

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

A Personal Glimpse: Al Sanders Interviews John MacArthur

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AL: A lot of these men have come to the Shepherds Conference this year from their churches, and I'm sure it's been wonderful as they've been elevated to the heavenlies with the music, and the speaking, and all of the rest. But they have to go home to circumstances that may be less than pleasing. Why are we people in the pew so touch on pastors? Is it just something that comes with the turf?

JOHN: Well, I think it is. You know, Jesus knew exactly what He was talking about when He called the church "sheep." They're dumb and dirty, you know. You know we don't...I say that, I went to New Zealand and in New Zealand there are three million people and seventy-million sheep, and so sheep define the culture, people don't. And it was amazing to me to find out that the sheep is the dirtiest animal in the world because of the lanolin in their bodies, they attract and accumulate massive amounts of dirt and a shepherd has to consistently clean them and shave them...I'm not talking about sheering a sheep, but just shave them consistently or they'll die because of the accumulation of dirt. And I think about that so often having been to New Zealand and I think about the fact that the reason it's so hard to be a pastor is because you're dealing with people who are battling with sin, struggling with all the issues of life, and who...who probably don't understand, in most cases, what it is we do. And what makes it really hard is not just the sort of sin struggles that they deal with in the issues of their own life, but when sin confronts your leadership, when that sin confronts the direction of your life, or your ministry, and it becomes a power struggle, or people undermine you, that kind of thing becomes very difficult, but it does go with the territory. I mean, it just goes with the territory. I think it's important to be very patient with people, and very loving so that you can give them space to mature. But even in that, it just comes with the territory.

AL: How do you...how do you guard your heart from being discouraged? I mean, maybe you've preached your heart out and somebody at the door said, "Well, you should have heard Chuck Swindoll on that passage."

JOHN: It happens. It happens. You know, I just think it's an inside thing for me. I really kind of live in 1 Corinthians 4 where Paul says, "It's a small thing what men say about me."

AL: But it hurts...

JOHN: Well it does, but I take it with a grain of salt because they don't know my heart.

AL: How does Patricia handle that?

JOHN: Worse than I do. Really, it hurts her much more than me because I have discharged a duty before God and it's His approval that I have sought. And if I can go home and pillow my head in the bed on a Sunday night, and feel that I discharged my responsibility before God to the best of my ability, then I can sleep. If I have been criticized, that criticism doesn't stick unless my conscience wounds me. I really do live the realm of my conscience. And I don't...I don't...my conscience isn't perfect. It's sensitive through the years of the exposure to the Word of God. It's not perfect, it's fallen like the rest of me, but I love what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:12, when the Corinthians were criticizing him, he said, "My confidence is this, that my conscience is clear, that I have discharged my life in godliness and holiness." And I think that's where you have to go. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4 again, he says, "However, even when I know something against myself, herein am I not justified." I'm not under any illusion that my conscience is perfect, but it's all I can live with at this time, and I will leave the final verdict to God.

But it has become a small thing to me, in one sense, how men might judge me. It is a huge thing to me, how the Lord might judge me. And I think I have to always keep that perspective.

AL: Some of the men here not only are going through times of discouragement, but also pressures, maybe thinking about their family. They're wondering, "Is it time for me to move on? How does a pastor know when his ministry in a church...how long have you been here?"

JOHN: Thirty-two years. I don't have any other invitations.

AL: How does a pastor know when possibly it's time to move on? Do the stars come in alignment?

JOHN: Yeah. It's an interesting question, I'm not sure I can standardize an answer because you don't want to equate discouragement with the voice of God, you know. You don't want to equate...you don't want to turn your back on a difficult situation. You could say, "Well, it's tough, they don't appreciate me here." And then you go and they'll do the same thing to the next guy, and he'll leave, and they'll do it to the next guy, and the next guy. Who is going to die on that hill and turn that church back to what it ought to be. So there's that battle.

AL: But there's that little group, you know, that meets on Sunday...

JOHN: I think...I think if I could get to a point where I feel I could make a general statement on that, I would say, when you are so compelled and so driven by an opportunity somewhere else, I think when

that opportunity somewhere else disconnects you, I think if you're just saying...I got to get out of here, and I don't know where I'm going...you're presuming. And maybe the whole deal here is that God is going to work on you.

