

The Friend of the Bible

For over fifty years, the name of John MacArthur has been virtually synonymous with biblical authority. That's a matter of public record.

What the public has less opportunity to observe is that the life of John MacArthur adorns the doctrine he teaches (*cf.* Titus 2:10). I write this book to supplement the public record so that he might be somewhat better known.

The official, short-form biography of John MacArthur at www.gty.org reads as follows:

*John MacArthur is the pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, chancellor of The Master's University and Seminary, and featured teacher with the Grace to You media ministry. Grace to You radio, video, audio, print, and website resources reach millions worldwide each day. In more than five decades of ministry, John has written dozens of best-selling books, including *The MacArthur Study Bible*, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (thirty-four volumes), and *Slave*. He and his wife, Patricia, have four married children and fifteen grandchildren.*

That bio, while accurate, doesn't begin to tell the story about John MacArthur, the man. (It also doesn't mention the growing circle of great-grandchildren!) In the pages that follow, I want to add some texture to the picture of a man whose teaching has led so many to a saving and sanctifying knowledge of Jesus Christ.

As you read, you will not find me assigning any sinless perfection to John. His own theology would rebuke me if I tried. John would be the first to say, "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

This book is simply a window to see something of that work of God's grace in John's life and ministry.

Nothing more. Nothing less.

For a full-length biography, I highly recommend Iain Murray's book, *John MacArthur: Servant of the Word and Flock* (Banner of Truth, 2011).



The Man Writes Good Books

I was first introduced to the ministry of John MacArthur in 1984. I had been a Christian for less than six months and was wrestling with the issues of the charismatic movement.

A friend recommended John's book *The Charismatics* (Zondervan, 1978) to me. It was the precursor to the better-known *Charismatic Chaos* (Zondervan, 1992). It was among the first ten Christian books I ever purchased.

It was by far the most strategic.

At that formative crossroads in my spiritual life, I read words that changed my spiritual trajectory: "Experience is not the test of biblical truth; biblical truth stands in final judgment on experience" (p. 14).

I immediately thought, "Of course. It could be no other way."

God is God. The Bible is His Word.

That gives Scripture the controlling position in assessing truth claims.

The Bible is the final authority—not the opinions or experiences of man. If your experience contradicts the Bible, your experience is false, no matter how sincere your feelings are about it.

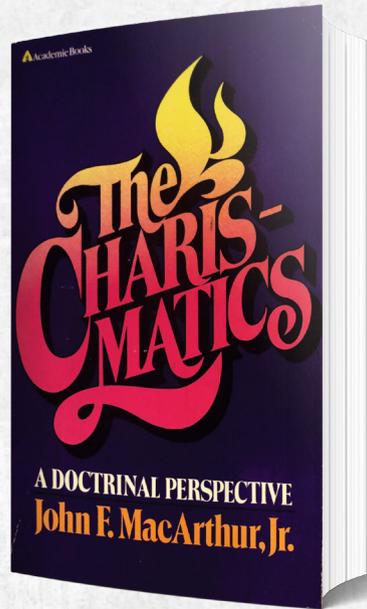
I never struggled with the assertions of the charismatic movement again. In that simple sentence from 1978, John MacArthur gave an anchor to my soul and an aspiration to my heart that has defined my imperfect life and ministry ever since.

The Bible is true. The Bible is precious. The Bible must be taught. The Bible must be defended.

John MacArthur has been doing that for over sixty years.

Pastors like me stand on his shoulders and follow in his wake.

The Bible and only the Bible, to the glory of God alone.



The Man on the Radio

Yes, I had benefitted from John MacArthur's written ministry in 1984. But as a young man, I still had a lot to learn.

I was still unmarried in 1986. One night I was listening to a Christian station on my car radio. Someone I had not heard before was teaching the Bible. I was drawn to the teaching out of 1 Corinthians 13—the great love chapter in Scripture.

I agreed with the speaker until he said, "If you don't have love, you are nothing. Zero. You don't even matter."

I reacted against that. Truth be told, it hit too close to home to my selfish heart. I pulled my car into the driveway and made a simple but consequential decision.

I had to listen to the end so that I could identify this speaker. I had to protect myself from his dogmatic teaching. If I knew his name, I could turn away from his teaching and protect my spiritual life forever.

I sat in the driveway until the bitter end.

You know how this story ends, right?

