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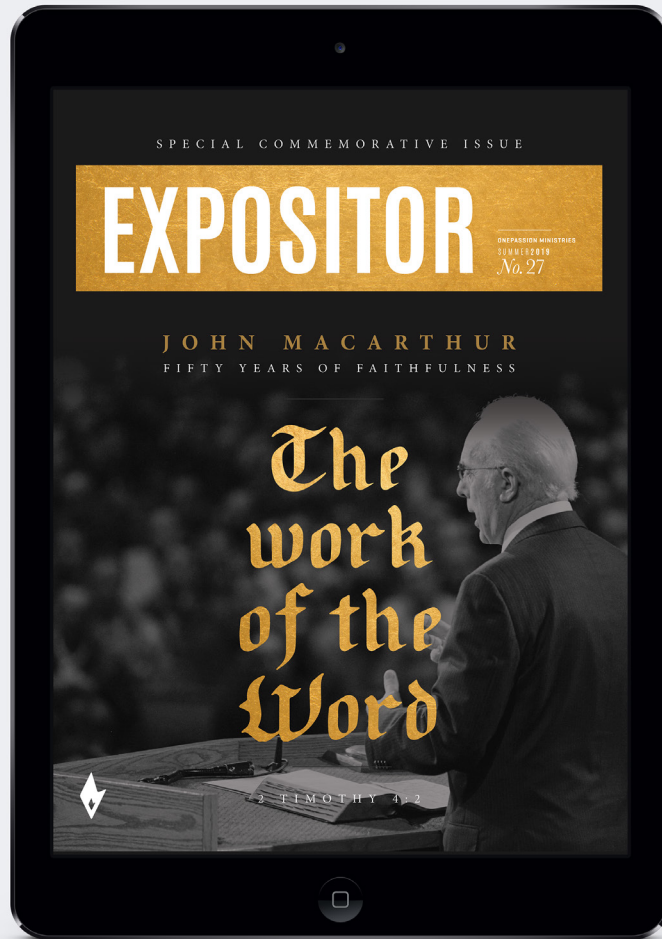
JOHN MACARTHUR

FIFTY YEARS OF FAITHFULNESS

## The work of the Word

2 TIMOTHY 4:2





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# FIFTY YEARS OF FAITHFUL PREACHING

DR. STEVEN J. LAWSON, PRESIDENT, ONEPASSION MINISTRIES



I am grateful to have been directly influenced by some of the greatest expositors of our generation. In my formative years, I was deeply impacted by the zeal of Adrian Rogers and the fire of W. A. Criswell, both of whom were my pastors. I was struck by the exegesis of S. Lewis Johnson and the command of R. C. Sproul, both of whom were my seminary professors. I was impressed by the profundity of James Montgomery Boice, who preached two different Bible conferences in a church I pastored.

Nevertheless, there has been one individual who has most affected my pulpit ministry. That man is John MacArthur. I initially heard him preach in seminary chapel over forty years ago. As I listened to his compelling expositions, I witnessed a powerful example of what preaching should be. In MacArthur, as in these other men, I saw an unwavering commitment to the biblical text that was grounded in solid exegesis, sound interpretation, and strong theology.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of enjoying a personal friendship with Dr. MacArthur. I have witnessed a man who walks with humility before the Lord and integrity in his daily life. No one has been more gracious and kind to me, outside of my own family, than John.

I am often asked when I first met John MacArthur. The story gives insight into the kind of man he is. As a young pastor, I had traveled to hear him preach at a conference, never dreaming I would actually meet him. After I heard him

preach that Friday night, I went to a hotel for breakfast the next morning. As I was writing my sermon manuscript, Dr. MacArthur came walking in with his wife, Patricia. Upon seeing my bottle of ink sitting in front of me, he made a beeline for my table. I could not believe my eyes.

John inquired about my fountain pen, which led to an engaging conversation. He then invited me to gather up my papers and sit with them for breakfast. What I thought would be a short visit turned into a two-hour discussion about preaching and theology.

What struck me about this man was how gracious he was to me, someone he did not know, someone out of the ministry spotlight. Nevertheless, his pastor's heart shined brightly that day. I saw that behind this gifted preacher was a genuine follower of Christ who cared deeply about people. Everything that has transpired since that first meeting has only served to reinforce my respect and love for him.

This issue is dedicated to John MacArthur, in recognition of his fifty years of faithful preaching at Grace Community Church. As I survey his life and ministry in the following pages, my desire is that this commemorative issue will encourage you to serve the Lord with renewed faithfulness, wherever He has placed you in His kingdom. ♦

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**JOHN  
MACARTHUR**

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**“I AM A SINGULARLY BLESSED PERSON. I HAVE NO IDEA WHY THE LORD CHOSE ME AND PREPARED ME AND SET MY COURSE, PUT ME IN THE FAMILY THAT HE PUT ME IN, AND PUT ME IN TOUCH WITH THIS CHURCH WHEN I WAS IN MY TWENTIES, REALLY TOO YOUNG FOR THE RESPONSIBILITY. BUT HERE I WAS, FEBRUARY 9, 1969, WITH ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA OF WHAT THE FUTURE WOULD HOLD, BUT KNOWING I WANTED TO TEACH THE WORD OF GOD.”**

**JOHN MACARTHUR**

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THE MASTER'S EXPOSITOR

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**F**or the past five decades, John MacArthur has stood in one pulpit at Grace Community Church in Los Angeles, California, and preached not only to his growing congregation, but to a far larger audience around the world. This faithful expositor has fed untold millions throughout the globe, while becoming the premiere example for a new generation of expository preachers. Combining a brilliant mind with a driven work ethic and pastor's heart, he has faithfully shepherded his flock for fifty years, while establishing his pulpit as, truly, a worldwide pulpit. In so doing, MacArthur has become the primary conduit for biblical truth throughout Christendom.

To put this steadfastness into perspective, other great preachers in previous generations have not come close to reaching this mark. Martin Luther preached in Wittenberg, Germany, for thirty years. John Calvin preached at St. Pierre's Cathedral in Geneva, Switzerland, for twenty-five years. John Knox preached at St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh, Scotland, for twelve years. Jonathan Edwards preached in Northampton, Massachusetts, for twenty-two years. Charles H. Spurgeon preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, England, for thirty-eight years. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached in the pulpit of Westminster Chapel in London for thirty years.

By comparison, John MacArthur has preached in Los Angeles at Grace Community Church for fifty years—and counting. This long-term endurance is a remarkable testimony to the enabling grace of God in the man.

In each generation, there seems to be one dominant voice in the church that speaks with the greatest authority and theological accuracy. That formidable figure exerts a far-reaching effect in his hour of history. For the twenty-first century, a compelling case can be made that this luminous individual is John MacArthur. His influence has seen Grace Community Church grow into one of the most significant churches in our generation, one that is home to a world pulpit. More than any other expositor in this century, MacArthur has been used by God to impact the church for the cause of Christ around the world.

The Apostle Paul wrote that we should “hold men...in high regard” (Phil 2:29), referring to those who have endured in the service of the gospel. The intent of this issue is to do just that—to hold MacArthur in high regard for his faithful work in preaching the Word. We are instructed, “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you” (Heb 13:7). That being so, let us reflect on this noted expositor of Grace Church. He has spoken the Word of God with excellence for half a century. Let us give

thanks to God for his longstanding fidelity.

In this special commemorative issue, I want to provide an overview of this remarkable life and ministry. Many of us know the preaching of John MacArthur. But do you know his life's story? Do you know about the early years of his ministry at Grace Community Church? And can you trace the movement of his ministry over the decades?

## **PASTOR'S SON (1939–1957)**

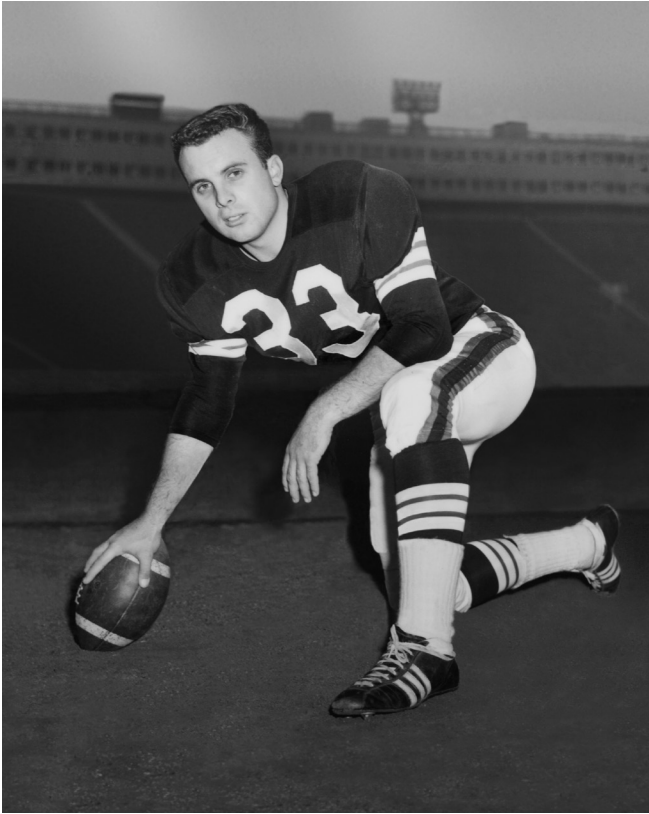
John Fullerton MacArthur, Jr., was born at St. Vincent's Hospital in Los Angeles, California, on June 19, 1939. He was the firstborn child of Dr. Jack and Irene MacArthur, both parents being of Scottish descent. Providentially, this newborn child shared the same birthdate—June 19—with another famous preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. MacArthur came from a long line of preachers, and would become a fifth-generation minister of the gospel. MacArthurs before him were faithful missionaries in Scotland and Canada, and even in Australia. John's grandfather, Harry, was a gifted preacher whose deathbed request had been to deliver one final sermon. His father had a ministry that lasted over sixty years.

As a child, MacArthur lived for a brief time in Philadelphia and Chicago, where his father was involved in evangelistic work. Later, his father moved the family back to Los Angeles, where he served as the pastor of a Baptist church in Los Angeles, in what was known as the Downey Watts area. Eventually, Jack MacArthur pastored Calvary Bible Church in Burbank, California. There, John grew up in a pastor's home and learned firsthand what a pastor's life looked like. As a hyper-active child, John spent much of his spare time riding bicycles and sliding down flood drains. This indomitable drive and energy would one day be channeled into his future calling.

John attended high school at Colter Academy, where athletics was his main interest. A gifted athlete, he excelled in football, basketball, baseball, and track. John said, “In my high school days, I basically lived to compete.” His competitive instincts were fueled in sports, another asset that would help him strive for excellence in the ministry.

## **COLLEGE YEARS (1957–1961)**

Upon graduating from high school, John wanted to play sports in college. But his father insisted that he attend Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina (1957). John commented, “My dad wanted me to go to Bob Jones University. I didn't want to go; I wanted to play football, baseball, and basketball, and Bob Jones didn't have athletics.” As a dutiful son, John complied with his father's wishes and enrolled at Bob Jones. Though the emphasis upon



John attended high school at Colter Academy, where athletics was his main interest. As a gifted athlete, he excelled in football, basketball, baseball, and track.

the Bible was strong, he found the school to be legalistic and wanted to transfer to another college. But God had an important lesson to teach John.

After his freshman year, he was driving back home to Los Angeles with several classmates when he was involved in a serious car accident in Alabama. The car lost control, flipped into the air, and landed on its side. John was thrown from the car and slid one hundred yards down the highway on his back. He suffered severe burns on his back, down to the bone. John ended up in the hospital and in bed at home for the next three months. He had to lay facedown so his back could heal. God used this incident to get his attention, humble him, and bring him into greater submission to His will.

As a result of this incident, John confessed:

I realized I was not in control of my future. I had survived something that should have killed me. God suddenly had my undivided attention. I remember saying, “Lord, I’ll do anything You want me to do.” I spent those three months drawing close to Him and

reading His word and reaffirming my commitment to do whatever He wanted me to do.

When John returned to Bob Jones, he was dramatically changed. That year, while nineteen years old, John preached his first sermon at a bus station in Spartanburg, South Carolina. He confessed, “The sermon was terrible. I didn’t know how to do it right. I went there—had my Bible in my hand—and walked into this mostly empty bus spot. As I looked around at a motley bunch, I started preaching a gospel message.” With a fire building in his bones, this initial sermon was a harbinger of things to come. For one more year, John attended school in Greenville, from 1958 to 1959.

After John completed his first two years of college, his father allowed him to transfer to Los Angeles Pacific College, now Azusa Pacific University. In this new school, John was able to resume his passion for football, where he played on the team for his last two years, from 1959 to 1961. He admitted, “When I was in college, I didn’t want to read. I was a typical guy who was usually outdoors, and I preferred not to be indoors reading.” John was more than merely a player on the football team. He excelled as a defensive back, receiving the All-American Honorable Mention Award after his senior season. He graduated from Los Angeles Pacific College with a Bachelor of Arts in Religion with a double minor in History and Greek. He also had enough hours to have had another minor in English. This study of the English language would be another important asset in his future ministry of preaching and writing.

After college, John gave serious thought to pursuing a career in professional football. He was scouted by some professional teams and attended the training camp of the Washington Redskins in the National Football League. Standing at this intersection of life, he sought to know God’s direction. Along with his passion for football and athletic competition, John was also sensing the call to ministry. With that strong inner compulsion placed in his heart by God, he knew he must answer to a higher calling. John was determined to attend seminary for the biblical and theological training he would need for a lifetime of ministry.

## SEMINARY STUDENT (1961–1963)

John MacArthur soon enrolled in Talbot Theological Seminary in La Mirada, California, to begin his study. The Los Angeles Rams and the Cleveland Browns invited John for a football tryout. But at this point, his decision had been made. God had directed him into the ministry, and there was no turning back. To plant his feet firmly in the Word,

his father introduced him to one of the premiere professors of the day at Talbot Seminary, the highly regarded Dr. Charles Feinberg. This renowned Bible scholar took John under his wing and showed a special interest in him.

Feinberg left an indelible influence upon MacArthur that would endure throughout his ministry. In one memorable incident, John had preached a sermon in the seminary chapel on 2 Samuel 7, which he assumed had gone well. To his utter embarrassment, Dr. Feinberg corrected him afterward, saying, “You missed the whole point of the passage.” This strong rebuke left a lasting mark on John for the rest of his ministry. The painful lesson had been learned. He must find the true meaning of the biblical passage before he could preach it in a God-honoring way.

During this time of development, John also began reading the seventeenth-century Puritans, especially Stephen Charnock. His classic book *The Existence and Attributes of God* elevated John’s theological thinking to an even greater height. This voluminous Puritan work on the being and character of God resulted in a far more God-centered orientation to his theology, a commitment that would only grow over the years.

During these days in seminary, John met Patricia Sue Smith at her father’s church (1962). John remembered, “She was the cutest girl I ever saw.” Though she was engaged, the powers of John’s persuasion convinced her to accept his invitation for a ride in his Volkswagen. The result was inevitable, and they were married in August 1963. In this formative season, there was another pivotal matter. Several of John’s friends and colleagues in ministry unexplainably apostatized from the Christian faith. This drove John to write his master’s thesis at Talbot Seminary on the counterfeit disciple, Judas. He commented:

I was always trying to come to an understanding of who was a true believer. And when I was choosing a subject for my dissertation in seminary, I chose to write on the character analysis of Judas Iscariot; and the reason I chose that, as I think back, was because I wanted to have a better understanding of a fake believer, somebody who could deceive.

These pseudo-believers in John’s life brought him to the sobering realization that a person could profess Christ without knowing Him. For the rest of his ministry, the reality of such self-deception would be a major focus of his teaching and preaching. Much of his future ministry would be an attempt to expose the empty profession of a tare sown among the wheat. To this day, this sobering presence of unconverted church members remains in the



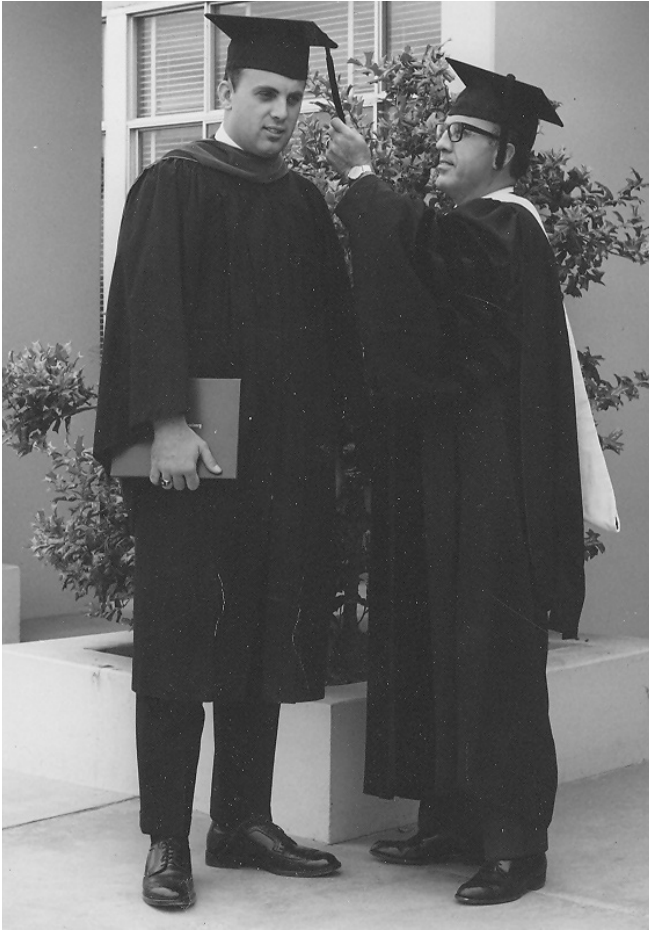
While in seminary, John met Patricia Sue Smith at her father’s church (1962), and they were soon married (August 1963).

crosshairs of John’s exposition.

