

## Oral History Interview of Dr. Elmer Towns

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Location of Interview: Recording Studio of the Student Radio Station, 90.9 The Light

Name of Interviewee: Dr. Elmer Towns

Name of Interviewers: Lowell Walters and Cline Hall

Transcriber: Jesse Ronda

Interview Length: (1:44:28)

Notes:

**Walters:** (0:01) Welcome to this interview in the oral history project of the Liberty University archives. This interview is being conducted on July 23, 2010. Today is the third part of our interview with Dr. Elmer Towns. My name is Lowell Walters and I will be conducting the interview today along with Dr. Cline Hall. Greetings, Dr. Hall.

**Hall:** (0:21) Good afternoon.

**Walters:** (0:23) And greetings, Dr. Towns.

**Towns:** (0:24) Good afternoon.

**Walters:** (0:26) Ok, well let's pick up, as we went through the first two interviews, we covered a little bit about your education and your degrees but just for the record, as we start off today, I'd like to ask you about your honorary doctoral degrees and what institutions conferred those and what led to those institutions deciding to give those degrees to you and such.

**Towns:** (0:52) The first one was a honorary doctor of divinity from Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri. Because I had written much about the Baptist Bible Fellowship, because I had written an article they could become the largest in the world, because so many of the Baptist Bible Fellowship churches were in the listings I was doing about the hundred largest, they, Dr. Beauchamp Vick, at their 1970 graduation, had me there kind of in an unusual way. They had me come and I was not supposed to know that I was going to get one but I knew it because a friend had told me. So they called me up and, to the platform and put a robe on me and put a hood over me and then gave me and they said, "No man has put more people in Sunday school in the last twenty years

because of Elmer Towns and his writing about the bus ministry.” So that was a...it’s interesting, I got it, Trinity was a very sophisticated academic institution. And I was ridiculed by some faculty members who thought, “You accepted that degree from a Bible college? That doesn’t much sophistication to it.” But I thought because it came from Sunday school and I was writing about Sunday school and I loved Sunday school, that I was very proud of that degree. Second degree I got was from California Graduate School of Theology. It was an up and coming in the late ‘60s, early ‘70s, up and coming place where you could go and work just in the summer schools to get your Ph.D. And it had received a charter from the state of California and it was funded by an organization called the Little Church Foundation out of Texas. And they gave them the money. And there was a man who had run that foundation and so they wanted to honor me for what I had done for churches and so they gave me a doctor of literature degree. Now, that foundation collapsed; he man who was there died and so I think the school doesn’t have much visibility today, that’s 2010. The third degree I received was from, let’s see now, Evangel Seminary in Harrisburg, Tennessee; small seminary that has classes in Washington D.C. The, the president of that seminary had his doctor’s degree from Fuller and Princeton and it was a Pentecostal Charismatic and I went and taught for them on several occasions for free because the people in my class were basically men out of Washington D.C., there were some Pakistani, there were some from Afghanistan, they were from India, they were from all over and they all pastored small Pentecostal churches in Washington D.C. And I thought, “What better contribution can I make than to help these pastors become better pastors?” And so, I forget what degree I got from them. The Providence College and Theological Seminary, that’s the old Winnipeg Bible College where I served, they had me back and um...by the way, there’s a dorm there that’s named after me, the, the Elmer Towns dorm for girls, it’s a two story dormitory, and none of the girls know who I am or what I’ve done but they refer to themselves as living “up-Towns” or “down-Towns” whether they’re living on the first floor or the second floor. And they gave me a doc, I forget what degree they gave me. And that happened long about 19...2003. Tennessee Temple Seminary, Danny Lovett had been the head of our seminary here, he went on to be the president of that school. He had me in as the first speaker and they gave me an honorary degree. Again, I’d have to go look on the wall and see what the name is there. And then Louisiana Baptist University that used to be called by a different name and it’s a large school much like Liberty’s online University. When I say large, they have about fifteen hundred, two thousand students in Louisiana. It’s out of a church, when I used to list the hundred largest churches, Baptist Tabernacle in Shreveport, Louisiana was one of the largest churches in that state and so I knew pastor Thorpe, who began that school, and I knew the other people and they gave me an honorary degree so, that’s the six of them.

**Walters:** (5:16) Ok. And then, you’ve mentioned your other degrees, but could you just list those for us here, your, your different graduate degrees that you have?