AL: Through them.

JOHN: Right. I mean, look at Jonathan Edwards, he's 22 years in North Hampton, the greatest preacher maybe in American history, probably...certainly it's a little group of three, anyway. After 22 years, his congregation votes him out, kicked him out of the church, destroyed his reputation. So he spent the rest of his life talking to some Indians who were about at a kindergarten level. Spurgeon, I mean who can conceive of going to the association meeting and Spurgeon was voted out of the Baptist Union. Do you remember what year that was?

AL: That was before my time.

JOHN: It was before your time. Do you remember him? Eighteen eighty-eight, they voted him out. And his brother, James Spurgeon, who as his assistant pastor made the motion, and seconded the motion. I mean this is not just some rummy pastor here, this is Charles Spurgeon.

AL: Was that at the end of his life?

JOHN: I think, and, of course, Iain is the biographer, but I think that contributed to the distress of his later years, and he went to France and he never really recovered, did he? No.

I mean, you ask yourself, how can he do that to a Jonathan Edwards, who eventually was asked to become the president of the college of New Jersey which became Princeton. And he said, "No, I'm not worthy to do that." He finally agreed to do it, went there and died before he could do much and ended his life...I think, from a viewpoint, a sad time, and Spurgeon did as well, but history has certainly reversed those courses, hasn't it?

So, you know, don't be under any illusion, men, that this is a bed of roses and you...I'll tell you what, people talk about burnout all the time. "Well, you know, burnout, burnout, burnout." Nobody ever got burnout from hard work. Plumbers don't get burned out. Ditch diggers don't get burned out. This kind of burnout, this kind of discouragement usually is connected to unrealistic expectations....

AL: Of yourself?

JOHN: Of yourself, for yourself, for your ministry that aren't met. And that's what winds you down into depression. So what I tell people is expect nothing. You don't deserve anything. So expect nothing. And you know what you said, Iain, at the end of your message this morning about remembering humility has made me decide that tomorrow I'm going to preach on humility, because that's the way

to end this. Now you're all pumped up and you've got all this information, and you know more than everybody else cause you've been here...now before you go home, you better get humble. So...we're going to talk about that Sunday night.

AL: I'm humble, and proud of it, John.

JOHN: I've got to work with you, Al.

AL: I want to talk because this is the man behind the pulpit, I want to talk a little bit about you and I know it doesn't make you comfortable to do it. But how do you balance your ministry and your family? Now you're here today, if you were at home, you could be playing with your four kids, you could be with your wife, it would be a whole lot easier than being under the spotlight. How do you balance? How do you shepherd your own family?

JOHN: Well, I think the first way, I love my family. That really helps. I mean that. I mean, I love my wife, I adore my wife. It isn't a sacrifice to be with her, it's what I choose and what I want, it's what I desire.

AL: I might just tell the folks that she feels the same way about you. I remember hearing her say that John had asked me, "Will you love me when I'm old and feeble?" And Patricia said, "Of course, I do."

JOHN: She's telling you things she hasn't told me. I mean that. God graced me with the woman He wanted to be my wife and partner for life. And that is a grace gift. And so I love her and it's no sacrifice for me to be with her. And so I pursue ways to do that. I love my children, all four of my children are in Christ, they love Christ, they serve Christ. They...and we have eleven grandchildren and they're teaching them to honor Christ, and they've been sitting with me, some of you saw them, the little ones, the last couple of nights, and sitting there for three hours and taking it all in. And then asking me questions about it, a few of them coming home. I just...I guess there's several things, you know, Al, one, you try to live your Christian life because my greatest fear is that they would hear me preach a message they didn't see in my life and the hypocrisy would be so blatant that they'd cancel out the faith. I mean, I think that is the deadliest thing that can happen in the life of a pastor. I can't imagine what happens to the children of a pastor who runs off with the church secretary or something. I can't...what do they do with the faith? What do they do with....?

I mean, I'm not what I am here at home. In fact, my son Mark said to me, one time. "You know, in the church, Dad, in the pulpit, you're something special. At home, you're just really ordinary. What is it?" And he was serious.

AL: He's the one you cut out of the will?