In 1963, John earned a Master of Divinity degree with honors from Talbot Theological Seminary. He was recognized by his classmates as president of the student body. He was also awarded the Charles Feinberg Award by the faculty. This was a fitting recognition for his diligent study and obvious giftedness. Through these school days, John had turned his focus from athletics to academics and had become a serious student of the Word.

## INITIAL MINISTRY (1963–1968)

John considered pursuing a doctorate at Claremont School of Theology, but realized that doing so would require the study of liberal theology. Why study dead, unbelieving German philosophers? He refused to enter the program, saying, “I have spent all my life learning the truth, and I cannot see any value in spending the next couple of years learning error.” Instead, John assumed the role of pastoral assistant to his father at Calvary Bible Church in Burbank. He would serve there for the next two years, working in the youth ministry (1964–1966). It was during this time, August 1964, that John and Patricia welcomed their firstborn



John graduated with honors from Talbot Theological Seminary with a Master of Divinity degree (1963), having been recognized as president of the student body. He also received the Charles Feinberg Award.

son, Matthew MacArthur. John was ordained by the Independent Fundamental Churches of America the following month, on September 25, 1964.

John also served as an assistant professor at Los Angeles Baptist College (1965), later to become The Master's College. He then accepted an invitation from Talbot Seminary to be a representative of the school and travel as a speaker. He served in this capacity for the next two years, from 1967 to 1969. This period saw him preach in numerous churches, camps, and youth gatherings, including Youth for Christ events and Campus Crusade meetings. He remembered, "I had two-and-a-half wonderful years there, preaching all over the country as a faculty member at large. I preached an average of 35 to 40 times a month.... I really had an opportunity to work on my preaching ministry." This season in his life provided John with the needed experience to hone his skills as a preacher.

In July 1966, John and Patricia had their next child, a daughter, Marcy MacArthur. Then Mark MacArthur was born in April 1968. With a growing family and after almost three years of heavy travel and concentrated preaching, John increasingly desired to settle down and pastor a local church. He stated, "I was asking God to open a door for me. Now that I had preached, I had a hunger for a flock of people to use this gift. So, I asked God in my own heart to draw me to a situation where I could have that opportunity." Amid his growing preaching demands, John took time to write his first two books, *Christians and Demons* (1969) and *Take God's Word for It* (1969).

## GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH (1969–PRESENT)

While preaching at a youth camp in 1968, John was asked by a small group of the students if he would consider coming to their church to be their pastor. They were from Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, and the position had recently been vacated. Their previous two pastors had died suddenly, and they were now looking for a young pastor who could have a longer ministry. A group of men from the church contacted John and asked, "Would you be interested in candidating?" In the fall of 1968, they invited him to speak at their small church on Roscoe Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley. John accepted and preached a message on a Sunday night from Romans 6–7. It was a precursor of things to come, as the message lasted an hour and twenty minutes.

While driving home, his wife Patricia said matter-of-factly, "They will never invite you back." Despite the length of the sermon, Grace Church with its three hundred members called John to be their third pastor in January 1969. At age twenty-nine, he accepted the invitation and began his new ministry on a rainy Sunday: February 9, 1969. Fittingly, from the length of John's sermon, a giant clock had been mounted on the back wall.

Like a hurricane making landfall, John's first sermon in his new pulpit was a powerful exposition on the danger of a false assurance of salvation, based on Matthew 7:21–23. It was appropriately titled, "How to Play Church." He remembered, "The first time I stepped into a pulpit at Grace, I wanted to confront the fact that the church...had false and true believers mixed together." This inaugural sermon opened with these pointed and challenging words:

The true church of Jesus Christ is not a religious institution which welcomes everybody; it is the body of Jesus Christ set apart unto God, uniquely married

and wedded to the self-same Christ, redeemed by faith. And no one outside of that faith redemption can be a part of it, for that is the requirement for the church, and it is our task as a people and a preacher to warn those who have not received Christ, to warn them in love but to warn them nonetheless how they are in danger of the terror of the Lord.

As the sermon progressed, MacArthur advanced to this dramatic point:

I am sure that in this church right here there are people who come who do not know Jesus Christ in a personal, vital way. I am convinced that because of the size of the congregation this morning there are some sitting right here in this audience who have come to church many times but who do not know Jesus Christ... It is my conviction that before we as a church can move together as a body, as a unit, we must become a unit, and the only way we can ever be united and become one as Christ prayed that we might be is when we all are real in Christ.


This kind of preaching required extensive time to study. When John first talked to the elders at Grace Church, he explained that he needed time to prepare in order to excavate and interpret the biblical text, as well as to assemble his preaching manuscript in a coherent manner. He reflected:

I wanted them to give me at least thirty hours a week to study... At first, they were a little concerned; that seemed like a lot of time... I wanted that because I believed that if I read Ephesians 4 properly, pastor-teachers are given to the church for the perfecting of the saints. And the perfecting of the saints comes about . . . through the word of God. So, the tool is the word, and I had to spend time in the word. So, I set apart basically fifteen hours for each of the two messages that I would give on Sunday.

The elders agreed to this request. Nevertheless, John still had to maintain a heavy load of pastoral duties. He was fully engaged in his duties as a shepherd. He stated:

What you may anticipate and what really happens are two different things. I found myself being called to the hospital and called to homes where there were deaths and counseling people. I set up the tables and the chairs for the women's meetings, and I used to clean out the bathrooms on Saturdays preparing for Sunday and make sure the windows were clean and the ushers were ready.

In describing his calling as the pastor of this church, John expressed that it was his passion, first and foremost, to know God. He explained, "I see my calling, first of all, is to know God. I frankly do not study the Bible to get a



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**JOHN MACARTHUR**



Grace Church called John (age 29) to be their third pastor in January 1969. He accepted and began his ministry soon thereafter (February 9). The church had 300 members.

sermon. If I ever do that, I find myself contriving the Scripture to get my sermon.” In other words, the primary focus of his study of the Word of God was to know the God of the Word. This priority would remain central for him over the years.

In his study, John endeavored to know, specifically, what God meant by what He says in His Word. That is, he understood that he must know the truth accurately before he could preach it faithfully. He stated:

I have an insatiable hunger to know what the Bible means.... I have to know what the Bible says and what it means by what it says so that I would know how I can live to glorify God.... To me, the ministry is simply a tremendous gift, which says in effect.... “Spend your whole life finding out what the

Bible says.” At the end of the week...I get to share it with them.... That is a ministry out of the overflow of the relationship that I have with the Lord that comes from the study of His word. As that overflows from my life, it touches the lives of the people in the congregation. The word has the impact of affecting them as it affects me. Together we grow.

From the beginning, John was committed to the serious study of the Word in his sermon preparation. Gifted with a commanding intellect, he feverishly devoted himself to the diligent analysis of the Scripture. Biographer Iain Murray notes that this relentless pursuit to study the Bible has always marked John’s pulpit ministry:

For forty-four or forty-five Sundays, through forty years, two new sermons have been prepared every week; in the early years it was three, as MacArthur also spoke at the church on Wednesday nights. The pattern of his week has been to give the best of his time, from Tuesday to Friday, to preparation for preaching.... In early years, this meant some fifteen hours of work for each sermon; and he still requires from eight to ten hours.

From the start of his pastorate, MacArthur was convinced there is no substitute for depth of understanding of the Word. Regarding this non-negotiable commitment, John recalled his passion to plunge into the biblical text itself. He stressed:

I always begin by reading the whole book. It is imperative for the expositor to be familiar with the overall message and flow of the book before he begins preaching any passages from it. I also read the introductory sections in several good commentaries [in order to] become familiar with the author of the book, the addressees, the book’s theme or purpose, the date of its writing, and other important background material. I ask myself, “What is the primary message of this passage? What is the central truth? What is the main expositional idea?” I begin to look for the subordinate points that support it. The next step is a detailed analysis of its words and grammar [to find] any problems in the passage, such as an important textual variant, an unusual word, or a difficult grammatical construction. Rightly dividing the word of truth demands great effort. It was originally written many years ago in very different contexts; today’s exegete has to work hard to bridge

the gaps of language, culture, geography, and history. He must also do his best to understand the flow of the argument, as it would have been understood by its original readers [and] intended by its original human author. The meaning of the Scripture is the Scripture. If you do not have the interpretation of the passage right, then you do not have the word of God, because only the true meaning is the word of God.

From the beginning of his pastorate, MacArthur was keenly aware he must always isolate the doctrinal truths in the passage to be preached. Murray observes that this focus upon discovering the theology in the passage yielded the profundity in MacArthur's preaching that was lacking in other expositors:

[There is] a growing difference between the older, [G. Campbell] Morgan tradition of exposition and MacArthur's. In his case, as with Lloyd-Jones, the devotional thought is grounded on the bringing out of clear doctrinal principles. Exposition needs to lead hearers to doctrinal certainties.... The necessity for doctrinal content—the making clear of biblical principles—became an increasingly important part of MacArthur's preaching.

MacArthur has always been committed to this kind of biblical preaching that finds and teaches the doctrine in each text. He stated: "The pastor's purpose is not to make Scripture relevant to his people but to enable them

to understand doctrine, which becomes the foundation of their spiritual living." No matter what the people may want, MacArthur specified, solid theology must be given to them. He summarized: "People's ears may be itching for anything but sound doctrine, but the faithful pastor will defy the spirit of the age, confront his own fear, and boldly preach the truth anyway." MacArthur is convinced that in his preaching and teaching, it is his primary objective to "enlighten his congregation in doctrine that protects and preserves their spiritual health."

MacArthur later reaffirmed this fundamental commitment to the truth when he wrote in *Only One Way* the following conviction:

Authentic Christianity is concerned first and foremost with truth. The Christian faith is not primarily about feelings, although deep feelings will surely result from the impact of truth on our hearts. It is not about human relationships, even though relationships are the main focus in many of today's evangelical pulpits...Biblical Christianity is all about truth.... An excellent minister is to disseminate sound teaching to all people at all times through all means. That is the heart and soul of the ministry.

Rather than going with the contemporary flow of the day, MacArthur swam against the current of most modern-day preaching when he said:

There is much relational preaching today that attempts

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SOUND TEACHING TO ALL PEOPLE AT ALL TIMES  
THROUGH ALL MEANS. THAT IS THE HEART  
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**JOHN MACARTHUR**

# “THE WHOLE CHURCH SERVICE SHOULD REVOLVE AROUND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD. EVERYTHING ELSE IS EITHER PREPARATORY TO, OR A RESPONSE TO, THE EXPOSITION OF SCRIPTURE.”

**JOHN MACARTHUR**

to make people feel better about themselves and about how God might feel about them, but there is little forceful defense of the full truth. As in most periods of church history, strong and effective defenders of the faith are at a premium.

The previous two pastors of Grace Community had possessed a moderate Arminian stance. To rebuild the theological foundation of the church, John initially preached through the opening chapters of Romans (1969). He then expounded the book of Ephesians (1969). Other doctrinally rich books would follow in these foundational years at Grace Church. These series would include Habakkuk (1969) and 1 and 2 Peter (1969). In addition, John preached on Wednesday nights from the book of Psalms. He also started a men’s discipleship group on Saturday mornings, in which he taught on the authority of Scripture, as well as basic Bible doctrines. A strong nucleus of men was being forged together around him upon the strong anvil of the Scripture. Through this teaching, a new, concrete base was being laid for the church. The life of the church began to change as it became a more Word-centered congregation. During this same time, the Word of Grace tape ministry, now Grace to You, also began. In the beginning, it produced about one hundred tapes per week.

A critical test to John’s ministry came when he was asked to marry the daughter of an elder to an unbeliever. John firmly refused, based on the clear teaching of the Scripture. When the question was put before the elders, they decisively affirmed the teaching of the Word. This

decision, however, led the senior men’s Sunday School class to boycott the morning worship service. They protested and remained in the courtyard, refusing to attend the service. As a leader, John took action, attended their class the next week, and confronted them with their carnality. The message was loud and clear. This church would be governed by the Word of God, not the carnal desires of men.

## **PROLIFIC EXPOSITOR (1970–1979)**

As the 1970s began, MacArthur established a strict commitment to the primacy of biblical preaching. Though he fulfilled many duties as a pastor, he was first and foremost a preacher of the Word. He believed that the exposition of Scripture must occupy the central place in the gathering of the church. The pulpit was the place where he exerted his greatest influence. He maintained: “The church’s most important function is to proclaim the word of God in an understandable, direct, and authoritative way. Preaching the word *must* be the very heart of our ministry philosophy.” This fundamental commitment has always lain at the heart of John’s philosophy of ministry.

MacArthur stated that preaching the Word must be front and center in any church:

In corporate worship, the preaching of the word should take first place. Preaching is an irreplaceable aspect of all corporate worship. In fact, the whole church service should revolve around the ministry of the word. Everything else is either preparatory to, or a response to, the exposition of Scripture.



Regardless of whatever people might want in a church, MacArthur refused to cater to the superficial desires of unconverted people. He remained a man under the divine injunction to preach the Word:

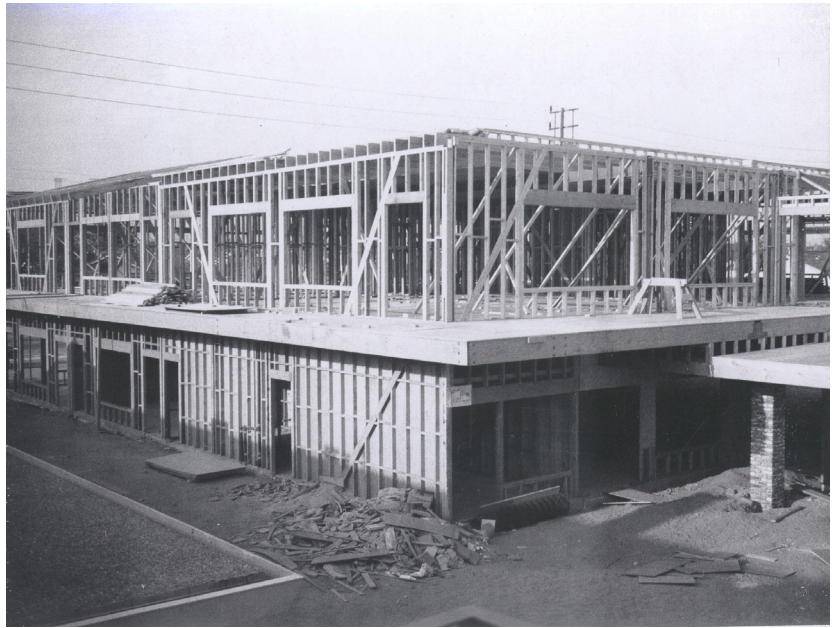
Some people today argue that the church could draw more “unchurched” people by featuring drama and music instead of preaching. But Paul’s instructions to Timothy were clear. He was to preach the word whether preaching was popular or not—“in season and out of season.” A “church” where the word of God is not regularly and faithfully preached is no true church.

MacArthur believed that too many churches had forsaken the high ground of biblical preaching. He was determined that Grace Church would not be one of those congregations sliding down this slippery slope:

Many things have come along to try and supplant preaching. And unfortunately, most people just let it happen. If you open your newspaper and look at the church page, instead of reading about men preaching the word of God, you read about musical phantasmas, movies, and all sorts of other things going on. They must never supplant the preaching of the word. A holy man, who is gifted to preach by the Spirit of God and prepared in the word of God, has no equal in a powerful presentation of the truth. That is the pattern of Scripture. Preaching is to be the priority.

Preaching verse-by-verse through entire books in the Bible, MacArthur followed the *lectio continua* approach, the continuous exposition of Scripture. This fundamental approach led him to serve a balanced diet of the Word to the Grace congregation. This comprehensive manner of preaching ensured that he expounded the full counsel of God. No truth could be ignored. No controversy avoided. No promise undelivered.

This sequential exposition of Scripture has been the genius of MacArthur’s preaching. Starting at the first verse of chapter one and moving consecutively through the entire biblical book, he read, explained, and showed the implications of the written Word of God. He has always believed



To accommodate the rapid growth, the first Education Building was completed (1970). The Family Center, with a seating capacity of 900, was built and used for Sunday services (1972).

that he is merely the messenger of the biblical text. He stated, “Preaching and teaching must be expositional, setting forth as clearly, systematically, and completely as possible the truths of God’s word and only those truths.” This is the underlying reason for the success of his ministry. John is simply the mouthpiece for the Scripture, nothing more.

