reason was because the dean was a man named Charles Feinberg. Charles Feinberg was a formidable biblical scholar and a man who was passionate about the authority of Scripture, passionate about the Word of God, just a converted rabbi, basically, studied 14 years to be a rabbi. Brilliant, brilliant mind, knew 35 languages, learned Dutch in a couple of weeks. His wife was a part of the "Fiddler on the Roof" Jewish community that came out of Russia. She was also a brilliant, brilliant person and, you know, their daughter was valedictorian at UCLA. Their two sons are both double-doctorates, they have PhD's and ThDs and there was just an incredible genetic pool of brain power in that family.

Well Feinberg just knew the Bible and loved it passionately. And I wanted to be under a man who had a passion. I wanted to be under a man who was not just an academic but somebody who literally bled the Word of God and was serious about it. And somebody who was way beyond me and so I went to that seminary just for him, to be my mentor, my professor and took every course that he offered.

PHIL: And he took you under his wing.

JOHN: He did. He...he decided...in fact, my Dad brought me into his office when we first went down there and he said, "This is my son, Johnny." I was always known as Johnny. "And I want you to make him into a Bible expositor."

And Dr. Feinberg said, "Well what has he been up to now?"

And he said, "Well he's basically been a football player."

And Feinberg kind of looks over his glasses like...are you kidding me? You know, some brain-dead jock I'm going to turn into a Bible expositor? So anyway, he said to my Dad, "I'll do my best."

And you know what made it really neat was he had a son, Paul Feinberg, who teaches at Trinity Seminary, and Paul was a pitcher on the UCLA baseball team. And so...and I had pitched in college. And so we just hit it off as buddies. And so I had access to the family through Paul. And Feinberg found out, you know, we had this friendship and it just enhanced the possibilities and as time went on, he did take a personal interest in me, very personal. Until I failed him, he asked me to preach a certain sermon on a certain text in chapel, and I butchered it. And it just...he was so angry at me for doing it because I had misrepresented the intent of the text that I thought he was going to give up on me, I really did. I thought it was curtains from then on.

And he called me into his office and he just rants around. "How could you do that? How could you possibly do that? How could you completely miss the point of the passage?" And it was the greatest lesson I ever learned...greatest lesson. I guess one of the particular joys of my life is when the family

invited me to preach at his funeral. So they must have gotten word from him toward the end that I had figured out how to get the point of the passage.

PHIL: That left an indelible point in your mind, I know it did because I've heard you talk about it.

JOHN: Yeah.

PHIL: And you know...

JOHN: Look, you have one man you want to please. All right, this guy mattered to me. I wanted to please him. I wanted to show him that his time invested in my life was not wasted. I wanted to show him that I would carry the baton. I wanted to show him that I would be faithful to the heritage that he had given me and that the professors that he had surrounded himself with, Rosscup(?) and Thomas in particular, who now teach at the Master's Seminary, and were my teachers, that these guys hadn't wasted their time on me, that I was going to be faithful to this charge that they had given me. And so you've got that going and you go up to preach and the whole faculty is standing behind you and they're expecting you to deliver something that reflects the investment they've made. And then you've got the student body out there and you want to impress them that you're making it and you're doing what you're supposed to, and then you miss the whole point of the passage. And the faculty can't believe it and are beginning to wonder whether like the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians, you know, your whole ministry is in vain.

PHIL: (Laughs) Now was it...

JOHN: And the student body are looking at you going...puh-puh-puh.

PHIL: So to this day when you prepare a message, you hear that voice in the back ear?

JOHN: That little Charlie Feinberg on my shoulder saying, "Don't...whispering to me...don't miss the point of the passage." That's a great lesson.

PHIL: It is, it is.

JOHN: You know, I mean...failure is the backdoor to success. You just don't want that pain again.

PHIL: You said once that he gave you a set of books, too, when you graduated.

JOHN: Well, when I graduated, I disappointed him again because he told me I had won some award for exposition for my seminary career, you know, my grades and the classes in exposition. And he called me in to thank me and all this. And then I didn't turn a paper in because, you know, you get to your last courses, and your last deal and it was a final little paper and my grades were good enough, I was going to graduate. And Dr. Thomas whacked me down a grade and he didn't know that that was

going to happen to me. And so the next day he found out that I had not won the award because I didn't turn in this little paper. And he called me in and gave me another lesson about no matter how far you go, you haven't gone all the way until you've finished. And great lessons. I mean, he just said that's not tolerable. That is not acceptable.

And then as his parting shot, he...I walk into his office, just the day of graduation, he's got this box full of Keil and Delitzsch which is a Hebrew text commentary in the Old Testament, it's about 25 volumes. And it's his own personal set. He's been marking in it all his ....all his years of teaching. And, you know, highlighting the good stuff and all this. And so he says, "This is for you, I'm giving this to you. Now you have no excuse."

PHIL: Wow!

JOHN: So he gives me this. I go marching out to my car with these two big boxes full of this. I think recently I've...it was pretty worn then and it's so shattered now I took it down...I'm taking it down to the seminary library, maybe they can put it in their archives as little memorabilia.

