

The Legacy of Pastor John MacArthur

By Michael Barto

Pastor John MacArthur finished his race July 14. Many eulogies and tributes have been published in honor of this renowned pastor, who faithfully served Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, CA, for his entire career. Many already have written tributes and recounted the events of his life and ministry, so I just want to say a little about his impact on me and my family.

I became familiar with MacArthur not by his radio show, not by one of his numerous books or commentaries, but by of all places, CNN. When I was a young adult, I watched political shows regularly, one of which was *Larry King Live*. On occasion, Larry King would wade into religion, and he had a few token religious figures he would invite in to discuss a hot topic of the day that touched on religion. King was, at that time, most certainly not a believer. But he was curious about religious perspectives and would have a round table of sorts with a Catholic priest, a rabbi, imam, and often MacArthur representing the protestant Christian perspective.

Each time MacArthur was on, he spoke with clarity and supported his points with biblical text. This was the first time I observed someone use the Word to speak into very real and controversial issues that I, as a young man, was sorting through. The Word is sharper than any two-edged sword, and MacArthur skillfully wielded it with grace, on live TV. He also boldly, yet gently, shared the gospel with King, right there for all his TV audience to witness. I, on the other hand, barely had the courage to share it with a close friend or co-worker. But I was inspired.

At that time, many of my theological positions were wrong. I had grown up in a few different church types. However, upon moving to Minnesota, Diana and I had joined an evangelical church with a wonderful small group led by a young man named Gabe Castro. With the Spirit's help, Gabe was working to help us all understand God better. He invited me to go with him to see MacArthur speak at Grace Church in Eden Prairie. I remember saying, "You mean the Larry King guy?" Gabe didn't know the show I was talking about, but I attended and sure enough, it was the pastor from King's show.

That's when I began to discover reform theology. I became, in a small sense, a pupil. I began reading MacArthur's books, commentaries, sermons, and conferences to grow in my understanding of God. MacArthur was very consistent and clear about the sovereignty of God, the authority of His Word, the work of the Spirit and the person of Jesus. Digesting and understanding these four things led me to a spiritual awakening that truly changed my life and heavily impacted the lives of my family and many of those around me. For that reason, I am eternally grateful that MacArthur was faithful to his calling, unashamed of the gospel, and served his church, and the rest of us, to the end. ♦

Michael Barto is married to Diana and has two adult daughters and a new son-in-law. When he isn't leading worship at Waterbrooke, he might be found sailing on Lake Waconia or exploring a dirt road in his Jeep.

Small Group Packs Meals



As a small group project, Linda Frolund, Dan and Kris Citarella, Dale and Barb Evans, and Geoff Evans recently packed 12 boxes at Feed My Starving Children in Chanhassen. The 2,592 meals packaged went to Honduras to feed seven kids for a year. If interested in packing meals at FMSC with a group from Waterbrooke, please contact Dan Citarella at dacitarellajr@aol.com. (submitted photo)

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Living out the Legacy of Christ's Gospel

We all have spiritual leaders who have gone before us who have molded us and inspired us with their sacrificial determination to share the truth and love of Christ with us. Like Hebrews 11 reminds us, we carry on our mission and ministry before a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us.

The pastor in history who has most profoundly shaped my own life and ministry as a pastor was the man from London who has been called "The Prince of Preachers," Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

I have long admired Spurgeon for many reasons. First, his sermons were powerful. He had a remarkable capacity for teaching rich biblical truth, a deep adoration for Christ, a passionate shepherd's heart for the people of God, and a vibrant evangelistic zeal for the lost.

Spurgeon began preaching at the age of 16. By the time he died, he had written numerous books including one that every pastoral trainee should possess and read, *Lectures to My Students*. All his sermons were published the week after he preached them. Before the days of radio, TV, and computers, his sermons would be mailed around the globe. His doctrine was deep and had the capacity to captivate the brightest of scholars but also the average everyday man or woman.

