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

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AL: Thanks, Carl, and you stand by because I know you want to add your voice to today's very special program, a salute, 25 years with the ministry of Word of Grace and John MacArthur. And, John, I guess the most obvious question, did you have any idea 25 years ago the worldwide scope the ministry would develop into?

JOHN: Oh, I had no idea whatsoever. When I came to Grace Church and all of this started, my goal was to keep people from leaving the church. I really never thought many would come, I just had experienced that when new pastors come, people leave. It was a shock, it continues to be a real shock to me and a testimony to God's goodness and God's grace.

AL: Well let's start at the beginning. How did it start?

JOHN: Well, I came to Grace Church in 1969. They had two pastors who died of a heart attack, the first two pastors, and I think the only criteria that I satisfied was I was young and they wouldn't have to support another widow. I was involved in doing some preaching and I was in youth conferences all across the country and college campuses and highschool meetings and just doing a lot of that kind of thing. But when I was contacted in 1969 to come to Grace Church and I preached there, I was overwhelmed with the love and the exuberance, it had a tremendous youth group. That's what really excited me. And it had a board who said we wanted to grow and we want to grow according to the Scripture and we want a man who will teach the Word of God.

Right from the very start a man came to me and said, "We need to record your sermons." And, of course, there were no cassettes in those days, it was all reel to reel. And he said, "We need to record these because there's sick people who can't come on Sunday." That's all he was thinking about was sick and shutins.

AL: And a very worthy cause indeed.

JOHN: Right, and what he would do would be make one tape and haul around this big tape recorder in and out of homes and hospitals and play this same tape over and over for these people while he sat by their bedside.

AL: What a ministry.

JOHN: Yeah. And as time went on people began to ask for the tapes and so he began to duplicate them reel to reel and people would pick them up on Sunday and eventually cassettes came. And we started out with batterypowered tape recorders. In fact, when we went to cassette, he had about 50 little tiny battery powered cassette machines all over his house.

AL: Where did he get them?

JOHN: Boy, you know, I can't remember. They were purchased from some company that rented tapes for tours of Hollywood. And so we sanctified all of those.

AL: In other words, you'd take a walking tour of Hollywood and play these little portable tapes.

JOHN: Right, we used those to play our tapes and to make these little broadcasts. And, of course, they were all plugged in to each other going at normal speed and he would record them that way. And that's how it started.

AL: Wow. And as a result of that, of course, the ministry continued to grow from those 50. I'm sure that many more were added after that.

JOHN: Well what happened was people said, "You know, we need to send these to missionaries and I want to send them to my brother inlaw," and you know how that happens. And it just began to take off. And we always tried to keep the price of our tapes very low. In fact, in the early days we sold them for a dollar a tape. And I was convinced that people were buying the tapes, erasing me and recording their kids, you know. But they just took off from there.

AL: Where was Grace To You located at that particular point?

JOHN: Well, it was located on the campus of Grace Community Church. We had some space within the church and just dedicated it to the tape ministry. It started right there.

AL: Let's telegraph ahead just a wee bit. Well, first of all, let me ask you, do you recall that first sermon that you preached?

JOHN: Yes I do. I preached on Matthew chapter 7, "Many will say unto me, Lord, Lord, and then will I say unto them, Depart from Me, I never knew you." Because the first Sunday I was at Grace Church I was concerned that there were people in the church who might not know the Lord.

AL: That's been your concern for many years.

JOHN: Many years. And I think some people thought when I wrote the book The Gospel According To Jesus that this was something new. No, this was the first sermon I ever preached at Grace Church. And as it turned out, it was of the Holy Spirit that I did that because a number of people surfaced who were not Christians. In fact, a number of them were on the board of the church. And we had a tremendous response, even to that first sermon.

AL: As a matter of fact the title of the message was, "How to play church." And we have a cassette, I have one in my hand here that I know our listeners would like to hear. And any of our friends, particularly those who may have never written to John MacArthur and Grace To You before, you can ask for a free copy of this first message by John MacArthur at the church, "How to play church." It would be a tremendous challenge to anyone you may know about whom you may not be sure of their eternal salvation. It would be a great idea.