PHIL: Yes.

PHIL: Wow. What other influences do you recall from seminary?

JOHN: Well, there were a number of them. I think the thing that I go back to so often in seminary is you have to learn the Greek, you have to learn the Hebrew. You need to learn the framework of theology, all those kinds of things. There are some great insights that we get in the intensity of church history and all that. But I think the thing that stands out most is the out-of-class intimate times with professors where you probe deeper than the lecture. Where they take an interest in your life. And that's something that's so very valuable to me. There were only a hundred and twenty-five guys in the seminary at that time.

One other guy I remember was a guy named Ralph Kuyper, Ralph Kuyper is a name that some people will know. The name Donald Grey Barnhouse, everybody would know, the great, great Philadelphia preacher at Tenth Presbyterian. Preached a Bible Study Hour on network radio across America. He had a secretary named Ralph Kuyper. Ralph was a little short guy, almost totally blind, could see ten percent out of one eye. But he was just the funniest guy you ever met. He was hilarious. I mean, everything he did was funny. Everything he said was funny. And yet he was a serious scholastic. He did a lot of Barnhouse's secretarial work in research, but he taught me one thing that has literally defined my ministry through the years. And that was, whenever he explained a passage, he explained it with another passage.

PHIL: Huh...

JOHN: I never saw anybody do that. I never heard anybody do that. My Dad never did that. Nobody I ever heard in chapel at the seminary ever did that. He would...he would take a passage and explain that verse with other verses.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: So it was Ralph Kuyper that taught me to explain the Bible with the Bible. And he said that when you do that you have authority in your illustrations and people learn the Bible and you see the cohesiveness of Scripture. And he taught me to do that and I have followed that to the letter through all these years.

PHIL: Interesting because that's one of the things I would say you taught me to do.

JOHN: Yeah, that's really an inimitable characteristic of what I do.

PHIL: Well you started after seminary, you started to get more education, right? Didn't you begin a doctoral program?

JOHN: Yeah, I decided...well, they wanted me to think about coming back and taking a position in the seminary, you know...

PHIL: At Talbot.

JOHN: Yeah, becoming whatever at Talbot or Biola in those days, would I consider going on to get a doctorate so I could come back. And so, I thought...well, I don't know what the Lord has for me. At the time I was serving at the seminary and so I thought, "Well maybe I ought to get a doctorate." So I went to Claremont School of Theology which is the only place you could go to get a doctorate and it was liberal, as liberal can be. But I thought maybe I've got enough seminary units that they'll leap-frog me into something I can just sort of wrap up and get their doctoral program over with. And they gave me 200 books to read, they were in French and German. So I went off to a local junior college for a couple of semesters and learned German. And then they started to assign me my first classes and the first class was, "Jesus and the Cinema." And the other class was, "The Jesus Hermeneutic." And as soon as I saw the class descriptions I said, "I'm done." There's no reason for me to have my convictions, you know, attacked and assaulted by this kind of nonsense.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: And so I dropped out of the program.

PHIL: But you did...you did work for Talbot, you were on their staff.

JOHN: Oh I was on there for almost three years and I was there at the seminary and most of the time I was traveling and preaching. They wanted me to represent the school by kind of being the demonstration of what they did when they trained a guy. I would go out and do expositional preaching and I was...I was Youth For Christ, Campus Crusade, Young Life, every camp, every youth convention, churches, colleges, universities. I preached about 35 times a month for nearly three years. And that was like cramming ten years experience into three.

PHIL: Is that where you really honed your preaching skills?

JOHN: I think so.

PHIL: So it was during those years while you were speaking for Talbot that you met your wife. Is that right?

JOHN: Actually, I met Patricia before I worked for Talbot. I met Patricia when I was still a seminary student. We were married at the end of my second year in seminary. I...I remember taking Patricia to my football games because I wanted her to see me play. I wanted to take her to the games. I thought if there's no other way to win this girl, you know, I'll wow her on the football field. And thought I could get her to...so I remember her standing on the sidelines in a few games, we have some fun little pictures of her standing beside me when I'm in a football uniform at the end of a football game. So it was actually at the end of my college career that we met. She was a friend of my sister's and her dad was Sunday-school superintendent in my Dad's church.

PHIL: Oh.

JOHN: Precious guy and great family.

PHIL: So tell us how you came together. It's an interesting story there, I know.

JOHN: Well, yeah, she was a friend of my sister and so she was around the house. Even when I was gone away in those first two years of college at Bob Jones in the east, she was a friend of Jeanette's and so she would be at the house. I can't remember exactly when I first started recognizing her, but she was the cutest girl I had ever seen, fun, loved the Lord. I always say, and it's true, she could cook. She just...she was just the best, the...

PHIL: Yes, I've heard you say that one of the things that attracted you to her from the beginning was she made great sandwiches.