Spurgeon was passionate about God's Word. He once preached, "Oh, that you and I might get into the very heart of the Word of God, and get that Word into ourselves! As I have seen the silkworm eat into the leaf, and consume it, so ought we to do with the Word of the Lord—not crawl over its surface, but eat right into it till we have taken it into our inmost parts."

I love Spurgeon because he was passionate about His

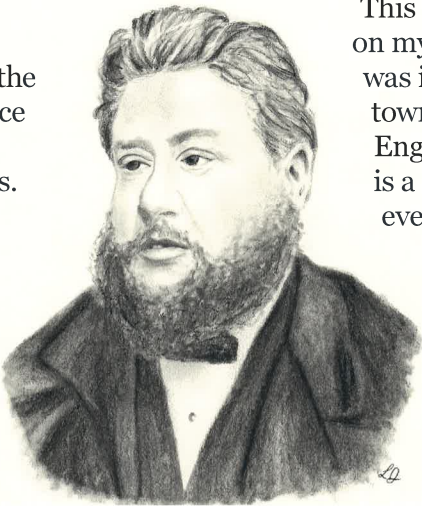
love for Christ. In fact, the reason that he loved God's Word was because in it, Christ was the central theme. He adored Christ. Spurgeon taught me that no sermon was a faithful sermon that did not lead the hearers clearly to Christ.

This line made an indelible mark on my life and ministry when I was in my early 20s: "From every town, village, and little hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London... and so from every text in Scripture there is a road to the metropolis of the

Scriptures, that is Christ. Your business is, when you get to a text, to say, 'Now, what is the road to Christ?' and then preach a sermon, running along the road towards the great metropolis—Christ."

I have always looked to Spurgeon because despite his exceptional gifts of intellect and oratory, Spurgeon was transparent that he was just a weak and broken man who battled depression. Often he struggled mentally and emotionally, and he let God's people know that instead of pretending to be a super-hero.

One time in a service his congregation was holding at the Surrey Music Hall in London, some trouble-makers shouted "Fire!" while Spurgeon was preaching. In a panic, people rushed to the door. There were 10,000 people in the service. Seven people were trampled to death, and 30 were seriously injured. ►



◀ (continued from front cover)

Spurgeon never recovered completely. Zach Eswine in his book, *Spurgeon's Sorrows*, describes what life can be like for leaders like Spurgeon and for Christians like you and me: "There comes a time in most of our lives in which we no longer have the strength to lift ourselves out or to pretend ourselves strong. Sometimes our minds want to break because life stomped on us and God didn't stop it."

A few years ago, my wife MariAnne and I traveled to Menton, France, to fulfill a lifelong desire of mine to go to the place Spurgeon went to recover from ministry. There he attempted to heal from his physical ailments but also the toll that the gospel ministry had put upon his life. A physician who often hosted him there was Dr. James Henry Bennett. We found a statue of Dr. Bennett

when we were wandering through the older section of the city. Spurgeon would have regular fellowship with people like George Müller and Hudson Taylor. On the hill side is an olive tree grove — still growing from that time period — where he would go to pray. Spurgeon said it reminded him of the Garden of Gethsemane.

We all need examples of people who were faithful until death despite the cultural struggles that raged around them and the personal challenges that took an ever-increasing toll on their souls. We need pastors and leaders and friends who don't pretend that they have their own strength but who have found the one secret for carrying on for God: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). ♦

-Senior Pastor Kevin Dibbley

(Cover portrait of Spurgeon is by Linnea Barto.)

7 Reasons We Thank God for Pastor Kevin

By Diana Barto

Pastoring a church is hard, but it's also hard to miss Pastor Kevin's love for Jesus and his love for this flock. And since this year marks his 10th year of ministry at Waterbrooke, I quietly went behind his back to gather feedback from a few folks around church. Some have been here longer than others, but together we built this list of reasons why we love and appreciate Kevin and why we thank God for him. I doubt he "approves this message," but let's pray these words encourage him! And let's all pray for him and for MariAnne as he continues the hard work of shepherding souls and faithfully preaching the gospel — all to the glory of God.