MacArthur believed that verse-by-verse exposition should be the primary way to preach. He would also conduct many doctrinal and biographical series, all based upon Scripture. But preaching through books in the Bible would be his chief focus. He maintained:

It is for that reason that expository preaching—preaching that systematically and thoroughly explains the meaning of Scripture—is the only legitimate way to preach. The preacher’s responsibility is not to create messages from his own wisdom or cleverness, or to manipulate or sway his listeners by means of his own persuasiveness of charisma, but to interpret, explain, and apply God’s word as clearly and completely as possible.

Fed a steady diet of strong preaching, the people of Grace Church were ignited to be a dynamic witness for Jesus Christ. In the surrounding communities, where the members lived and worked, they confidently bore witness for Christ. Many people were converted, and the baptismal services at Grace

revealed this reality. John reasoned, “A church that evangelizes 365 days a year is better than a church which has a week of revival meetings once a year.” The more Grace members were taught the truth, the more they spread the gospel to others.

As a result of their contagious faith, the body of Christ at Grace began to grow. The congregation doubled in size every year for the next several years. People began to inquire about this rapid growth. One reporter asked MacArthur, “Do you have a desire to build the church?” To which, John emphatically responded:

No, I have absolutely no desire to build the church; that is not my job. Jesus said, “I will build my church.” And I would rather not compete with Him. So, I will let Him do His job, and His job is to build the church. I simply want to allow Him to do that through me in a small way in one location.

To accommodate this rapid growth, the first Education Building was completed just one year after MacArthur came to Grace, in 1970. In 1971, the Logos Bible Institute began as an evening program to further equip the church members in the Word of God. The Family Center, with its seating capacity of 900, was built and used for Sunday services. The next year, 1972, The Book Shack also opened its doors. With additional growth, this resource center would later be renamed Grace Books International. The members at Grace became so actively involved in ministry that the magazine *Moody Monthly* published a story in June 1972 about the church, “The Church with Nine Hundred Ministers.” The vitality of the church under John’s preaching was obvious to all.

In another startling move, John also led the elders and the church to implement the practice of church discipline. This decision was made in spite of the many naysayers outside the church. “This will kill the church,” they scoffed. John believed otherwise, because this principle is clearly taught in Scripture. He remarked:

Church discipline is the key to the purity of the church, which in turn will enable us to reach the world....When church discipline was first applied at Grace Church, a couple of pastors said to me, “It won’t work. The church will be wrecked. You can’t have everyone watching out for other people’s sins.” I said, “The Bible says we are supposed to be accountable to one another. Let’s just do it and see what God does.”

Rather than destroy the church, this biblical practice of church discipline actually was a critical factor in growing the

congregation, both spiritually and numerically. During the two morning services, the Sunday morning attendance significantly escalated, with more people watching in an overflow room. As the church flourished, so did the MacArthur family. John and Patricia welcomed Melinda MacArthur into their fold in July 1973.

In recognition of his biblical scholarship, John was awarded a Litterarum Doctorate from Grace Graduate School on June 20, 1976. In that same year, the expansive growth of those attending caused the church to move into three morning worship services, with John preaching at each one. On June 4, 1977, John was awarded yet another doctorate, a Doctor of Divinity, from Talbot Theological Seminary. That same year, Talbot opened an extension campus at Grace Church to train the many young men attracted by John’s preaching. The extension would continue to operate for the next nine years until the start of The Master’s Seminary. From meeting in the original sanctuary, which is now the Chapel, and then the Family Center, now the gymnasium, the church moved into its present sanctuary in 1977. It was an expansive facility holding three thousand people, yet two services were still required.

In 1977, a radio station in Baltimore, Maryland, WRBS,



In recognition of excellence in the pulpit, John was awarded a Doctor of Divinity from Talbot Theological Seminary (June 4, 1977).



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unbeknownst to MacArthur, began playing his sermons on the air from cassette tapes ordered from Grace Church. This was the unplanned birth of the Grace to You radio ministry. What was becoming obvious is that God had plans to use John's preaching ministry far beyond the walls of Grace Church. Soon, people around the world would be affected by his preaching.

During this time, MacArthur was invited to participate on the advisory board of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. This group was a prestigious body of theologians, with over two hundred evangelical leaders involved. It contained only two pastors—James Montgomery Boice and John. The focus of the ICBI was to support and defend the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Scripture. John signed the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in 1978. This was a truth to which he had been firmly committed.

Any understanding of MacArthur's ministry begins at exactly this point, with his unwavering commitment to the inerrancy of the Bible. He said, "All Scripture is God's inerrant word. God divinely superintended the accurate recording of His divinely breathed truth by His divinely chosen men." MacArthur further believed that divine inerrancy is inseparably connected with biblical authority: "Those God-given, humanly recorded words became God's written word, inerrant and authoritative as originally given." He further asserted: "If the Bible is infallible and inerrant, it must be the final word—the highest standard of authority." The Bible, he believed, is the highest arbitrator

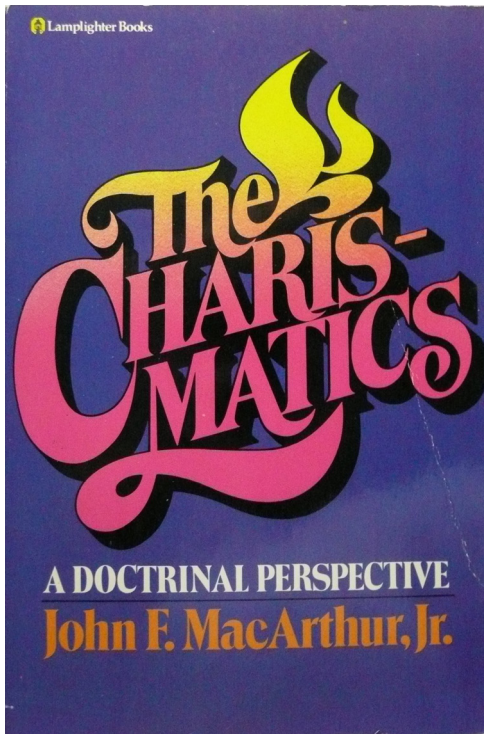
and final judge on every matter in the church. Everything yields to the Scripture.

Consequently, MacArthur argued: "The truth of Scripture . . . has the full weight of *God's own* authority behind it." He insisted: "If the Bible is true, then it is also authoritative. As divinely revealed truth, it carries the full weight of God's own authority. If you claim to believe the Bible at all, you ultimately must bow to its authority." To this end, MacArthur maintained:

Preaching the Bible establishes the authority of God over the mind and the soul. When we preach the word of God, our people understand who has sovereignty over their souls—it is God alone who reigns over their thoughts and their actions.

MacArthur noted: "[The Bible] is not a book of suggestions. Its divine mandates are authoritative and binding. Those who treat it lightly place themselves in eternal peril. Those who take it seriously find eternal blessing." Consequently, the Scripture, he believed, possesses the right to rule every part of every life. John stated, "The Bible claims complete authority over our lives." That began with him as the preacher.

This fundamental commitment to biblical authority, Hughes Oliphant Old observes, is what has produced great power in MacArthur's preaching: "What he seems to have is a witness to true authority. He recognizes in Scripture the word of God, and when he preaches, it is Scripture that



*The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* was published in 1978 and first brought widespread attention to John's ministry.

one hears.... Surely one of the greatest strengths of MacArthur's preaching ministry is his complete confidence in the text." Therefore, his unwavering commitment to the biblical text has determined his complete reliance upon its power to accomplish God's work.

Such notoriety afforded to John was not without its difficulties. Sadly, there grew within some of the pastors at Grace a jealousy over his growing reputation and influence abroad. At one pastoral staff meeting, John expressed his love and appreciation for his fellow men. Their response was unexpected. They chided, "If you think we are your friends, you have another thing coming." This internal mutiny led to a pivotal elders' meeting known as "Black Tuesday," in which MacArthur's leadership at Grace was seriously challenged—proving wherever God is at work, so is the devil. However, John ended up being affirmed by the elders as providing true spiritual leadership for the church.

Never backing down from controversy, John took a strong stand on the cessationist issue and the various aspects of the Charismatic movement. He evidenced his stance in another popular book, *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* (1978). This blockbuster book would later be followed by *Charismatic Chaos* (an expansion of *The Charismatics*) and *Strange Fire*. John explained:

The point in writing was to help people who are true believers or who are open to the true gospel, but they're caught and trapped in these charismatic, fake kind of places, churches, to help them out. I saw that book as a remedy. I saw that book as a cure for the disease of charismatic religion.

If the Lord was going to give back miraculous sign gifts, would He give those gifts to the people with the worst theology? Would He validate error? That doesn't make any sense to me at all. If the Lord was going to give a gift of healing, would He give it to Benny Hinn, who's a heretic?

On this issue of sign gifts, MacArthur reasoned:

If God had wanted to give any kind of sign gift to anybody who preached the gospel...He would have given it to Billy Graham, who was preaching the gospel from pole to pole, from across the globe for decades and decades and decades; and yet, he never claimed a miracle in his entire life, or the use of any supernatural power ever in his entire life; and yet, he was the most far-reaching gospel preacher that the planet has ever known.

Throughout this first decade at Grace, John dedicated himself to the exposition of God's inerrant Word. Regardless of the widening contemporary trends of the day, he continued upon this narrow path. As a result, God blessed such efforts and caused his influence to become global in its scope and impact. It was during this time that John was being recognized as a sound, biblical voice within evangelicalism.

During this decade of the 1970s, John preached through the following books in the Bible as well as these doctrinal series: Gospel of John (seventy-eight sermons, 1970-1972), Acts (103 sermons, 1972-1975), Hebrews (forty-three sermons, 1972-1973), The Superiority of Christ (seven sermons, 1972), The Second Coming of Jesus Christ (twenty-three sermons, 1973), Galatians (twenty-four sermons, 1973-1974), Is the Bible Reliable? (twelve sermons, 1974), God, Satan, and Angels (nine sermons, 1975), 1 Corinthians (eighty-one sermons, 1975-1977), Colossians (twenty-three sermons, 1976), Zechariah (nineteen sermons, 1977), The Charismatic Movement (twelve sermons, 1977), Spiritual Bootcamp (four sermons, 1978), Ephesians (sixty sermons, 1978-1979), Gospel of Matthew (226 sermons, 1978-1985), Daniel (thirty-one sermons, 1979-1980).

This same season witnessed John writing the following

books: *The Church: The Body of Christ* (1973), *Found: God's Will* (1973), *God's Will Is Not Lost* (1973), *Can a Man Live Again?* (1975), *Keys to Spiritual Growth* (1976), *Liberated for Life* (1976), *God's Plan for Giving* (1977), *Focus on Fact: Why You Can Trust the Bible* (1977), *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* (1978), and *Giving: God's Way* (1978). Most people have not read that many books, much less written them!

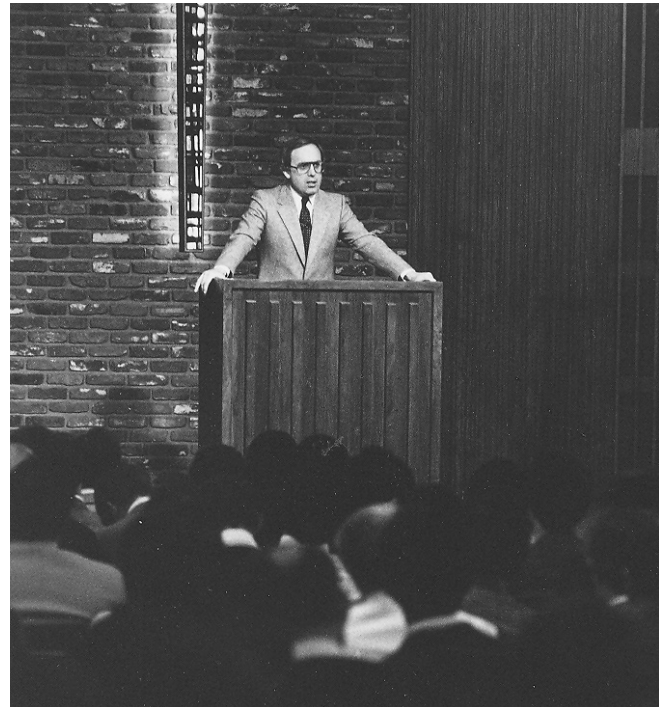
## INTERNATIONAL VOICE (1980–1989)

As MacArthur moved into the 1980s, it proved to be another decade of God's favor upon his ministry at Grace Church. He said: "Worry about the depth of ministry and let God worry about the breadth of ministry." As John drilled down into the Word, God widened the outreach of his ministry as the one-millionth cassette tape of his sermons was distributed in 1980. That same year, with increasing demand from pastors abroad to learn what God was doing at Grace, the first Shepherds' Conference was held at Grace Church. Some two hundred pastors attended in the Chapel. In addition, Grace Church opened a Christian school to educate children in the church and community. John began serving on the board of Moody Bible Institute, Chicago (1981). Likewise, John also began serving on the board of the Independent Fundamental Churches of America.

By April 1981, Grace To You had produced another million tapes, marking the two-millionth tape. The demand for tapes of MacArthur's sermons grew exponentially around the world. Grace to You opened satellite offices in Singapore (1981), New Zealand (1983), South Africa (1983), Canada, and Australia (1983). In 1984, Word of Grace produced its five-millionth tape of John's sermons. This high demand forced the ministry to move offsite from the church to another location in Sun Valley. The Grace Church campus simply could no longer contain the rapid growth from its expanding influence.

In 1985, John assumed the presidency of Los Angeles Baptist College in Newhall, California, which he renamed The Master's College. In 1986, he completed an eight-year sermon series on Matthew. This same year, John made his first preaching trip to Russia. Eleven more trips to the former Soviet Union would follow. With an increasing number of young men desiring to be trained for ministry, John became the founding president of The Master's Seminary at Grace Community Church in 1986.

As a result of John's careful study of the Word, he stressed the necessity of an unbeliever recognizing and submitting to the lordship of Jesus Christ at the point of conversion. At the time, few evangelical pastors held to this



With increasing demand from pastors abroad to learn what God was doing at Grace, John started the first Shepherds' Conference. More than two hundred pastors were in attendance and they met in the Chapel (1980).

strict view. Far fewer who believed it were willing to take a public stand for it. Despite pleas from other pastors for John to back down, he courageously wrote *The Gospel According to Jesus* in 1986. This sound defense of the biblical position of lordship salvation created an enormous uproar within the Christian world. This provocative book, with forwards by two formidable individuals, James Boice and J. I. Packer, articulated the truth that true saving faith involves a self-denial and surrender to the lordship of Christ. It played a major role in the early blossoming of the modern Reformed movement.

In defending this important doctrinal truth, John stated that God is the Author of authentic, saving faith. Salvation is His work in the human heart, and it produces a willing surrender to Jesus Christ. Reflecting on this period later in life, John remembered:

Salvation is the work of God, and it is a complete work, and His work encompasses repentance and the confession of Jesus as Lord, and submission, and an obedient heart, and loving the Lord. That's all the work of salvation. What they had come up with was a truncated, superficial kind of salvation that didn't really meet the minimum for a real salvation. When



In 1984, Word of Grace produced the five-millionth tape of John's sermons.

God saved, He worked repentance in the heart, He worked submission in the heart, He brought about a confession of Jesus as Lord, and a willingness to obey, and a love for the Lord, and a transformed life. That was all the work of God. And to pull anything out of that was to attack the true, sovereign, saving work of God at some point. The idea that you can ask Jesus to be your Savior, and save you from hell, come live in your life, and then go live any way you want . . . that's what antinomianism is. It's an overstatement of grace.... It's almost like God celebrates your sin because it lets Him put His grace on display.

Discerning the dangers for many whom he believed to be lost church members, MacArthur recognized, "A superficial understanding of true salvation had found its way not only into the churches, but into the leaders of churches and the leaders of Bible colleges and other Christian institutions." Easy believism and cheap grace ruled the day. This book was a knockout punch, a much-needed antidote to the shallow preaching and superficial teaching that filled many pulpits. The response to this book was overwhelming. John reflected:

The publisher had high expectations for the book from the start and initially thought it might sell as many as 30,000 copies—an unusually high number for an academic book of this sort. But, it surpassed 100,000 in sales in a few months, and within a couple

of years it had reached 250,000.

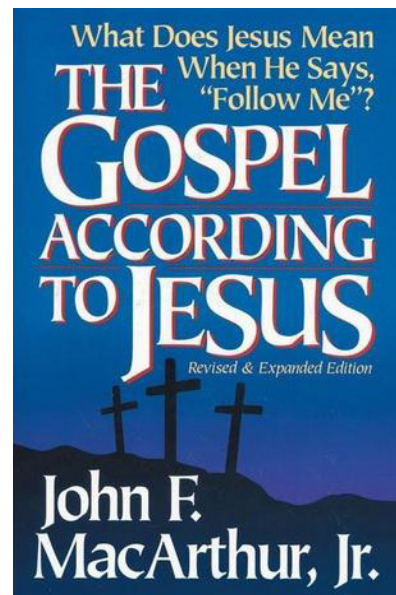
This book was the theological shot heard around the world. He explained its impact as follows:

When I wrote the book, I expected it to be somewhat controversial, of course, because I was defending a view that a handful of respected Christian leaders (including Charles Ryrie, John Walvoord, and Zane Hodges) had already denounced as "lordship salvation." But I confess that I did not anticipate the firestorm of intense debate that arose. The controversy seemed to dominate the evangelical world for several years after the book was published.

Much of the controversy was caused because the message of the book was directed at other Christian leaders and Bible-believing Christians.