JOHN: Yeah, you know I never had a sandwich like she would give me. She'd make me a sandwich and it was just...it was one of these Dagwood things, you know, and I was always hungry when I was playing ball and things. But anyway, she just seemed generous. I saw it in her sandwiches. She just did more than, you know, the sort of basic thing.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: That was her. So anyway, she, however, at the time was engaged to another guy. And they were preparing to get married. So I just didn't do anything. Well then it was time for her to get married, she had the wedding invitations addressed in the trunk of the car but she couldn't bring herself to mail them. Well this is pretty strange. And everybody is saying, "You've got to mail those things, you know, the wedding's coming and you've got to send..." She couldn't bring herself to do it...to mail them. And I wasn't really a factor. It was God, just restrained that whole thing. And she gave them...she pitched the wedding invitations, gave the guy his ring back. And at that point I knew she was in significant struggle and that's when I thought, "Well, there's no harm in trying."

So I said, "Hey, maybe that all happened because you're supposed to marry me." I didn't know, I figured, why not go for the moon and see what happens. And that was kind of hard for her to swallow at the time, but I said, "I don't know if this is true, but..." So I took her home after church one night, I was her teacher. When I was playing football in those last couple of years I would, on Sunday mornings, come in and teach the college Sunday-school class and she was there. So I for a couple of years had been her Bible teacher, so I had a little bit of influence in her life from teaching. And so we were drawn together as friends, and we started to date in that little time and eventually it became very clear that God had brought us together and August of 1963 we got married.

PHIL: So when you were doing itinerant ministry for Talbot Seminary, you were practically newlyweds.

JOHN: Yep, I was married.

PHIL: Wow.

JOHN: Yeah. I went to...I went to the seminary really from 1967 to 1969 when I came to Grace, '66 to '69, so I had been married three years. And we already had Matt twelve months after we were married. And another two years later, little Marcy. So our little family when I went to Talbot, we had a little family. It was hard on her. I mean, I was all over the place, preaching those years. But she was great about all that. She understood that that's what God had given me to do and we tried to make some compensations and the kids were young enough, we took them.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: We went together.

PHIL: Did you at the time enjoy itinerant ministry? Cause I know you're not real fond of traveling now.

JOHN: No at the time I...I mean, I do what I've always just done what I needed to do. At the time I just...I wanted to be used by God. And so I wanted to go wherever He wanted me to go. And in those years, as I said, a lot of it was camp ministry. We'd do weekend camps, week-long camps. For nine years I was at Hume Lake Summer Camp for like two months. And I would preach to junior high and high schoolers every single day for two months. They just keep changing kids every week. So we could go as a family and stay together there. We did that nine summers in a row. I could take my little family on weekend things that I did, you know, whether it was Campus Crusade or Youth For Christ, or some conference or some deal, here, there. I could take them and in the summers we used to go on the conference trek, the camp tour as a family. And those were wonderful times as family. So those were good times.

I look...I think it's harder when it kind of becomes...get on a plane, and go over here and go over there, and come back and go. As long as, in those early years, I didn't do any air travel, I was basically driving everywhere and most of the time took the family with us.

PHIL: Through those years when you were in itinerant ministry, was it your desire to become a pastor?

JOHN: Always to be a pastor. I never wanted to be an itinerant minister because I always wanted to exposit the Scripture. I mean, I poured...I took a Greek minor in college because I wanted to work in the New Testament. I didn't want ten suits and ten sermons. I didn't want to be on the road. I didn't want to be the out-of-town guy. I wanted to follow what my Dad did and my Granddad did. I wanted to be in a church and I wanted to exposit the Word of God. That's what I wanted to do, not so much for the sake of the congregation, I wanted to know what the Bible taught. I had just a craving to understand the New Testament in particular. And so the only way I knew I'd ever satisfy that hunger would be to get in a church and go through it systematically.

PHIL: So that desire and your preparation and everything that had happened in your life up to then all sort of came together in February of 1969.

JOHN: It did. I had a couple of churches that had my name but they both said I was too young. I was twenty...in my late twenties, twenty-eight or twenty-nine at the time. They didn't want to deal with somebody that young.

PHIL: You were by now actively looking for a permanent pastoral role.

JOHN: Yeah...yeah, well I don't know if I was actively looking. People were coming to me. And I was open. I was a little hesitant because my Dad had wanted me to serve alongside of him and I had made the break by going back to the seminary to be there and to preach all the time, cause I wanted to increase my preaching. I couldn't preach if he was preaching all the time. But I was just open to whatever...I've never been a big long-range planner. I just...Okay, Lord, whatever is going to happen is going to happen. But it was in actually 1968 toward the end of the year, I had done a number of conferences for the young people of Grace Community Church. They...I was kind of the guy that was all the camps, all high school camps and conferences, I wound up kind of being the speaker out here in the west. And I just...the kids from Grace Community Church were just alive and vibrant and enthusiastic and excited and they loved to sing and they had fun. And I just had a great time ministering to their conferences and their camps. And so the kids said to me, "Would you ever be our pastor?"

And I said, "Well I don't know, nobody's asking me to be your pastor, but, you know, some day that's what I want." And so they went back and told the elders at Grace Church, "We want John MacArthur to be our pastor." It's the high school kids that started it all.