JOHN: To be truthful, I sound like a bad imitation of Alvin the chipmonk on the tape. I was young and I talked so fast.

AL: How long did you talk?

JOHN: You know, Al, the first time I ever preached at Grace Church I talked for an hour and a half.

AL: And they stayed?

JOHN: They did and my wife when I walked down after preaching, she said to me, "Well, that's the end of this church." And I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "Do you know how long you talked?" I had no idea, there was no clock. The next Sunday there was a huge clock on the back wall.

AL: Who saw to that?

JOHN: The elders.

AL: Let's telegraph ahead just a wee bit. That was 1969 when you came to the church, February. Now 1977, some dramatic changes take place. What happened?

JOHN: I don't know, what happened in 1977?

AL: Well let's see, Hitler was gone so it couldn't have been that. That's when the radio began.

JOHN: Oh, part two...

AL: Part two. So what happened in 1977, John, that really brought the ministry of Grace To You into a quantum leap, as it were, a whole new plateau?

JOHN: Well it was Christian radio. You know, in my experience I had benefited from Christian radio. Of course, it wasn't then like it is now. It wasn't nearly as popular and common.

AL: In what way would you have benefited?

JOHN: Well because I heard Dr. M.R. De Haan and I heard Dr. J. Vernon McGee and...

AL: Lewis(?) Talbot

JOHN: Lewis Talbot on the Biola Hour. I had the opportunity to be exposed to what Christian radio there was. And I even...I even heard Haven of Rest and most people don't know this but my father was the host of Haven of Rest for quite a while.

AL: I didn't know that.

JOHN: He would pinchhit for Paul Myers, the original guy. And my Dad did many many of the broadcasts for Haven. And my own father with a program called Voice of Calvary which was a weekly program and now is still on the air and he must...that program must have been on the air by now nearly 60 years. So we decided to take a shot at radio. And we kind of backed into it. It was kind of funny, really. Somebody called us from Baltimore, Maryland, and said, "Boy, we really enjoy your radio program." And we said, "We don't have a radio program, what are you talking about?" Well, my friend Tom Bisset(?) who is with WRBS in Baltimore just took our tapes, stuck them on the air...just played a tape in the evening, I think between 9 and 10 or something. (A hum goes on) That's awful, Rick.

AL: I have this pain I should have told you about.

RICK: That's one for me.

AL: It's gas.

So, Tom Bisset put these tapes on the air.

JOHN: Yeah, he put them on the air and people started responding and when they would call the station he would give them our address at the church and they would write. And we thought, well if there's a need and there's a response, we'll track this a little bit and see what happens. And so we developed a halfhour format which changed a lot in the early years and went on the first radio station

with a daily program, KDAR in Oxnard. They just celebrated their twentieth anniversary. And that was where it all started in that station in Oxnard.

AL: Well sit back for just a few moments and let's give you a treat as well as our listeners and play a brief montage of what some of those early broadcasts dating way back to 1977 must have sounded like. Let's listen together.

AL: Well, we certainly can see some of the changes that have taken place across the years. Who was that masked stranger we heard a moment ago?

JOHN: Terrible, isn't it? I don't know how anybody endured my preaching in those years.

AL: You know, since those first broadcasts there have been a number of changes including the addition of our announcer and good friend Carl Miller. And, Carl, I think that's your cue to say whatever is on your heart as to how you feel about the ministry of John MacArthur and Grace To You.

AL: Oh, he will say something nice, presumedly.

JOHN: Yeah, we'll twist his arm. (coughing)

AL: Carl, we appreciate those kind words and I know, John, you've appreciated the opportunity of working with a grand dedicated fellow like Carl Miller.

JOHN: Well, the first time I met Carl Miller I think he was working for a radio station in the Kansas City area, or somewhere in the midwest.

AL: Yes, that's it.

JOHN: I just had an infinity for him from the very start and wanted him to be a part if the Lord allowed that to happen. And He did and we've just been so thankful for that partnership through the years.

AL: Thanks, Carl, for those good words. Let's talk now, John, just a wee bit about your relationship to the audience. There are some wonderful people you've gotten to know, many that you'll not have the opportunity of meeting until you get to glory, of course. But tell us about some of those people that you have met in some of the meetings across the nation.