1. He genuinely cares.

Pastor Kevin shows great care for the congregation through his shepherding, says Katie Campbell.

"Whether he is at a prayer meeting, at a work day, visiting you at the hospital, supporting the Alba Run, attending your child's graduation ceremony, or even cheering for your child at a sporting event or play, Pastor Kevin demonstrates loving pastoral care for his congregants above and beyond office hour appointments and greetings on Sunday," she says.

I'Ching Thomas says she appreciates Kevin's authenticity. "When he asks you how you're doing, he genuinely wants to know and care and is not merely dispensing his pastoral duties."



Karise Pagano says she's thankful for his care and support as she serves the Lord overseas, and she's deeply grateful for Kevin's heart for the nations.

2. He values community.

"We're relatively new to Waterbrooke," I'Ching says. "But we can say this is the only church where we've found true community, and we think a big part of the credit goes to Kevin."

Ray and Sophia Pearson agree.

"Pastor Kevin has a gift for

making everyone feel seen, valued, and encouraged, and his faithfulness over the past 10 years has been such a blessing to our Waterbrooke Church family," they say.

Karise adds that since her first visit to Waterbrooke nearly six years ago, she's felt seen and safe in her brokenness and grief.

Chad Pearson says, "I appreciate how he makes every member feel like they mean the world to him."

3. He's compassionate.

When Russ and Cammy Morfitt first visited Waterbrooke during their teenage daughter's severe medical crisis, Pastor Kevin was "compassionate beyond words."

"Even though Pastor Kevin barely knew us, he read between the lines and intuitively understood the

(story continues) ▶

Painting Events Help Cover Citizenship Expenses

Coordinated by Andrea and Jeff Merboth, two "Paint with a Purpose" events this fall had 47 participants altogether and raised \$2,090 to help get Waterbrooke missionary Karise Pagano another step closer to returning to Italy full time. The process of obtaining her Italian citizenship should be complete by the end of the year, Lord willing. Keep praying that it goes well so she can stay in Italy without returning to the U.S. every 90 days.

"I'm deeply grateful to all who have been praying with me over the past two years," Karise says. "What a gift to labor together to take part in seeing the gospel reach every tribe, tongue, and nation!" ♦



Above: Andrea Merboth instructs Cammy Morfitt about the next detail in her acrylic painting. Left: Connie Evans and Melissa Cripps display their paintings. They were two of the many artists who took part in a painting event to raise funds for Karise Pagano's Italian citizenship expenses.

Afghan Refugee Family Purchases a Vehicle



What a difference one year makes! In August 2024, the Rasooli family was suddenly relocated to Minneapolis from the temporary refugee camp in Qatar, having been forced to flee their home in Kabul, Afghanistan because of ongoing, direct threats from the Taliban.

A year later, they now have purchased their own vehicle, thanks to their diligent saving and a fundraising event that many in the Waterbrooke congregation contributed to. The quick purchase is an uncommon feat for a refugee family, and the vehicle will open up many more employment options for Naim. It will also help make their daily lives less complicated. Praise God for the privilege and the blessing of working with this sweet and hard-working family.

The refugee ministry at Waterbrooke is currently putting together a second team to work with another refugee family. If you are interested in being part of that, please contact Steve Kowalke at skowalke@yahoo.com. ♦ -Gina Eaton

Review: *The Kingdom and the King Story Bible*

By Diana Barto

With captivating illustrations by Catalina Echeverri and winsome storytelling by Bob Hartman, *The Kingdom and the King Storybook Bible* is a rare gem that every family should add to their home library.

This author-illustrator duo previously teamed up to create *The Prisoners, the Earthquake, and the Midnight Song*, one of 14 books in the bestselling picture book series “Tales that Tell the Truth” from The Good Book Company. Actually, Echeverri illustrated that entire series, which includes *The Garden, the Curtain and the Cross, The Friend Who Forgives*, and *The One O’Clock Miracle*. Hartman, who has written more than 100 books and authored the YouVersion’s Bible App for Kids, is an ordained minister and a professional storyteller.