PHIL: Huh.

JOHN: Yeah. And so they said, "Well, we ought to have him come and preach." So they had me come and preach.

PHIL: Now I've heard you talk about the first time you spoke. You came to candidate, or at least to preach so that those elders could hear you. And Patricia didn't think you did a particularly good job, right?

JOHN: You know, Patricia is very sensitive to how people might receive what I say, still she is that way. But then, yeah, because I preached this one...they asked me to preach on a Sunday night. And I had been studying Romans 6, 7, all summer up at Hume Lake. I had been preaching all summer to kids. And so they asked me to do this...it was at the end of the summer, either October or November. And I just said, "Well, look, I'm just going to talk about what I'm learning out of Romans 6 and 7." Cause I really had gotten for the first time in my life a grip on those passages. And so I got up and I just started doing what I've been doing with kids and camps and conferences and paid no attention to anything except what I was saying.

And then I went about an hour and twenty minutes. And they were used to 30 minute max sermons. And I went down to sit down and I was oblivious. You know, I can get that way, I just get into it. And Patricia looks up at me and she says, "I can't believe what you just did."

I said, "What?"

She said, "Do you know how long you spoke?"

And I said, "No."

She said, "You spoke an hour and twenty minutes. I mean, there's no chance." They're not going to get...they're not going to have you here."

And afterwards, I remember Bob Barrow was the guy's name, he came to me and he said, "If you're here every week, would you...would you teach us the Word of God like that?" And I said, "Well yeah, that's what I do." And so they asked me to come back another week and then when I came back the next week, they had to put a big huge clock on the back wall. Huge clock.

PHIL: (Laughs) You know what I think....

JOHN: They wanted it but they didn't want it all at once, you know.

PHIL: What I find amazing about that story and anyone who knows your ministry now is that you could get through Romans 6 and 7 in an hour and twenty minutes.

JOHN: Well I was not dealing with the individual elements of the text, I was giving the concept of what was there, but you're right. I mean, obviously that's a two-year trek now.

PHIL: At least.

JOHN: And so they...and there were unsaved elders on that board and unsaved people in leadership in the church. But there were enough good people that knew what they wanted and knew that they needed to be taught the Word of God and Bible teaching was just beginning to find its way in. And new translations of the Bible, the Jesus Movement, there was new excitement about Bible study because of the new translations. The Jesus Movement was coming...

PHIL: Yeah, California in those days was a wild place to minister, wasn't it?

JOHN: Yeah, we caught the wave, no question.

PHIL: Sixty-nine was the summer of the Manson murders and all of that. That was the same year you started as pastor.

JOHN: And that was when the Jesus Movement started out here and there was a tremendous renewed interest in Bible study. And with those translations and a whole bunch of new little Christian publishers coming into the picture, and I was doing what was unavailable, and so people started

flooding in here to hear Bible teaching.

PHIL: Now, did you from the very beginning have a commitment to preach verse by verse?

JOHN: Absolutely...absolutely. From the very start I began with just a couple of messages up in the front and then I just started right in to the gospel of John and I think I started in to 1 and 2 Peter, or 2 Peter, I can't even remember. Yeah, in the morning one book, in the evening one book. That's all I ever intended to do.

PHIL: Did you have a realistic expectation at that time that before you finished your life and ministry you would preach through the entire New Testament?

JOHN: Absolutely not because I didn't know how fast I would go. I think I also did not have a realistic expectation of how people would receive it because I didn't have any track record of doing this. I didn't know whether I'd drive people out in two weeks. I mean, I didn't know...I knew I could give some messages at a conference that were finely tuned and honed and, you know, you take the same fifteen or twenty messages and travel around with them for three years. But I didn't know what would be the response. I was pretty much shocked as the response began to be manifest that people were just taking this stuff in and inviting friends and so I had no expectations at all, least did I ever expect that I would live long enough to finish the New Testament. And, of course, the longer I did it, the less I expected that because it kept getting longer and longer, you know. As I got older my insights into the text got greater and greater and so it was harder for me to get through a book. I mean, I went through the gospel of John in 100 messages...that would be two years to do John. It took me eight years to do Matthew. So everything gets elongated as time goes on.

So, if the Lord is gracious, I have only Luke to finish and then Mark and will have done the New Testament. Which would be great.

PHIL: Was there an event or influence, a single thing you can point to that prompted you to do this? Because when you started in '69, almost nobody...there probably wasn't a pastor anywhere who would take a book and preach verse by verse through the entire...