JOHN: You know, that's such a tremendous joy. When I go places and go into cities I've never been to or churches that I'm not familiar with, to meet people who feel like they know me. The constant line is, "I feel like I know you." And the truth is they do know me because what's coming through in the preaching and teaching is really my heart. I think of a pig farmer in Fort Wayne, Indiana, a huge guy. I mean, he must have weighed 380 pounds.

AL: Whoa...

JOHN: Just huge, and he came up to me and he had big tears in his eyes after I preached and he threw his arms around me, about squeezed the life out of me. And then went on to tell me how the Lord had saved him by listening to Grace To You. That's...that's some years back. Just two weeks ago I was in Oklahoma City and I was sitting at a table signing some books, I was there to preach in a Shepherd's Conference and a radio rally for, I believe, it's KQCV radio there in Oklahoma City.

AL: That's it.

JOHN: And I was sitting at the table signing books and this lady came up, lovely lady and she said, "I want to thank you for your radio ministry." And I said, "Well thank you." She said, "No, you'll never know what a difference it's made in our family because my husband was converted to Christ listening to Grace To You." And I said, "Well isn't that wonderful." She said, "Yes, and that after pastoring five churches."

AL: Wow, that's hard to believe.

JOHN: Five churches. But he never really knew the Lord and he it and God has changed his life and she went on to tell the wonderful story. It is a tremendous avenue, obviously. Radio, I believe, is a communication teaching kind of medium as opposed to television which tends to fall on the entertainment side. And the Lord has just brought people, thousands of them across my path that have been touched by the radio and they continue to be a real joy to me.

AL: Well, John, you've touched the hearts of many people as you've just suggested and we all appreciate the way in which the Lord has used you and you have effectively given your gift back to Him. This might be a good point to let us have the opportunity of bringing some encouragement to your heart from a good friend of yours and a lady I'm sure most of our listeners are acquainted with...Joni Erickson Tada. Joni, why don't you share what's on your heart with John?

AL: Okay, so we're going to talk about building relationships with listeners. Okay, let me just see here...

JOHN: Now you can follow anything, any path you want on this.

AL: I'm just trying to get a little.

JOHN: You know what's interesting and...

AL: Thanks, Joni, we appreciate those kind remarks and I know that encourages John as well as our listeners and you've expressed it in ways that perhaps we would have liked to expressed it.

John, what excites you most about the ministry of radio and Grace To You? Is it still exciting to see the Word go out?

JOHN: Yes it is and I think what is most refreshing and wonderful about it is that even though radio is a media kind of thing, it has an intimacy about it. You can catch people in very isolated times...in their car and I'm sure many many people listen in the car, in their bedroom, in their living room, you know, in a hotel room, wherever it might be. And the opportunity to teach the Word of God in a very intimate setting, different than a church where somebody might feel a bit intimidated or they might be distracted by what's going on around. I can think of many times people would come to our church and say, "You know, the first time I came to Grace I really didn't hear anything you said, I was kind of watching and listening to the music and seeing all these things and there was so much going on." And I just think it's like having a oneonone opportunity to just drive the truth of God's Word right into the heart and it's better than having a discussion because they can't talk back, you know.

So I think about a guy who was in Sebring, Florida, he came up to me and he said, "I just have to tell you something," he said, "I'm a new Christian and I want to give you my testimony." And I said, "Well what is it?" And he said, "Well," he said, "I am the fifth generation Jehovah's Witness." He said, "My father is in charge of the Jehovah's Witnesses for the state of Florida. And my wife and I and our two sons are all very involved. I train," he said, "all the pastors in the Jehovah's Witnesses in this state." He said, "The other day I was driving across Alligator Alley, you know, down in South Florida, flipped on the radio and I heard you. And you said Jesus is God." And, of course, he said, "We don't believe that. So I reached over and I turned the radio off, I didn't know who you were, turned it off." And then he said, "I turned it right back on again and I listened." And he said, "I was in that area for two weeks and I listened every day for two weeks." And he said, "At the end of the second week I got down on my knees in a motel room and said, `Indeed, Jehovah, whom I've served all these years, if You came into the world in the form of Jesus Christ, show me.'" And he said, "In the morning I gave my life to Christ." And he said, "Now I'm going back to all these meeting places all through Florida," this was like two weeks before I saw him this happened, "and I'm telling them the truth about who Christ is."

