A Retrospective on 40 Years: John MacArthur with Rick Holland
Selected Scriptures
90-371

Well, John, thanks for agreeing to endure series of questions. We're thinking about how to set up the week that's really coming ahead of us and there's so much bottled up in 40 years that we're going to try to pull some of that out tonight. I've prepared a series of questions, I'm not sure I'll ask all of them and we're just trying....

JOHN: I'm not sure I'll answer all of them. (Laughter)

RICK: I just want it to be...questions and answers, plural, not one question, and one answer.

JOHN: Short...

RICK: Short. That's good.

We just elected a first black President and it's raised the whole issue again of civil rights in our country. And some of the folks might not know that you had a very interesting brush with the Civil Rights Movement at a very significant time in history. Why don't you talk about that?

JOHN: Yeah, before I came to Grace Church when I was a seminary student, I came to know a man named John Perkins. John Perkins came to Christ after a very, very troubled childhood. He was raised in Mississippi. He saw his brother killed by Ku Klux Klan men before his very eyes in the street. And John, as a result of that, had a lot of bitterness in his heart, but when he came to Christ all of that was swept away and he started attending my Dad's church and I got to know him and grew to love him and his wife Vera Mae.

Well in the purposes of God he returned to Mississippi to a little town called Mendenhall, and Mendenhall, Mississippi south of Jackson and he started a ministry there. He started a school there. He started a church. Started a little co-op for people to buy things and really helped that little community of Mendenhall. This was right at the time when Civil Rights Movement really exploded and John asked me if I would come to Mississippi and if I would preach, if I would go out to the black high schools which were totally segregated and always on the other side of town, and if I would preach and do some gospel ministry in these high schools around Mississippi. So I said, "Absolutely, I'd love to do that."

Got a few friends, in those days I used to sing a little. And we would do a little bit of singing together. And then I would preach and I had an absolutely wonderful time. I can't remember how many years, I think I went down there for a period of about five years, going down and spending a pro-longed period of time. I lived with John and Vera Mae in their house, very interesting to live at that time in

the home of black people in the south and to be treated the way they were treated, to be refused meals at a restaurant that I would go to because they knew who I was associating with.

It was so tense there. There was a friend of John's who was a custodian in the First Baptist Church in Mendenhall which is a white church. This custodian loved Christ and he built a friendship with the pastor at the church, even though he couldn't attend the church. The pastor started a Bible study with him on a regular basis and the church leaders told him he had to stop that. He said, "I can't." And the circumstances became so overbearing on him, he had problems in the community, in the town and getting gas and things like that. He had a nervous breakdown. They took him to Jackson. Put him in a hospital room and he dove out of the window, the third floor, and killed himself. That's how intense that was.

Well it was during those times that I was there and I will never forget, I can't tell you the whole story, but I'll never forget one night, I was in the middle of Jackson, Mississippi in the office of a man named Charles Evers. Charles Evers had a brother named Medgar Evers. Medgar Everswas the first martyr of the Civil Rights Movement. He was the first person killed. Charles became the first black mayor...the first black mayor in the south at Fayetteville, Mississippi. He was a friend of John's and I had come to know him. And we were sitting there and he was trying to explain to me that night in Jackson what was going on. Now remember, I was a very young guy, I had become immersed in that culture, grew to love those people. And Charles was talking and a man burst through the door and said, "Martin Luther King has been assassinated." That happened that night while I was with Charles and John and some others.

The immediate issue was that there were serious things going on in the street in Jackson and they were trying to get me out of there because I was as pale as a ghost. And here we were worried what might happen to me. And so they escorted me. And then they said, "You know, we're going to go to Jackson. We want to...we want to go...we're going to Memphis, we want to see what happened.

So they took me. And in those days the police weren't nearly as protective, forensics hadn't developed to what they had and they didn't necessarily protect crime scenes. So we went to the motel, up to the landing, saw the blood where Martin Luther King had been shot just hours before by James Earl Ray. I actually went to the little building opposite the motel, went up on the second flood, stood up on the toilet and looked out the window where James Earl Ray had shot him. And I was there at that very, very, very crucial time.

To make a long story short, when we went back and endeavored to continue to do what we were doing, we're driving down a country road headed to one of the high school meetings and we were arrested and taken to the jail and accused of fomenting trouble and all of that.

You know, there's a lot to say about it. You wanted short answers.

RICK: You can elaborate.

JOHN: But, some good things came out of that. There were some wonderful young people in John's ministry who wanted to go to a Christian college and I knew about Los Angeles Baptist College which was the name of the Master's College then, and I said, "Well I know a college near our church, I'm sure you could send them there." So I think we sent three or four of these young men to be trained

and to graduate from the Master's College before I had any association with them at all, it was called Los Angeles Baptist College.

So I understood something of the inside of that and I think that tenderized me toward the whole thing because I saw a very clear dose of reality of how things really were and John went on to continue his ministry there and the men who were here educating went back. I just talked to two of them a couple of days ago cause they came back to the college for a special event. And one of them who was an outstanding athlete, basketball player, is a leader in the Mississippi Correctional Institutions where he lives for Christ and extends the gospel to prisoners in that situation.

So those were very, very volatile, volatile times. I remember when we were taken to the jail, the sheriff's said something about they were going to fine us. And I said, "Well how much is the fine?" And he said, "How much have you got?" And the fine was everything we had. So those were very, very difficult times. But God has continued to bless the ministry there. It's going on today, it's called Voice of Calvary. John took the name from my Dad's radio program and he used it there and that ministry flourishes today, led by Dolphus(?) Weary(?) who is a graduate of the college.

RICK: You were speaking this morning, the sermon apexed on the purpose of the church really being evangelism. I think it might interest the folks to know how you came to know Christ, your conversion story.