JOHN: I just knew it was right. I don't know. There was nothing that I can put my finger on. My Dad had taught through Romans and John, I don't know the exact number, the exact timing of that. But I just knew that was right. I just knew that was right. And again I go back to what I said. Not because that's the best way to preach to them, but because that's the only way that I can learn the New Testament. My goal, my initial goal was not to make up sermons that people would like. My goal was to comprehend the New Testament. I was in awe and still am of the Bible and in particular in awe of the New Testament. Not that it's better, but that it's the full revelation, it's the completed revelation, not better than the Old Testament. But I've always been in awe of the glories of the New Testament. And I knew that if I didn't do expositional teaching, I would never ever dig out all that was there. And

so basically it was my own personal desire to understand everything in the New Testament. I was very frustrated when I use to read the Bible in my devotions because I didn't know what I was reading, I couldn't understand it all. I didn't know the depth and breadth of it. So I admit that I started out to go through the whole New Testament for a very self-centered reason, and that is I wanted to know what it meant. Because I knew it was the Word of God. And then I knew if I knew what it meant, I could...I could pass it on.

PHIL: Here's where your curiosity comes into play.

JOHN: Sure....sure.

PHIL: Were there any great surprises in your early years at Grace Church? Things you didn't anticipate?

JOHN: You know, somebody asked me that question in another form. They said, "If you could go back to the beginning of your ministry, knowing what you know now, what benefit would that be?" And here's how I answered that question. What I know now that I could never know there is what won't work.

PHIL: (Laugh)

JOHN: What won't work and where I wasted so much energy and so much effort to do stuff that won't work. And you only know that by experience because what happens is you come out with idealistic ideas. You come out with concepts that are air-tight, with boxes that you want to put everybody in conveniently. You've got a perfect program. Everybody is going to fit in this program. You go here...you go here...you go here...you go there. It doesn't happen. People are not rubber ducks. They don't fit in slots. There has to be flexibility in a ministry. There has to be option in a ministry. I just think I...I...I wasted a lot of energy when I was young trying to create concepts and programs to get everybody into conforming in a slot. And now I realize that's just so much wasted effort because you learn what's not going to happen. And you learn what people will do and won't do. You learn how far you can push them and how far is too far. And you learn what to expect out of your staff and your help and the people around you. And what to expect out of yourself. Experience helps you deal with life realistically. I just explained it as you learn what isn't going to happen no matter how hard you try it.

PHIL: Have you noticed a tendency with young guys going into the pastorate that usually their most...their worst and most disastrous experience is right at the beginning, the first pastorate they go into?

JOHN: And that is largely due to the fact that they are not aware of what won't happen. They go rushing in expecting that their idealistic plans, everybody is going to own and buy and they sort of

force-feed those people, and they blow up their opportunities.

PHIL: Humph. What was the most difficult thing for you as a young pastor?

JOHN: The most difficult thing that ever happens to me, whether it's when I'm young or old, is disloyalty at the level of leadership. Not because I deserve loyalty, but because disloyalty is so destructive. The hardest thing you'll ever deal with is false accusation...people who say things about you that aren't true and undermine people's trust and confidence and this goes on in my case all the time all over the place. Not so much at Grace Church, anymore. Our people are very loyal. All the critics I've outlived. What are they going to bring up that they haven't brought up in the past, you know. But even beyond Grace Church, there are all kinds of accusations and criticisms that aren't related to reality made against me. That's very hard to deal with because I don't want to be viewed by anybody as unfaithful to the Lord, unfaithful to His Word as an unfaithful Christian. But I think it's particularly painful at the level of intimacy when you pour your life in investment spiritually into men around you that serve with you and they generate a mutiny against you. That is very hard to deal with...very hard.

PHIL: That happened to you...

JOHN: Oh, it's happened several times. Yeah, it's happened several times. And it's a shock. You know, your own familiar friend has lifted up his heel against you, the one with whom you broke bread, you know, like the Scripture says about Judas. And I'm loyal. I think the only way to get loyalty is to give loyalty. If somebody in church comes to me and criticized another staff member, they don't find me a very good listener. I will rise to the defense of all those that are in my care and serve alongside me. People don't do that because they know they're not going to get anywhere with me. And I expect in giving that loyalty to receive that back because disloyalty is so harmful to the unity of the church. So that's always been the hardest thing to deal with. To criticize me personally, is not disloyal. To undermine me and criticize me publicly, behind my back, that's disloyal.

PHIL: Now next, John, I want to ask you some questions that don't really fit in to any chronological order within your testimony, but these are questions that I think our listeners are going to want...want to hear you answer.

JOHN: Sure. Fire away.

PHIL: Tell us just briefly, what's involved in the preparation of a sermon?

JOHN: Well, first of all, I'm in a book, I'm always going through one book on Sunday morning and another book in the sermon on Sunday night. And so I know where I am at all times. I'm not trying to think up a subject or think up a theme. I just take the next section in the book. So I start with the given text in the flow of the book. And my first...down to the practical nub of it all, I take out an eight-and-a-

half by fourteen set of pieces of paper, a little tablet and I write each verse down on those sheets. And then I go into the original language, working in the New Testament, of course predominantly I go to my Greek New Testament and I do all the research I need so that I get the actual text correct and what it really says. And I've got that all written down on these sheets.

Then I go to a second step which is to read commentaries, just because I want to know how others interpreted the text and how certain writers approach it and how certain theological viewpoints approach it. I want to take the best of the scholarship of the past, then the present. So I probably read anywhere from 15 to 18 or so commentaries. And whatever I find in those commentaries that I think is helpful or insightful, or explanatory, I also write in those notes in front of me.