**Towns:** (5:25) Remember, I started my school at Columbia Bible College...

**Walters:** (5:27) Right.

**Towns:** (5:28) where I was really influenced by the deeper life...

**Walters:** (5:31) Right.

**Towns:** (5:32) And then I transferred to Northwestern College because it was non-accredited to find out it was non-accredited. I have a, a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Arts in Bible from Northwest. Then I went to Dallas and received a Th.M. and I, and my graduate in systematic theology. At the same time, I went to Southern Methodist University, received a master of arts in the philosophy of education. And then I went to Garrett Theological Seminary and at Garrett on Northwestern University's campus in greater Chicago, I receive and M.Re. in religious education. Now, that degree was greatly, I did a lot of work in, although it was in religious education, I did a lot of work in counseling, I did a lot of work in group dynamics, and every chance I got I took classes in John Wesley, life of Wesley, Wesley theology because I'm a theologian. And uh...let's see, Philip Watson was the number one Wesley scholar in the world and he was there and I figured, "What better than to sit at the feet of the master?" Then I went to Fuller and received my doctor of ministries degree at Fuller Theological Seminary and I wrote my doctoral dissertation on an examination of faith in church planters. And so I took the, the data pool of a hundred and seventy-six churches in the Liberty Baptist Fellowship, surveyed them, measured each of the men, how strong did he consider his faith in planting churches, what was his faith projection about, how strong would he measure his faith concerning his doctrinal faith, his living faith, his trusting God for money, etcetera. So that became a book later on and right now I forget the title of the book [*laughter*].

**Walters:** (7:21) [*laughter*] Ok.

**Hall:** (7:22) You mentioned seminary a moment ago and it just reminded me, I don't know whether we've got it down factually, who are the presidents of our, of the Liberty seminary from the beginning on to this, start with...

**Towns:** (7:34) Ok, I hired Dr. Hughes...

**Hall:** (7:35) Hughes, ok.

**Towns:** (7:36) to be president, to be the, the dean; we called him the dean of Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary. And, matter of fact, before I left we sat down and wrote a doctrinal, we wrote the catalog for the seminary. And then the first two he hired was Carl Diemer and Frank Schmidt, plus others that first year. And in 1979, I took over as the

dean of the seminary and I was dean of the seminary from '79 to '92, basically twelve and a half years. And then when I left, Ron Hawkins became the dean. What happened is it was getting so big, Jerry said, "You either got to go one way or the other." And the reason I left the seminary, I had my secretary do a two week time study of where I spent my time. Seventy-five percent of my time was spent on the seminary, twenty-five percent of my time was spent with the school of religion, and most of my time was spent in management work; things that didn't relate to the academic but related to the basic details of running a school. So I prayed about it, I didn't know what to do and when I saw the time study, I immediately said, "That's it; I'm going to go with the school of religion." And so Ron Hawkins became the dean after me. I think he was there about four years. And then, matter of fact, I was speaking out in Oregon and I met with the committee looking for a president of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary and I said, "I know the perfect man. He was raised Conservative Baptist, he's one of you, he's pastored one of your churches, he's the dean of our seminary, and this is a big promotion for him." And so he went out and became president there. When he became president there, Danny Lovett took over and Danny Lovett was here for, I forget just how many years. And then after he left, Ergun Caner came in. And, and I had something to do, I told Jerry, "Ergun Caner." He said, "He's too young." I said, "He may be young but he's got great potential." I thought he would of had great potential and so, and then right now he's stepped down as dean and we have an acting...no, he stepped down as president, we have an acting dean which is Dan Mitchell. And I think he'll be acting until either he is replaced and called a dean or president, I don't know what they're going to do, or they get another man.

**Walters:** (10:04) So...

**Hall:** (10:05) Of course Dan Mitchell has been here many years.

**Towns:** (10:07) Mitchell has been here since um...I think the mid '70s. Yes, it, when he came here, he had not finished his doctor's degree. He had finished his Th.M. and he was writing his doctoral dissertation when he came here.

**Walters:** (10:20) So Dr. Hawkins went out west for a time?

**Towns:** (10:22) Yes, he went out west for, I think four years...

**Walters:** (10:26) Ok.

**Towns:** (10:27) and Danny Lovett called him right back...

**Walters:** (10:28) Ok.

**Towns:** (10:29) and he was very willing to come back. Matter of fact, we have a club around here; it's called the "I came back" club...

**Walters:** (10:33) [*laughter*]

**Hall:** [*laughter*]

**Towns:** (10:34) and it's filled with people who used to be here and left and Ron Hawkins is there and Ron Godwin is there and I'm a, I'm a charter member. There's a lot of people who were here and left and...