JOHN: Well, obviously, I was raised in a pastor's home. I went to church every Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night. I loved it. I loved the church. I loved to be at the church. I loved the basement where we played games and ate cookies and red punch. But I grew up loving the church. I did. At some point my love for my parents, my love for the church developed and matured into a love for Christ. I don't know the exact moment that happened. I can't really nail that down. I can honestly say I don't know a time when I didn't believe. I don't know a time when I rejected the gospel. I never went through a period of rebelling against it by the grace of God, and I'm deeply thankful for that. I've often thought to myself, with the profile I have now, if there had been a past in my life that could be exposed, it surely would have been by those who would want to expose it and God protected me from that. I don't think...I would never find any pride in a life of sin or rebellion, I'm just grateful that God spared me all of that.

I remember kneeling down with my Dad one time on the steps of a church where he was preaching and he took me with him on a meeting and got into some mischief with some other boys and I was feeling so guilty because I was the visiting evangelist's son. But they led me into it...they led me into it. (Laughter) But I felt so guilty about that, that I remember talking to my Dad about wanting to be sure I was really saved and we prayed together there.

And then, of course, later on in my life, after my freshman year in college, most of you know I had a pretty serious automobile accident. I was thrown out of a car going about 70 miles an hour and slid down the highway over a hundred yards on my backside. That was very traumatic. I don't know that that was my salvation, I believe I was saved prior to that. But that was a serious wake-up call about the fact that I was not in control of my life. I could live or die in an instant. And I remember that event and the subsequent several months when I was lying on my stomach while all of that tried to heal, saying to the Lord, "I don't want to fight You, whatever it is You want out of my life, that's what I want for my life." And so that was a time of real turning away from any personal ambition I might have had and just saying, "Lord, whatever You want me to do, that's really what I want to do."

RICK: What did you want to do before being a pastor?

JOHN: I don't know what I wanted to do. I was going through high school, I got all kinds of kudos for athletics. My...I found my affirmation there. You know, I did that well, a lot better than I did school work. So I never remember a teacher coming to me and saying, "You're an outstanding student." When they passed out any award for outstanding, it always had something to do with athletics if I got them.

So, you know, when you're fed that and you're nurtured in that way...so I thought maybe that's something that I can do. I wasn't really sure. I can honestly say that I don't think I had a clear direction of what I wanted to do but in the back of my mind, I always felt that I was supposed to be a preacher.

RICK: And you almost went pro in football.

JOHN: Well, I had the opportunity. I went to a training camp for the Washington Redskins after my junior year of football. And later on I received letters on whether they were going to include me in the draft and all of that. And by the time I graduated I said, "I'm not going to do that. I know I'm not going to do that." So I said I wouldn't be interested at all. By then I was fixed on going to seminary.

But I think I always had respect for preachers. I have respect for my Dad and my Grandfather and other preachers that I knew. I always understood that that was the most important thing that any person could do. So in the back of my mind, in fact my parents told me as a little kid, I'd stand on some kind of soapbox and mimic my father. That might not have any significance at all. But in the back of my mind it just seemed that that's where I would go. And by t he time I got through that accident and out the other side of it, I really believed in my heart that that's where God wanted me to go. I never thought about the church, what kind of preacher, missionary. I thought I might want to be a missionary in Europe in Germany, maybe I would be a pastor, maybe I would be an evangelist. I don't know that ever nailed that down in my mind until I was finished with seminary. Even then I was open to whatever the Lord had for me.

RICK: Let's go back 40 years. You finished seminary, for about ten years you traveled, preached at youth camp survivals, but then you end up...go 40 years back this week. You're a week away from going to Grace Community Church. What did you imagine?

JOHN: Well first of all, I graduated from a college in '61 and I graduated from seminary in '64. I came to Grace in '69. So there were five years in there.

When I graduated from seminary I was very young. I graduated from college at 17...high school at 17, college at 21 and seminary at 24. I was newly married. We had been married one year and that was a tremendous blessing for zillions of reasons that have now unfolded, but even at the time, I loved Patricia and I dated her while going to seminary and that was really difficult because I was working in ministry, I was carrying 18-19 units in seminary and I was courting her at the same time. When the Lord convinced her that I was the right person and it took some convincing. (Laughter)

RICK: Now hang on ....

JOHN: We're not going to talk about that. You ask her HER version or I'll get in a lot of trouble.

Anyway, suffice it to say she was engaged to somebody else when I first noticed her.

RICK: Now you're telling the story.

JOHN: Some shifting had to go on. But anyway, so it was so wonderful to be married and then do that last year together. It just was really wonderful. And when I finished seminary I was still young, 24, and my Dad had for many years said to me, "I want you to work with me. I want you to come alongside me."

RICK: And he was at Burbank.

JOHN: He was at Burbank, Calvary Bible Church. And I said, "Dad, I want to do that. I'd love to do that." And so I left seminary and went to work as the assistant pastor to my Dad who was still my Dad. And dads have a unique relationship with their sons. And I loved those years, but I wanted to preach and he was the preacher. And I didn't have opportunity to preach and when I did preach I felt like I got compared to him. And so after a couple of years I said to my Dad, "Dad, I think I need to go somewhere else. I don't want to be compared to you. I don't want to feel like I need to preach and yet I honor you as the pastor, so I need to go somewhere where I can just preach."

And Dr. Charles Feinberg, who was the dean at Talbot and he said, "Would you come to the seminary? And what I want you to do is just go preach everywhere." And this was perfect for me because I really needed to develop the ability to preach. And if you had heard some of the early sermons, you would understand how desperate that need was. So when he said, "What we'll do is we'll make you the seminary representative and we'll get all kinds of scheduling and we'll let you preach." And I preached. In a period of about three years, I was two years with my Dad, and about three years doing that, I preached as many as 30-35 times a month sometimes. I did camps sometimes morning and night, all week, six days in a row, seven days, preach on Sunday. So it was a very, very intense time of learning how to communicate the Word of God. And I crammed lots of years of preaching into those three.