JOHN: He's the one we cut out of the will.

But he saw a demonstration of giftedness, and I was his pastor, and his preacher, and his teacher in the pulpit, and it was all sort of spiritual and profound and wonderful. And at home it was like, you know, nothing...just Dad. But that's, I think, it should be. I think in some ways you have to crawl back from that. You talked about Chuck Swindoll and we were having a conversation one time, and he said, "Do you get lonely?" And I said, "Well, no, I don't really get lonely because I think lonely is related to being unloved, unappreciated." But he went on to say, "Do you mind being alone?" And I said, "No, I actually prefer it." And he...you know how he laughs, he rolled back and laughed and laughed. And I said, "Why are you laughing?" He said, "Because that's exactly the way I feel." And he said, "The reason I feel that way is I can't produce anything if I'm not alone. I can't produce in a crowd. I can't prepare in the crowd." And so I have, as he did, and we talked about that for a long time, we have this mass of people who surround us in ministry and then we have this mass of people who surround us in the home. And we have to balance all that. And then we also have to isolate ourselves almost as a way of life. And so you live in three worlds. And sometimes there's a culture shock moving from one world to the other one.

And I don't know if you understand what that means, you guys that are pastors know, you decide you're going to go home and study, right? And now all the kids are there. And how do you...how do you, when you're little...you know, I'll give you an illustration. One night when Patricia...I told Patricia after being here for years and years, "I'm going to bring my study home because I can't get anything done at the church because I'm here, everybody comes to me and phones. I've got to go home." And this was...I don't know, how many years ago, some of you guys may remember, I don't know.

And I went home. And, you know, she fixed up a little office. We got a desk and she was so thrilled. She said, "Oh, I'll bring you lunch and I'll bring you some tea in the morning when you're studying, this will be so wonderful." And so I came home and the first week, it's about Thursday, and I come out of the office, you know, five or six o'clock, after studying. She says, "You know," she said, "Could you take your office back to the church?" She was serious. And I said, "What do you mean?" And so we started a conversation. It was the first time she had ever been rejected by me because I'm in there, I'm down in the middle of some verb, you know, about eight-foot deep and I hear, "Honey, Honey," knock-knock on the door. And my... just instinct..."Yeah?" and then it gets silent. And pretty soon, you know, it's only pizza because that's all you can slide under the door, you know. She...you know what I'm saying, she starts to feel. But you know how that is. When you're down somewhere and you're trying to unscramble something, you can't stop and go away and come back and get back where you were again.

AL: Your thoughts are gone.

JOHN: Yeah. And so...so all of that is juggled. I don't know. I think if you asked the family, I think God has graced us with love because we're all in Christ, they love the ministry, they honor the ministry.

AL: That is a very unusual situation, John. That's not normal.

JOHN: That's God's grace and I...

AL: It's wonderful that you have that opportunity. I think I'd like to follow that up by asking then, "What do you do for relaxation?"

JOHN: You know, I have a really active mind. And I...I have...Dick Mayhue told me one time, and I think he may be right, that I'm the most curious person he's ever met.

AL: What do you mean by that?

JOHN: I just keep needing to know...I need to know. I just need to know, I just need to have information coming in.

AL: Well what causes a curiosity right now? What are you curious about?

JOHN: Well, I just want to answer the question right, at this moment. That's the limit of my curiosity. I can isolate my curiosity to one moment, I think, or one issue. But I say that to say I read a lot recreationally. And I just...I have books all around and I just read because I just...I have this appetite to know, so that's a factor. I do enjoy spending time with Patricia. I'm not a real intense person in the sense that I'm wired, high strung, have a fast pulse, or anything. I'm pretty laid back, I have a real slow heart rate, real sort of calm kind of person. I don't have moods, I don't rise and fall. So I can take life on an even keel. I don't get stressed and things like that. But I just need information to keep coming at me, and I need my mind to stay active. And so Patricia always to take a walk, but I don't want to take a walk unless I'm chasing a ball, because I have to have a reason to walk. I mean, I can't imagine...I mean, you want to just walk? You know. Isn't there a hole at the end of the walk? You know. You understand that?

AL: John, is you could...

JOHN: So I play golf.