Like their previous work, this new storybook Bible by Echeverri and Hartman is sure to shine as a bestseller. Echeverri’s collage-like illustrations wrap around the lively text in reverent, compelling ways that reinforce the words on the page. Little ones and beginning readers will find the pages filled with plenty of visual treasures to behold as the book is read aloud, and more experienced young readers will find the text friendly enough to read on their own.

The book covers the overall story of Scripture – creation, the fall, redemption, and the new creation – by carefully tracing the kingly theme through all 70 chapters. In fact, 50 of the chapters include either the word “king” or “kingdom” in the chapter title. This biblical theology approach weaves together the Bible stories in a beautiful way that can help readers of all ages to better understand and remember the big story of the Bible.

One of the most attention-grabbing chapters of the storybook is Hartman’s retelling of when Jesus speaks to calm the wind and the waves during a sail across the Sea of Galilee with His disciples. The narrative is based on Luke 8:22-25, and along with it is a riveting full-page illustration of the nautical scene, which is rich in color and detail. Hartman relays the story with

an engaging description of the stormy adventure, emphasizing the disciples’ question, “Who is Jesus? Who is he really, when even the wind and the waves do exactly what he says?” The chapter concludes by carefully pointing readers back to the first chapter of the book, the story of the creation. It reminds them how, in the beginning, “a voice spoke, and the waters moved at his command.” Drawing this parallel is a powerful and memorable way to proclaim Jesus as the King of Creation. It also steers readers toward the Trinity and demonstrates how the Old Testament and the New Testament are parts of the same big story.

Parents and teachers will be heartened by how intentionally this storybook promotes Bible literacy, a great need in every generation. Each chapter heading includes references of the specific Bible verses for the story being re-told, and the “Welcome” page encourages readers to take note of those references and go read the Bible itself.

The storybook also aims to adhere closely to the Scriptures, dividing the chapters into an Old Testament section and a New Testament section. The

story selection includes God’s covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, as well as the New Covenant in Jesus. Later chapters refer back to characters, events, and truths that earlier chapters introduced, strengthening the overall story.

Most importantly, our triune, Creator, covenant LORD gets the glory as each chapter points readers to God the King. And the “What’s Next?” page at the end invites readers to repent from wrongdoing, trust in King Jesus, and find joy in belonging to the Kingdom of God. It’s refreshing to see this evangelistic call-to-action incorporated into the storybook in a gentle yet intentional way.

Unlike the many storybook Bibles that tend to be cartoonish, hero-focused, or carelessly imaginative in how they portray God’s Word, *The Kingdom and the King Storybook Bible* is true to God’s Word and delightfully illustrated. It can be edifying and spiritually formative not only for the children looking and listening but also for the parents or other adults reading it aloud. I recommend it! ♦

NOTE: This book review originally appeared on The Story Warren: Allies in Imagination at storywarren.com.



crisis, led others in prayer for us (even though we were gone most Sundays, seeking medical care for her), and checked in on us, as if he had known us for years,” the Morfitts say. “And it’s not just us. Pastor Kevin is God’s gift to all of us at Waterbrooke.”

4. *He’s prayerful.*

Mark and Connie Evans love that Pastor Kevin is a man of prayer. Connie says that she appreciates hearing his heart for the lost, whether the lost are family or a nation across the globe.

“He seeks the throne of grace for their salvation,” she says.

5. *He encourages us.*

“He cheers me on,” Tara Pierson says. “He gave me thumbs up when he walked in and saw me with the Easter choir. And when I was doing my testimony, he came in afterwards and said, ‘Did ya do it? Did ya do it?’”

Michelle Pearson says she appreciates Pastor Kevin’s heart to serve. “He points us to Christ when we are discouraged,” she says. “And he is always ready to lend a hand, even at the last minute.”

