

# John MacArthur and the issue of personal stewardship

The questions and quibbling innuendo that have been published on the Internet regarding John MacArthur's income and stewardship are rooted in misinformation. For example, a report has been floating around online for some time that John makes more than half a million dollars annually from GTY. Totally false. That idea is wrongly extrapolated from the fact that GTY's 2011 990 tax form (ten years ago) reported \$400k in "salary and benefits" paid to John.

That figure reflects a one-time gift—a rare 1st-edition KJV Bible given to John to honor the completion of his verse-by-verse exposition of the whole NT. It was an expression of thanks for 40 years of faithful ministry. John in turn gave the Bible to the seminary's collection of rare manuscripts and early Bible editions.

John is paid a modest but reasonable salary by Grace Church. Lay elders review and approve his salary annually, using information gleaned from careful surveys. They take great pains to ensure that John's salary is well within the upper-medium range for California pastors' salaries. The same process is followed with equal care by the board of directors at Grace to You. (Board members with blood relationships or employment connections to John MacArthur recuse themselves from those decisions, to make sure there are no conflicts of interest.) Professional auditors and an impartial audit review committee review all such decisions to add two extra layers of accountability. John is not paid an exorbitant salary by either organization.

It is possible, however, that most of John's total annual income comes neither from the church nor from Grace to You but from book royalties paid by his publishers. He has written numerous best-selling works, and his commentaries and the Study Bible will no doubt be in print long after we are all in heaven. John earns a fair author's royalty for all those works—and all of that income comes from the publisher, not from any of the three nonprofit organizations John serves.

Grace to You gives away freely tens of thousands of John's books every year. He waives his royalty on all the books we give away, and he gets no royalty payments from Grace to You on any videos or audio recordings—or anything else we produce.

No law requires an author to make book royalties paid from his publisher public information, so the "facts" about John's total annual income being reported by a small group of critical bloggers are pure speculation and (frankly) well-salted with cynical false assumptions.

All of that aside, ***the best gauge of John MacArthur's stewardship is his actual lifestyle.*** Here are the facts: he has lived in the same house for the past 40 years.

(When he built the house, it cost less than one-fifth of what it would list for today on any of the online realty sites. It's ridiculous to portray his home as some kind of extravagant mansion.) John and Patricia own just one car. And I know for a fact that he quietly supports more missionaries and missions projects than most mid-sized churches. I also know of many cases where he has generously but discreetly met the needs of individuals and families in the church and community. (Such gifts given by him to private individuals carry no tax benefits for him.) And I'm certain he does this far more often than anyone knows (Matthew 6:2-4). It would, of course, be utterly inappropriate for me to broadcast the facts I *do* know about his personal giving. But it should be sufficient that no one who actually sees how John lives has ever accused him of self-indulgence or even thought in their wildest dreams to describe him as a lover of money. His lifestyle, not his income, is what biblically-minded people should look at if they want to evaluate his character.

Regarding specifics: contrary to other noisy claims once made by a certain angry blogger, MacArthur doesn't *always* fly 1st class, but since he almost died of pulmonary embolism a few years ago, it's not good for him to be immobilized in a middle seat on a long flight. So when we at GTY make his reservations for flights more than 3 hours, we do put him in business class whenever we can so that he can move around and stretch more easily. He's in his eighties and often has to preach multiple sessions immediately after arrival on an overseas flight. It's hardly an unreasonable expenditure.

On top of all that, Grace to You paid John MacArthur *zero* salary or benefits for the first 30+ years of our ministry's existence. The board mandated a change to that policy shortly after the start of the new millennium. Since they know John's personal giving is unstinted, and considering the principle of 1 Timothy 5:17-18, they made a deliberate decision to pay him a full salary rather than a diminished wage that was arbitrarily curtailed just because he has other income. For the record, his lifestyle now is as modest as it was before the board voted him that benefit.

Recently a few critics have raised questions regarding GTY's contracts with John's son-in-law's video production company. We do lots of video, and we bid out the contract. We chose John's son-in-law's firm because 1) his company's work is excellent; 2) he has easier access to record John than any other videographers would; and 3) his bid was competitive. Our payments go to his company, not him personally. In other words, what we pay covers his company's related overhead and personnel costs; it is not personal salary paid to him, despite what some have claimed. We save money by not maintaining our own video production department.

The critics who seem so eager to sully John's name with controversy are busybodies guilty of sinful scandal-mongering. As far as I know, no one who has any actual firsthand knowledge of John or his lifestyle has ever accused him of extravagance or poor stewardship. That is why, despite the persistence of a few nattering critics and

mud-slingers who keep trying to turn this matter into a controversy, their idle talk has not gained any traction.

What Spurgeon said about his personal finances could likewise be said about John MacArthur:

I will only add that I serve a good Master, and am so sure that He will provide for me that I never thought it worth my while to be scraping and hoarding for myself. When I gave myself up at first to be His minister, I never expected anything beyond food and raiment; and when my income was £45 a year, I was heartily content, and never thought of a need without having it supplied. It is with me much the same now: 'I have all, and abound.' I have only one grievance, and that is, being asked for loans and gifts of money when I have none to spare. Under the impression that I am a very rich man, many hunt me perpetually; but I wish these borrowers and beggars to know that I am not rich. They argue that a man must be rich if he gives away large sums; but, in my case, this is just the reason why I am not rich. When I have a spare, £5, the College, or Orphanage, or Colportage, or something else, requires it, and away it goes. I could very comfortably do with much more. Oh, that I could do more for Christ, and more for the poor! For these, I have turned beggar before now, and shall not be ashamed to beg again. The outside world cannot understand that a man should be moved by any motive except that of personal gain; but, if they knew the power of love to Jesus, they would understand that, to the lover of the Saviour, greed of wealth is vile as the dust beneath his feet. [Spurgeon, C. H. (1899). *C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography, Compiled from his diary, letters, and records, by his wife and his private secretary, 1854–1860* (Vol. 2, p. 128). Chicago; New York; Toronto: Fleming H. Revell Company.]