AL: Yes, I understand you do.

JOHN: Sometimes.

AL: Looking back on those 32 years-plus all of your time of education, if you could look at your ministry, is there anything you'd change, anything you'd like to go back and do differently?

JOHN: From a human standpoint, yes.

AL: What would that be?

JOHN: Well I'd like to be more diligent, more, you know, faithful, preach better, study harder. I'd like to...

AL: Is that realistic, though?

JOHN: I'd like to treat people, some people that I overlooked. I go back to a time when a little boy in our church had a brain tumor and I went to the hospital as they were removing the brain tumor. And I was there with the family and then it was a few years later that he died, and I did his funeral. And then a couple of months went by, and his father came to me and said, "We haven't heard from you in two months, what's...wondered if you wanted an update on how our family's doing.

And it just really...and I can't imagine how many times through the years I've overlooked those kinds of things. And especially in a church this size, you know, that's kind of hard to do. I don't think everybody expects that. I know there are things I've overlooked. I think there are times when I wasn't as kind in treating people around me because, you know, as this church has grown, we get going at a pretty much Mach One speed and you tend to sort of become a blur in people's lives, instead of stopping to nurture, as you go along. So those kinds of things. I guess...you know, from my standpoint, though, Al, I'm singularly blessed. So to go back and say I would redo it, I mean, this is way beyond anything I ever dreamed. I mean, this is way beyond anything I'm capable of. Anybody who is under the illusion that I am the reason why this has all happened, is wrong. This is a work of God through a multiple of people who aren't in this pulpit, but whom God has brought together.

So what can I say? Can a man be more blessed? Look at these men here. Can a man be more blessed than to be in the company of the faithful? Can you be more blessed than to be surrounded by men and women? Can you be more blessed than to have a loving wife and family and friends? What can I say? In spite of the things that have happened, and I think if I looked back, the thing that blesses me most about this church has been the salvation of so many thousands of people who have come to hear the message and have come to faith in Christ.

AL: Well this is only one little piece of the pie. What are some of the other distinctives of the ministries in which you are involved? What do you have coming up in the future?

JOHN: Well I keep waiting for when is the time when you sort of rest and you sort of look back and say, "Well those were the years?"

AL: Was that a wake-up call when your knee was so seriously injured and...

JOHN: Yeah, well...

AL: You actually almost died, didn't you?

JOHN: I think I need to tell that story, I told John Piper. He was talking about suffering, and we suffer a lot of ways in ministry. I've never been persecuted physically. I've been threatened. This is a tangent, but for a few months, I was doing a series, you guys remember, on demons? Remember that? And for...this was back a few months, we were going through Luke. And it seemed like we were just being assaulted by really bizarre people. Some of them with weapons? I'm talking about a few months ago.

AL: Was that the time the fellow came in your office...

JOHN: Yeah, I walked in my office and this guy's in there with a sphere and I don't know how he gets through three sets of double doors. You know, I'm guarded like, you know, an important person with these security people. And so this guy's in there, he's got a sphere and it's a threatening situation. And I've got people come attacking me and they've had to have them arrested and carried...taken out of here with handcuffs.

AL: Well don't close that story so quickly. What did you do with the fellow with the sphere?

JOHN: He said to me, he said...he had gym shorts and...

AL: Was this a Sunday morning?

JOHN: Sunday morning.

AL: Don't all your people come with gym shorts?

JOHN: No. And he's bizarre and he's real intense and he's got a big club in his hand and a sphere. He said, "I'm..." I don't know, he mumbled some things, then he said, "I'm here to make my presentation, and you're going to allow me to make that presentation."

Oh I said, "Yeah. Yeah," I said, "the guy whose arranged for that is in the hall and just let me get him and he'll tell you how it's all going to work out." So I walked out of the office and I said to the

policeman, I said, "There's a guy in there with a sphere who wants to talk to you." He says, "What?" I said, "Yeah, he's got a great big sphere and a club in one hand, he's in gym shorts and he wants to talk to you about the presentation he's making this morning."