Karise adds, “I’m thankful for Kevin’s love for Jesus and his desire to see me grow in my love for and knowledge of the Lord.”

6. *He preaches God’s word faithfully.*

“I am so thankful that Pastor Kevin is a faithful teacher of the gospel every Sunday,” Katie says. “He tirelessly points us to Christ through his preaching.”

Jeff and Andrea Merboth agree.

“He expounds on a Scripture I’ve read many times and teaches me new things I’ve never thought of before,” Jeff says. “He always points us back to Christ.”

7. *He leads with humility.*

“Kevin frequently and sincerely reminds us that he too is a sinner in desperate need of his Savior — a humility that makes him deeply relatable and approachable,” Karise says. “In a world where many pastors are primarily concerned with their name and image, I’m grateful for one who reflects Christ by helping us feel seen and safe to come as we are — and be changed by Him!”

The Morfitts add, “He models Christian humility, shares a clear message of grace, and serves as a kind and attentive shepherd to the whole Waterbrooke flock.”

Ray sums it up well: “What I love most about Pastor Kevin is his genuine heart for people and his steadfast devotion to God’s word. He leads with humility and compassion, always pointing us back to Christ in both his preaching and his daily example.” ♦



Michael Barto, Joyce Casey, Pastor Kevin Dibbley, MariAnne Dibbley, Katie Campbell and Kevin Campbell gathered for the Alba Safe House Run/Walk at Carver Park.

Quotables

“Do what the Lord bids you, where He bids you, as He bids you, as long as He bids you, and do it at once.”

—Charles Spurgeon, 1834-1892

“...[my dad] gave me a Bible, and he just wrote in it, ‘Dear Johnny, Preach the Word. Love, Dad.’ That was the one thing he wanted to say to me: Preach the Word. And we had that conversation about 2 Timothy 4, about preaching the Word all the way to the end and being faithful to the end. That’s how his father had been, and that’s the goal that he wanted for his own life.

—John MacArthur, 1939-2025

“Christ grabs His pastors by the heart; He doesn’t twist them by the arm. He wants men with a holy ambition for the office, men with holy dreams about feeding and leading the flock, men willing and eager to stretch themselves to do what the calling requires.”

—David Mathis, Desiring God

At Age 90, Alan Says the Best is Yet to Be

By Dana S. Brumitt

“Oh, what have I done?” These words swirled around Alan Langstaff’s head as his plane slowly descended into Minneapolis-St. Paul International airport.

Not that long before the flight he had been riding on top of a tidal wave of the growing Charismatic Renewal ministry in Australia, pioneering a Bible college, founding and leading conferences, and so much more.

But on the evening of June 8, 1980, sitting on the plane with his beloved wife and ministry partner, Dorothy, and his two daughters, Joy and Beth, Alan felt a cold sweat creep over him. “What have I done?” They had only visitor visas, temporary living quarters, and no guaranteed place of work. It was the beginning of an Abrahamic-like journey that was to mark their lives for the decades to come.

Initially trained in architecture and working in Sydney, Australia, Alan felt the stirrings of a call to ministry early, and at the age of 28 he gave up his architectural career and began seminary training as a Methodist minister. His first assignment was serving parishes in Sydney and then, in an onward and upward trajectory, he established a national Renewal ministry called the Temple Trust.



But at the peak of his ministry success in Australia, Alan heard God tell him to move to America, and in a radical step of faith, he obeyed. Many people were puzzled by this decision and some criticized, but Alan said, “Understanding can wait, but obedience can’t.”

And there began Alan’s second 45-year chapter of life and ministry in Minnesota.

For the first eight months in America, Alan traveled from Minneapolis to Sydney and back every month, meeting his ministry commitments and, by his estimation, spending more than 350 hours inside an airplane. The transition was arduous. It was during one of those exhausting trips that Alan found himself chasing a burglar at 5 a.m. around his hotel room in San Francisco. Alan eventually pastored a church in Eden Prairie that grew to nearly a thousand people.