AL: Wow.

JOHN: And he said, "I am being indicted as a heretic and I want you to pray for my family." He said, "Pray for my mother and father and my wife and two sons." And I got a letter from him, marvelous letter, his name is Tim about six months later and he said, "Thanks for your prayers, they're all in Christ." The whole family had come to Christ. That is to me what is so powerful. I mean, how am I going to meet a guy like that driving across Alligator Alley? What a privilege. How many people can get in his car for two weeks? It's just a tool there that the Holy Spirit in His sovereign purpose can

use. You don't have to buy something, it's not like a tape. You don't have to want it, it can come whether you want it or not. And that's what's exciting to me about Christian radio.

AL: And radio, of course, is a means of multiplying the efforts that go forth every Sunday at your church.

JOHN: Well, you know, I don't...I don't say this at our church but the people who hear me preach on Sunday at Grace Church are in the minority. That's just a small little handful of folks, even though it's a large church, compared to where the radio goes.

AL: Do you still find excitement, John, when you come to the Word of God? Is it still fresh? Do you still see things that you've never seen before that you discover, that you impart with other people?

JOHN: I think you can tell by my voice that I'm not feeling too well today.

AL: Yes.

JOHN: That I've been sick. But yesterday I was up all night long, I had to preach yesterday, we're recording this on a Monday and I got up in the morning after being up all night sick, and I'm never sick so this really hit me. And Patricia said, "You know, you need to get somebody else to cover for you today." I said, "I can't...I can't because I have this message from the Lord, I have to do it." And I'm not sure anybody really understands that who doesn't do it. And I went and preached twice in the morning and once again at night, that's...that's not only a mandate but that's what I'm all about. That's what sustains me and that's my joy and I can't get into the Word of God soon enough.

AL: But isn't there a day in John MacArthur's life when he feels like picking up the telephone and just calling in sick and maybe going fishing with Patricia?

JOHN: Oh sure. Oh yeah. There are days like that and when those days come I'm dutybound if I'm not more highly motivated.

AL: Let's talk about some of those sermons for just a minute. I'd be curious, deviating from the script a little bit, or at least some of the suggested questions we're looking at. I want to ask you some fun questions about ministry that I've been curious about. You remember the first one, we mentioned, "How to play church," which was the title of your message in February of 1969 and we've been offering a free copy of that cassette to our listeners. But do you remember that first one before February 1969, the first message you ever preached? Were you nervous? Were you much younger? Was your father in the audience? Do you recall any of that?

JOHN: Oh, it was brutal. The first sermon I ever preached was just really frightening.

AL: How old were you?

JOHN: I was a college guy and should have known better but I took a passage, this is hard to believe, "The angel rolled the stone away," and preached on rolling away stones in your life.

AL: I like it.

JOHN: It's brutal.

AL: I think it has possibilities.

JOHN: That passage doesn't have anything to do with stones in your life, that's the resurrection. But, you know, in those days, you know, I was trying to be clever instead of biblical, I think.

AL: Was your dad in the audience?

JOHN: No, he wasn't. But, you know, whenever I did preach and I preached a lot of my early sermons with my Dad there. My Dad then and my Dad now has always been my best fan, always. He has been enough of a father to me to tell me if he thought, you know, his first concern was the first time I preached in his church, I showed up and I had a plaid sport coat on. I mean, this is no big deal today. But then...in the mid sixties? He said, "You can't wear that. What are you doing with that on?" I said, "Dad, what does it have to do with anything?" He said, "You can't wear that." I said, "Well I don't have anything else." He said, "Well, I don't know if I'll ever live this down." And then I went and preached and preached. And afterwards he came to me and he said, "Oh my," he said, "you've got to get the humor out of your messages." He said, "The pulpit is no place for humor, this is really serious business." So there I was in my plaid coat telling jokes in his pulpit, you know.

