

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: In July you will have preached through every verse of the NT!

A: It's the result of staying in the same place for a long haul. This was something that I held in my heart as a desire when I began here in 1969. And it is also the result of signing up to do the commentary series for Moody. I had to continue.

Q: All these years and you've never slowed down. Will your ministry change when you finish?

A: I hope not. I'm not leaving. I'm going to take some time off to go to Europe and visit missionaries and then I'm going to come back and keep doing what I've always done.

Q: Are you planning to preach through the OT?

A: Look at me. (hahaha)

Q: I'd like to see you throw away your notes on John and do it again — like you did Matthew (8 years).

A: Christ is the most compelling person ever — I've spent 23 years preaching the gospels and add those to the years I've spent working on the commentaries and the most inviting and compelling suggestion I've had is to go back and do the gospel of John again. To preach Christ is what we've done here. Any glimpse of Christ is potentially transforming. It has the ability to completely captivate and instruct.

I don't know exactly what I will do; I'm thinking about going through the OT and preaching Christological passages — the mountain peaks.

Q: Will there come a time when you retire?

A: If I make sense, leave me alone. The problem will be that when I don't make sense that I won't believe them. Retirement is not a biblical concept to me. My father taught until he was 90 when he said, "I think I need to stop; I've started repeating myself." I'm ready to go for as long as the Lord wants me. This is my place and it will always be my place.

Q: Forty-three years at Grace Church. What were the most difficult changes you wanted to implement?

A: To see mature elders — in terms of knowledge, ministry knowledge and responsibility. After seminary I looked for a biblical model and I struggled to find one — I didn't know of a church that had elders or did church discipline or a church that had mobilized its laity into anything more than superficial activity or a church where intense discipleship was going on. Coming out of seminary I was struggling to find out how to do church. I found a Plymouth Brethren book who just kept going back to the Bible and explaining "this is what you do." I saw myself as all alone — I didn't have a model. I didn't have pastor friends who understood it and I knew a bunch of churches and church leaders who I knew didn't know. So I had to wait and then take a group of young men and pour that into them and grow the first group of leaders (which I did for seven years).

Q: If you could be transported back to 1969 and the beginning of your ministry — what advice would you give to yourself (the mature John to the young John)?

A: You wish you would do many things differently — I think patience. There was something wonderful about this constant accessibility and availability — it brought a reality into my life of really shepherding a congregation of people. The hardest lesson for me, though, was just to be patient. That is the greatest challenge for a young person. Patience means that I have to know where these people (individually) are — so that I don't trample over them and drag them, but I use the process to move them along (individually).

Q: Impatience seems to be the #1 cause for failure of long men.

A: Patience is not “for four years,” but long-term with the people you live with... It was not until 7-8 years that collectively that the leaders began to understand and were coming along.

Q: What's the secret to staying in one place for so long?

A: I didn't have any offers. (hahaha) I have had for many years a profound attachment to this church. It's never been about me and what I might like and the novelty of different ministry. I don't think of my life as anything other than here. A couple of times I could have left (because of split elder boards). But I've never had any interest in any other thing. And that's only become stronger over the years. This is where God has settled my soul and my heart. The church is (really) my only priority. All the other ministries I'm involved in are led day-to-day by other men. All those other things could go away tomorrow and I wouldn't miss a step or shed a tear. I could never do one of those jobs and not pastor Grace Church. (The discipline of study is what I love most about it, along with the progress of people and the impact of truth on the lives of people.)

Q: There is a new biography by Iain Murray to be published about you this summer. What is it like to read a book about you?

A: People should not have a biography until they are dead. It's embarrassing and strange, but if it has to be, the one I would choose is Iain Murray. What I love about Murray is that he can't keep himself out of interjecting about the story. I am the only living person he's ever written about! He writes by collecting data, so he's never interviewed me. It's an honor that he would do this — he's a very precious man.

He wrote the biography of A. W. Pink. You don't want to end up like him, who suffered and never embraced it as the work of God in his life...

Q: You've never been very introspective. Has that changed after 50 years of ministry?

A: No. I don't understand the question.

Q: My point.

Q: You haven't embraced technology very much. You don't use a computer. (no) You do use an iPhone.

A: I can read things on it; but I can't send things on it.

Q: You say, “Just fax it to my cell phone...”

Q: You have actually learned to text on your phone to communicate with your grandchildren.

A: Yes, it's been a great way to connect with them; I struggle to be cryptic like them because I've spent my life being verbose. Yesterday I received a text from my grandson Ty (AF Academy) and he said he was praying for me and the Shepherds' Conference. So there you get a view into his heart through a text...

Q: For someone who is as prolific as you as an author, you really do very little travel and rarely speak at large conferences or speak in other churches besides Grace. Would you say "stay in your own pulpits as much as you can"?

A: In the first 10 years I don't think I left the state of CA for anything and more than a dozen years to speak anywhere. This is my place. I have done quite a bit of international travel because I don't go to make events successful; I go to be strategic.

Recently I went to Angola Prison — that was a real highlight for me (the only prison with a seminary in it). And I went to South Carolina because I went to preach for Douglas Wilson, an African-American Anglican priest and the word "slave" was redeemed for him when I preached on the topic. So I went to his church in East Charlotte and preached for him. To be a slave of Christ is liberating. He wrote an endorsement on the back of the book. I want to go where I can reach in where no one else can go.

Q: In the early years, when you discipled young men — talk about that. Some are no longer in the ministry and others are now antithetical to you. How could you have done it differently? What is the most effective way for discipling young men for ministry?

A: I knew of no resources to do this, so I just went through theology and took them through what I knew and interacted with them and nurtured them. The difference now is that I would be able to pull together a cohesive structure for what is right — something like Grace Advance. I know now exactly what they need to know. Since the way to go wasn't defined the attacks weren't defined. The church always better defines itself when it weathers the attacks so we have a better understanding of a good, biblical philosophy of ministry.

One of the most interesting things to see about my life is that I spent the first years of my life defining my ministry and now I am defending it from all the vigorous attacks against it.

Lane Dennis made a presentation of a special leather copy of *Truth Endures* for John. This is symbolic of the enduring mark of your ministry.

They also commemorated the 20th anniversary of TMS — a leather ESV study Bible (125,000 copies now!).

The MacArthur ESV Study Bible is available online.