No, no. I said, "Yeah, you probably should go in and meet him, I really don't want to go back in there." And he went in and had him arrested. And his brother called the church to say that it's one of those deals like the school shooting, that he had been telling people he was going to come and get me." So...you know, the other situation...and he kept back I think last week, or the week before last, after...anyway, when I had that knee surgery, I had some old football injuries and they wanted to clean my knee out because I had so much pain all the time, and it's great, it's really great now. But I went in and it was a surgery done by an outstanding physician and for some reasons it formed blood clots which can happen in many surgeries from the hip down. And so I didn't know that. Of course, you don't know for about a four-day period and the blood clots, if they break loose, can go into your lungs, then you have pulmonary emboli which is fatal if it's not dealt with. Or you can get one of those emboli going through your heart and that's instant death before they know what happened, or into your brain, and that's a stroke. These are serious issues.

Well anyway, four days later I'm in pain, serious pain, I don't know why. I go to a doctor, he gives me a bad diagnosis, misdiagnosis, so I lose three more days, it's seven or eight days. What happens is, blood clots go through to your lungs which are a series of increasingly smaller tubes, decreasingly smaller tubes. And the clots go through until they hit a tube they can't get into and then they block at that point, the blood supply, and the tissue behind that begins to die. So eventually your lungs are dying. And, of course, they can't recover from that once they die. So my lungs are dying, I don't know it. And I'm increasingly suffering immense pain, the likes of which I never have had and I've dealt with pain through my life. And I'm saying to my wife, "This isn't right." And she's never used to seeing me sick. I think I've missed two Sundays here in 32 years with an illness, flu or something. So I don't get sick. And she doesn't get it and she's saying, "Get up, don't act silly." And I'm trying to get sympathy and there isn't any. You know? And so finally, I'm in a fetal position on the floor and I can't even move and I said, "I'm going to go to a doctor, somebody's got to cut me up and fix me, this is serious."

I can't find the right doctor. I call George Saunders who is a doctor in our church, he says, "You need to talk to Douglas Morrow, chief of surgery, abdominal surgery at the Regional Medical Center. Get over there. I'll arrange, he's busy, but I'll arrange, you get there. I walk in the door, I'm like this, can't breathe. He knows what's happened. Immediately put me in the hospital and he told me later, it was a 24-hours within death, and 48 hours to see if I could survive.

Well I didn't know this. This is a simple knee orthoscopic surgery. I'm in there and some of these guys are coming to see me and I know I looked like death warmed over. I wasn't getting the right amount of blood, or oxygen, or anything. And I'm lying in there in the bed and Doctor Morrow comes and he saved my life. And they started hitting me with all this stuff and I'm right next to the Intensive Care

area and thin in the blood anyway. I'm there for seven or eight days and I really began to anticipate heaven. And I told John Piper, we were having dinner yesterday, there was a little bit of disappointment when I got well, cause I really...I really did begin in my heart...I had no fear, absolutely no fear, but...in fact, I just was saying, "Lord, are You sure this is okay for Patricia and my family and the church?" And then I had thoughts like, "No more meetings," you know, that kind of thing. No more preparation.

But the long story of it is, I got out of the hospital. Dr. Morrow came every day and he was gracious and a friend, and there were other pulmonary specialists taking of it. Well anyway, when I got out he said, "You know, you're going to have to rest for three months, but when you get in the pulpit, I want to come hear you preach." He hadn't been in church since he was sixteen. He said, "I want to come and hear you preach." I said okay. So I called him on the Sunday I was going to preach, I think it was about sometime in September or October of that, a couple of years ago and I said, "I'm going to preach." So he said, "I'm going to come."

It just so happened that that in the scheme of preaching that was the Sunday I started the gospel of Luke. And my opening message was on Luke, the beloved physician. And just set the hook. And he came to Christ, and he's never missed a Sunday since. (Applause) So I said to the Lord, "This is a strange evangelistic scheme. And if you want to know the truth, honestly, people, I cannot figure out any other reason for that illness.

AL: One other thing happened though, in a sense, and that was...maybe I'll look at my schedule, maybe I'll be careful as to how many overseas threats...

JOHN: They told me don't fly because flying exacerbates any kind of tendency toward blood clots. And so that's true. So I really don't want to fly.

AL: But you've been to Russia since.