"You've been listening to 'Grace to You' with the Bible teaching of John MacArthur . . ."

Aww, man. I had been busted.

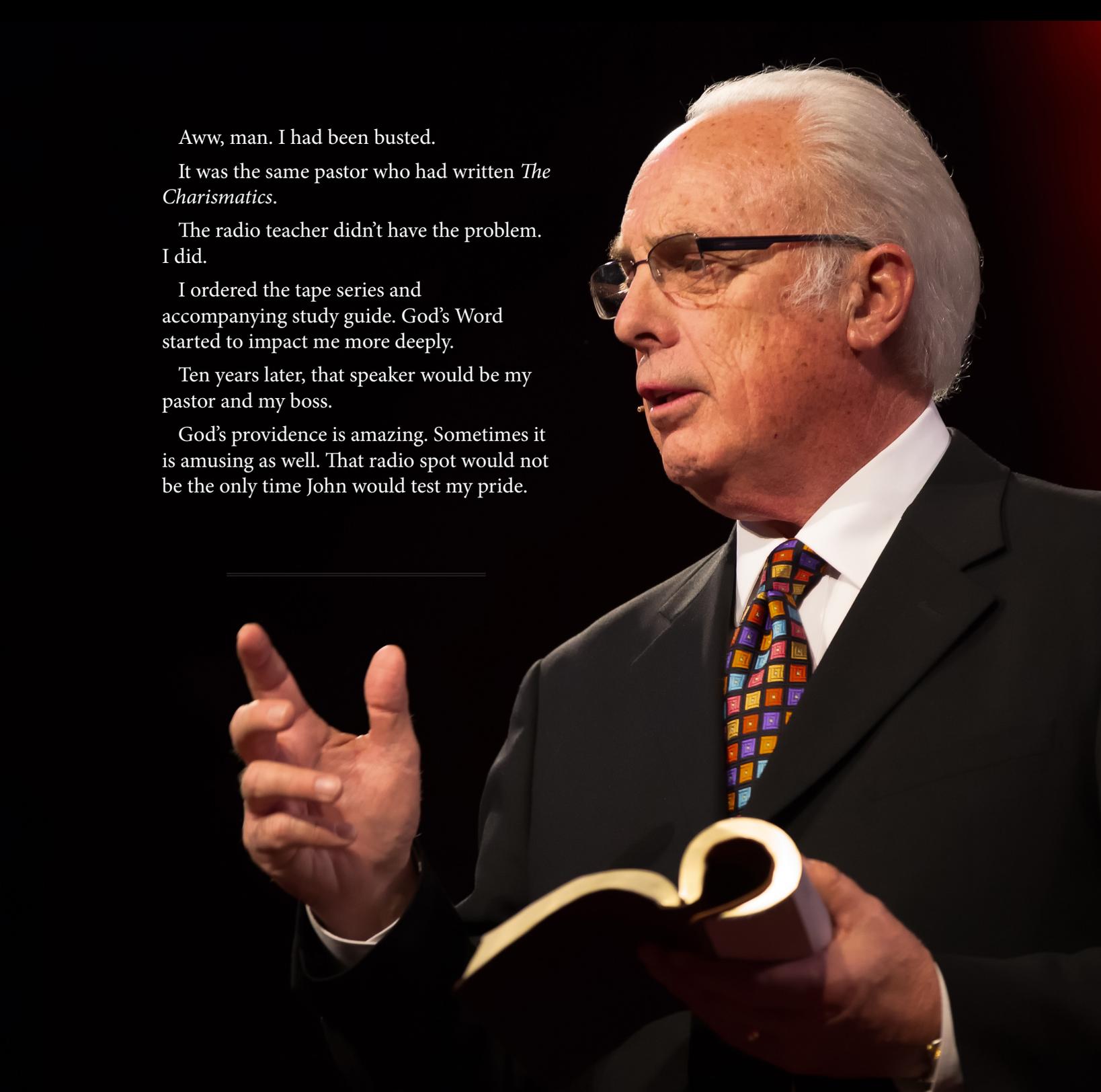
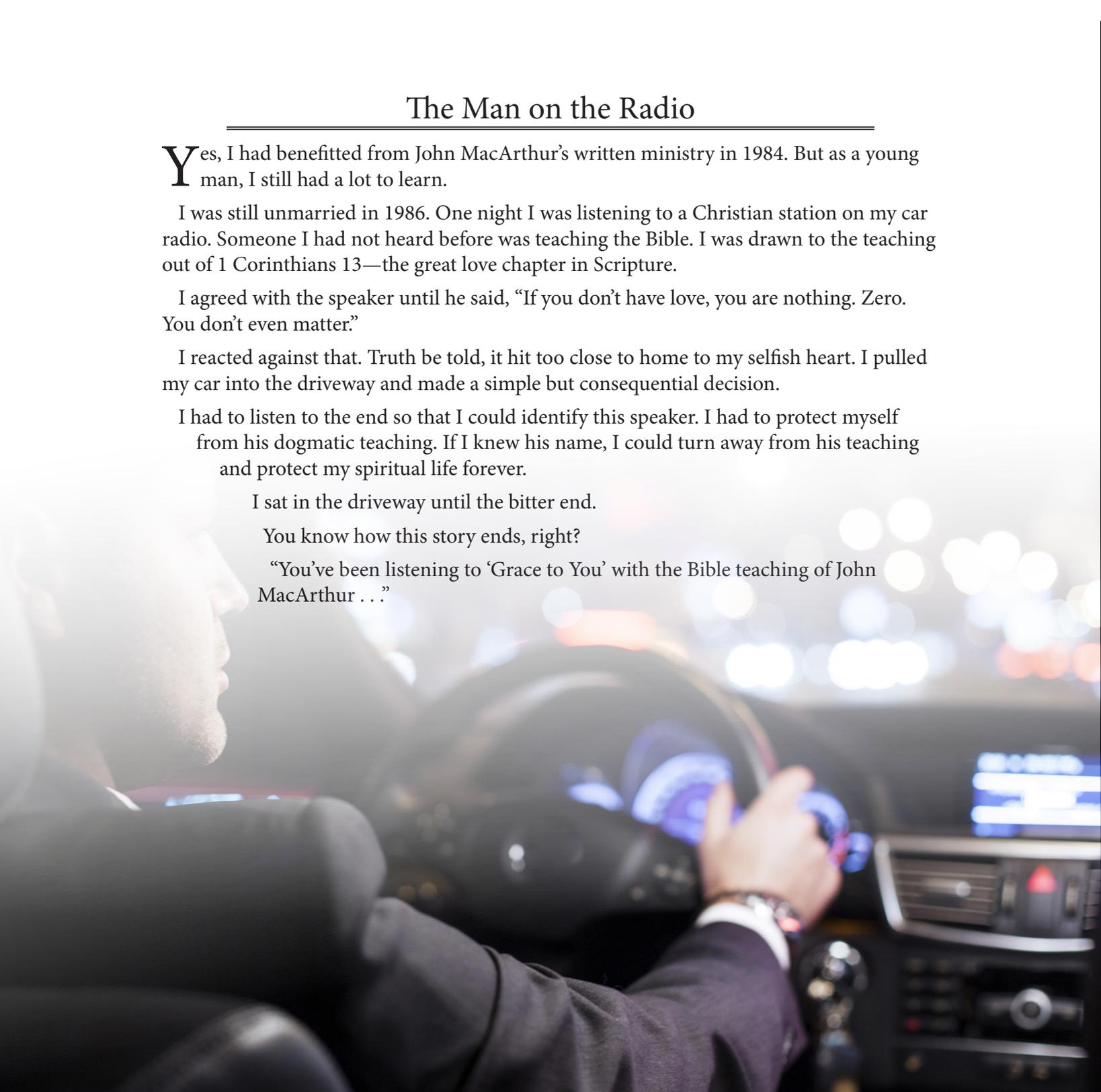
It was the same pastor who had written *The Charismatics*.