MacArthur noted:

Most of my theological opponents in the lordship debate were fellow conservative evangelicals who had been my friends and allies in earlier controversies regarding the charismatic movement and the inerrancies of the Scriptures. They were men whom I deeply respected (and still esteem highly for much of the work they have done).



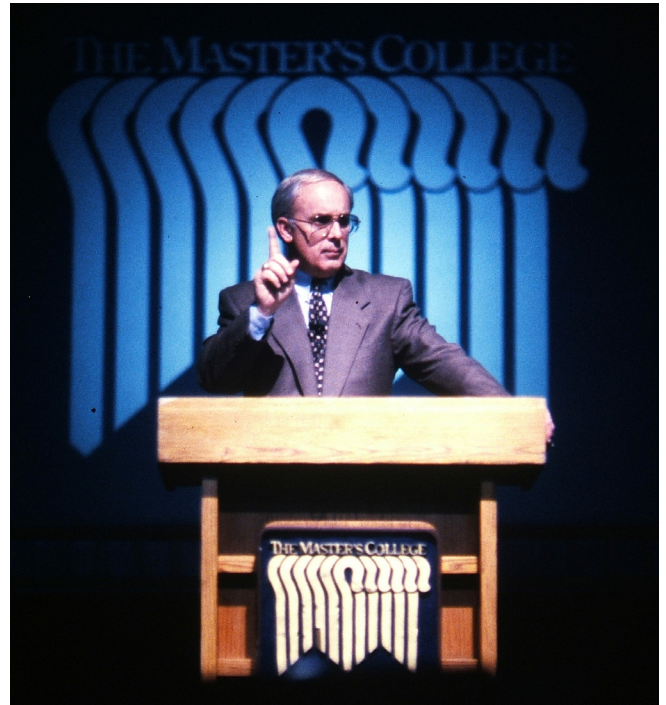
*The Gospel According to Jesus* was published in 1986 and made a major impact that is still felt to this day.

Despite knowing that opposition awaited him, MacArthur was compelled to speak out on this issue. He believed the nature of the gospel was at stake. This was not a matter of secondary significance, but one of supreme importance. John explained:

They were promoting a view of the gospel that, from a biblical perspective, seemed seriously flawed. They insisted there is no place in the gospel for the proclamation of Jesus' lordship. They said those who call unbelievers to surrender to Christ's authority are preaching a gospel of works. They taught that repentance is a false addition to the gospel message. They objected to any kind of evangelism that employed the language of denying oneself, taking up a cross, and following Christ (cf. Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). They declared that devotion to Christ, love for Him, and obedience to His commands are all matters that pertain to discipleship rather than saving faith. Faith, they said, is merely the acceptance of salvation as a free and unconditional gift—and they portrayed discipleship as a second-level commitment. Therefore, according to their view, the gospel presents Jesus as Savior only, not as Lord.

During this decade in the 1980s, John continued with his heavy load of preaching in the Grace Community pulpit. The following are the books in the Bible and the doctrinal topics he expounded during this time: Gospel of Matthew (226 sermons, 1978-1985), Romans (124 sermons, 1981-1986), True Worship (eight sermons, 1982), The Anatomy of a Church (eight sermons, 1983), 1 Timothy (fifty sermons, 1985-1987), James (thirty-four sermons, 1986-1987), Heaven (eight sermons, 1987), 2 Timothy (twenty-seven sermons, 1987-1988), Philippians (forty-six sermons, 1988-1989), 1 Peter (fifty sermons, 1988-1990), Spiritual Growth (four sermons, 1988), Seven Steps to Spiritual Stability (six sermons, 1989), Whatever Happened to the Holy Spirit? (six sermons, 1989).

At this same time, MacArthur produced a sizeable number of materials that extended his teaching ministry to a much larger audience in print. For the first half of the 1980s, these works were as follows: *Take God's Word for It* (1980), *Beware the Pretenders: Jude* (1980), *Why Believe the Bible?* (1980), *Kingdom Living: Here and Now* (1980), *Jesus' Pattern of Prayer* (1981), *The Family* (1982), *Body Dynamics* (1982), *The Ultimate Priority* (1983), *Your Family* (1983), *Why I Trust the Bible* (1983), *Hebrews Commentary* (1983), *1 Corinthians Commentary* (1984), *Answering Key*



John assumed the presidency of Los Angeles Baptist College, which he renamed The Master's College (1985).

*Questions About the Family* (1984), *Answering Key Questions About Elders* (1984), *Answering Key Questions About Deacons* (1985), *Christian Ethics* (1985), and *Matthew 1-7 Commentary* (1985).

In the second half of this decade, more publications followed: *Ephesians Commentary* (1986), *The Legacy of Jesus* (1986), *My Favorite Verse* (1986), *Galatians Commentary* (1987), *Matthew 8-15 Commentary* (1987), *Matthew 16-23 Commentary* (1988), *The Gospel According to Jesus* (1988), *Examine Yourself* (1988), *The Ministry of the Holy Spirit* (1988), *How to Study Your Bible* (1988), *Six Ways Satan Is Stealing Christmas* (1988), *When Healing Doesn't Come* (1988), *The Lordship Controversy* (1988), *Matthew 24-28 Commentary* (1989), *Freedom from Sin* (1989), *The Believer's Armor* (1989), and *Shepherdology* (1989).

Throughout this decade, MacArthur remained primarily concerned with the accuracy of the Word of God. He did not equivocate the message of truth, but proclaimed it with all the means available to him. His expository pulpit at Grace Community Church was extended through Grace to You, his many books, and conference speaking. He was reaching a much wider audience nationally and internationally. In so doing, John was being recognized for possessing an uncommon ability to proclaim God's truth with accuracy, clarity, and conviction.

“I WAS CALLING ALL THE PEOPLE THAT I COULD REACH—ALL THE LEADERS, ALL THE CHURCHES—TO TRUST THE WORD OF GOD AND TRUST THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE WORD OF GOD AND OUR SUFFICIENCY IN JESUS CHRIST, AND NOT LEAN UNTO YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING, NOT TO LEAN ON HUMAN UNDERSTANDING.”

**JOHN MACARTHUR**

### **STAUNCH DEFENDER (1990–1999)**

The decade of the 1990s proved to involve more tireless effort by MacArthur. With mounting demands before him, there was no slowing down in the rigorous assignment entrusted to him by the Lord. His increased responsibilities were requiring more of his time and energy. Yet with steadfast determination, John fulfilled the many ministry duties that continued to escalate. Some men do the work of twenty men, and, as those closest to him would attest, he definitely embodied such a prolific energy.

New issues in the church at large would require his attention. One of those issues dealt with the most influential seminary in Southern California, Fuller Theological Seminary, which had adopted a syncretistic approach in counseling—integrating secular psychology with biblical truth. John saw this as an affront to the sufficiency of Scripture and its ability to minister to the needs of the soul. In 1991, He wrote *Our Sufficiency in Christ* as a defense of the all-sufficient grace of our Lord:

*Our Sufficiency in Christ* was a totally different controversy.... I was deeply concerned with the rapid

rise of Christian psychology.... [It] dominated the evangelical landscape, and the idea was that psychology was necessary for sanctification.... It was offering human solutions to what essentially were spiritual problems.... They had people looking for the solution to their problems within their own humanity, within themselves.

In response to this encroaching problem, MacArthur urged the church to rely not on the secular wisdom of man, but on the sanctifying truth of God. He explained:

I was calling all the people that I could reach—all the leaders, all the churches—to trust the word of God and trust the sufficiency of the word of God and our sufficiency in Jesus Christ, and not lean unto your own understanding, not to lean on human understanding. And I was going against the grain.... I have one strong conviction, one very strong compelling conviction, and it is this, that the word of God is absolutely true. Everything it says is true. That one conviction then dictates every other conviction.



As other churches were integrating secular psychology into their counseling, MacArthur called the church to uphold biblical counseling. He commented:

The word of God is true, every word of God is true. And whatever Scripture says, I affirm. And the Scripture declares its own sufficiency, and it declares the sufficiency of Christ and the sufficiency of the Holy Spirit for everything in the life of the believer.

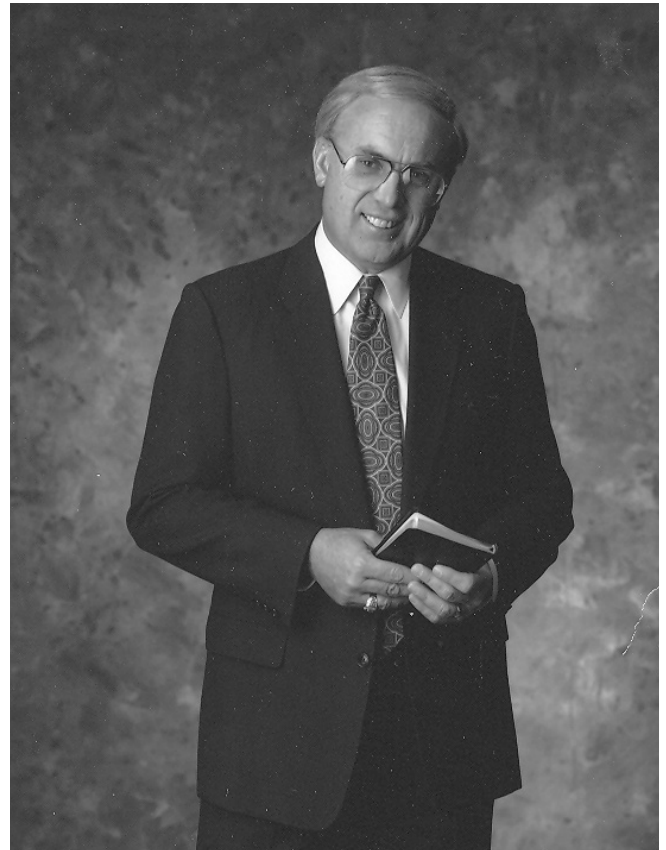
MacArthur added, “The whole premise was wrong, that there is something between the believer and a productive life—and somebody between the believer and the Holy Spirit producing a productive life, and it’s . . . psychology. I just did not see that at all.”

In 1994, another significant milestone was reached when Grace Church celebrated MacArthur’s twenty-fifth anniversary as pastor-teacher of the congregation. For such an historic occasion, the elders invited the famed pastor of First Baptist Church, Dallas, Texas, W. A. Criswell, to preach the two morning services. Criswell delivered a memorable sermon on the supernatural power of the Word of God. The message concluded with Criswell hurling his Bible down the center aisle. The congregation gasped. He claimed that is what the unbelief of liberal thinkers does to the Word of God.

Criswell then walked out of the pulpit and picked up the Bible. He embraced it, claiming that this is what Bible-believers do with the Word. Because they receive the Word by faith, they love its message and truths. The point was made. A deep love for the Word of God was the immovable cornerstone of MacArthur’s ministry, which, by God’s grace, it continues to be.

Yet another threat loomed on the horizon in 1994, with many Christian leaders signing the Evangelicals and Catholics Together document. The statement read at one point that evangelicals and Catholics believe the same gospel, which is a false claim that denies biblical teaching and five hundred years of church history. Among its co-signers were prominent evangelical figures such as J. I. Packer, Chuck Colson, and Bill Bright. MacArthur decried such an alliance with Catholics, who hold “another gospel,” saying it is a compromise of the gospel of grace. He recognized that there cannot be any joining together with those who corrupt the message of salvation.

By the next year, 1995, the ECT controversy continued to heat up. It was time for MacArthur to speak out more decisively. Taking a stand to defend the gospel, John joined forces with R. C. Sproul and D. James Kennedy in a television appearance on the *John Ankerberg Show* to discuss the



John MacArthur in the 1990s as always with a Bible in hand.

issue. MacArthur spoke directly to this crisis with penetrating insight. In the course of this program, MacArthur cut to the chase:

The Catholic faith...says that justification is initiated as a process at infant baptism. And it progresses through life, based upon what you do with infused grace. That grace is infused into you supernaturally; it is infused into you through the Mass; it is infused into you through the Sacraments. And as it is infused and you cooperate with it, you keep the justifying process going. You can stop that process at any point in time with a mortal sin, but you keep it going. Even when you get to the end of your life, the odds are you have not kept it going good enough and you are going to purgatory. When you get in purgatory, you are there for an eon or two doing whatever you can do to keep that process moving, hoping somebody up on top is sending down something from the Treasury of Merit to add to you so that “eventually” justification may “actually” be completed and you will get out of that place and into Heaven. Nothing

could be a more convoluted view.

Recognizing this Catholic system as a false gospel, MacArthur denounced Rome for what it is:

The Catholic Church claims to be “true Christianity.” And when we reverse 450 years of history and just throw our arms around the Roman system—which I think we have to say, in all honesty, is not a group of wayward brothers, but is an apostate form of Christianity—it is a false religion. It is another religion.

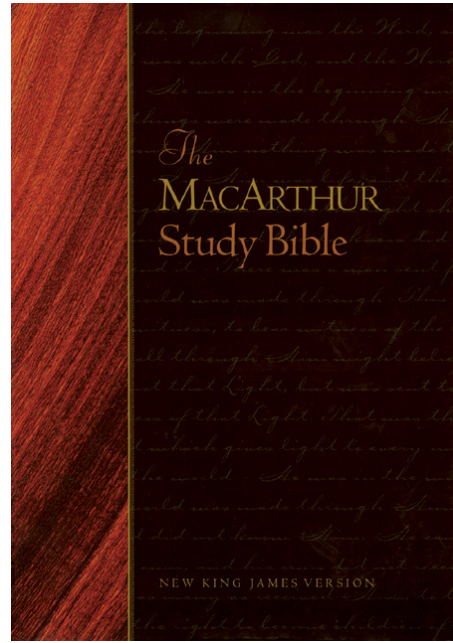
False teaching will always cry “intolerance.” It will always say you are being divisive, you are being unloving, you are being ungracious, because it can only survive when it does not get scrutinized. And so it cries against any intolerance. It cries against any examination, any scrutiny. “Just let’s embrace each other, let’s love each other, let’s put all that behind us.” False doctrine cries the loudest about unity. And listen carefully when you hear the cry for unity, because it may be the cover of false doctrine encroaching.

When the ECT document stated that Catholics could not be evangelized by Protestants, MacArthur responded:

The Catholic Church, from my vantage point, is the single most fertile ground for evangelism that exists in this community in which I minister. These people know about Christ, they know about the Bible.... What they do not know about is how to become a Christian; how to be genuinely converted and saved. They do not know that. And for somebody to try to back me off of that would be to bring me under the judgment of God! Because I am commanded to be faithful to the discharge of the gospel to the ends of the earth and to every creature that I can reach.

The Lord’s blessing continued to be upon all that MacArthur was doing, as Grace to You produced its ten-millionth tape in 1996. That same year, Grace Ministries International was birthed as men trained with the gospel were being sent out by Grace Church. There seemed to be an open door as John’s ministry of preaching the Word of God was spread via these many outlets.

In 1997, after almost twenty years of intensive study for his preaching and writing ministries at Grace, John produced the *MacArthur Study Bible*. Drawn heavily from his preaching notes, this extraordinary resource contains 20,000 insightful entries to help its reader better under-



*The MacArthur Study Bible*, containing John’s personal study notes, was published in 1997 and has been translated into many languages around the world.

stand the biblical text. Of these study notes, approximately 12,000 were written by John himself in longhand. The other entries were edited and reworked by John with a pen. Other study Bibles took as long as a decade to produce and employed as many as sixty scholars. But John produced this monumental work in two years. For the last year of this massive effort, he preached past sermons so that he could devote himself exclusively to this project.

Every aspect of MacArthur’s ministries seemed to be pulling together with increasing momentum. The seminary was experiencing significant growth as students were coming from across the country and around the world. John’s strong preaching, broadcast through Grace to You and distributed through his books and tapes, was attracting like-minded men to be under his influence. As a result, the new building for The Master’s Seminary was opened on the Grace Campus in March 1998.

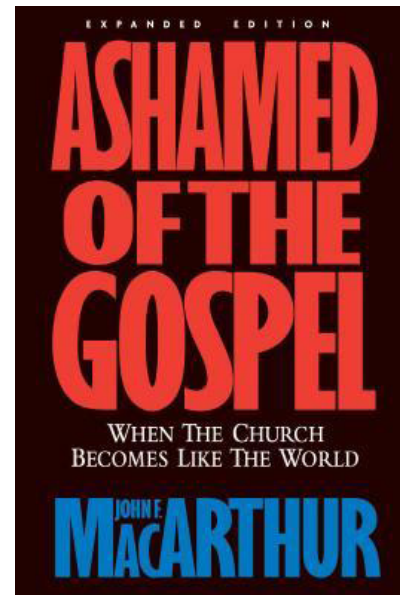
The following year, 1999, MacArthur’s next significant book, *Ashamed of the Gospel*, wielded a major impact upon the evangelical world. In this exposé, he called to account the crass pragmatism that was emerging in the evangelical church. Rather than the power of the Holy Spirit, it was relying upon worldly methodology. As if a siren was sounding within him, MacArthur discerned that a Trojan horse had entered the church. An unhealthy reliance upon Madison Avenue’s techniques and its cunning communication to win people to Christ had crept into the church. In this shot

across the bow, John confronted this carnal encroachment into the church. He described the focus of this book:

*Ashamed of the Gospel* was an answer to pragmatism.... [that] began to raise its ugly head.... I remember a pastor said to me one day, "I finally know how to run a church. I just read." I think it was Peter Drucker's book on leadership. It was a secular book on how corporate leadership works well. I said, "What are you talking about? Peter Drucker, a nonbeliever, writing a book that's going to help grow the church? Christ said, 'I'll build My church, and the gates of hell won't prevail against it.' What do you think you're going to accomplish by following a worldly pattern? And do you think you're going to convert people that aren't chosen before the foundation of the world anyway? Why wouldn't you just want to be faithful?"