So that was until the end of 1968 when Patricia and I went to Equador. We were invited to go to Equador, to go to Keeto, Equador, to go there to speak at a missionary school that was there, do a spiritual emphasis week for all the missionary children that were there. It was a wonderful experience because her sister and her husband were there. In fact, a couple of her sisters were serving the Lord in Equador and we got down into the depths of Equador into the jungles and got first hand with the history of the Alcas and death of the martyr missionaries and all of that.

So we came back from that and this congregation was waiting for me to preach here.

RICK: How did you find out about them?

JOHN: Well I was invited, because in those days I was speaking all the time to young people and Youth For Christ Campus Life, InterVarsity, church youth camps, conferences and things. And they

had a high school camp for Grace Community Church up at Lake Arrowhead(?) and they asked me to be the speaker. And they had just had the second pastor die here, Dr. Householder died here and then Dr. Elvey died. And so there was some interest in a younger man, for obvious reasons.

So I spoke at this camp and they were without a pastor. So the kids came home from the high school camp and told their parents, “We want you to think about John MacArthur as our pastor. We just had a great camp...great time.” And so it was the high school kids at high school camp that prompted the interest for me to come and to preach here. And my first time to preach here, I think was November of 1968, if I remember correctly, and I came on a Sunday night, it was in the chapel and I’ll never forget it. They had just kind of redone the chapel...we’ve redone it again since then. They asked me to come on a Sunday night and to preach and I did. And I had just spent months at Hume Lake speaking to young people every morning, every night. In fact our kids for nine years spent the summers at Hume Lake while I spoke to junior-high camp, high-school camp, college camp. And for that particular summer I had tackled Romans 6 and 7 personally in my own study. I wanted to understand that. And I was full of it, loaded with it and had nowhere to let it out.

So the Sunday night that I came here to preach as a potential candidate, I let it all out and it lasted an hour and twenty minutes. And so, I didn’t realize that. I really didn’t. I was in the moment, you know. There was no clock on the wall. They asked me to speak two Sunday nights. I came back the next Sunday night, there was a huge clock on the wall. (Laughter) So that’s...that was sort of the transition. And I think I had been turned down by a couple of churches because I was too young. I really wanted...and it was...in some ways I think maybe it was a selfish thing, I was tired of the traveling preaching because everywhere I went I was basically giving the same messages over and over and over again on themes that related to young people. And I wanted to go into the New Testament, always my vision was I want to go through the whole New Testament. And I knew if I was going to go through the whole New Testament, I needed to stay in one place.

And so I met with a couple of church committees and they were not interested. They thought I was too young and inexperienced. And this church had a different view. And after that first night I met with the leaders and they went from there.

RICK: You said often that Dr. Feinberg had an indelible moment in your life that launched you into hermeneutical priority in your preaching. You want to talk about that moment?

JOHN: Well first of all, you need to understand that Dr. Charles Feinberg was a very, very astute and intimidating man. He was probably in the four or five elite scholars of evangelicalism. He was Jewish, his wife was Jewish. He was fourteen years studying to be a rabbi. His wife was from the Fiddler on the Roof community so they had some great heritage. Dr. Feinberg was converted to Christ and upon his conversion he took that formidable mind of his and went to Dallas Seminary and he left Dallas Seminary with a doctorate in theology. And the president of the seminary, Dr. Chaffer, said he’s the only student who ever came and knew more when he arrived then he did when he left. They felt like the whole thing was subtraction. They just cluttered his head with things that he didn’t need to know, I guess. He was just absolutely brilliant.

He left there with a Th.D. Which is the pinnacle degree you can get there, very rigorous, and he went right to John Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland to get a Ph.D. under William Foxwell Albriet who was the leading archeologist in the world. So he got a Ph.D. in archeology. Just a formidable mind. Read through the Scripture four times every year. In class we would say things to him like, “Dr.

Feinberg, what does 1 Kings 8:3 mean?" We wouldn't even know what it said, we just pull it out of the air. (Laughter) And he would rattle off some Hebrew explanation and just wow us with the facility that he had to handle the Word of God.

He was tough. I remember my first day in class with him and he was the reason I was there. I found other men had great impact on me but he really was the reason. I wanted his imprint on my life, passionate love for the Scripture and accuracy in the Scripture. I remember the first day in class at the end of the class he said, "Are there any questions?" And some poor soul raised his hand and he asked his question and Dr. Feinberg said, without looking up, "If you don' have more intelligent questions than that, don't waste my time. I don't remember another question, I certainly never asked one. And I'm telling you, if you can get through Old Testament introduction without a question, that's pretty tough. He was very formidable and yet I loved him, I loved both his sons, John Feinberg who is a great theologian and teacher of the Word of God. Paul, his oldest son, was a very precious friend of mine. You UCLA guys, Paul Feinberg was a pitcher on the UCLA baseball team, so bright...John was so bright, they both became double doctorates. His sister was valedictorian at UCLA and his mother in her fifties graduated, knew the head of the class at UCLA. They had so much intelligence, it was scary in that family, it really was. And I hung around them just hoping that some of it would rub off.

I loved that family. You know, Feinberg was the only guy I knew who would go home, lock himself in his office and have his devotions in the Seriac Pachietta(???) You know, he was just off the chart. He would read copies of the Dead Sea Scrolls, you know, where all of us were reading books about the Dead Sea Scrolls.

So I loved him and I respected him because of his passion for the Word of God. So anyway. When you were a student there you had to preach in chapel to the students and faculty. You had to do that in your second year and your third year. So I was assigned by Dr. Feinberg to preach on 2 Samuel chapter 7 which is an encounter between David and Nathan. And David says, "I live in a house of cedar, the Lord lives in a tent tabernacle. We've got to build God a house certainly better than mine." Nathan says, "Great idea, go do it." And the Lord comes to Nathan and says, "You didn't ask Me, I don't want him doing that, he's a man of blood." And that was for Solomon to do, in his place He gives David the great Davidic Covenant. So anyway that was the passage.