The radio teacher didn't have the problem. I did.

I ordered the tape series and accompanying study guide. God's Word started to impact me more deeply.

Ten years later, that speaker would be my pastor and my boss.

God's providence is amazing. Sometimes it is amusing as well. That radio spot would not be the only time John would test my pride.



The Man of Unassuming Generosity

I have a friend named David (not his real name) who now serves as a pastor on the east coast. Early in our friendship, David told me a story. He was a young and somewhat isolated missionary in England when John MacArthur came to that country for a time of ministry.

David's time was not without difficulty. Men around him in ministry did not live up to the faithfulness that their position should have required.

John spent much time with David on that trip, encouraging him and giving counsel to him—even though David didn't have much to offer in return to a man of John's stature.

No matter. For John, the exchange was not about what he could get.

It was about what he could give.

When the time came for them to part, John spoke some final words of encouragement to his younger friend in ministry. John extended his hand and David shook it.

"I love you, brother," John said.

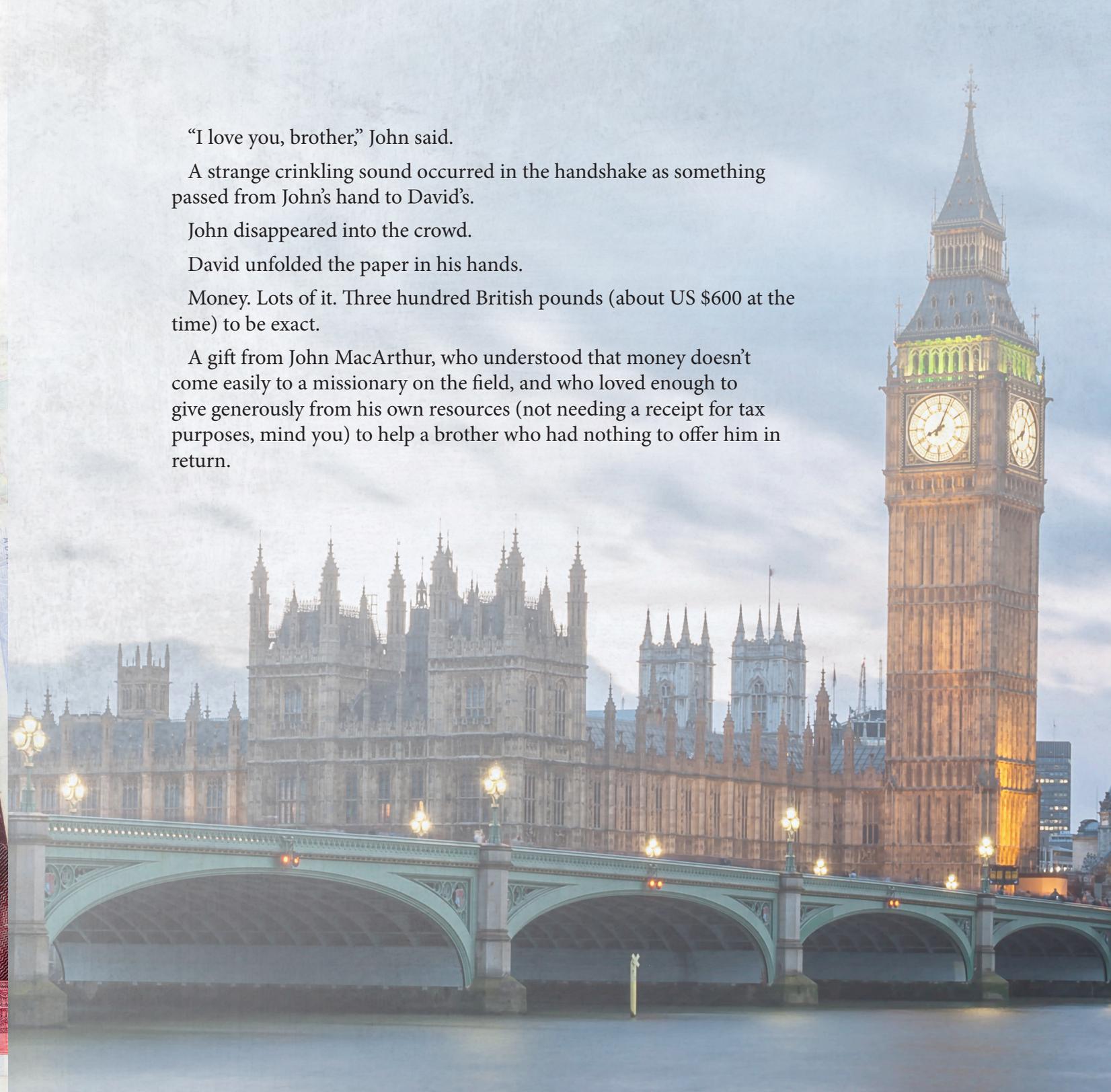
A strange crinkling sound occurred in the handshake as something passed from John's hand to David's.

John disappeared into the crowd.