MacArthur explained that this pragmatism was causing an erosion of confidence in the power of the Word of God to accomplish the work of God:

Pragmatics was rearing its ugly head, it was dominating everything. Everybody was talking about effective advertising and effective communication, and they were using every tool they could and every means they could to capture people's interest.



*Ashamed of the Gospel* was published in 1999 and has made a continuing impact upon the evangelical world.

**“MY CONCERN WAS THAT IF YOU WENT INTO PRAGMATISM, YOU DID IT FOR ONE REASON: YOU WANTED TO SELL THE GOSPEL TO SOMEBODY WHO HAD NATURAL RESISTANCE TO THAT. SO THE ISSUE WAS, HOW DO I OVERCOME . . . THE UNREGENERATE WORLD’S CONSUMER RESISTANCE TO THE GOSPEL?”**

**JOHN MACARTHUR**



The new building for The Master's Seminary opened on the Grace Community Church campus (1998) and would soon send out hundreds upon hundreds of Bible-preaching pastors.

MacArthur diagnosed the lethal disease of pragmatism as a toxic methodology being injected into the body of Christ. He discerned that the result was devastating:

My concern was that if you went into pragmatism, you did it for one reason: you wanted to sell the gospel to somebody who had natural resistance to that. So the issue was, how do I overcome . . . the unregenerate world's consumer resistance to the gospel?

The impotence of any secular packaging of the gospel was alarming to MacArthur. Such reliance upon the arm of the flesh was powerless to do what only God can do in convicting and regenerating spiritually dead unbelievers. With unwavering conviction, he stated that only God, by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the gospel, can raise sinners to believe in Jesus Christ:

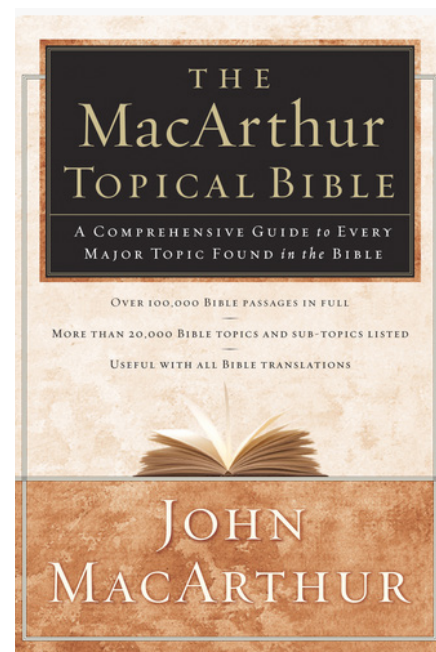
You have a person who is in the kingdom of darkness, spiritually dead, spiritually blind, double-blinded by Satan, a part of the satanic kingdom, a believer of lies and deception, and you're going to use music, or lights, or skits—in those days—or drama, or something to overcome consumer resistance in a person under that kind of power? That is not going to happen. The only thing that breaks the hold of Satan and sin on an unbeliever is the power of the Spirit of God, and He does that through the word of God.

MacArthur detected the rotten root that was producing this

pragmatic movement to be a latent, man-centered Arminianism. In the fifth century, it was known as Pelagianism. In the sixteenth century, it had earlier been taught by the Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus and in the nineteenth century by Charles Finney.

It is latent Arminianism that believes that the salvation of any soul is in that soul's own hands and not in God's hands. I mean, it is Finney: you have got to do whatever you have got to do to make the non-Christian make up his own mind to change, when the Bible is clear that the non-Christian can't make up his own mind to change. He is neither willing nor able. He is not going to do right; he is not going to see God, he doesn't have the power to do that or the will to do that. Only God can break that, and He breaks it through the preaching of the word in the power of the Holy Spirit. So that's what that battle was. Again, it was a doctrinal battle over the sovereign power of God in salvation as opposed to the techniques of man.

Surprisingly, even some Reformed pastors were being influenced by this pervasive thinking. They believed that God is sovereign in salvation, but they equivocated with



The MacArthur Topical Bible was published in 1999.

the doctrine of sanctification. John explained:

I have been partners with a lot of guys that are really good theologians, and they get the right understanding of Scripture. They have been sound in their doctrine. But sadly, they have handed it off to some of these young, restless, Reformed, these millennial guys who were not truly Reformed. There were pieces of it that they like. Many of them liked the idea of the sovereignty of God because they like a macho God. They liked the idea of this security of the believer and the sovereignty of God in salvation, because that freed them up from certain responsibilities. But they never had a full-orbed Reformed commitment.... Until they have a robust doctrine of holiness and sanctification, I am not going to buy into this that they are genuinely Reformed.

Throughout the 1990s, MacArthur continued his relentless drive in preaching through the books and major doctrines of the Bible. Most notably, he finished a five-year sermon series on 2 Corinthians (October 1993) and began preaching the Gospel of Luke (November 1998). This same decade saw him preach through the following series: 1 Thessalonians (thirty-six sermons, 1990-1991), 2 Peter (twenty-seven sermons, 1990-1991), Revelation (eighty-seven sermons, 1991-1995), Philemon (four sermons, 1991), 2 Thessalonians (seventeen sermons, 1992), Titus (twenty-four sermons, 1992-1993), 2 Corinthians (ninety-six sermons, 1993-1998), The Love of God (six sermons, 1994-1995), The Fulfilled Family (eleven sermons, 1996), Gospel of Luke (298 sermons, 1998-2008), Genesis 1-11 (forty-nine sermons, 1999-2001).

In addition, John also wrote a plethora of books. In the first half of the decade, he produced: *The Believer's Assurance* (1990), *Gospel Tract* (1991), *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (1991), *Romans 1-8 Commentary* (1991), *The Master's Plan for the Church* (1991), *Discernment: Spiritual Survival for a Church in Crisis* (1991), *Charismatic Chaos* (1992), *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (1992), *How to Meet the Enemy* (1992), *Faith Works: The Gospel According to the Apostles* (1992), *Saved Without a Doubt* (1992), *Colossians and Philemon Commentary* (1992), *God: Coming Face to Face with His Majesty* (1993), *Anxiety Attacked* (1993), *God With Us: The Miracle of Christmas* (1993), *The Vanishing Conscience* (1994), *The Gospel According to Jesus* (1994; revised from 1988 edition), *Romans 9-16 Commentary* (1994), *Introduction to Biblical Counseling* (1994), *Acts 1-12 Commentary* (1994), *Different by Design* (1994), *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry* (1995), *1 Timothy Commentary* (1995), *2 Timothy*



John and Patricia MacArthur in 1998. Patricia has been a faithful and strong supporter at John's side.

*Commentary* (1995), *Alone with God* (1995), *The Power of Suffering* (1995), and *First Love* (1995).

In the second half, MacArthur continued his prolific writing ministry. He wrote: *The Silent Shepherd* (1996), *Titus Commentary* (1996), *Acts 13-28 Commentary* (1996), *The Glory of Heaven* (1997), *The Power of Integrity* (1997), *The MacArthur Study Bible* (1997), *How to Get the Most from God's Word* (1997), *The Love of God* (1998), *James Commentary* (1998), *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (1998; reprint of 1991 Word edition), *The Pillars of Christian Character* (1998), *The Only Way to Happiness* (1998; revision of *Kingdom Living*, 1980), *In the Footsteps of Faith* (1998), *Alto Spanish Gospel Tract* (1999), *Successful Christian Parenting* (1999; retitled *What the Bible Says About Parenting*, 2000), *Revelation 1-11* (1999), *Ashamed of the Gospel* (1999; second edition expanded, 2005, third edition revised, 2010), *Nothing But the Truth* (1999), *I Believe in Jesus: Leading Your Child to Christ* (1999), *The Second Coming* (1999), and *The MacArthur Topical Bible* (1999).

Clearly, the 1990s was a highly productive time in MacArthur's ministry. Gospel-saturated material continued



Grace to You began broadcasting John in Spanish (January 3, 2000). Grace to You also moved to its current location in Santa Clarita, California (2000).

to pour forth from his pulpit and pen. It was abundantly evident that God was continuing to extend His blessing upon this pastor-teacher of Grace Community. John's ministry was becoming a shining lighthouse of doctrinal truth in a dark age.

## UNYIELDING WITNESS (2000–2009)

Moving into the twenty-first century, the decade of the 2000s witnessed yet more steady growth in the outreach of MacArthur's ministry. On January 3, 2000, Grace to You began broadcasting his sermons in Spanish. This new arm of John's ministry was growing at such a rapid rate that Grace to You was forced to move into a larger facility in Santa Clarita, California. From this new, enlarged location, this ministry that broadcasts and distributes John's sermons was able to extend its outreach yet further into Spanish-speaking countries.

An unexpected venue was provided for MacArthur to reach a still larger audience. On September 21, 2001, John appeared for the first time on the international cable television show *Larry King Live*, on CNN, shortly after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City. This vast exposure provided him an unprecedented platform for giving a gospel witness to a viewership around the world. As John spoke alongside other panelists, this program provided an open door for John to give witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. A part of the interview went as follows:

KING: John, do you question it? I mean, do you

question whether there is a God?

MACARTHUR: I don't question whether there is a God. I don't even question what God chooses to allow. It's not a matter of my opinion. As a Bible teacher and one who believes that the Bible is the authoritative word of God, Scripture tells us that God is absolutely sovereign; that everything that occurs, occurs within the framework of His purpose.

CALLER: Larry, I wanted to ask your panel, if these hijackers are in heaven or hell right now?

MACARTHUR: I believe there's only one way to go to heaven, and that's through faith in Jesus Christ. And obviously, their faith was not in Christ, and that's evident not because I know their religious background, but because if you know Christ your life is transformed and you don't do things like that.

KING: Deepak Chopra, where do you think they are?

CHOPRA: Larry, I don't know where they are, only God knows where they are. But I have a problem with some of your panelists, because I don't think Christ was a Christian, I don't think Buddha was a Buddhist, and I don't think that Mohammed was a Mohammedan. I think it's just that kind of thing that says only the way of Jesus is right, then the others say only the way of Mohammed is right, only the way of Buddha is right, only the way of Krishna is right. We have sacrificed a universal being and created a tribal chief with our gods, and that's the problem.

KING: Would you like to counter that, John?

MACARTHUR: I just don't think, all due respect, that Deepak is the authority on that. I don't think Rabbi Kushner is the authority either.

KING: Nor are you.

MACARTHUR: I don't think I'm the authority. Where are you going to go? You have to go to an authoritative book.

KING: And that is?

MACARTHUR: The Bible.

KING: Which Bible? The Koran?

MACARTHUR: The Holy Bible.

KING: The Koran is a bible. He believes the Koran as much as . . .

MACARTHUR: I know he does. I know he believes in the Koran. I don't believe in the Koran. I don't believe that is the holy book written by God.

KING: So, why is your belief better than his belief? It's different, but why...

MACARTHUR: It's not a question of comparing people's beliefs. It's a question of what is the authority, and the word of God has—that Bible has stood the test of time and been affirmed ever since Moses as a divine word from God.

KING: So, any person who doesn't believe in Christ is doomed to hell, whether he has lived a wonderful life?

MACARTHUR: This is what the Bible teaches.

KING: And Deepak, what do you believe about forgiveness?

CHOPRA: I keep listening to everybody referring to God as a he, which gives him a male sexist orientation, and I think God is the absolute power of the universe and is neither a he nor a she.

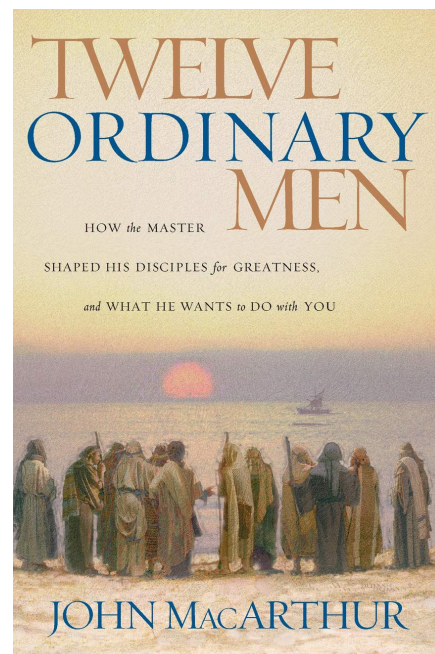
MACARTHUR: Back to the question about God—again, I hear all these responses, but we have to go back to some authority outside of ourselves. I can't define God for the universe from starting with me. God in the Scripture is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, He's the sovereign over everything who was incarnated in Jesus Christ, came down and died on a cross to provide atonement, so that the sins of those who repent were paid for in full, and therefore heaven was open to them. That is God revealed in Scripture.

Many more appearances on *Larry King Live* would follow. While seated with unbelievers on the panel, MacArthur

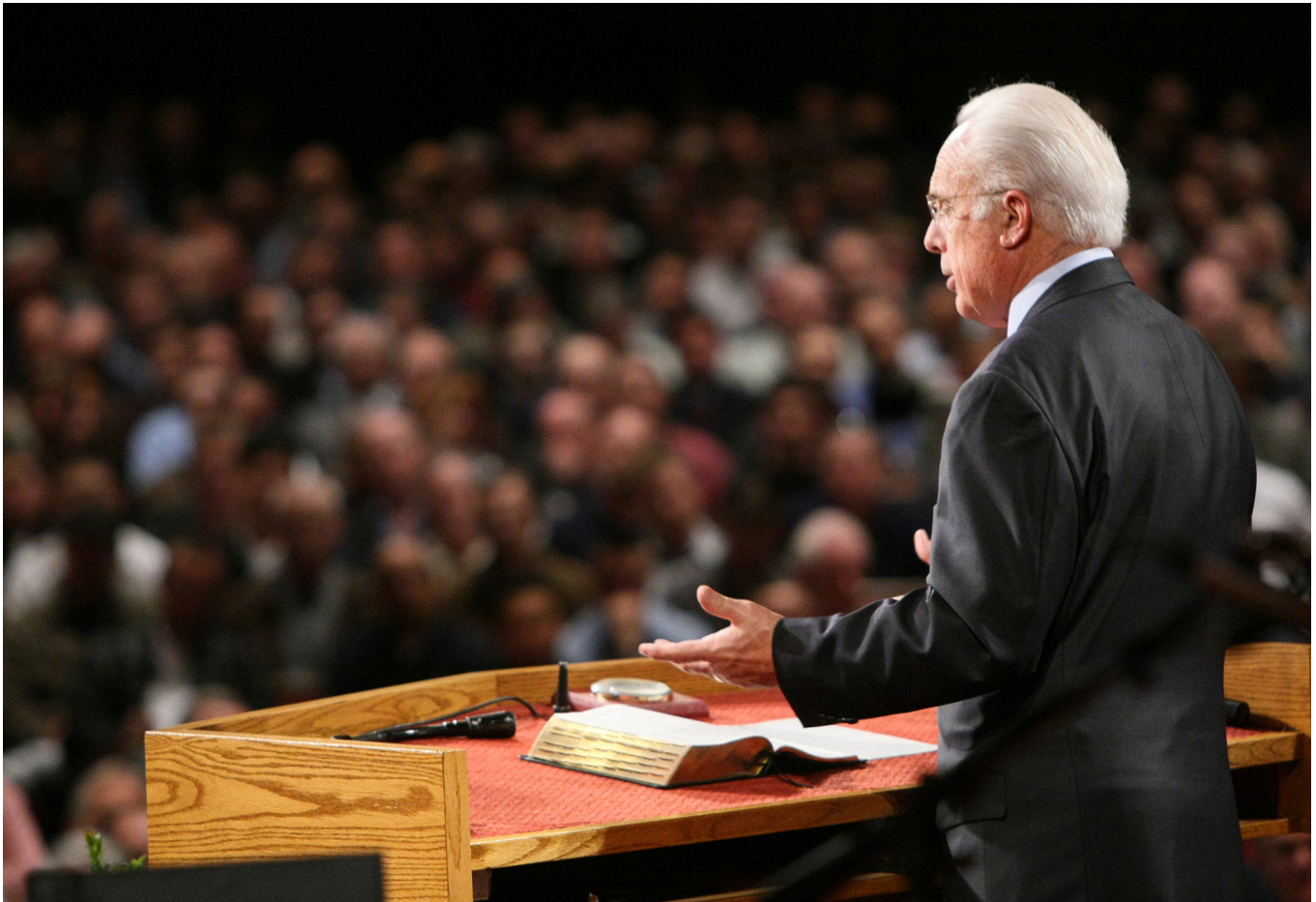
was the anchor point, giving a solid witness for the truth of Scripture. With John on the program, a clear and compelling witness for the gospel was faithfully sounded for people around the globe to hear.