Alan Langstaff attends Waterbrooke with his great grandsons Ethan and David, (above) as well as his grandchildren Mitchel and Katie Plaisted. Photos are courtesy of Katie Plaisted.

At 70, when most people are thinking about retirement, Alan received a prophetic word that God was not finished with him yet and years of fruitful ministry followed. At the young age of 85, Alan finally decided to step down from the church he was pastoring in Chaska.

Over the past three years, Alan has suffered the unimaginable loss of his beloved wife and both of his daughters. When asked how he manages to deal with that much grief, he simply said, “I shall see them again shortly.” The same faith that guided the family in life guides him now through great loss.

Yet Alan is still not done. At 90, he publishes a weekly newsletter for his ministry, Kairos Ministries, and he has just completed a book *The Best is Yet to Be*. You can find him most Sunday mornings in the back row at church.

We are so fortunate to have Alan and his grandchildren, Mitchel and Katie Plaisted, and great grandchildren, David and Ethan at Waterbrooke. Along with hundreds of loved ones, friends, colleagues, and ministry partners, Waterbrooke is far richer because he is part of our family.

When asked about the future, Alan says he’s looking forward to going to heaven, but he’d really like to live long enough to see the Vikings win the Super Bowl. He is truly a man of great faith! ♦

Stories of Faithful Followers Can Strengthen Us

By Diana Barto

The neatly typed list of books was extensive — a full page with two or three columns of book titles, single-spaced. And I remember feeling overwhelmed when my 9th grade English teacher boldly encouraged me and my classmates to read as many of them as possible during our high school years.

Although I read *Jane Eyre* and some of the other recommendations, I’m not sure how many of those books I officially marked off the list four years later. But three decades later, I do remember the one book on that list that changed my life: *The Hiding Place* by Corrie ten Boom.

God used this Christian autobiography to teach me many biblical truths. His glory shines brightly throughout the book, especially as the ten Boom family endures horrific struggles while held in a concentration camp during World War II.

After college, I continued reading about ten Boom’s life in *Tramp for the Lord* and *Jesus is Victor*. Reading about her life and the troubles she endured with God’s help gave me comfort and strength in my own struggles with grief and loss, and it helped my faith grow stronger.

Pastor John Piper of Desiring God Ministries in Minneapolis says God intends for the true stories of faithful Christians — such as Gladys Alyward, Martin Luther and John Calvin — to not only encourage and strengthen our faith, but also to guide and enrich our lives as we consider the outcome of their faith in Christ.

“Reading stories of great men and women combines lots of things that you could do separately,” he says. A Christian biography typically combines theology with the person’s real-life problems, struggles, marriage

and family. It allows readers to learn about the person’s whole life — from beginning to end — and how God and His Word shaped his or her life.

“It’s like getting to know somebody,” Piper explains. What’s more, Piper says the Bible instructs us to watch our leaders and to consider the outcome of their faith.

Hebrews 13:7 says, “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

“I don’t think it meant only living leaders because Hebrews 11 is all dead guys and gals,” Piper says. “You look at them and you are inspired.”

Piper concludes that reading Christian biographies is “life-giving, interesting, exciting, faith-building and Christ-honoring.” ♦

11 Inspiring Biographies

21 Servants of Sovereign Joy
by John Piper

Evidence Not Seen
by Darlene Deibler Rose

God’s Smuggler
by Brother Andrew

Joni: An Unforgettable Story
by Joni Eareckson Tada

Surprised by Joy
by C.S. Lewis

The Autobiography of George Müller
by George Müller

The Cross and the Switchblade
by David Wilkerson

The Diary & Journal of David Brainerd
by David Brainerd and Jonathan Edwards

The Forgotten Spurgeon
by Ian H. Murray

The Hiding Place
by Corrie ten Boom

Through Gates of Splendor
by Elisabeth Elliot