David unfolded the paper in his hands.

Money. Lots of it. Three hundred British pounds (about US \$600 at the time) to be exact.

A gift from John MacArthur, who understood that money doesn't come easily to a missionary on the field, and who loved enough to give generously from his own resources (not needing a receipt for tax purposes, mind you) to help a brother who had nothing to offer him in return.



Who's Don Green?

Grace to You, John MacArthur's media ministry, hired me for a part-time counseling position in their counseling department on July 25, 1996.

My work station at 24900 Anza Drive in Valencia, California was quite modest. I had a small cubicle in a high-traffic area with a desktop computer.

Ten feet away from my desk sat Melinda MacArthur, who worked on the web page at the time. Proximity guaranteed that we would get to know each other.

The job went on and I started feeling pretty good about myself. I was a former attorney, a good seminary student, and I worked for JOHN MACARTHUR.

At some point, I suppose, Melinda mentioned me to her high-profile parents. I'm sure it was kind and positive. We had a lot of laughs back then.

Well, at last providence brought all of it together. My elevation into John MacArthur's orbit was about to be made complete.

After an evening service, I "chanced" upon John and Patricia MacArthur in the parking lot of Grace Community Church. Everything that follows happened in about ten seconds, but the key thing for the present story is this: My Moment Had Arrived.

Patricia greeted me warmly and then she began speaking to John.

"John, this is Don Green." (Well, of course I'm Don Green. I work for him.)

"You remember. I said we should have a meal together." (Yes! The INNER CIRCLE is just ahead!)

The blank look on John's face instantly told me the conversation was going awry.

I was in the middle of a future Southwest Airlines commercial.

"Wanna get away?"

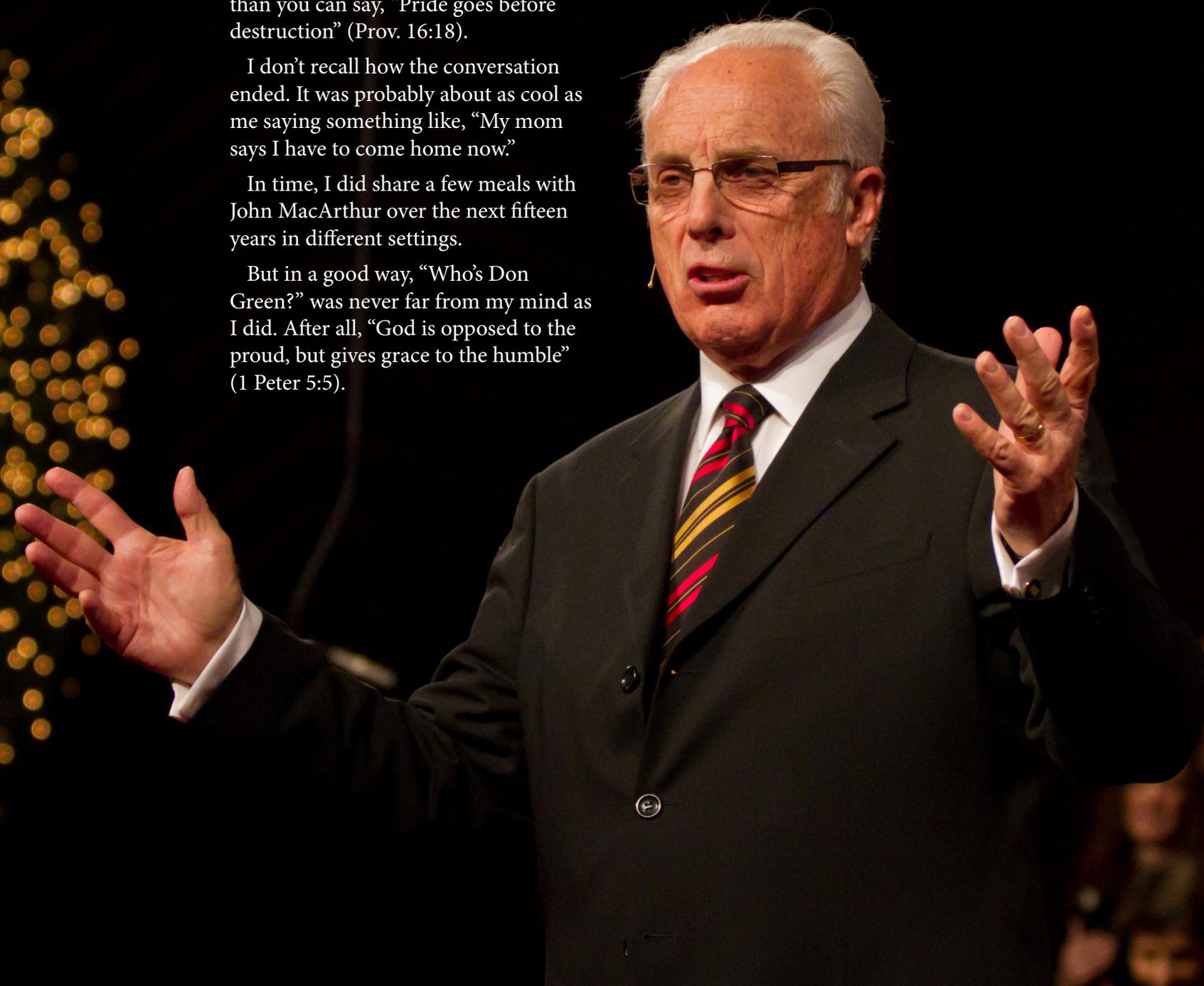
"Oh yes, I remember," John said rather blandly. "Melinda did mention you. I said, 'Don Green. Who's Don Green?'"