**Hall:** (10:45) Hindson, Ed Hindson.

**Towns:** (10:46) Ed Hindson, oh yes, Ed Hindson. And so it's a very prestigious club but we never get together because nobody's willing to buy everybody else lunch.

**Walters:** (10:55) [*laughter*]

**Hall:** [*laughter*] Well, talking about the, you shifted over to the school of religion, at that point you became, what, vice president? And what is the difference between the vice president and the dean?

**Towns:** (11:06) I was vice president when I came.

**Hall:** (11:07) Oh, ok.

**Towns:** (11:08) And when I left, I, I lost that. And when I came back and I became the dean of the seminary, I think Jerry gave me the vice...you've got a question here; what duties did I have? [*silent pause*]

**Walters:** (11:20) [*laughter*] He's holding up...

**Towns:** (11:21) It was an honorary. I'm holding up a zero here.

**Hall:** (11:22) [*laughter*]

**Towns:** (11:23) It was an honorary position as vice president. I became vice president and I went through one accreditation visit as vice president the second time through, that's in the mid '90s, they came through and I, I forget how many vice presidents we had, about fifteen, and they whittled us down to about five active. If you were a vice president and you didn't have an active role in executive administration, accreditation said, at that time, you had to get rid of all of those. I was one of about seven. I know that Harold Wilmington and I, I don't think we cried on one another's shoulders, but I know it was Harold Wilmington, Earl Sergeant, and several others. I forget who...

**Walters:** (12:08) And were those titles given to you so that you could have power to, to supervise and make some decisions and therefore...

**Towns:** (12:17) I think Jerry saw us as decision makers at the University; people who had a, a great influence on him and hence the University. So that's why...

**Walters:** (12:25) Ok.

**Towns:** (12:26) I, I don't see that I had a, a job description as being vice president. I think after the first accreditation visit, I was called vice president for church growth relations. And because I had a lot to do with church growth, growing churches and, and I think at that time, out of Liberty University, we were recognizing the fastest growing church in every state and they would come here and we would give them some type of a big award and Jerry was part of giving out those awards. And so...but I remember now, I was called vice president in charge of church growth relations.

**Hall:** (13:03) Now, all of the process, of course, recruiting faculty, I know you examined the doctrinal positions of faculty in, in the school of religion. Did you have anything to do with the examination of faculty of other departments as they are being, come on campus for interviews?

**Towns:** (13:22) Well, of course, in the first three years I hired all the faculty.

**Hall:** (13:25) Ok.

**Towns:** (13:26) And Jerry and I are very similar in our beliefs. When you hear what Jerry said, I would...Ron Hawkins made the assumption one time, he said, "Elmer, you and Jerry are closer together than any other two people on campus. When Jerry's against something, you're against it. When he's for something, you're for it." And he said, "When it comes down to doctrine, whether it happens to be the intricacies of the Rapture or the Tribulation..." because we were trained out of that same background, we agreed. So I, I used my theology, which was Jerry Falwell to reach out and to examine people to come and teach for us and so I wanted people who were pre-Mil, were pre-Trib. I wanted people who were local church. I wanted people who were baptistic. I wanted people who were soul winning. In the early days, we said, "Every faculty has to be involved in some ministry at Thomas Road; preaching, visitation." Dr. Hughes came and ran a bus route, if you remember, in his first two years. And that bus route became Heritage Baptist Church which is the second largest church in the city today. And so, many people have all types...I think Dr. Schmidt always worked at Thomas Road Baptist Church in the education department. Dr. Diemer, I think he told me he's been interim, over all these years, in twenty-three different churches. As they were between pastors he would preach there and he loved it and people loved to have him; he's very good at that.

**Walters:** (15:00) Now you mentioned Heritage Baptist Church. Tell us about the relationships and the, the children that um...that Thomas Road has given birth to, so to speak, in the local churches here. Can you speak to the, the other local churches and their histories and...?

**Walters:** (15:16) Before Liberty started, Jerry Falwell began two churches. He went to Altavista back in the early '60s, about 1960, and started a church. And he would preach there on Sunday afternoon; preach Thomas Road Sunday morning and Sunday night and he would run down to Altavista and preach. Now, I'm not sure, somebody else has to give you the...he also had a church right on the ridge overlooking downtown Lynchburg in Madison Heights. There's a church there they, from the front door of the church you can see downtown Lynchburg. Trouble is, it's grown up today; you can't see it. But back then you could see it. And Jerry started that church and he preached in the afternoons there and down at Altavista in the afternoons. Now, the church in Madison Heights is still there and operative. The church in Altavista went out of existence and sold its facilities uh...I, I think it did along about 2006 or 2007. But there were many people in that church who later came to Thomas Road. It used to be a big distance to go thirty miles and after a while, thirty miles was nothing and so more and more people came up here to church. And I just remember meeting different people at different times and talking with them and so...and they would tell me stories about what went on down there. Matter of fact, let me give you a story that's not in print. This is a good time to tell it. Macel put Jerry off to get married. Macel put, I mean, that is, it's famous that she didn't want to get married. She put him off for two years. Well, when he went down to Altavista and started the church, there was a girl there he started dating. And he started dating this girl and got pretty thick with him. Well, when he got back one Sunday night, Macel walked up to him and said, "Alright, tell me when you want to get married. I'll show up."