So I knew I was going to have to preach to the students here and the faculty sitting behind me. And they had 8 ½ by 14 criticism sheets, faculty. And the whole time you're preaching, they're checking off the box. And, you know, you're so self-conscious, you're worried about what your gestures are, you're worried about everything cause they're just checking it off. And the students are looking past you and watching them. So I thought, "I've got to do this right." So I really labored on that. I worked on that message and I gave it and the students seemed to like it.

And then the drill was, you go to the door where the faculty exit, you stand there and the faculty comes by and they had you the sheets. And they did. And I waited till Dr. Feinberg came and he came last and he wouldn't look at me. He looked straight down and he just handed me this folded up sheet. And I snuck off in the corner of the hall and I unfolded it and he hadn't checked anything. In red ink he wrote, "You missed the entire point of the passage." (Laughter) To put it mildly, I was devastated...I was devastated.

I mean, that's not easy to do. Spend 25 hours and miss the whole point of the passage? How do you

do that? He was just so upset because that was one of his favorite passages in all of Scripture, the glories of the Davidic Covenant. And I preached on presuming on God, the interplay between Nathan and David, which was stupid on my part.

And he called me into his office and he was not happy. And neither was I. It was the greatest moment in my seminary training.

He would call me into his office almost weekly and tell me about a book I ought to read, tell me about something he had learned. I remember, he would read anything. I remember one time I went into his office, he just finished a book on Bach. And he would call me in and he would encourage me and I took every class he offered and I did everything I could to get the best grade I could get in every class he offered and I wanted to redeem myself with him. And I loved his sons and they loved me, and that helped too.

But when my seminary ended and I don't even like to mention this, but the award of all awards was for the graduate who got the Charles Feinberg award and he gave that to me. And I think about it now and that's a little thing, nobody ever sees it, but it sits in a place where I see it and I remember him and I remember the redemption I experienced with him. And maybe the end of the story is this. When he went to heaven, his family asked me to speak at his funeral. So somewhere along the line he must have figured out that I could figure out the meaning of the passage. So that's the end of the story and I look forward to seeing him in heaven. (Applause)

By the way, one other footnote to that. One of my great experiences was W.A. Crisswell, the great, great, Southern Baptist preacher who preached 45 years in the pulpit of the First Baptist Church at Dallas held a prophecy conference one year, a great prophecy conference, and the two keynote speakers were Charles Feinberg and John MacArthur and that was one time when I shared the pulpit with him in a great event and what a joy and honor that was for me.

RICK: He christened you a Baptist that night, didn't he?

JOHN: He did. Well Dr. Crisswell said to me one time in his later years, I was actually in Jacksonville at a conference and he said to me...of course, he was here, you remember when Dr...some of you remember when Dr. Crisswell was here.

RICK: He was here for your twenty-fifth.

JOHN: Twenty-fifth, and he preached and he preached on the integrity of Scripture and he said there are some people who have no regard for the Bible, they would just as soon throw it away. And he took his Bible, raised his arm and threw his Bible about 15 feet down that middle aisle and people gasped. And then he walked out of this pulpit and he walked down there and he picked it up and he dusted it off and he pressed it to his heart and he went on preaching on the greatness of Scripture.

And afterwards, the kids and Patricia and I were having lunch with him and I said, "Dr. Crisswell, that was very moving, you threw your Bible." He said, "Oh, that's my throwing Bible." (Laughter) That was a very special day, I'll never forget that. But Dr. Crisswell was a great model of Bible exposition, he really was.

RICK: And he called you a Baptist...

JOHN: Yeah, we were having this conversation one night and he was talking to me and he said, “Now, son,” he said...No, “Boy,” he called me boy. This is a few years ago. He says, “Boy,” he said...he said, “Do people who join your church have to be real Christians?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “Do people who join your church have to be baptized?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “Do you baptize people by putting them all the way in the water?” “Yes, sir.” He said, “Boy, you are a Baptist.” (Laughter) Okay.

RICK: Did you have any idea 40 years ago that you would get this? What were your expectations?

JOHN: Are you kidding? No, when I came here when we had the chapel, when I came here we had just the little chapel, I was just trying to make sure people didn’t leave. I wasn’t sure anybody else would come. We had a little chapel and we had the little educational building in the back and that was it. And then out here were chicken coops, all over the place. We had Sunday School in chicken coops for a long time. That’s why the Book Shack got its name “The Book Shack cause it originally was a shack.

No, we had no concept, I had no idea at all. I’m still. You know, I live in the providence of God. It just unfolds to me every day...every day. It is a wonder of wonders. This is not the product of some master plan that’s mine or some committee of people.

RICK: What’s the statistic of the doubling of the church every how many years?

JOHN: Well, it doubled about every two years for the first ten, just kept doubling and it went from three hundred, to six hundred, to twelve hundred. Obviously our growth has slowed down eventually. But in those early years it was amazing growth. We were doing something that was fresh, expositing the Scripture, there was a new hunger for that. We kind of caught the wave of that, the tail end of the Jesus Movement. There were new Bible translations, that was huge. People were beginning to understand the Bible in new ways. There was just a wave, I think, at that time when I came that the Lord sort of allowed us to catch that I think a real moving of the Holy Spirit in a special way.

RICK: Grace To You began. How did it become a radio ministry, a tape ministry, where did that...?

JOHN: Well I was preaching here and one of the men in our church, a man named Vern Lummus(?) came to me, he’s now with the Lord, he said, “We need to tape your sermons.”

I said, “Why would you want to tape them?”

He said, “Because then people could listen to them later.” And he said, “We can take them to the shut ins, or people who missed the service.”

And I said, “Well, if you want to do that, fine. Do that.” So he set up big reel-to-reel

things and for a while he would drag one of these big machines with reel-to-reel tapes and take them to people and play these messages. And it wasn’t long, maybe a year or so when a man came to me

and said, I remember where I was, it was at Hume Lake speaking to a youth conference and he said, “Have you ever heard of a thing called a tape cassette?” And I said no. He said, “Well, they’re going to revolutionize the world, tape cassettes. Your stuff is going to be on tape cassettes.”