AL: Well that was...that goes back a ways. But what about the longest message you've ever given? You said an hour and a half for, "How to play church," what was the longest message? Anything longer than that?

JOHN: Well it wasn't "How to play church," that was a relatively shorter one. The first sermon I preached at Grace Church was when I was still candidating, it was prior at the end of 1968 and it was a hour and a half. And I've preached a couple of times an hour and a half. But lest you think that's a long sermon, I remember hearing Francis Shaeffer preach for four and a half hours.

AL: Wow.

JOHN: One sermon. In fact, after two hours we went out and had dinner, came back and he was just somewhere in the middle still. But I have preached in the black churches in the south and...

AL: In Russia where you have an interpreter.

JOHN: Yeah, but I mean in the black churches in the south, many times I'll preach a sermon and they'll say, "Preach another one." And I'll just turn the page in my notebook and go to the next one. I've preached as many as three sermons in one meeting that lasts two, three hours.

AL: What's the hardest message you've ever had to preach?

JOHN: Well, I don't know specifically, Al. But the hardest message that anybody ever has to preach is the one they're not prepared to preach. And I'm a real fanatic about preparation. The thing that makes preaching difficult or impossible for me is to be unprepared because...

AL: Well how do you do that? Do you set aside time? Now, like today you have had this recording, you have a funeral to minister in just a wee bit and you didn't plan on any of that, what happens to the prep time?

JOHN: Well, again I don't punch a clock from nine to five and I have my study at home and as my wife would gladly attest to, I'll be up there until I'm done. And that's wonderful. You know, it's not hard to keep at it. It's sometimes hard to get at it, you know. It's hard to get into it but once you're into it, you know, I become just about shut out from everything. You learn through the years. I tell young guys all the time, if you'll take the first ten years of your life and really do the hard, hard, diligent work of study to interpret Scripture and build your solid theological foundation, you will be able to spend the rest of the years doing great preaching with less time because the foundation will be so solid. So, you know, you just...there are some things you can't do. I mean, there are things I can't do. I wish I could be everything that some people might assume a pastor should be, but when you have a church with thousands and thousands of people, you can't...you can't even make yourself available to all of them on a personal basis. So...so you make choices and I know my people at Grace Church have said through the years, "John, whatever it takes for you to study is what we want you to do because we want, you know, the Word of God."

AL: They want to be fed.

JOHN: That's it.

AL: Just like the crowd back in February of 1969 when they listened for an hour and a half.

JOHN: And he...the chairman of the board came to me after I preached for an hour and a half that night and I didn't have a clock and I was just...I was just pouring my heart out and he said, "If you

were our pastor would you do that every week?" And I said, "Well, yeah, that's basically what I do only I'm sorry I went so long." But I said, "That is what I would do." And they said, "That's what we want." And it's never changed. I mean, 25 years at Grace Church and that's what they still want.

AL: What messages, John, would have brought the best response or the most response, perhaps, as a result of being aired on Grace To You?

JOHN: Probably the series on the family would have brought over the years because it's been around a long time and it's been replayed and...

AL: And is on video.

JOHN: But the sermon that I preached at Grace Church that had the greatest response, one Sunday I poured out my heart about spiritual commitment and about the culture in which we live which doesn't make commitments and isn't loyal. And I talked about church membership and submitting to spiritual leaders and putting your shoulder to the wheel and being a part of Christ's church and identifying and belonging. I just...I don't even know if I had any notes, I just poured out my heart. And 1400 people came forward at the end to join the church...

AL: Good.

JOHN: On one Sunday.

AL: Wow.

JOHN: And so we had...we had such an unbelievable...

AL: How did you handle it?

JOHN: Well, they just came forward in this mass and so the next week we had all of them go to the gymnasium and we spotted deacons and deaconesses and elders all around in chairs and they sat and interviewed all 1400 of these people to make sure they knew Christ. And I think 300 people were saved that day cause they had come to join the church wanting to make a commitment but didn't know the Lord. And that was the single greatest...

AL: Sounds like the day of Pentecost.