At this same time, God was at work in other ways abroad. The first training center for international theological education birthed from John's preaching began in Irpin, Ukraine. Moreover, Grace to You made the strategic decision to open the vault and make John's sermons free for downloading. In one month, one million sermons were downloaded. On December 21, 2008, after a decade of exposition, John finished a lengthy, verse-by-verse series lasting ten years on the Gospel of Luke. On February 1, 2009, Grace Church fittingly celebrated John's forty years as pastor.

During this decade of the 2000s, John's voluminous preaching included: Gospel of Luke (298 sermons, 1998–2008), Gospel of Mark (eighty-five sermons, 2009–2011), Genesis 1–11 (forty-nine sermons, 1999–2001), A Biblical Perspective on the Middle East and Terrorism (four sermons, 2001), 1 John (forty-two sermons, 2002–2003), 2 John (four sermons, 2003), 3 John (two sermons, 2003), Jude (fifteen sermons, 2004), The Doctrines of Grace (ten sermons, 2004), Spiritual Terrorism (ten sermons, 2004), Making a Case for the Bible (five sermons, 2006), Why Every Calvinist Should be a Premillennialist (six sermons, 2007), The Kind of Worship God Desires (five sermons, 2008), Hebrews 11–12 (eleven sermons, 2009–2010).



*Twelve Ordinary Men* was published in 2008 and became an immediate bestseller.



Grace Church celebrates John's forty years as pastor (February 1, 2009). This pulpit had become, indeed, an international pulpit with a far-reaching effect around the world.

This same decade witnessed John continuing to write books that rolled off the publishers' presses. In the first year, 2000, the following works were produced: *You Can Trust the Bible*, *The Murder of Jesus*, *O Worship the King*, *Why Government Can't Save You*, *A Faith to Grow On*, *Whose Money Is It Anyway?*, *What the Bible Says About Parenting*, *Biblical Parenting for Life*, *The Art of Giving and Receiving Forgiveness*, *The Gospel According to the Apostles* (retitle of *Faith Works*, 1992), *The Body Dynamic*, *Mark* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *John* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *Acts* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *Romans* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *Ephesians* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *1 & 2 Peter* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *1 Samuel* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *Ruth & Esther* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *Daniel* (MacArthur Bible Studies), and *Revelation 12-22 Commentary*.

The next year, 2001, saw more of the same impact, with John producing multiple resources: *Divorce and Remarriage*, *Terrorism, Jihad, and the Bible*, *O Come, All Ye Faithful*, *Our*

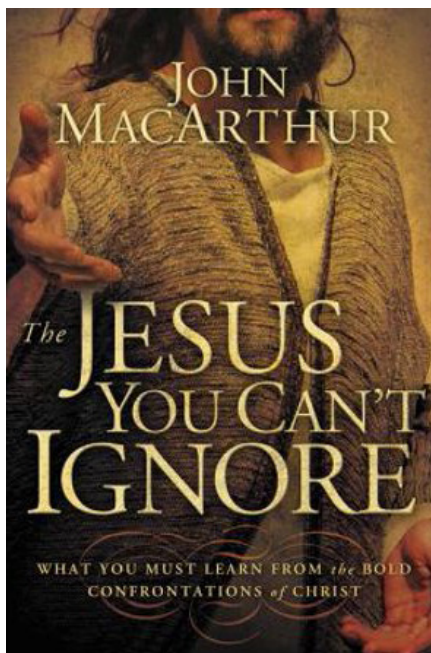
*Awesome God* (reprint of *God: Coming Face to Face with His Majesty*, 1993), *The Keys to Spiritual Growth* (revised and expanded from 1991 edition), *The God Who Loves* (reprint of *The Love of God*, 1996), *How to Survive in a World of Unbelievers* (revision of *The Legacy of Jesus*, 1986), *The MacArthur Student Bible*, *The Battle for the Beginning*, *God in the Manger*, *1 & 2 Timothy* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *Hebrews* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *Revelation* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *1 Corinthians* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *Nehemiah* (MacArthur Bible Studies), *James* (MacArthur Bible Studies), and *Philippians Commentary*.

The following years, 2002-2003, brought the same non-stop production of books by MacArthur: *Answering Hard Questions about Forgiveness* (2002), *Twelve Ordinary Men* (2002), *Can God Bless America?* (2002), *Truth for Today* (2002), *When Morning Guilds the Skies* (2002), *Strength for Today* (2002), *Why One Way?* (2002), *Drawing Near* (2002), *What Wondrous Love Is This* (2002), *1 & 2 Thessalonians Commentary* (2002), *MacArthur's Quick Reference*



*Guide to the Bible* (2002), *Hard to Believe* (2003), *What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Spirit?* (2003), *Cultivating a Godly Child* (2003), *Unleashing God's Word in Your Life* (2003, revision of *How to Get the Most from God's Word*, 1997), *Safe in the Arms of God* (2003), *MacArthur Bible Handbook* (2003), *MacArthur Daily Bible* (2003), *2 Corinthians Commentary* (2003), *Lord, Teach Me to Pray* (2003), *Think Biblically!* (2003), and *Lord, Teach Me to Believe* (2003).

In 2004 and 2005, MacArthur's study generated yet more books: *Is It Real?* (2004), *MacArthur Scripture Memory System* (2004), *Reckless Faith* (2004), *Follow Me* (2004), *The Murder of Jesus* (2004), *Truth Matters* (2004), *The Book on Leadership* (2004), *1 Peter Commentary* (2004), *A Faith to Grow On Journal* (2004), *Is Your Salvation Secure?* (2005), *A Faith to Grow On Bible* (2005), *The Vanishing Conscience* (2005, reprint of 1994 edition), *Welcome to the Family* (2005), *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* (2005, new edition of *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*, 1995), *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (2005, new edition of *Rediscovering Biblical Preaching*, 1992), *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically* (2005, new edition of *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, 1994), *Experiencing the Passion of Christ* (2005), *The Fulfilled Family* (2005), *2 Peter & Jude Commentary* (2005), *The Heart of the Bible* (2005), *The Battle for the Beginning* (2005, reprint of 2001 edition), *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (2005), *The Gospel According to the Apostles* (2005, reprint of 2000 edition), and *Fool's Gold* (2005).



*The Jesus You Can't Ignore* was published in 2009.

During 2006 and 2007, MacArthur authored: *Twelve Extraordinary Women* (2006), *Standing Strong* (2006, new title for *How to Meet the Enemy*, 1992), *Divine Design* (2006), *Saved Without a Doubt* (2006, repackaging of 1992 edition), *The Quest for Character* (2006), *The Second Coming* (2006, paperback reprint of 1999 edition), *Anxious for Nothing* (2006, new title for *Anxiety Attacked*, 1993), *John 1-11 Commentary* (2006), *The MacArthur Study Bible* (2006, NASB Updated Edition), *God's Gift of Christmas* (2006), *1-3 John Commentary* (2007), *Matthew (MacArthur Bible Studies)* (2007), *Luke (MacArthur Bible Studies)* (2007), *2 Corinthians (MacArthur Bible Studies)* (2007), *1, 2, 3 John & Jude (MacArthur Bible Studies)* (2007), *Philippians (MacArthur Bible Studies)* (2007), *1 & 2 Thessalonians & Titus (MacArthur Bible Studies)* (2007), *The Truth War* (2007), *The Extraordinary Mother* (2007), and *Because the Time Is Near* (2007).

Yet more books came from John's pen in 2008: *Before Abraham: Creation, Sin, and the Nature of God (OT Study Guide)*, *Twelve Ordinary Men/Twelve Extraordinary Women* (two in one), *A Tale of Two Sons*, *Grace for You*, *The Prodigal Son*, *The Master's Plan for the Church* (reprint and updated edition of 1991), *John 12-21 Commentary*, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (revised and expanded twentieth anniversary edition of 1994 title), *The Father of Israel (OT Study Guide)*, *The Exodus from Egypt: Moses and God's Mercy (OT Study Guide)*, *Jacob and Egypt: The Sovereignty of God (OT Study Guide)*, and *Daily Readings from the Life of Christ, Vol. 1*.

The last year of this decade, 2009, saw more books by MacArthur rolling off the press: *Daily Readings from the Life of Christ, Vol. 2*, *A Simple Christianity* (repackaging of *First Love*, 1995), *Fundamentals of the Faith*, *The Jesus You Can't Ignore*, *From Ordinary to Extraordinary*, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness*, *The Divorce Dilemma*, *Truth Endures*, *God's High Calling for Women* (repackaging of 1987 title), *How to Study the Bible* (repackaging of 1982 title), *Prophets, Priests, and Kings (OT Study Guide)*, *Finally in the Land (OT Study Guide)*, *The Restoration of a Sinner: David's Heart Revealed (OT Study Guide)*, *Luke 1-5 Commentary*, *End of an Era (OT Study Guide)*, and *A House Divided: Elijah and the Kings of Israel (OT Study Guide)*.

## FAITHFUL SERVANT (2010-2019)

With increasing resolve, John entered the decade of the 2010s full steam ahead. When others might consider slowing down or retiring from ministry, John MacArthur speed-shifted ahead to continue fulfilling his calling. From the first day John realized God's calling upon his life to

preach the Word, his whole life and work has been dedicated to this one purpose and singular passion. This is visible in every sermon he preaches and every publication he writes. With renewed vigor to serve the Lord, he has shown no signs of slowing down in his many ministry endeavors.

It was a monumental accomplishment on June 5, 2011, when John completed his verse-by-verse preaching through the entire New Testament. This was a forty-two year project that addressed all twenty-seven books, 260 chapters, and 7,957 verses. He finished this extraordinary undertaking with his final exposition of the Gospel of Mark. These sermons would be edited into thirty-three volumes of the *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* series. The entire writing process would take thirty-five years, and almost every sentence would flow from John's pulpit, be subject to his pen, and then included in the commentary. It should be noted that throughout these fifty years, MacArthur has done all his own sermon preparation. Everything started anew each Monday, as he anticipated what he would preach for the upcoming Sunday morning and evening. He stated:

The intensity of every week, the focal point of every week for me was the time isolated in my study to do all the preparation. Nobody helps me; I don't have any research assistant. Never had. Nobody ever reads, or edits, or adds to, or makes suggestions, or provides anything for me in that sermon preparation. That's all my own work.

As MacArthur preached through entire books in the Bible, he recognized the following:

These are books within a book.... They have a beginning, and a middle, and an end. They have an introduction, they have a conclusion, and they are clear-minded, brilliant, divinely authored arguments. They are systematic. They are clear. They are focused. They are intentional. They are progressive. They are linear. The mind of God is behind every one of these books in the New Testament, and there's flow. You can't just jump in at a verse. You've got to go bury yourself in the beginning and come up at the end. That's what I've tried to do with these commentaries. This verse can only mean this because of what the previous five verses meant. In other words, there's logical, progressive flow.

MacArthur revealed that he began his study process for

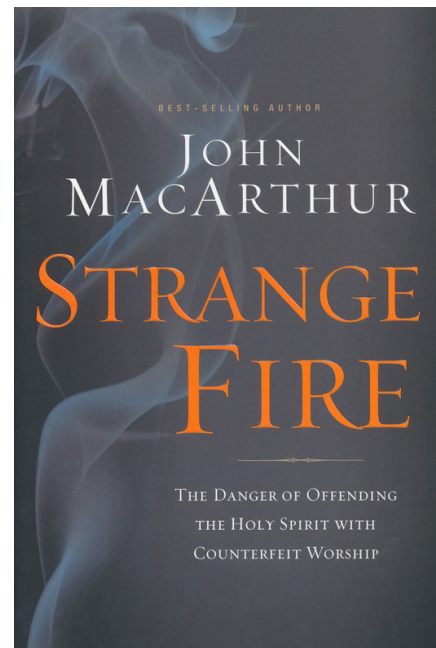
these many years by gathering observations from the text:

The idea for me is to know the text, to go back to the original text in the New Testament, the Greek.... I have an 8.5" by 11" sort of a legal pad of paper, and I write down every verse on one sheet, and I just start putting down what I'm drawing out of the original text. And then, I go through reading commentaries. I would read anywhere from a dozen to twenty commentaries. Anybody who might say anything helpful. And what I'm looking for is interpretations, theological insights, historical backgrounds, cross-references, and I just take copious notes of all of those things.

Having selected the biblical book on which to preach, John remained dedicated to discerning its truths:

You bury yourself in the flow of a text. You know the background, the argument, the writer, the readers, the occasion, what is going on. You follow the flow of his thought, his argument. Then every verse is not a challenge. Every verse opens up, because there's a progression in the thought pattern.

With pen in hand, John recorded his thoughts as he internalized its message.



*Strange Fire* was published in 2013 and confronted many abuses that needed to be addressed in the Charismatic movement.

**“YOU BURY YOURSELF IN THE FLOW OF A TEXT. YOU KNOW THE BACKGROUND, THE ARGUMENT, THE WRITER, THE READERS, THE OCCASION, WHAT IS GOING ON. YOU FOLLOW THE FLOW OF HIS THOUGHT, HIS ARGUMENT. THEN EVERY VERSE IS NOT A CHALLENGE. EVERY VERSE OPENS UP, BECAUSE THERE’S A PROGRESSION IN THE THOUGHT PATTERN.”**

**JOHN MACARTHUR**

Meditation is a critical part, just thinking. I always think with a pen in my hand, and I just write. I write my thoughts, because I may not recall them. So I’ve got papers with sort of Greek notes on it, then I’ve got papers with commentary, and then I’ve just got writing that I just write what comes to mind, and I get in a flow.

John then proceeded to rewrite and organize these observations into a linear, structured form:

What I’ve got is a sort of random bunch of observations, and then I have to get that into a cohesive first draft. And I write it [by hand], because if you’re preaching to the same people for 45 years, you’ve got to write things out. You can’t just fall back on the way you’ve always said things. So, you need to be fresh. You need to say familiar things in unfamiliar ways to capture their interests and attention. So I write it out, and then I write it another time on my

little half-sheet sermon notes, and I write probably ten pages, both sides, in a bold, black pen. No one ever sees this. It’s just me. Then that, I take into the pulpit.

As he wrote his sermon manuscript, MacArthur was riveted on the truth in his message, adding minimal supporting material:

From the very beginning, I determined . . . I wouldn’t load my preaching with contemporary illustrations that dated everything. . . . So, I stayed away from all the sort of cultural things that were going on around me and stuck with the text of Scripture. And I always illustrated the Bible with the Bible so that it became kind of timeless.

In 2013, John convened the Strange Fire Conference to confront the continuing abuses of the Charismatic movement. It was a provocative conference that struck a live nerve



During the 2015 Shepherds' Conference, an Inerrancy Summit was held to reaffirm this core belief. MacArthur was the obvious man to lead this charge.

in the body of Christ. A book by the same title, *Strange Fire*, accompanied the conference. As a follow-up to two earlier books, *The Charismatics* and *Charismatic Chaos*, this book addressed the abuses of the Charismatic movement. MacArthur believed that these doctrinal aberrations needed to be confronted with a sound presentation of cessationist theology. He argued that this movement misrepresents and blasphemes the Holy Spirit, while offering false worship that is offensive to God.

During the 2015 Shepherds' Conference, MacArthur hosted another landmark event, the Inerrancy Summit, that reaffirmed the core belief in the flawless purity of the Word of God. Arguably, none but MacArthur could have been the rally point for such a conference. In many ways, this battle for biblical inerrancy has marked his entire ministry.

In 2018, the evangelical church was in danger of caving in to the demands of the social justice agenda. In response, when many leaders were silent, John mounted a strong defense against the aberrations of this movement. John claimed that the social justice agenda is the most dangerous issue that the church has faced during his lifetime. He believes it is a widespread movement that threatens to bring the social gospel back into the church and replace the one, true saving gospel. He said,

Social justice is lethally dangerous because it has the potential to distort the purity of the gospel by adding good works to it.... If people merely view themselves as victims, they will never come to a realization that

they are responsible for their own sin. They will never feel compelled to come to Christ for forgiveness.

On February 10, 2019, Grace Community Church celebrated MacArthur's fiftieth anniversary as its pastor-teacher. Few pastors in any church have reached this half-century landmark. Still fewer as highly visible have shepherded one flock for this length of time. Few spiritual leaders have shown the personal discipline and tenacious resolve as he has. Few pastors have been as loved and supported by their congregation.

On this momentous occasion, MacArthur was presented with a gift from the family of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. It was the personal prayer table of the Doctor, where he daily prayed over his preaching ministry. John preached a message that was entirely fitting for the occasion. He predominantly expounded passages from 1 Corinthians 1-2, as he spoke on the sovereign grace of God in building this church. What has occurred over the last half century at Grace, John attributed entirely to the foreordained purpose of God. In so doing, he explained the work done in this church is entirely antithetical to a church built upon the wisdom of the world.

In this present decade, John has preached through the following books: Gospel of Mark (eighty-five sermons, 2009-2011), Romans 8 (twelve sermons, 2011-2012), Isaiah 53 (ten sermons, 2012), Gospel of John (116 sermons, 2012-2016), Acts 1-9 (thirty-three sermons, 2014-2015), Revelation 1-3 (eight sermons, 2015), 1 Corinthians 15 (six sermons, 2016), Philemon (three sermons, 2017), Galatians (forty-two sermons, 2017-2018). During this same period, MacArthur also preached: *Creating Shade for Your Children* (four sermons, 2016), *Your Responsibility to the Church* (five sermons, 2017), *Social Justice and the Gospel* (four sermons, 2018), and *The Return of Christ* (9 Sermons, 2019).