Pretty soon it was and in those early days, Vern in his house turned his living room into a place to produce cassettes only it was at actual speed, so you put one cassette in here, hook it into another little machine over here and you’d record at the actual speed. So it would take an hour to record a cassette and he just started connecting them all over the place, look like some kind of a chemical schematic. And he was just making all these tapes all over the place.

It started to grow. And the tapes started to circulate a little bit. And we started getting mail saying, “We appreciate your ministry,” and it was coming from Baltimore, Maryland...your radio ministry was coming from Baltimore, Maryland. And we said, “We don’t have a radio ministry. What does this mean?”

So there was a radio station back there, it’s still there, WRBS, and there was a guy at the radio station who was taking these cassettes that he was getting and sticking them on the air. And from like nine o’clock to ten o’clock at night, just playing a tape. That was it. And the response was people were thanking us. And we thought, “Well if people appreciate that and it’s helpful, maybe we should have a radio ministry.”

So we got together and thought, “Well why don’t we take a sermon, cut it in half, make two half-hours, put it on the air and see what happens.

There was a station in Glendale in those days, a little station that did country music and horse racing, okay? So we bought a half an hour between the horse race and the country music and they hated us. You don’t interrupt horse racing and country music with Bible teaching. So we soon went off.

And a friend of mine bought a Christian radio station in Oxnard, KDAR, some of you know that, and that’s where we first went on Christian radio. We’re still on that station and it just kind of went from there.

JOHN: I’ve never really been involved in that other than to be the teacher who provides a message. God has always surrounded us with people who carry on that ministry and direct that ministry.

RICK: Historical heroes and why, who stands out?

JOHN: Well, you know, obviously you look at the influence my Dad had on my life. But from the standpoint, if I can go far enough back, apart from the Lord Himself, my personal model for ministry, and I certainly sit at his feet in every sense that I can is the Apostle Paul. I just...and I think that’s partly because there’s so much of him in the New Testament. He’s such a dominating figure, particularly because of his ministry to the churches. Peter writes general epistles. James writes a general epistle. But Paul writes to the churches. And I’m pursuing Paul. I really am. I really have aligned my life up to be an imitator of him as he’s an imitator of Christ. He would be the one that I pursue.

If a new biography comes out and....I mean, I go all the way back to Coney Barren Houseman’s

(????) treatment of Paul, a big thick thing years ago, to the more modern, anything I can get on the apostle Paul I read, even little kind of abbreviated things on him. I can't get enough of insight into his life and ministry. I think that's why I love 2 Corinthians so much because it's the heart of the man in the ministry. Paul would be a hero of mine.

In my seminary days, Dr. Feinberg would be a real model to me. Another man that you probably wouldn't know, Ralph Kypper(?). Ralph Kypper didn't write books, but Ralph Kypper was the primary editor of Eternity Magazine which was a product of Donald Grey Barnhouse. Donald Grey Barnhouse was one of the great American preachers, probably the greatest preacher of his day. He would be the James Boice, James Montgomery Boice of his time. In fact, Boice took over his radio ministry. Donald Barnhouse was a great theologian and a great preacher in the Reformed tradition and expositor of Scripture.

I didn't know Barnhouse but I read Barnhouse some. But I got to know Ralph Kypper who was his secretary. Ralph Kypper was a little...and Patricia will remember him...he's a little guy, he looked like the Pillsbury Dough Boy, he was just one of those guys you just want to poke, he just was that. So Kypper...and he was nearly blind. He was nearly blind, he had ten percent vision and he told me, he explained it to me, it would be like looking through binoculars backwards, that's how he could see, just kind of a little pinpoint. And he was just wonderfully charming and he helped me to have, I hope, a little bit of humor in my life, cause my father always told me, the pulpit is no place for humor. You've got to get that out.

I remember one time I showed up in a plaid coat to preach and he was appalled, my father was. So...but Ralph had this impish sense of humor. My favorite story about Ralph is...and I got to know him because he was a guest speaker at Talbot Seminary and I was asked to pick him up and take him every day back and forth to seminary and I just fell in love with this guy. We had him in our home. We had him back. He was just incredibly, incredibly wonderful guy and so much charm. He married this great big Dutch girl who was huge. And I'm sure he thought she was small, you know, looking (Laughter), but she wasn't. And he told me stories about the fact that when they first got a car, they lived in Philadelphia in an apartment, didn't have a car, she didn't know how to put it in reverse, so she just pushed it backwards down the road. Anyway...

He had so much charm and he brought so much joy to the ministry. And he was really astute. I mean, being close to Barnhouse and being one of the writers for Eternity Magazine, that was a significant magazine. Anyway, my favorite story was he went into one of these great department stores in Philadelphia one day and there was a fortune teller there who had set up a booth and she was telling fortunes. And he listened for a while and he could get away with anything because of how he looked and because he was blind, and he had a little cane.

And so he listened to her spouting off about what was going to happen, telling people the future. And she had a little microphone. So he walked up to her in his inevitable bold way and he said, "Ma'am, do you know where the Kleenex is?" She looked at him and she said, "No, I do not know where the Kleenex is." He said, "Ma'am, how is it you know so much about the future but you don't know where the Kleenex is?" (Laughter) That sort of took the wind out of her sails, I think.

But he had this charm. Well here's what he taught me, get to the point. He said, "I believe the greatest way to explain the Bible is with the Bible." He taught me that. I had grown up in a situation where you take a passage and you explain that passage contained within itself and then you take

illustrations from here and there and tell stories and read poems and so forth. He said, “You explain the Bible with the Bible.” And I heard him do it every time he preached and I’ve never heard anything like it. And I said, “Where do you learn to do this?” And he gave me my first edition of The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, TSK, which is a tool that helps you explain the Bible with the Bible. He is the one who really taught me how to do that and how important and how impactful that was. And so I’m deeply indebted to him. He’s long with the Lord but he brought a tremendous amount of joy into my life and really was used by God to teach me to do that and to draw the theology out of the text and then pursue it everywhere in the Scriptures.