JOHN: Some guy said to me the other day, talking to a Southern Baptist pastor, he said, "Listen, I'll give you any price for that sermon..."

AL: Well that leads me to say, why wouldn't you preach that again?

JOHN: Well I'm about to in January, the problem is I don't remember what I said.

AL: Do you ever preach the same message twice? Like R.G. Lee, what was it, a thousand times he did "Payday Someday."

JOHN: Payday someday, yes. Well yes, I always try to yell in different places. I don't really very often at Grace Church, rarely will I ever do that for the simple reason that I've only been in one church and I don't have any sermons that I haven't preached there and they're on tape. And I want to finish the New Testament so I want to keep moving to new...new passages. But occasionally I will repeat a message because people will desire it or because I think there's a new time in our church when it's important to go back over something.

AL: And there are some portions of the Word of God, some books of the Bible that...do I recall that there were three books that you haven't preached all the way through?

JOHN: Yeah, in the New Testament.

AL: Luke was one of them...

JOHN: Well Luke and Mark and 2 Corinthians and now I'm starting through 2 Corinthians and then I'll do Luke and Mark if the Lord allows. And I will have done the entire New Testament.

AL: I'd be curious to know, I was talking with an elderly gentleman the other day whom you know and I know and we've known through the years, he's now 93 years of age and I said, "Have your views changed any over these years?" And he said looking at me with sort of a twinkle in the eye and he said, "Well I guess I've become a little bit more mellow." Has John MacArthur since he preached this message, "How to play church," February of 1969, has he changed his theology, his viewpoint on things?

JOHN: Not really, not a lot. I think I'm a little more mellow. I sound a little more mellow, I think, than I did in those days. I sounded like there was a fire going on all the time. But basically the theology has been refined and nuances have changed and I've grown. I remember one Sunday night I preached on why the Antichrist will be a Jew. And during the week somebody called me and said, "You're wrong." And we had a little discussion. And so the next Sunday night I preached on why the Antichrist will be a Gentile.

AL: You take your pick.

JOHN: Yeah, so for a while we had two tapes...you know, you could take which ever one you want. No, there are those kinds of things that do occur through the years but basically the foundation of theology that I gained from the men who poured their life into me has stood the test of time.

AL: I recall you used the word mellow, old Dr. M.R. De Haan used to say, "Don't ever call me mellow." He said, "I don't want to mellow." He said, "When it comes to bananas, the next thing next to mellow is rotten."

JOHN: That's right.

AL: So he said, "I just want to hue the line."

JOHN: Well, I think, you know, all of us have a fear of spending your life in the defense of the faith so long and so diligently that when you get to the end you become hard and unloving and weary of the battle. You know, some of the really great men of God got that way in the end and they were caustic and they tended to just put off people. They weren't going to debate these issues anymore. I want to stay sensitive and...with a sweetness in my life and ministry even to the end. I don't want to get to the point where...where I lose the shepherd's heart and just want to pontificate. Always I want to be able to defend the truth from the Scripture not from who I am or something like that.

AL: So how do you handle criticism when it comes? And I'm sure it must inevitably come.

JOHN: Well I think there's a simple thing, simple answer to that question, believe it or not. The Apostle Paul was mercilessly assaulted in Corinth by the false apostles who came in. That's what prompted him to write 2 Corinthians. And they had accused him of seeking sexual favors from women, embezzling money, having no credibility, manipulating, being in it for his own fame and glory. They had accused him of being in error. They were trying to literally destroy his credibility so they could take his place as the resident gurus and then teach Satanic error. And when Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, this is what he said, "My confidence is this, the testimony of my conscience." And I really think that's it. I mean, he could have said, "Well let me line up 15 guys who will give you good quotes on the fact that I'm really a good guy." Or, "Look, here's some things I've done over here, this many people came to Christ here and this many churches were started," and all. He doesn't do any of that. He appeals to the highest court and the highest court is the conscience. And all you can do when you're criticized and you must do it is look inward and listen to your conscience. And if the criticism brings a stinging rebuke and a stinging criticism from your conscience, then you know that the criticism is just.