And then the next step is to go back and look for passages in the Bible itself that further elucidate the particular statement or phrase or word so that I compare this passage with other passages, for the sake of interpretation and for the sake of expansion and completeness. So by the time I've done that, probably a full day may go by. Maybe six hours of actual work on that.

And then...

PHIL: That's just preparation, study...that's just...

JOHN: Yeah,

PHIL: Before you actually organize your own sermon.

JOHN: Right, and I haven't written an outline and I don't necessarily have direction at that point. But once I'm done with that, then I...then I write sort of an outline in on top of the...of those notes. By then I can frame up the flow and I have figured out the main point, the main point then becomes where you're going with the message and then you sort of break the material into those elements that make up the explanation of the main point.

And then the last thing I would do would be to write an introduction, because I can't introduce something until I know exactly what it is I'm going to say. And then I would think about how I would want to draw it to a conclusion. I've got all that down on those sheets in my sort of bizarre shorthand, so that only I could read it.

PHIL: Yes...

JOHN: You've seen them, you know.

PHIL: I have, something that most of our listeners would be surprised to discover is you don't use a computer at all.

JOHN: No, I don't.

PHIL: All of that is manual.

JOHN: It's all done by hand.

PHIL: And almost ineligible to most of us.

JOHN: Yeah. But once I get all that together, I finalize it all, formulate it all, then I take out some little half sheets that I actually carry into the pulpit and I use a broad felt-tip kind of pen and I write out the sermon...I write...

PHIL: By hand...

JOHN: By hand, and I write it out, the introduction, then I write...I just flow through the text and write everything that's important, not necessarily full sentences, but I write pretty full sentences because when you preach to the same people years and years and years, you tend to want to go back and say the same thing about the same idea. You tend to gravitate to the same words. So I have to be somewhat literary and little prosaic and come up with different ways to say things, so I do write out key sentences, transitions, then I'll put in biblical illustrations that I've found. And I come up with about...usually it's about eight to ten half-sheets on both sides of my own notes. Those are legible. They tend to be more legible to some degree, more legible...

PHIL: (Laugh)

JOHN: But that's what I carry into the pulpit to preach and that process...that second process is another three or four hours. Saturday night I set aside a block of time in the evening, I don't do things on Saturday night, and I go over my final notes very carefully. They're done in black ink and then I use a red pen to mark them up. And if there's anything that I have a question about, that I didn't understand, I change it so I can understand it. And I check all the references so they don't have a wrong reference written down, or so I don't think Ezekiel is Exodus, or something like that. So I make sure I've checked all those out and I know exactly what's in those passages.

PHIL: Humph...

JOHN: So I go over it and I do the same Sunday afternoon, I take a block of time late in the afternoon just before I go to preach at the church and I do the same thing with Sunday night sermon.

PHIL: So by the time you get in the pulpit, your mind is saturated with this text.

JOHN: Right. Yeah, because I've done all the research myself, no one does any research for me at all. I've written it out in rough form, I've thought it through, I've outlined it, I've tampered with that rough draft, and then I've written out the final sermon notes in longhand. And then I've gone back, checked them out, gone back outlined things in red, underlined things. And so by the time I get there I'm very familiar with it and I will...I will very often preach through pages without looking at them. And then sort of look down and catch myself where I am. But I still like to have all that material there because I don't want to depend upon recall when you preach to the same people all the time. Plus, once I've done with those notes, they can be filed and they're comprehensive enough that I can pull them out and preach that message again, cause there's enough there for me to basically know pretty full treatment of the text.

PHIL: Probably the single most familiar recurring theme in your preaching is the gospel. That's true in your writing and your preaching. And most of your major books have in one way or another defended the gospel. Why have you spent so much time and energy in the pulpit teaching about the gospel?

JOHN: You know, I never expected that. That's really surprising to me, frankly. If I thought there was anything that was sort of locked down when I came out of seminary, it was the gospel. I mean, everybody knew the gospel. Everybody knew that salvation by grace, through faith in Christ alone, no other way to be saved. And believing in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ as the substitutionary provision of God for the sinner. I mean, everybody knew that. I grew up hearing that. Every preacher I ever knew preached the gospel. And so when I came out of seminary, I mean the last thing I thought I would do, would be to spend my whole life trying to defend the gospel, not against attacks by unbelievers and liberals, but against what I always considered to be its undermining by evangelicalism. And it all really sort of got going with a book that was written called *The Gospel Under Siege*, which ironically enough was an attack on the gospel. It purported to be in defense of the gospel, but in truth it was an assault on the gospel.

So the book itself was laying seeds to the gospel in the name of defending it. That book just shook me to the core. And then I got into reading some more of things written by Charles Ryrie and things that had come out of Dallas Seminary, and Lewis Sperry Chafer and that whole lordship controversy and that was...well that was in the late '80s when that all started to break loose. Up until that point, I don't think that I did focus on the gospel as much.