The air went out of my balloon faster than you can say, "Pride goes before destruction" (Prov. 16:18).

I don't recall how the conversation ended. It was probably about as cool as me saying something like, "My mom says I have to come home now."

In time, I did share a few meals with John MacArthur over the next fifteen years in different settings.

But in a good way, "Who's Don Green?" was never far from my mind as I did. After all, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).



Don, the Bean Counter

John MacArthur taught me about leadership.

His track record at Grace Community Church, Grace to You, The Master's University, The Master's Seminary, his writings, and other things too numerous to mention establishes conclusively that John knows how to lead people and organizations effectively.

To sit under his teaching is one thing, and is obviously the way most people "know" him.

To work under him is something different. He has a unique style of leadership that takes time and patience to grasp.

Phil Johnson promoted me into the administration of Grace to You in 1999. In time, I became the managing director and held that position until I left Grace to You in April 2012.

It's not from false modesty that I say this: I was not a natural fit for secondary leadership responsibilities in a John MacArthur organization. I was a former attorney, trained to do things by the book. My prior career taught me to anticipate problems and prevent them.

Caution and planning were key tools of the profession.

I was a bean counter.

John's leadership is different. He is decisive. Out of nature and necessity, he makes quick decisions that sometimes he will change later. "The key to leadership is good second decisions," I recall him saying.

When he reverses course, you need to go with the flow, not object with, "You said the opposite last month."

It's no insult to John's stature to say that, at times, that frustrated me. I wasn't wired that way.

John taught me I needed to change through his book *Twelve Ordinary Men* (W Publishing Group, 2002). What he wrote about Philip stopped me cold (pp. 121, 125):

It seems Philip was a classic "process person." He was a facts-and-figures guy—a by-the-book, practical-minded, non-forward-thinking type of individual. He was the kind who tends to be a corporate killjoy, pessimistic, narrowly focused, sometimes missing the big picture, often obsessed with identifying reasons things can't be done rather than finding ways to do them. He was predisposed to be a pragmatist and a cynic—and sometimes a defeatist—rather than a visionary.

Whether officially or unofficially, he seems to have been the one who was always concerned with organization and protocol. He was the type of person who in every meeting says, "I don't think we can do that"—the master of the impossible. And apparently, as far as he was concerned, almost everything fit into that category.

That was hard to read, even though John didn't aim it at me (as far as I know!). I moped about that for days. "I'm just trying to do things properly and in order!" But eventually I came to realize: as usual, John was right.

His book held a mirror to me. I was initially a Philip at Grace to You. I'm sure John saw that in me even though he graciously never said a word about it.

The fact that I didn't like what I saw wasn't John's fault. I needed to change if I had aspirations for a greater sphere of leadership.

There are wistful moments when I wonder what would have happened in my ministry if I were more like John and less like Philip. That question is unanswerable.

But the fact I even ask it shows the single most strategic lesson about leadership that I personally gained from John. It came from a book, yes, but even more from his life.

Great leaders don't manage process.

They influence people.