Because I have a very well informed conscience, you know. I mean, all these years in studying the Scripture, my conscience isn't trying to find the basis of truth. My conscience...my conscience knows the truth and it reacts to the truth. So the first thing I always do when I'm criticized is just look in my

own heart and listen to what my conscience says and if there's no accusation in my own heart, then I just have to say my conscience is clear like Paul and just go ahead and trust that God will bless in spite of the difficulty.

AL: And, John, you have a number of people who are standing in your corner cheering you on, as it were. You mentioned your Dad a moment ago but you have a whole staff both at the church as well as at the radio ministry, Grace To You. But there's one person who perhaps cheers you on more than anyone else and that's your wonderful wife Patricia. And maybe I could take you back to...and maybe I could take you back to the summer of 1992, actually it was August 11, a very special broadcast of Grace To You. Maybe we could just play that tape excerpt right now to let our listeners hear what went on.

Excerpt

AL: And you had an incredible number of people who were praying for you.

RICK: Take that up again, Al.

AL: And you had an incredible number of people who were praying for you and Pat during that time. But did you ever wonder, John, why me, God? Why was it necessary for Patricia to have to go through that experience?

JOHN: No, I guess I just trust in God confidently. Obviously I rejoice every day that God spared her life, and I've told her...it's good living with me, I mean we have a wonderful happy life but I can't compete with heaven. So the Lord didn't spare her for...for her sake. For my sake.

AL: Well it was just about...it was just about a year after that, almost a year to the day that we had a special program on Grace To You. Patricia was here in the studio with us. She's in the control room today for this program. But let's just play an excerpt of that special program a year after the tragic accident.

Excerpt

AL: Wow, that gives me sort of tears just hearing what Patricia had to say to you, John, on that occasion.

JOHN: We have a permanent relationship. We have a lifelong deep wonderful loving friendship and...

AL: What a great role model in days like these when so many men in the ministry seem to be defecting morally.

JOHN: Oh, it's so tragic and so unnecessary and forfeits all the good things that God gives to those that are faithful.

AL: Well that brought a few tears, tears of joy, of course, because of Patricia's healing. But you've had other times of encouragement and laughter, right?

JOHN: Yes. We've had quite a few. You know, I mean, James said, "Who doesn't offend with his tongue is a perfect man." And when you preach 2,000 sermons and everything you say is recorded, there are some things you wish hadn't been recorded. Through the years the guys in their more carnal moments will excerpt those out takes and splice them all together and even have the audacity to play them at church occasionally. In fact, I've had allergies through the years and there is a marvelous tape of sniffles and snorts and hacks and coughs which concludes with several verses of "just as I am," actually.

AL: Well do we have any tape there from our production department that we could share maybe a story that you told from one of your sermons.

JOHN: You know, this is the kind of stuff my father told me never to do.

AL: Let's hear it.

Excerpt

AL: As far as we know, he's still looking for somebody.

JOHN: That's right.

AL: I'm trying to think. Now what did that illustrate again?

JOHN: Nothing.

AL: Nothing.

JOHN: Illustrated insensitivity to this poor guy's fear of the Rapture, I think.

AL: I can understand how your father must have felt at that particular moment. Let's talk about the future, John, and we appreciate being able to capsulize these 25 years in a brief period of time. I do want to mention before we talk about the future the past, and that is this excellent message, "How to play church," the first message by John MacArthur back in February 1969. You owe it to yourself to get a copy of the tape and the best part of it is it's absolutely free. This is going to be the only time at

least on this particular program that we'll make that announcement, so if you've never written before particularly, we'd love to hear from you. I know that it would encourage John's heart.

Next 25 years, John, what do you see?

JOHN: You know, my Dad is 80 and he's preaching every week. He's got his radio program. And if it's in the genes, you know, I may go on another 25 years and I've never been more excited. Grace Church is in the best and most happy and productive time of its life since I came there.

AL: You're committed to the church?