PHIL: But you did actually. Maybe not even without being aware of it, your book on the Beatitudes which was written six, seven years before, that really dealt with the same issue.

JOHN: That's true.

PHIL: In fact, your very first message at Grace Church was a message from Matthew 7 called, "How to play church."

JOHN: Yeah, and that did deal with the many who say, "Lord, Lord, and don't know Me." So from the very beginning of my ministry, very in a defining way, I guess, the directing of the Holy Spirit, I was always concerned about people in the church who weren't Christians. And I came to that because my closest friend in high school that I used to go witness with and we were involved in the youth group, denied the faith. One of my closest friends in college, we were the tandem backfield in our football team, went off to seminary and after seminary abandoned the faith, denied the faith. One of my very closest out of two or three friends I had in seminary, the dean's son, abandoned the faith and set up a Buddhist altar in his house.

PHIL: Wow.

JOHN: So here I am dealing with...I'm not dealing with people on the periphery of Christianity, I'm dealing with the core people. Those last two guys fathers were both pastors. And so I was very aware of the fact that the churches were somehow occupied by people who weren't truly Christians and I had seen them in my college and I'd seen them in my seminary and I had seen them in my youth group. And when I got into the church, by the time I became pastor of Grace Church, I had met with people for a while, I knew there were people in that church that weren't Christians. And I felt like the first thing I need to do is come out of the shoot here with a message that defines this whole issue. And I guess as I think about it, it did launch that emphasis about being a true Christian.

At that time, however, I didn't...I didn't think that the church was filled with non-Christians because the gospel wasn't being preached. I felt that people were there for whatever reason didn't really believe the gospel, then it turned around to being...I began to see that the church was abandoning the true gospel. And so this even made the problem worse.

PHIL: I know your life hasn't been without personal trials or heartache, talk about some of these. I mean, many of our listeners are aware of the fact that several years ago Patricia and Melinda were in a serious automobile accident.

JOHN: Well, that's right and they...you know, we had little Hondas in those years and we've gotten bigger Fords these days. But in those days we had these little Honda cars because they were economical and Patricia and Melinda were driving along on a four-lane road out in the country here and for whatever reasons, Patricia lost control of the car and sent the car really flying across the incoming traffic...the oncoming traffic, missed everybody but going very fast, probably 60 miles an hour on this four-lane highway. Hit a curb and catapulted the car in the air and it flipped in the air and came down in an eight-foot deep culvert, crushed the top of the car below the headrests. So it...Melinda, by the providence of God, was in the front right seat, she slid down onto the floor and only abrasions and cuts and things like that. But Patricia's head took the full blow and it shattered her neck, C2 was an explosion fracture, they called it, and it just disintegrated, fragmented and C3 was shattered, that's above the respiration line.

PHIL: Right.

JOHN: So she should have...if it had touched her spinal cord, which would have been down to millimeters, she would have been paralyzed or dead because if it had hit the spinal cord there she wouldn't have been able to breathe. She survived all of that and it's astonishing really, she never had surgery, the neck healed amazingly. The nerves that were totally devastated so that she had paralysis in one arm, rejuvenated itself so she had full use of that. But during that time, of course, she had a steel halo on her head and that was a horrific thing for her to go through. And I've always thought that God allowed that not only to elevate my own appreciation for the gift she is to me, but I have never experienced anything in all my years in ministry that more endeared the congregation to me than that because they saw a certain vulnerability, they saw that I was not impervious, that I was not, you know, living at another level than everybody else. And as I went through that, trusting in the Lord, the congregation just embraced us with tremendous love and affection, you know, they were all praying continually that she would live and that she would not be paralyzed and all of that. I just think that...that took my relationship to our church family to a completely different level.

And, of course, as well it taught us how dependent we are on the Lord and how we have to trust Him in everything. You know, in some cases the Lord would allow a paralysis to happen for His own glory, but I think the Lord knew that with the level of involvement in my ministry, the busyness of my ministry, to have to take care of someone who was totally incapacitated would have been such a difficult thing. And, of course, because I love Patricia, I would have felt responsibility to do that. And the Lord was gracious in letting me continue and letting her continue to be my helpmeet. So we look back on that not knowing all the reasons why God does what He does, but we have seen many, many streams of blessing that have come even out of that.

PHIL: It equips you, too, to deal with people who are going through extreme trials.

JOHN: I was comforted in that and we saw the hand of God, we saw the face of God, really in that and through the years, you know, we can identify with the people who go through those kinds of things. It was the same with Mark when he had a brain tumor when he was a college student. It was somewhat similar when I had those severe blood clots a few years ago.

PHIL: Yeah, you had a brush with death there yourself, right?