JOHN: Well I had to go...a couple of times I had to go, so I just said, "Lord, if I die, I die flying to meet Bob Provost's expectation, what can I say? No. I'm going to go preach. If I die going to preach, that's great, you know.

Another thing happened out of that, I need to mention. Because we decided I couldn't go everywhere in the world, some men stepped up and built a world-class video studio in the basement of our seminary that I can do interactive conferencing and teaching anywhere in the world. So I can go without leaving. I just have to preach in the middle of the night cause of the time difference. But that's wonderful. And I think...I think it was really good, you know, to be at the edge of death and sense that there was joy there.

AL: If you were at the edge of death, what would your last sermon be?

JOHN: If I knew? I'll answer that with an anecdote. My grandfather, Dr. Harry MacArthur preached to the end of his life and I was a boy of about eight or nine, I don't remember the story, but my Dad tells it to me, he remembers things like this. And he and I went in my grandfather's bedroom, he was in a coma, he had been at the Mayo Clinic, they discovered cancer. He was in his late fifties, he had cancer, it was fatal and he was about to die. And he was on his bed in his house, I remember the house vividly. My Dad and I went in the bedroom, my Dad said to him, "Dad," he says, "what do you want? Is there anything you want?" He said yeah, I just want to preach one more sermon. And the reason was, he had prepared a sermon and hadn't preached it. For a preacher, that's like fire in your bones, you know. You know what it was on? Heaven. And he wanted to preach his last sermon on heaven, but he died before he could preach it.

So my Dad took his notes and them printed up and passed them out at his funeral so he preached on heaven from heaven. So if I could time it, I'd just preach on heaven and go.

AL: Well talking about...I don't want to be morose about it, but if something....

JOHN: Yeah, could we get on to life here?

AL: We could go back to the pizza under the door, you know. Do you see any young John MacArthurs coming along?

JOHN: There's a lot of them. That's the thing. John Piper was talking last night was talking about joy, joy, joy. That's what I have all the time. I just look in the faces of these guys and they're around me here and men at the seminary, young men in college, these men here. The Lord always...you know, He buries His workers, but His work goes on. I'm not indispensable. I'm just...this is my time, this is the little window in God's eternal plan, and I just want to carry my load in my little time and then God will hand it on and He'll preserve His truth and He'll build His church. This is the future.

AL: It was interesting, coming in this morning, as is so often true, if you come in between services, there are always people standing around John MacArthur. And I imagine many of the people here, many of the men here consider you their mentor. Have you had mentors in your lifetime who have meant a great deal to you?

JOHN: Sure. I mean, I'd have to start with my Dad. He's eighty-six, still preaching the Word of God every weekend.

AL: How's he doing? Is he better than he was?

JOHN: You mean as a preacher? (Laughter)

I couldn't resist that because you would have done that to me.

AL: Well he told me you were sending him your old sermons, so I presumed that was the case.\

JOHN: Oh yeah...yeah. You know, he is physically well. He's healthy. He's been on the radio with The Voice of Calvary, radio program 62 years. For years, you know, he was on live television. Yeah, we would have Sunday night church over in Burbank and then...channel 13...we'd jump in the cars we'd go down there, and he'd preach live on channel 13, preach the gospel. And that's when he started me preaching. I preached on television years before I ever preached on radio.

AL: And your sister sang.

JOHN: My sister sang.

AL: But your Dad...your Dad misses your Mom.

JOHN: Yeah. I mean, everywhere from his most precious companion in life, to he can't find his socks, and everything in between. You know, but he was...largely because he expounded the Scripture, because he was at home exactly what he was at the church. There was never any deviation because what he believed in the pulpit is exactly what he believed. He preached the same sermons to me riding in the car and sitting in the house that he preached to the congregation in the pulpit. And they were as passionate in his giving them to me as they were there. I saw integrity. I love the ministry. I grew to love the ministry. He was surrounded with preachers. I grew up with preachers everywhere. I loved preachers and that's just the environment I grew in. He was a mentor.

Dr. Charles Fineberg was a profound influence on my life because I was a non-intellectual athletic guy. I was very physical. I was very sort of, you know, glib and I could have gotten by on personality and glibness and all of that stuff as many men do. But this man nailed me down tight to being a student.