RICK: Forty years...for ten years of those 40, the church was embroiled in a very significant law suit that made it very far in the court system, the Nally case. Talk about what that was and the impact it had on the church.

JOHN: There was a young man named Ken Nally who was a student at UCLA at the time. He was a well-rounded young man, very, very fine student, I think he played on the baseball team also at UCLA. He was...he came to Christ out of an Irish-Catholic family. His father had married...his father had gone to the war and married a Vietnamese lady, I think, or some lady from the east and came back and he was Irish/Catholic. His father had deep resentment for Protestantism, for the Christian gospel. And Ken came to Christ and this created a tremendous conflict in the home, tremendous conflict.

So much conflict that many of our pastors here at Grace Church were embroiled in trying to work with Ken and help with Ken. He was very troubled because the conflict, it reached epic proportions at home. I mean, it was really, really serious. It was dangerous for him to be in that home.

I remember, Patricia and I tried to rescue him on one occasion, we took him in to our home. And he lived with us for a while during the trauma of those experiences. The conflict such epic proportions that he took his life. And we were all devastated by that because he had felt the call of the Lord in the ministry, which the ministry only escalated everything.

Well, the media hit us with the idea that we were...this is when psychology was really big, and psychology had all the answers and they were trying to shut down churches from doing counseling. And so they were saying, you know, this...they were digging into the archives of this church trying to find out how many people came to this church and killed themselves and there were articles about three people who had gone to that church and killed themselves. So the church came under this tremendous scrutiny. And the father found some lawyers who would take on the case of suing the church for exacerbating a pre-condition toward depression and pushing him to suicide by saying so much about sin. And so they put a lawsuit on us and took us to court in what really was a first in America. There was no prior case of clergy malpractice, that’s what the case was.

It started in 1980 and this was an amazing case because I knew immediately when threatened us this was first amendment because the first amendment gives you the right to practice your religion. That’s what we were doing. We were not licensed counselors, we were just practicing our religion by a constitutional definition.

Immediately the psychological community embraced the lawsuit against us because they wanted to put churches out of the counseling business so they could get it all. And so they had co-belligerence

on their side, namely the whole psychological world. We immediately found that the rabbis and the Roman Catholic priests were joining us and they were threatened by this as well.

Well as God would have it, at the time Sam Ericsson was on our staff. Sam is a Harvard lawyer and a dear friend who now is the center of a great ministry to lawyers around the world. Sam was here, Sam took it personally. We had about 25 attorneys in the church who joined him and the whole thing, ten years, never cost us one cent. There was a little clause in an insurance policy we had that protected us against any law suit and whatever costs there were, were absorbed by the insurance company. Ten years of litigation either done voluntarily by the men who are attorneys in our church. And first it went to trial in the Glendale courts and the strangest thing, they...I'm sitting there and myself and other pastors who were named in this have our future destiny in the hands of a jury. And the people presented their case, the plaintiff presented the case and they just dragged us through the mud. All kinds of things were said. Psychological experts were brought in and they presented their entire case.

And then it was time to present our case and before we could present our case, the judge rendered a summary. Judge threw it out and says there's nothing here...absolutely nothing. The media then...everything exploded in the courtroom, the media attacked the jury, they polled the jury, the jury would have voted against us. It didn't happen.

It went to the appellate court, the appellate voted in behalf of the plaintiff. And we appealed it to the California State Supreme Court and they State Supreme Court of California ruled in our favor, said we had no culpability, no guilt. And it was all in first amendment. It went to the United States Supreme Court who refused to hear it and therefore upheld the state court. But for ten years we were under that kind of scrutiny.

You know, the Lord knows who needs to fight those battles. We're just glad it was us because we had the people to do it who were formidable. Sam was a first-rate constitutional attorney and some other church might have fallen to that and then precedent might have been set for other churches to be victimized by that same thing. So...but that was the sort of the sword of Damocles hanging over our head and yet I never lost any sleep over it, I knew the Lord would vindicate us in the process. And if He didn't, we would take whatever came and continue to be faithful. But I'm grateful that the case was upheld by the State Supreme Court and by the Federal Supreme Court because it allowed and it was a great hurrah because it allowed people in ministry to go on talking to people about the things that are precious to them without the threat of being sued.

RICK: That was an attack from outside the church. You have said often that when you began your ministry you never had any idea that you would spend the majority of your ministry defending the gospel against other so-called Christians, especially with the respect with lordship debate and that controversy. Talk about that.

JOHN: Well when I was in seminary, I knew there were issues that we're going to face. The big issue when I was in seminary was over the inerrancy of Scripture. There were all kinds of liberal attacks on the authority of the Bible and we were highly trained in those years to be able to defend the authority and inerrancy. And inerrancy was the big word of Scripture. There were issues about sanctification. There were all kinds of paradigms of sanctification. The Charismatic Movement had begun. We were dealing with issues that had to do with Arminianism, and Calvinism and all those kinds of things. There were all kinds of eschatological issues. And I thought, you know, there would be a certain

measure of, you know, battling those kinds of things. I never really expected that this cheap grace, superficial kind of Finneyism that had saturated the evangelical church in America would reach the epic proportions that it did in what eventually came known as the No-lordship gospel.

But as it turned out, apart from ministry here at Grace Church on the bigger front, it seems that the emphasis has always been to defend the clarity of the gospel and the integrity of t he gospel. And what it is that we must believe.