JOHN: Yeah, in fact I was watching the Discovery Channel the other night and they were talking about pulmonary emboli, blood clots that go into your lungs. And they had a little medical panel there and I was reminded again of the potential fatality of that particular phenomena. These doctors were saying, you know, this is deadly when this happens. Blood clots form in your leg, mine as a result of a knee surgery, really a minor orthoscopic surgery to try to repair some damage done years ago when I

played ball. But blood clots formed, broke loose and splattered literally over both lungs. You know, which really is terminal. I mean, if any of those blood clots break loose and go to the heart, you have a heart attack or they go break loose and go to the brain and you immediately have a stroke, and I didn't get diagnosed right so I'm four or five days into this thing before I ever get the help. By the time I get the help from Dr. Doug Marrow, who has become a very dear friend, and by the way, came to Christ through this, and has since been in our church and, you know, maybe the Lord knew this just needed to be the way to reach him because he was the doctor that saved my life and hadn't been in church since he was a kid. But anyway, through...through all of that, your congregation again rises to embrace you in prayer and affection and love and gratitude and all of that. And I think those are wonderful, wonderful things. And as well, you know, I have a sense that God's given me more life and I need to make the most of it, you know. That's part of how I view all of that. I...when I came out of that after getting the immediate help I needed to thin out that blood, and recently having a medical exam, they couldn't find traces of any of that, I really do feel the Lord said, "You know, you've got more years," and that just kind of heightens my sense of accountability.

PHIL: That experience was supposed to slow you down, too. The doctors counseled you, I noted, to do less travel and all that. But it hasn't really slowed you down, has it? It seems like every year you make two or three trips overseas for important things like that. You've got a ministry in Russia, England... really your ministry is taking you all over the world.

JOHN: Well it has for many years and it has been cut back a lot. I've said I'll make one trip. Unfortunately this year I'll take two trips. But the other one is, of course, to Italy because that country is so much on my heart now. They...they have opened their hearts, the missionaries there and the pastors, you know, the national pastors, the Italian pastors who are so...that's such a tough place to minister. But they've turned to us now. And, you know, I've been over there a number of times, and you've been there, and our staff has been there and we've all taught and now they know what sound doctrine is. For the first time ever really and now they know what expository preaching is so they said now you need to come and teach us. And so we've actually started with the help of our board member, Joe Aleppo, of course, and his vision, Expository Preaching Training Center in Italy and the building is complete in Sicily. We need some men who will go to Italy and train a generation of Bible expositors who are just now finding out what it is to exposit the Scripture." So I will continue to do some of these things, but the ones that I think are strategic to my own ministry, to our own ministry rather than going as I did on some occasions in the past to speak for other, you know, organizations.

PHIL: Well you mentioned the training center, there have been a number of training centers raised up around the world as a direct result of your preaching ministry. There's one in Samara, Russia, there's one in Puna(?), India. There's one in Italy now.

JOHN: Yeah, it's pretty amazing. There are fifteen or sixteen expository training centers, leadership training centers around the world now, everywhere from Japan to Croatia, to the ones you mentioned, to New Zealand, South Africa, one of the most exciting ones is in Petersburg, South Africa where

we're training. We're going to be able now to train 100 black tribal pastors. They come out of there, they're in their tribe for three weeks, they come out for one week of intense training. They go back for three weeks, they come for one week of intense training. Great ministry. And all of these fifteen or sixteen training centers around the world are manned by graduates of the Master's Seminary.

So what happens is, I preach, these countries get the tapes, people in these countries get the tapes from Grace To You, they hear the preaching, they say we want that, could you come? I go, you go, you know, Phil, you've been, and others of our staff go, you've been to India, you've been to South Africa, and we send guys to go to give training. And eventually they say, we need a school here. And that's the process. It starts with tapes and books, it winds up in seminars, cranks up and then pretty soon they want a full-fledged school and then we get graduates out of the seminary to go. And Samara(?), Russia, I'm going to go there when I go to Moscow for the Study Bible, is really the model, in some ways the model. I don't know how many men there are in that program there, there are hundreds of them and they're lining up to learn expository preaching from the four or five guys that we have that launched that. We started a seminary in Irpin, outside of Kiev, we have had six hundred graduates of that seminary now. All taught by our men and that's the only faculty the Russian evangelicals want, they'll only take Master's guys. And our commentaries have been translated, you know. We have six hundred graduates to that seminary now, every one of them in pastoral ministry.

PHIL: It's amazing.

JOHN: It is amazing. And those...those seminaries, those training centers are continuing to grow around the world and we have a model now, you know, we've done it enough, we have the model and all we need to do is take that model into various countries, find an association of churches, a fellowship there in the country that we can partner with and train the men that are there.

PHIL: That is quite a legacy, John. What...what would John MacArthur most like to be remembered for?

JOHN: Well I always think when I'm asked that question about what Paul said in 1 Corinthians, "Let a man account of us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." I just really want to be known as someone who was a servant of the Lord, who, you know, Paul uses the word *huperetes*, a galley slave, under rower. Just that I was faithful to the Word of God, faithful to the teaching of the Word of God and to the unfolding and the mysteries of the gospel and the New Testament. That's...it's not about how many schools or how many books, or how many radio programs. It's...it's just about being faithful to the Word of God.

PHIL: Well thank you for that faithfulness, John.

JOHN: Well you're welcome. Thank you for being faithful and being a partner along the way.

PHIL: It's been great.

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