The writing ministry of MacArthur during this same period continued apace. In 2010, he wrote: *Slave* (2010), *Losing the Promised Land: Elisha and the Kings of Judah (OT Study Guide)* (2010), *God's Presence During Hardship: Daniel and Esther in Exile (OT Study Guide)* (2010), *Rebuilding God's City: Israel Returns from Exile (OT Study Guide)* (2010), *Hard to Believe* (2010), *Ashamed of the Gospel* (2010), *Daily Readings from the Life of Christ, Vol. 3* (2010), *Called to Lead* (2010), and the *ESV MacArthur Study Bible* (2010).

In the years that followed, MacArthur produced: *Evangelism: How to Share the Gospel Faithfully* (2011), *Luke 6-10 Commentary* (2011), *Truth Endures* (2011, repackaging of 2009 title), *At the Throne of Grace* (2011), *The Truth*

*About Forgiveness* (2012), *The Truth About Grace* (2012), *The Truth About the Lordship of Christ* (2012), *Worship: The Ultimate Priority* (2012), *Moments of Truth* (2012), *The Silent Shepherd: The Care, Comfort, and Correction of the Holy Spirit* (2012), *Twelve Unlikely Heroes* (2012), *Strange Fire* (2013), *The Glory of Heaven* (second edition) (2013), *One Perfect Life* (2013), *A Jet Tour Through Revelation* (2013), *Drawing Near Devotional Bible ESV* (2013), *Luke 11-17 Commentary* (2013), *The Jesus Answer Book* (2014), *Being a Dad Who Leads* (2014), *Luke 18-24 Commentary* (2014), *The Upper Room* (2014), *Parables: The Mysteries of God's Kingdom Revealed Through the Stories Jesus Told* (2015), *Found: God's Peace* (2015), *Mark 1-8 Commentary* (2015), and *Mark 9-16 Commentary* (2015).

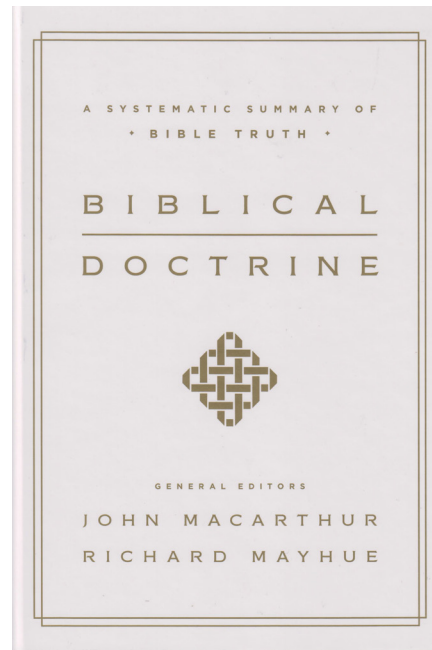
The second half of this present decade saw more books from MacArthur: *Remember and Return: Rekindling Your Love for the Savior* (2016), *MacArthur New Testament Commentary Index* (2016), *The Deity of Christ* (2017), *The Believer's Walk with Christ* (2017), *The Gospel According to Paul* (2017), *Biblical Doctrine* (2017), *None Other: Discovering the God of the Bible* (2017), *The Gospel According to God* (2018), *Christ's Call to Reform the Church* (2018), *Good News* (2018), and *The John MacArthur Handbook of Effective Biblical Leadership* (2019).

## WORLDWIDE INFLUENCE (1969-2019)

For fifty years, Sunday by Sunday, John MacArthur has stood in one pulpit at Grace Community Church and faithfully expounded the Scripture with a remarkable excellence and far-reaching effect. Within half a century, Grace Church has grown from three hundred members to five thousand members actively serving the Lord. During this same time, thousands more have been faithful members and either moved or passed away. Untold numbers around the world would call Grace Community their extended church home through John's teaching. The influence of the Grace pulpit has reached around the globe, making it a world pulpit with an unprecedented influence.

Over these five decades, MacArthur has delivered almost four thousand sermons at Grace Church. When a second and sometimes third Sunday morning sermon is added, when Wednesday night preaching is added, when Christmas and Easter sermons are added, plus individual sermons on special occasions, Shepherds' Conference messages, The Master's Seminary and The Master's University chapels, and more, the number of sermons easily doubles.

Through Grace to You radio broadcasts, MacArthur's sermons are heard daily over 1,500 times on almost one thousand English-speaking radio outlets. These stations are

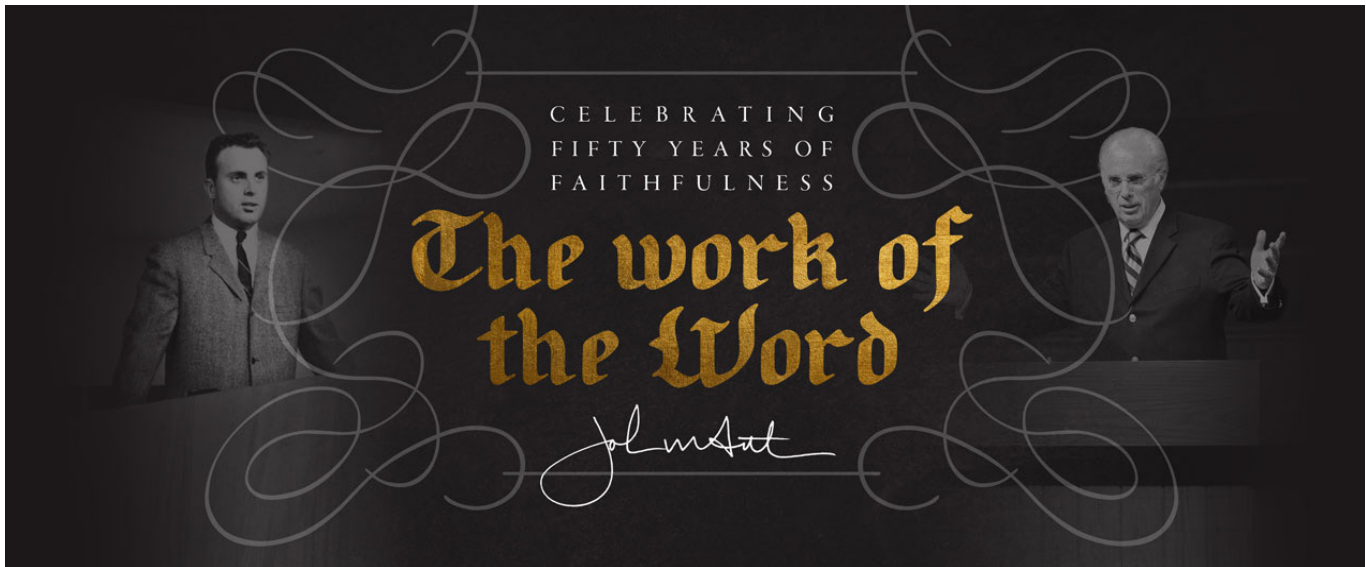


*Biblical Doctrine* was published in 2017, a crowning jewel to the MacArthur legacy.

found throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, Philippines, and South Africa. In addition, these sermons are heard via livestream and the internet around the world. Further, they are heard over eleven hundred Spanish radio outlets in twenty-seven Spanish-speaking countries. These broadcasts include those in Mexico, Spain, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Venezuela, and Colombia.

The number of daily downloads of John's sermons is fifty thousand. Monthly, over one and a half million sermons are downloaded. Over the last eleven years, the number of downloaded or streamed messages preached by MacArthur has approached two hundred million. There are another fourteen English TV stations that air his sermons.

Under John's leadership, there have been a total of forty-five Shepherds' Conferences since 1980. Pastors and church leaders from around the world have gathered for this high-impact occasion. Over forty thousand men have attended across these years. The attendance in one year has reached as high as five thousand people. Overflow crowds have filled the Grace campus. Sixty-seven countries have been represented, as well as all fifty states. Translators convert the messages simultaneously into multiple foreign languages for the attendees. Over one million resources have been distributed to pastors. During the 2018 conference alone, over forty thousand books were given away. Each year, John's messages are signature sermons for the thousands who



Grace Church celebrated John's fiftieth anniversary as its pastor-teacher in recognition of a half century of dedicated service (February 10, 2019), a rare example of steadfast endurance for any pastor.

attend.

Since MacArthur assumed the presidency of a struggling Christian school, Los Angeles Baptist College, and renamed it The Master's College and later The Master's University in 2016, the school has grown exponentially to its present enrollment of around one thousand students, with alumni around the world. MacArthur also served as the president of The Master's Seminary since 1986, until his recent retirement in 2019. His preaching has drawn young men from across the globe to sit under his influence. There are twenty-two faculty members, six hundred students in various degree programs and locations, and seventeen hundred TMS graduates presently serving the church in the U.S. and abroad. This army of expositors has been drawn together and assembled under the enduring impact of John's preaching.

The *MacArthur Study Bible* is the direct fruit of MacArthur's prolific pulpit. Since it first appeared in English, it has since been translated into Spanish, Russian, German, French, Italian, Chinese, Arabic, and Portuguese. This invaluable resource has been printed in many translations and versions, including NKJV (1997), Student Bible (2001), Daily Bible (2003), NASB (2006), ESV (2010), NIV (2013), and NKJV 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary (2017). The *MacArthur Study Bible* has sold more than one million copies worldwide and has received a Gold Medallion Book Award for excellence.

Another outgrowth of MacArthur's preaching is the establishment of training centers that circle the globe to

train indigenous pastors in expository preaching. Known as The Master's Training Academy International (TMAI), these fourteen centers have graduates of The Master's Seminary serving as faculty. There are sixteen member schools with over sixty training locations in Albania (Southeastern Europe Theologian Seminary), Croatia (Theological Biblical Academy), Germany/Switzerland (European Bible Training Center), Honduras (Ministerios Evangelicos de las Americas), India (Pastoral Training Seminary), Italy (Italian Theological Academy), Japan (Hamadera Bible Institute), Mexico (Word of Grace Biblical Seminary), New Zealand (The Shepherd's Bible College), The Philippines (The Expositor's Academy), Russia (Samara Preachers' Institute & Theological Seminary), Russia (Word of Grace Bible Institute), South Africa (Christ Seminary), and Ukraine (Irpın Biblical Seminary). These institutes are a direct outgrowth of MacArthur's preaching.

The effect of these training centers is impossible to estimate. There are more than fifty-five hundred graduates from these TMAI centers, with over twenty-three hundred current students being instructed in biblical preaching. These graduates and current students serve in seventy-three countries. In 2017, there were twelve thousand pastors and church leaders worldwide who attended fifty conferences hosted by TMAI, with forty-nine original works published by TMAI schools. All of this is the result of the ministry of John MacArthur, who has been mightily used by God.

As MacArthur reached his eightieth birthday on June 19, 2019, it can be said that he continued to be a good soldier who has fought the good fight. He has contended for the faith. He has taught sound doctrine and refuted those who contradicted the truth. He has maintained his watch and blown his Master's trumpet.

### A FITTING BENEDICTION

A decade ago, I wrote a book, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin*, that analyzed the biblical preaching of this Genevan Reformer. As I considered to whom I would dedicate this book, there was only one man in my estimation who had emulated this luminous figure from the sixteenth century. That individual is the subject of this issue—John MacArthur. My dedication aptly concludes this survey of

his life and reads as follows:

To John MacArthur—faithful shepherd, peerless expositor, defender of the faith. For almost forty years, Dr. MacArthur has stood in the pulpit at Grace Community Church and has been the gold standard of biblical exposition for an entire generation of preachers. His masterful preaching through books of the Bible, as well as his New Testament commentaries, study Bible, seminary, college, missionary academy, and worldwide radio ministry, make him, I believe, the John Calvin of our day. “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake (2 Cor 4:5). ♦

“FOR WE DO NOT PREACH OURSELVES BUT  
CHRIST JESUS AS LORD, AND OURSELVES AS  
YOUR BOND-SERVANTS FOR JESUS’ SAKE. FOR GOD  
WHO SAID, ‘LIGHT SHALL SHINE OUT OF DARKNESS,’  
IS THE ONE WHO HAS SHONE IN OUR HEARTS TO GIVE  
THE LIGHT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE GLORY OF  
GOD IN THE FACE OF CHRIST.”

**2 CORINTHIANS 4:5–6**

**GRACE**  
*to You*



**CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS OF  
UNLEASHING GOD'S TRUTH,  
ONE VERSE AT A TIME**

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**GTY.ORG**

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION  
FEBRUARY 10, 2019

The  
work  
of the  
Word

J O H N M A C A R T H U R

2 TIMOTHY 3:16 - 4:5  
SERMON TRANSCRIPT

GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH

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**T**his is beyond overwhelming. I had prepared something to say; I don't know if I can recover it at this point. My heart and mind are flooded with so many incredible thoughts after this amazing time together. Thanks to everybody—thanks to Michael [Mahoney], and thanks to all those of you who made this happen here at Grace Church. I am a singularly blessed person. I have no idea why the Lord chose me and prepared me and set my course, put me in the family that he put me in, and put me in touch with this church when I was in my twenties, really too young for the responsibility. But here I was, February 9, 1969, with absolutely no idea of what the future would hold, but knowing I wanted to teach the Word of God.

No pastor has—I can't imagine—ever had a more wonderful pastoral ministry than the Lord has given me. It's not something I have earned; it's not something I deserve. The Lord has overcome my weaknesses and my failures and singularly blessed me in spite of them by bringing me here. I have never had a split-second desire to be anywhere else. This is my home; this is my life. You are my love. You are my joy and crown of rejoicing, and we will share this fellowship forever in heaven. We'll let some other folks up there join us, but we'll be together up there.

I thank you for being my life, for all your gifts and all your sacrifices, all your love, all your care for me. I cannot imagine a more wonderful life. Had its challenges, some of my own making. But the Lord has stood by us, hasn't He, through all of these challenges. We had no idea where this ministry would go, and the Lord has blessed your efforts. I come back, stand in this pulpit week after week all these years, and you take the ministry and spread it around the world. This is how the body of Christ is supposed to function. So, first, thank you. Thanks to all the volunteers. And again, special thanks to you, Michael, for being behind all this wonderful expression of love.

I have to say to the most wonderful gift that God ever gave me, my wife Patricia. Thank you, honey. I love you to death; I think you know that. It's one thing to be preached to on Sundays; it's another thing to be preached to every day. So she's demonstrated a lot of grace.

How blessed am I to have my children and my grandchildren even here today. Love to all of you. Thank the Lord for all of you. It's a joy to have my sister and her husband with us this morning, Jeanette, and many other friends, some of whom I've seen and some of whom I haven't seen because Michael has kept me locked up all morning; and hopefully I'll be able to get around to see you all soon.

This is not a retirement. I'll be back next Sunday and we'll

be in 2 Thessalonians. I really want to just point you this morning to the Word of God, because what we have all experienced is the work of the Word, and that is the appropriate theme for our celebration. There is a text that has been noted with regard to this—it's 2 Timothy chapter 3. You can turn to it. I'm only going to make a sort of general reference to it, and then there are some other portions of Scripture that I want to bring before you.

In 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 14 we read the Word of God: "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."

Let me stop there and say that 2 Timothy 4:2 has been my lifelong mandate: "Preach the word. Preach the word in season and out of season." That means all the time, and that is what I have endeavored to do. I come into this pulpit on a Sunday and through these years I've preached two or three and sometimes four times on a Sunday, and the early years began on Wednesday. Other times throughout this half a century I have preached across this country and pretty much around the world, and always I have preached the Word, always I have opened the Word of God. I have really nothing to say of significance on my own. I stand solemnly charged or commanded in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead—and that includes me—by His appearing in His kingdom. And I have been commanded to preach the Word. So I have endeavored to do that to the best of my ability.

I'm grateful that this church has allowed me to have the time to do the preparation, to spend three days or so every week of this half century just studying the Word of God; and I can tell you now, there has not been one weary moment in fifty years in the Word of God. I've had weary moments with my own weakness. I've had weariness with some of the challenges. I've had weariness with some of the people that are difficult, some of the issues that we face. I have never grown weary of the Word of God. It is life-giving, and it has done that in our church. So I want to borrow some words from David, Psalm 138: "I will give thanks with all my heart; I will sing praises to You. I will bow down toward Your holy temple and

give thanks to You for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word according to Your name.”

God has exalted His Word equal to His name. When we exalt His Word, we exalt Him. True worship is the exaltation of the Word of God, and we have done that together for half a century.

The story of this church is not the story of a man; it's not the result of the work of a man. It isn't the work of many men and many women that is the record of this church to be told. It really is the story of the work of the Word of God through the Spirit of God. As Martin Luther said, “I did nothing; the Word did everything.”

The Scripture has dominated the pulpits and lecterns and classrooms and conversations and homes and lives of this congregation for half a century, and we have experienced the reality of Isaiah's words: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it.” How marvelous is that to know that when you proclaim the Word of God it is predetermined what God will do with it.

We know what the work of the Word is, as we just read. It brings about salvation. It brings about sanctification. It brings about spiritual growth. It fills the heart with hope. It pours truth into the mind and the life. It empowers for the living of that truth.

In Acts 20:23, the apostle Paul said to the elders at Ephesus, “And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” The Word of God is able to build you up, and that's what we have lived these fifty years to see.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:13, Paul writes, “We constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you have heard from me, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.” Hebrews 4:12 says, “The word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword.”