I think for me one of the pinnacle moments was when I was sitting next to Jim Packer, J.I. Packer at a meeting in Fort Lauderdale on this very issue, after the ECT document, Evangelical Catholics Together document came out. And after seven hours of wrangling over what was necessary, what is essential with regard to the gospel, I said to Dr. Packer, whom I greatly admire, I said, “What is the irreducible minimum of the gospel which must be believed in order to be saved?” And his answer was, “That’s a very good question.” And that is THE question that you must answer. There are a lot of things that get passed off as the gospel. And it’s been my experience, as I said last week, the churches were full of people that thought they were saved. Many, many.

So I’ve continued to address t hat because that’s the main issue. We can differ on baptism. We can differ on the gifts of the Spirit. We can differ on church policy. We can’t get the gospel wrong.

So that ‘s, you know, why there’s been so many different efforts on my part to clarify that. And I praise the Lord for the more recent explosion of interest in Reformed theology because they got the gospel right. And it was great last year to go to that event called Together For the Gospel and there were five thousand men there, I think most of them were young, weren’t they? I mean, really young like 30 and down.

RICK: Twenty-five, thirty-five is the...

JOHN: Twenty-five to thirty five, five thousand young men who get the gospel right. Whatever else may be going on, whatever other things that you may differ on, that is the critical thing.

But, you know, as you think about it and you go back in history, that’s always been where the battle lies...with the clarity and the truth of the gospel.

RICK: Do you know what the latest number is on how many books you’ve authored?

JOHN: Too many.

RICK: Too many.

JOHN: Yeah. You know, I’m grateful for that, there’s been interest in books. You know, if I had to do it again, I might want to do less books, but the one encouragement to me is, you know, it seems to me we don’t need...there are lots of books better than the books I’ve written that are on that same subject that I’ve written on, but one thing I am grateful for that as a pastor....one very great scholar in America who I admire said, “My books are fine. My commentaries are fine for the untrained laymen.” And I’m not sure he meant that as a compliment. But my response to that is I spent my whole life

talking to the untrained laymen. I've spent my whole life trying to make the Bible clear to the person who is not in seminary, who is not in the Ivory Tower. And the good news is for me, this...they translate into other languages in an understandable way. That's the encouraging thing. Cause all around the world there are people who just need a simple understanding of the truth of the Word of God. And that's the encouraging part. There are better books that deal with issues that I've written on for the American audience, but there's a need around the world for things that are said in a clear and simple way. And I'm just profoundly grateful.

You know, when I see, for example, one book this big that has all the commentaries I've written on all the letters of Paul in one volume, all of Paul's letters in...all the commentaries reduced to one book put in the hands of African pastors who speak French, then that gives me joy. There are lots of commentaries in the English language on the text, but...or when I see, first thing when I saw that commentary on Romans in French and I was told it's the first one in French since Godei(??), that's a real joy. Or when you see a Romans commentary in Italian. I mean, that's a joy.

So, I think maybe for me that's the most satisfying aspect of writing and working on these books is. And I know they help folks because God's Word does. But I'm just especially for the translations that go on. And, you know, I just saw the first copy I've seen on the Arabic version of the study Bible. And I think it reads really well. (Laughter) But I don't know.

RICK: Talk to me about the study Bible. You said that if you had known at the beginning what it would have taken to put it together, you would have never started. We're thankful that you've finished. But that was to look at it, comment on it, and decide on every single verse in the Bible and maintain Sunday preaching ministry, what kind of toll did that take?

JOHN: Well first, I didn't know what I was getting in to and that's probably good. I mentioned this morning, didn't I, that a friend of mine had a son who had a terrible car accident and he's a paraplegic. As far as we know, I haven't heard the latest on it. But it's David Moberg(?) and he's the one who prompted me to do that. And I didn't know what I was getting in to and I didn't want to do it. I know I said, "I don't want my name on a Bible. I don't want my name on a book outside the Bible. I don't want my name on a Bible.

And then a very dear friend of mine gave me a Bible, a very special Bible, a Bible that was printed in Scotland, the first Bible ever printed in Scotland, I'm told, in 1576 by Bassendine(?) name of the man who printed it, and it's a Geneva Bible. And it was basically the work of John Knox and the translators in Geneva. And he brought it back to Scotland and it was printed there. And I understand it was the first one printed. There's another one, only two of them in the world. They don't know where the other one is. And I noticed when I got it, and it is a treasure to me now, of course, always has been, it's a study Bible. And the Reformers were concerned that people understand what they were reading. And so I felt...Well, if it was okay for them, maybe it's okay to do a study Bible.

That really moved me to the willingness to do it. It was an assembly of all the things I've taught. I asked the guys at the faculty of the seminary to do some basic ground work of books of the Old Testament that I hadn't taught and just give me some rough draft material that I could work off of. And I remember, I went away for a week to start it. And I started with Ezekiel. That's a hard book, Ezekiel, that's a hard book. And I figured, I better start with the hard stuff.

I started with Ezekiel. Took the notes that had been given to me. And they weren't really helpful. So I said, "I've got to start at the beginning and do this." So I went to Ezekiel. I finished Ezekiel, I remember, I finished Ezekiel and I sat back and I said, "This...65 more books? This will never happen...this will never happen." But it did. That's one at a time.

It took three years. The final year I was anywhere from eight to twelve hours a day. Those of you who were here in that final year know that I didn't really prepare to preach here because I couldn't. I would preach out of the overflow of the work on the Study Bible for that year.

It took me about a year physically to recover, just because of the expending of your energy. But of all the years of my life, that would be the richest. I had to embrace the whole of Scripture and what a privilege, what a joy for me.

The good news is I only had to do it in one language and all the translations somebody else gets to do.

RICK: Forty years, if you look back and change some things that you did, some perspectives that you had, not asking to digress but what would you change now looking back?

JOHN: I don't know that...I would be more patient, maybe. But how does a young man be patient. It's just part of the nature of youth. I wish I knew then what I know now. I mean, what can I say?