AL: A Greek and Hebrew scholar, the likes of which...

JOHN: Oh, he knew 35 languages, taught himself Dutch in two or three weeks to read a theology. I mean, he had a mind. I can't even fathom. He read through the Bible four times a year every year of his life. And in class, we would say to him, we would say to him, we would ask him things like, "You know, what is the proper Hebrew interpretation of 1 Kings 7:2?" We didn't even know what it said, we just pulled it out of the air. And he'd rattle off the Hebrew and interpret it. He studied for four years to be a rabbi, was converted to Christ.

Went to Dallas Seminary, graduated there with his Th.D. and Dr. Chafer said at his graduation, "He was the only student that ever came there that knew more when he arrived than he did when he left." So some...was that your experience? And then he went from there to John Hopkins and got a Ph.D. under William Foxwell Albright who was the world's leading archaeologist at the time. I mean, he had a consummate mind. We used to kid him because he did his devotions in the Syriac Peshitta, you know. I mean, he was just...he was just...he was just off the charts. But at the same time, he was unwaveringly committed to self-discipline, to this absolute self-discipline and this rigid, rigid commitment to time and using every moment of time. And I'm telling you, what that man taught me about time has been a God-send to me in my life because if I couldn't discipline myself and order my time, I could never ever live the life that God has laid out for me.

And I suppose the greatest lesson he taught me was the first time I was to preach as a student in chapel before the faculty and the students, and I preached. And I won't take the story...tell you the whole story. But after I preached, the faculty would come and give criticism sheets and I only cared about one and it was his, and I didn't care about any else's. He was the one I wanted to please. And I had worked about 35 or 40 hours on this 20 minute thing. And I preached it. And he didn't check off all the boxes, and make all the things about gestures and introductions, conclusions, and all the stuff they did. He wrote in red across the page, "You missed the entire point of the passage."

AL: Do you still have the paper?

JOHN: No, I don't have the paper but I don't need the paper. He wrote it on my heart. You missed the entire point of the passage. And he looked at me and there was so much grief in his face, like how could I have invested in you what I've invested in you and you do this? And that man...that was the most crushing thing that ever happened to me. And seminary was the greatest lesson I ever learned and I think the converse of that, AL, and you'll be able to appreciate this, when he died, his family requested that I would speak at his service. And so somewhere between that sermon and his death, he decided that I had figured out how to find the point of the passage. So that was like a valedictorian experience for me to preach at his funeral.

AL: He was very proud of John MacArthur. I can assure you of that.

JOHN: You knew him.

AL: Any other mentors?

JOHN: You remember a guy named Ralph Kiper(?).

AL: Of course, he was only...what five-something...

JOHN: And blind and he was Donald Grey Barnhouse's research assistant. And he only could see ten percent out of one eye and it would be like looking through a telescope backwards. And he had this incredible ability to explain the Bible by the Bible. And he didn't use human illustrations, he used biblical illustrations. So I...I got to know him because when he was doing conferences out at Talbot, or Biola, they would send me to come up. And he...his persona was like the Pillsbury Doughboy. You know, you just wanted to kind of poke him and watch him giggle. He was just...he was flesh with no bones. You know, he was just...

AL: He was about five-feet high and he married a woman who was about seven-feet tall.

JOHN: And the riot of that is, he bought her a car to drive him around and they had it in an apartment in Philadelphia, and the first time they took it out, she couldn't find reverse. So he got in and she pushed it backwards clear down the one-way street so they could turn around. And that was her...vroom...you know. My favorite story about Kiper was, he went into...he was real bold. Because he was blind he could get away with anything, you know. Everybody cleared the way for him. So he goes in to this big store in Philadelphia and...

AL: Wanamakers, I think.

JOHN: It may have been. And they had a fortune teller in there doing an exhibition. And so there were people all crowded around and she was telling fortunes of these people. So he stood there and listened. Finally he pushed his way to the middle and got up in front and he said, "Mam...."

AL: Yeah, that's the way he talked.

JOHN: "Mam, do you know where the Kleenex is?" And she says, "Of course I don't know where the Kleenex is." He says, "How come you know so much about the future but you don't know where the Kleenex is?" (Laughter)

Well he took a personal interest in me and taught me how to do what I do, or to do what I do, and that's to explain the Bible with the Bible.