JOHN: Yeah, that's what I am. I'm a pastor, a preacher, so I see myself preaching. I don't know, the Lord may move me, I don't know, I mean, I can't predict what He would do but I have no sense of release. I don't see anything other than what God has called me to do and I love preaching His Word and I love my flock. I believe God is going to give us opportunity to expand our radio outreach as well. And as you know, we've been expanding in international areas as well. And, you know, that's just really amazing to me. The other day I received a letter, for example, from a group of people in South Africa. The ANC, African National Congress, and the Butalazi(?) group which is another group in the racial tension there and about four or five other groups were having a big meeting. And they write, actually sent me a FAX to ask if I would fly over to speak to them and fly right back because of the influence of Christian radio in South Africa. They want a biblical perspective on dealing with all this stuff. So God has given us in other parts of the world in some ways a very unique ministry opportunity. And I was unable to say yes to that because of some commitments but I only mention it just to illustrate how the Lord is using the Word in very fresh ways in other parts of the world where they're a little bit, they're in a little different location on the Christian spectrum, you know, they're not as far into the sort of overdosed and apathetic kind of Christian culture that we may have in America now. So I think that, I think our tape ministry will increase with the extension of radio and tapes, I'm very excited. And I want to keep writing. I want to finish commentaries on the whole New Testament. I want to write books that deal with the issues that face the church and some books that will help Christians grow.

AL: And, of course, for the world, unlike the United States where television seems to be all the world for them, radio is the most important commodity.

JOHN; Well it is. You know, there are many places in the world where they have very limited television obviously and it's very highly controlled by government in some cases. So radio becomes a tremendous option.

AL: In case there's a man driving across Alligator Alley right now who turns on the radio and hears for the first time the voice of John MacArthur with a bit of a cold, Southern California smog albeit, and

Grace To You, what should we know about this ministry? For instance, your facility where these programs originate and your staff, what's that all about?

JOHN: Well, I'm looking across and through the window here at Rick Drae...

AL: He's grown old.

JOHN: Twentyfive years, I mean, the whole time...

AL: He's grown old in this ministry.

JOHN: Gracefully...gracefully, of course. He hasn't lost anymore hair, he didn't have any when he started. And he hasn't grown any either. But, you know, the whole thing, as you know, Al, is people. You know these people and God has blessed us with the best staff we've ever had in the history of this ministry.

AL: One word, really, commitment.

JOHN: Yeah.

AL: That's what it is.

JOHN: Commitment, loyalty, love, excellence. What they do they do as unto the Lord unquestionably. And another thing, too, service in ministry. Their...their cry constantly is how can we better serve people...how can we...how can we make things less expensive? How can we expedite answering their needs and their mail and all of that? So I'm very very grateful for what these people mean to me and how they facilitate all of this ministry. The team is just phenomenal. I mean, I wouldn't change anybody.

AL: Well I guess the last question that would come to my mind would be a very simple one, John. If God gives you another 25 years well and good. Maybe we'll join that fellow looking for the Rapture, however, going down the hall..(end of side one) for what would John MacArthur like to be remembered?

JOHN: Well, I just want to be remembered like the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 4, he said, "Let a man account of us as of servants, stewards of the mysteries of God." I don't want to be known as anything other than a faithful steward who discharged his responsibility. That's it and that's the criteria on my life that will satisfy my own heart and I think that's the spirit of what Jesus said when He said, "That the end you couldn't hear any better words than, Well done, good and faithful servant." And speaking of that, I happen to know that you are celebrating a fiftieth anniversary, Al. And there's no much that I can do to add to the joys and the blessings that those 50 years have brought to many,

many people. But I have a new book and I just finished it right here and the title of it is The Vanishing Conscience and it will be out in a few months and there's a special dedication here and it says, "To Al Sanders, with gratitude for half a century of loyal service to the Savior and thanks for many years as a wise and generous friend."

AL: I'm completely overcome.

JOHN: Well it's a small thing but...

AL: Thank you, John.

JOHN: It's appropriate and I thank you for your friendship.

AL: I thank you for yours, my friend. And I stand in your corner to root with you, your wife, Patricia, your family, your Mom and Dad and many other faithful saints down through the ages just to say, "Keep at it...keep keeping on."

Well, Carl, I'm completely speechless, can't even get the words out right. Maybe you'd be kind enough to tell the folks how they can get a copy of this tape, "How to play church," John MacArthur's first message from February 1969. Carl?

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