Look, I can't say that I would change anything because this is what God has done. What would I do differently? I love the friends that the Lord has given me, the faithful people through the years. As I said, this church has been heaven on earth, my family has been heaven on earth to me, continues to be a joy to me. The men I work with closely, like yourself and Dick Mayhue and Phil Johnson, and Don Greene, Mark Tatlock and others. All the men I've worked with through the years, the long line, you know that have come through and are now out pastoring other places. They're all a joy.

In fact, well you know this, recently we all got together for three days and for no other reason just to enjoy each other, everybody who has come through and worked closely with me, were there eight of us, or nine of us? Yeah, and we just prayed for each other and just caught up on everybody's life and ministry. Those are just such profound friendships and wonderful relationships.

The Lord has given me so much more than ever a person could have expected that there wouldn't be anything. Obviously if it could be more mature, more godly, you would desire that. But that's a process that unfolds in time and you never...you know, you never attain it but you keep pressing toward it.

I had been...I think, more than any man that I've ever known, helped by the people around me. I continue to be helped...immensely helped. People say to me, "How can you do all this?" I don't do all this. But there are people around me who have been ennobled to the partnership and the friendship and the relationship and the ministry who carry the great burden and the great weight of it. I have been greatly helped by very gifted, very dedicated, very faithful people. And some of them are behind the scenes, some of them are in front. And some of them are there praying and nobody knows it, but I've been greatly helped.

And this is God's plan for me so I've never looked back and said, "I wish I had done this," or "I wish I had done that." There may be have been some decisions in terms of structure or expenditures that maybe you would say that's probably not a good decision or something like that. No, I've lived, I think, in the unfolding purpose of God as His grace has unfolded.

RICK: Okay, John, ten years in Luke, one book left. There's a ground swell of question, "How long for Mark?"

JOHN: Well...(Laughter)....Mark is the newspaper edition of the gospels. You don't need four volumes like Matthew, or four volumes like Luke. Ninety-seven percent of what is in Mark is in Matthew. So I want to do Mark kind of like a newspaper edition. I want to be able to have Mark as a one-volume commentary so that somebody who wants to read the life of Christ in one volume can read it in one volume instead of four or five.

Mark is very fast-paced. Forty-two times in the book of Mark the word "immediately" is used...immediately, immediately, immediately, immediately. I'm going to take that as my model word to keep me moving through Mark.

There are not a lot of teaching discourses, it's an action gospel. It's narratives. But I need to do it. Some of you are going to say, "Well we just went through the gospel of Luke, why do we need to do it again?" Because God authored the gospel of Mark through the work of the Holy Spirit and we need to get all the views of Christ and what better subject than the Lord Jesus. The Lord is going to send us new people in the future and they're going to be exposed to the glories of Christ in fresh ways and so are you and so am I and I'm looking forward to it. So when the Shepherds' Conference is over, I'll begin the gospel of Mark.

Mark is very fast, it starts fast and it ends even faster. He doesn't do anything with the birth of Christ, it just jumps in at the ministry of Christ and it ends in a most amazing way. And in between it's just fast-paced. I think maybe two years, something like that. (Laughter)

See, I don't want to say that because then you all laugh at me cause...(More laughter). But remember, there will be some interruptions, you know.

RICK: A couple of quick questions. Scrap a perfect meal for John MacArthur, what would it look like?

JOHN: Well, you know, I'm a really simple guy. I love the tacos my wife makes. I love the lemon pie she makes. She takes wonderful care of me. I am a real pizza fanatic. I love food that ends in a vowel, basically any kind of food that ends in a vowel.

RICK: All Italian.

JOHN: Yeah, and if you think about that, all Italian food ends in a vowel. I enjoy the food, you know, I enjoy all kinds of food. There are some things, you know, you kind of grow up not eating and I still don't like what I didn't like as a kid. But I enjoy, you know, all the food. And I think that's one of the wonderful common graces, isn't it, that there's such a bounty that the Lord gives to us. But I like simple things like a good cheeseburger and an occasional broccoli, I'm saying that for Patricia's benefit.

RICK: And you've had the now and then...the highest rated cheeseburger in America.

JOHN: I did. I did. There is a funny little place down in New Mexico that had the highest rated cheeseburger in America and it was right near High School Camp. So....

RICK: How many times did you go?

JOHN: Three. (Laughter) People keep telling me when I'm there...take me, take me. So I was just taking them.

RICK: Oh sure.

JOHN: It's called Bob-Cat Bite and Austin Duncan who is the high school pastor knew about it so I took him.

RICK: He's from New Mexico.

JOHN: He's from New Mexico and it's legendary. You've got to know where it is, however, but it's pretty special. It was wonderful. Then I was able to take some of my grandsons...grandkids who were at camp and some others who were the counselors there so we had a good time doing that.

RICK: Well, John, thanks for your patience and enduring some of these questions tonight. We're looking forward to next week and being able to honor you. It's just...you're almost an impossible person to thank and you serve us so well each week, and we're just very grateful to you and we'll be able to express that in some specific ways next week.

JOHN: Well thank you, Rick. Thank you for all you do to help me. You're a tremendous help to me.

RICK: Will you dismiss us in prayer?

JOHN: Sure. Father, what a joy it is to look back and see your hand of blessing through many years. I just thank you for the grace that has been lavished upon my life and the life of my family and this wonderful church. Thank You, Lord, for what You've chosen to do. We're all in awe of it. We are unworthy when we have done what we have done we've only done what we have been commanded to do, we've only done what we ought to have done. We deserve no credit. We are but servants, but slaves. Our slavery is joyous. Our obedience is eager. And Your grace is abundant. We have endeavored as a church family together to do what we ought to have done in obedience and honor to You and Your Word and You have graced us in spite of our failures and we thank You and praise You for that.

For all the joys that have been ours through these years, we give you the praise. And we look forward to what awaits us in the future knowing that Your goodness has been on display a long time here and will continue to be as we remain faithful. For that we live in anticipation and we thank You in Christ's name. Amen.

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