AL: John, I have only about five minutes because I know there are a lot of questions these folks want to ask you. Ever have a question you couldn't answer?

JOHN: If it's not in the MacArthur Study Bible, I can't answer it. Oh sure, all the time. There are some questions that can't be answered to satisfy the human mind and there are plenty of questions, plenty, plenty, plenty of questions that I don't know the answer to, or can't recall the answer to. People ask me, "Do I ever listen to my own tapes?" And I often say, "Only to find out what I believe because I

may have preached something ten years ago, you just listen to it, you'll know more about that than I will because I don't remember it. So there are plenty of things.

AL: Just for your interest, I have mess of other questions here, like what three people would you like to meet in heaven? And why?

JOHN: Well my Mom, I guess would be first.

AL: I'm not going to ask you that question. These are just questions if we had time I'd like to ask you.

JOHN: Oh.

AL: What we'd like to know about you that we don't even know enough to ask.

JOHN: Well, you can get that straightforward from Patricia.

AL: What about the so-called coming together of Catholics and Protestants? What about trends, moral and political? If you hadn't been called into the ministry, ever wonder what profession you might have been in? Any special message on your heart you haven't as yet brought? What's the hardest part of the ministry?

JOHN: Can I answer that one? Can I stop you? Or is this just...

AL: No, no, it's my show, you get your own show.

JOHN: Okay.

AL: I guess that's the last time I'll be out here. And the last question is do you ever feel spiritually dry? If so, what do you do? Yeah, go ahead and say whatever you want to say, you've got five minutes.

JOHN: I don't know that I ever feel spiritually dry. Sometimes I feel assaulted by temptation. There are times when I wonder why my spiritual life is so buoyant and so fulfilling, and so satisfying and I don't feel like I'm really waging some fierce war. And there are other times when I feel I'm just battling to maintain my spiritual balance. I don't know...I can't really discern why all that's happening. But I've lived long enough to know that I have been protected by the grace of God when I felt that my own strength was not up to the confrontation. I mean, when you're sixty-one, and I am, if...if Satan hasn't thrown at me everything he can throw at somebody, I'd be surprised. And I'm not...whatever may be my strength at this point, I didn't have it when I was thirty-three or forty. And after all, spirituality is not an absolute anyway. So I guess I've just...I just look back on my life and say there's been an amazing, sustaining work of the grace of God suited to the moment of trial. And so, I just...I rejoice in that, that preservation. People say to me all the time, you know, don't foul up, don't scandalize the

church and obviously we all pray that, I pray that as well.

My wife through the years, you know, always had that fear that what happens to others would happen to her, you know, and her pastor husband would bomb out. And you look back at your life and you know that it's by the grace of God that you are what you are. And all I can say is God's grace has sustained me through all this life and I have...I know what it is to live in His blessing and I'd like to stay there. I'm grateful that He has sustained me this far. And I think that's part...I think that's part of what makes this ministry have some value is because it's the long haul. And I think that's what's really makes this church what it is.

I mean, not only do you outlive your critics, which is nice. But there's some kind of credibility that comes when they see you, they see your wife, they see your kids, see your grandkids, years and years and years go by and you're feeding and teaching and they're growing and they're...there's something about that that's restful, that's satisfying. When you start, you know, you're climbing a mountain, you're pursuing these things and I don't know when you begin to see the turn, but you sort of enter into a rest. And I think you know you're there when the people surrounding you doing ministry are right on the same wave length with you and you can rest now that the ministry can be extended through them everywhere without changing, without deviating from what you believe to be the principles.

AL: Eleven forty-four, John, so my last question is this. When the Lord does call John MacArthur to be with Himself, for what would he like to be remembered?

JOHN: Well I think that it's just that I was faithful to teach the Scripture. It's just that God was gracious and sustained my whole life in faithfulness to preach and teach the Scripture. That's plenty good for me.

Lord, we love John and Patricia and the family. We love what You're doing through him, ultimately around the world in so many different venues, in so many different areas of media. We pray Your hand of blessing may be upon John, very distinctly in these important days. And with the rest of us. Help him to end well in Your name, we pray. Amen.

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