As a church, we have come to believe that the Word of God is divine revelation. All Scripture is inspired by God. We have come to believe that that revelation was placed through the minds of the writers of Scripture so that men didn't write their own ideas, but holy men were moved by the Holy Spirit to write the Scripture. We have come to the conviction from studying the Scripture that the law of the Lord is perfect. It is without error, that as Proverbs 30 says, “Every word of God is

pure.” We have come to the conviction that it is authoritative, as it says in Isaiah 1:2, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken.” When God speaks, we listen. We have found the Word of God to be sufficient; it covers everything that we could possibly need.

I could never close this day without reading that revelation from Psalm 19:7, “The law of Lord is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.” That is the sufficiency of Scripture.

We have come to understand that the Bible is also definitive, even determinative. “He that is of God hears God's words. You therefore do not hear them, because you are not of God” (John 8:47). Those who belong to God hear God's Word; they hunger for it. Those who have no interest in it are not of God.

We have come to believe that the Bible is clear, that as Psalm 119 says, “It is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.” And we have come to find that the Bible is also ultimately satisfying. We find in it what John says: “These things are written so that our joy may be made complete.” We find our joy in the Word of God.

We come Sunday after Sunday after Sunday. The Word of God is strong and powerful and penetrating and convicting. There's rebuke and there's restoration. There's conviction and there's comfort. But there's joy in all of it. We find our joy in the Word of God.

I could break down how we feel about the Word of God into four simple terms. Recognition: we know what it means. Conviction: we believe what it says. Submission: we eagerly obey it. And the final one, affection: we love it. We love the Word of God.

Psalm 1 says, “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord.” That would define us. Our “delight is in the law of the Lord.” We're not here to be entertained. We're not here to be an audience to some kind of show going on up here. We're here to be fed the Word of God because that's what we delight in.

Psalm 40:8 says, “I delight to do Your will, O my God;—Why?—“because Your Law is written in my heart.” It's a heart delight. It's not a moment's experience. It isn't that somehow there's an emotional uplift when you show up on Sunday. We live in the delight of the Word of God. It rises up from within our hearts; and that's true all the time. And it's excitingly amplified when we come together collectively like this. That's

why we sing the way we sing. We don't sing about ourselves; we sing about the Word of God and all that's revealed there, and we sing with joy.

Psalm 119:97 sums it up: "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." That's how we live our lives, isn't it? Psalm 19:10, "Your words are more precious to me than fine gold and sweeter than the honeycomb." Job said, "I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." We love the Word of God.

First John 5 spells it out. John writes, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome." We love the law; we love to obey the law of God; we love to proclaim the Word of God. That's why from this church the Word of God has covered the earth.

Jesus was speaking to His disciples in John 6 and He said, after the crowd had left Him, "Will you also go away?" to which Peter, responding for the whole group, said, "To whom shall we go? You and You alone have the words of eternal life." There's nowhere else to go; there's no one else with the words of eternal life. That's why Grace Church is what it is; that's why you're here. I know why people come to this church and I know why they don't. They come because their souls crave the satisfying joys of Scripture; they don't come because that is not their interest.


We are God's people. We are a redeemed church, spiritually alive, who hunger for His Word, because it alone feeds

our souls, satisfies our longings, and conforms us to the Christ we love. We are what we are, not because of a man; we are what we are because of a book: Scripture. And because we are so engulfed in the Word of God, we understand doctrine and we understand worship. We understand spiritual character, and we understand spiritual life and spiritual ministry. Where do people go to find that? It's only available where the Word of God dominates.

We love the Bible. Now why is that the case? Is it because somehow we're smarter than other people who go to church? Is it because somehow we are more spiritual? Why is it that we have this love? Let me begin by having you look at the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians. Here's a start to answering that question, "Why do we love the Word the way we do? Why does it do its work in us the way it does?"

Paul, writing to the Thessalonians in chapter 1—we'll pick it up at verse 2—says, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you."

Hmmm. How did we become the people we are? How did we become a church like Thessalonica? And I often say Grace Church is like the Thessalonians' church. How did this happen? How did we become a people who does the work of faith and the labor of love and has the steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ and in the presence of our God and



**WE ARE A REDEEMED CHURCH, SPIRITUALLY ALIVE,  
WHO HUNGER FOR HIS WORD, BECAUSE IT ALONE  
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Father? Because we were chosen. We were chosen.

Verse 5, “The gospel didn’t come to us in word only, it came in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction,”—Why?—“because we were chosen.” Verse 6, “You became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit.” How did that happen? We were chosen. “You became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.” And in verse 8 it says, “And beyond that, in every place.” How did that happen? Because we were chosen.

Verse 9, “You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God.” How did that happen? We were chosen. Verse 10, “We’re waiting for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.” How is that possible? We were chosen.

Paul gives us some insight into that in 1 Corinthians 1; so let’s look at that for just a brief few moments. In this very rich portion of Scripture—starting in chapter 1, verse 18, running down through chapter 2—we have a contrast between those who do not hunger for the Scripture, who do not believe the Bible, and those who do. And just lightly touching on what this great text says, here is why non-Christians, non-believers do not accept the Bible.

Verse 18 says, “The word of the cross”—the divine message, the center of which is the cross and Christ—“is foolishness to them.” The message is unreasonable. Greek term is *moron*. It is moronic. It is stupid. It does not suit human reason, this idea of a crucified Jew, crucified by the Romans; being God, the eternal God, the Creator of the universe; then rising from the dead, being the only Savior in the world, the only true God, the only true Redeemer. Therefore Christianity’s the only true religion; all others are lies out of hell. To the unregenerate mind, that is unreasonable.

People don’t believe, secondly, because the truth is not only unreasonable, it’s unattainable. Look at verse 19: “For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.’” In other words, you can’t get to this truth by being wise and clever.

“Where is the wise man?” verse 20. “Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know Him, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.” People on their own in the world cannot attain to this knowledge. The Word of God is unreasonable, it is unattainable. Jeremiah said, “The wise men, behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord, so what wisdom do they have?”

Thirdly, even unattractive. The message isn’t what people are looking for, verse 22, “The Jews ask a sign, Greeks


search for wisdom. We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness.” The message is unattractive. They want something more philosophical, do the Gentiles. The Jews want a sign—a sign in the sky, if you will—because not even the sign of the resurrection convinced them. We offer no signs. And this is not some kind of complex, erudite, esoteric philosophy that might tantalize the intellectuals. No; this message, this simple message of the Word of God, the theme is salvation, and the main person is Jesus Christ in all of Scripture. This is unreasonable, unattainable. This is also unattractive.

And then to add to the difficulty, its purveyors—us as Christians—are unremarkable. Look at verse 26: “Consider your calling.” Again, a reminder that we are saved because we were called, we were chosen. We were called, called by God; that’s an effectual calling into salvation. “Consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that they may nullify the things that are.”

Not only are we working with a message that is offensive, but a lot of very unremarkable people are carrying this message. Wouldn’t it have been better for God if He had decided to bring to Himself the erudite, the elite, the well-known, the powerful, the influential, the educated? But He didn’t do that. “Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble.” “Not many” three times.

The majority of believers are unimpressive. They’re not wise; they’re not powerful; they’re not noble; they don’t have influence. Most of us don’t have power. “Not noble” means “well-born.” We’re “not well-born.” We don’t have social rank. We’re foolish, uneducated. We’re weak, uninfluential. We are also “base,” verse 28 says, “base.” What does that mean? “Base” means—it’s *agenē*—it means “no births,” “insignificant.” Worse than that, “we are the things that are not.” That’s from the verb *eimi*, we “don’t even exist.” Far as the world is concerned, we don’t exist.

So you’ve got an unreasonable message, an unattractive message, unremarkable people communicating that message. And even the preachers, fifthly, are unfashionable. Look at chapter 2: “When I came to you, brethren, I didn’t come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that



# WE HAVE BEEN MADE COMPLETE IN CHRIST. WE HAVE BEEN PREDESTINED TO ETERNAL GLORY. WE LOVE HIM. WE LOVE HIM BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US. THAT'S WHY WE BELIEVE.

your faith wouldn't rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

Everything seems to go against us. We're not orators. We're not the famous. We're not the influential. We're not the powerful. We're not the philosophical. We're not the intellectual. We're unremarkable, and the culture sees us that way.

There's a historian [Hughes Oliphant Old] who has written seven volumes on preaching, and he has a section on me. Seven volumes on history of preaching; and I want you to hear what he wrote about me. This is a quote: "MacArthur's rhetoric is terribly out of date. But maybe he knows something the rest of us don't. Why do so many people listen to MacArthur, this product of all the wrong schools? How can he pack out a church on Sunday morning in an age in which church attendance has seriously lagged? Here is a preacher who has nothing in the way of a winning personality, good looks or charm." Thanks a lot.

"Here is a preacher who offers us nothing in the way of sophisticated, homiletical packaging. No one would suggest that he is a master of the art of oratory. What he seems to have is a witness to true authority. He recognizes in Scripture the Word of God. And when he preaches, it is the Scripture that one hears. It is not that the words of John MacArthur are so interesting as it is that the Word of God is of surpassing interest. That is why we listen." I think he got it. Could have been a little kinder in the process.

So you understand, while there are lots of people who are happy to listen to my teaching, the perspective of the world


is there's nothing in me at all to cause that to happen. For all of these reasons, people don't believe the Bible. And you can add the reality of fallen reason, natural darkness, satanic blindness, divine alienation. And people don't believe the Bible, and those who have some kind of tacit acceptance of the Bible have no hunger for its truths and find no joy in its depths.

So why do we believe? Why do we believe? Here it comes, chapter 2, verse 6: "Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature." Here's the first reason: because we're "mature." What does that word mean, *teleios*? "Complete." Why do we believe? Because we're "complete," we're fully developed—we're developed by God into unique persons.

You know of Paul's great ministry passion in Colossians. At the end of Colossians 1 he says this: "We proclaim Him,"—meaning Christ—"admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." So we are in Christ, we are complete. That's the first reason we love Scripture.

"In Him," says Colossians 2, "we are complete. And in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." And we are complete in Him.

Secondly, we believe the Bible because, verse 7, we are predestined to believe it. "We speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory." Did you see that? Do you know why you believe the Bible? Because God before time began predestined you to believe it.



**WE HAVE BEEN PREDESTINED TO ETERNAL GLORY,  
BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN TRANSFORMED FROM  
HATING HIM TO LOVING HIM AS A DIVINE  
MIRACLE, BECAUSE HE GAVE US HIS HOLY  
SPIRIT WHO IS THE AUTHOR AND THE  
INSTRUCTOR OF SCRIPTURE, BECAUSE HE  
TRANSFERRED US FROM THE NATURAL TO  
THE SPIRITUAL BY MAKING US ALIVE AND  
GIVING US ETERNAL LIFE.**

Go back to verse 27 in chapter 1. “God has chosen.” “God has chosen.” Verse 8, “God has chosen.” Verse 30, “By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.” It’s His doing—His choosing, His predestining, His calling. And He chose specific kinds of people. He chose the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, the nobodies, so that no one may boast before God.

We don’t believe because we’re smarter than other people; we believe because we’ve been made complete in Christ, because we are the predestined. And we are predestined to eternal glory. Predestination before time began had in mind

eternal glory after time was ended.

Thirdly, verses 8–9, because we love Him. Verse 8, “the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood. If they understood it, they wouldn’t have crucified the Lord of glory.” They did that because they hated Him. “But it is written, ‘Things which eye has not seen, ear has not heard,’—they’re not visible by any empirical methodology; divine truth can’t be known empirically—“and which have not entered the heart of man,”—divine truth cannot be known instinctively, intuitively, internally; it’s not available—“but God has given it for those”—end of verse 9—“who love Him.”

We have been made complete in Christ. We have been



predestined to eternal glory. We love Him. We love Him because He first loved us. That's why we believe.

Fourthly, because we've received the Holy Spirit, verse 10: "God has revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God knows no one except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who's from God, that we may know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words."

In every verse it says, "We're taught by the Spirit. We're taught by the Spirit. We're taught by the Spirit." We have been given the Holy Spirit. First John 2 says, "He is an anointing which we have from God, so that we need not depend on human wisdom." Paul says to the Galatians, "It was the desire of the Lord. The Lord was pleased to reveal His Son to me."

And then God gave us the truth-teacher, the Holy Spirit, to live in us. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit; He lives in us. The Spirit of Christ lives in us. That's why we understand the Scripture; He's the truth-teacher. The author of Scripture lives in us and is the interpreter of what He inspired.

Fifthly, Paul says, because we are therefore spiritual. Look at verses 14–15: "A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they're foolishness to him; he cannot understand them, because they're spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual appraises"—or discerns—"all things, yet he himself is discerned by no one." The world doesn't understand us; they can't figure us out; they can't discern who we are. But we, because we are spiritual—*pneumatikos*—because we are endowed with spiritual life, are no longer in the natural, fallen condition. We have been made new creations. We've been born again, regenerate. We now possess spiritual life, the life of God. And we *anakrinō*, we "judge" everything by the Word of God and by the understanding of the Word of God that is vouchsafed to us by the Holy Spirit.

And one other thing; this is so amazing. Verse 16, "we have the mind of Christ." "Who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him?" (from Isaiah 40). The answer: "We have the mind of Christ." What an amazing statement.

Why do we love the Scripture? Because we think the way Christ thinks. Why? Because we have His mind. What does that mean? As a believer you don't have the body of Christ, but you have the mind of Christ. The only part of Christ that's in you is the mind of Christ. We are literally the residence of Christ. We have His mind, His understanding, His judgment, His thinking.

Why do we believe the Bible? Because we have been made

complete in Christ. We have been predestined to eternal glory, because we have been transformed from hating Him to loving Him as a divine miracle, because He gave us His Holy Spirit who is the author and the instructor of Scripture, because He transferred us from the natural to the spiritual by making us alive and giving us eternal life, and because He gave us the mind of His Son who lives in us, and we know what He thinks.

Why are we committed to the Word of God like this? Because of the work that God has done in us. That's why 1 Corinthians 1 ends with these words borrowed from Jeremiah: "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (v. 31). That's what we're doing today, boasting in the Lord.

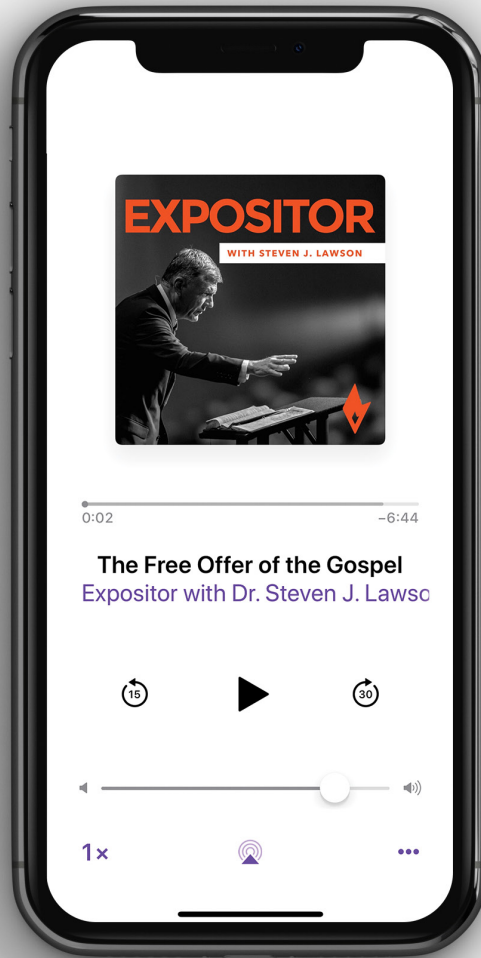
Psalm 34:2 says, "My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad." Jeremiah 9:23–24 says, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things."

Here we are, and all worship goes to God, all glory goes to God, all boasting goes to Him. If you feel like you're a spectator on the outside looking through a window, you say, "I don't have this kind of passion; I don't have this kind of love for the Word; I don't see that in my heart," you need to pray this prayer, Psalm 119:18, "Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of Your law."

Father, we thank You for such a wonderful, joyous day; really the culmination of so many days of blessing and joy. All glory to You. As we honor Your Word, we honor You. You have exalted Your Word to the very heights of Your own name. We glorify You, we worship You when we lift up Your Word, when we understand it, believe it, obey it, and love it, and then spend our lives proclaiming it.

Thank You for daily, hourly providence for half a century in my life and Patricia's and our family, and all the precious, dear, amazing, irreplaceable people that have surrounded us through all these years, whose lives You have touched, who were predestined, chosen, called, redeemed, set apart for ministry here, or even from this place all across the world. All is for Your glory and Your glory alone. Thank You for letting us be witnesses to what You have done. We praise You with thankful hearts. Amen. ♦

The audio of the sermon transcribed here is available at [GTY.org](http://GTY.org)



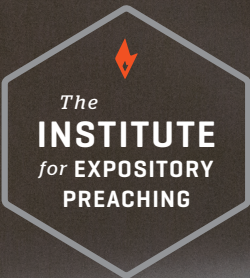
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"PREACH THE WORD; BE READY IN SEASON  
AND OUT OF SEASON; REPROVE, REBUKE,  
EXHORT, WITH GREAT PATIENCE."

2 T I M O T H Y 4:2

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