**Walters:** (17:15) *[laughter]*

**Hall:** *[laughter]*

**Towns:** (17:16) And so he said, he said the date and he said it was kind of like a confrontation of boyfriend and girlfriend and, boom, they set a date and she showed up for the date, for, she showed up for the marriage, yes.

**Walters:** (17:28) That's good to have on record.

**Towns:** (17:29) Now, you want to interview Sam Pate who was the first treasurer of Liberty University and he was the chairman of the, first Chairman of the Board of Liberty and also he was the treasurer of the church and the treasurer of the University. And ask him some questions about his sister Macel and the marriage....

**Walters:** (17:49) Ok.

**Towns:** (17:50) There's two or three tales there that need to be put down...

**Walters:** (17:51) Ok.

**Towns:** (17:52) to be told out that, to be told out.

**Walters:** (17:53) We'll add him to our list.

**Towns:** (17:55) Ok.

**Walters:** (17:57) What types of questions were asked of people? I mean, what, when you, you talked about you and Dr. Falwell...

**Towns:** (18:04) Oh, when I interviewed people?

**Walters:** (18:05) Sure.

**Towns:** (18:06) I, I started out on, on the question of the fundamentals; are you a Fundamentalist? And the Fundamentalists are basically five things; the authority of scripture, the deity of Jesus Christ is number two, number three would be the vicarious blood atonement, number four, the physical resurrection from the dead, and number five, the second return of Jesus Christ. Those were the five fundamentals. And Jerry was writing about the fundamentals, I was writing about the fundamentals; we were, we were going to be a Fundamentalist school. And Bob Jones was a Fundamentalist and they would complain about Liberty because they added a sixth; you must not only believe those but you must fight for those. And at times they would say, "Liberty is not a Fundamentalist because you don't fight," meaning we don't attack the other brothers. And we, from the very beginning, from year one, Jerry went down to the Tidewater area and spoke at a Church of God Pentecostal Rally and got hammered by the Fundamentalist brethren. I went to two or three places and spoke to Pentecostal meetings. Why? I love to tell the Pentecostals, I said, "I love you Pentecostals. You live like we Baptists preach." Now, they know I'm a Baptist and I'm not about to become a Pentecostal, but I have great respect for them. If you are a Fundamentalist, and a Pentecostal is a Fundamentalist, I will fellowship with you. But if you deny the fundamentals, I won't have fellowship with you. It's as simple as that. I'm a Fundamentalist and I've never backed away from calling myself a Fundamentalist.

**Hall:** (19:37) What is greatest concern about recruiting faculty members, theologically...if, if one would say, for instance, you mentioned those five things, that "I don't believe in the second coming." Would that eliminate him?

**Towns:** (19:47) Absolutely.

**Hall:** (19:48) Ok.

**Towns:** (19:49) In other words, if you are not a Fundamentalist and you didn't, that would eliminate you. If you were weak on the local church, you know, we told them, "You have to join Thomas Road." I don't remember right off hand whether we had to baptize any of those early on; we probably did but I don't remember it right now. And as I hired different ones, I looked for people with an accredited degree, although, in the second year, I think I had either five or seven faculty from Bob Jones. And, of course, Amos Wiff had a, had a couple of Ph.D.'s outside of Bob Jones and one from Bob Jones so he was, he was certifiable. But his wife had an M.A from, and all the others had M.A.'s from Bob Jones and that was non-accredited back then but we hired those people because of the great educational philosophy, a consistency of philosophy. I wanted our young people to be like Bob Jones. I wanted them to be good on the platform; be able to communicate, to be sharp.

**Hall:** (20:48) Was there a conscious effort about uh...well, speaking in tongues; for, against, so far as faculty members?

**Towns:** (20:53) The, the application, up until 1979, had about next to the last, "Have you spoken in tongues?" And then there was, "If you have, give an explanation." We would take a person who spoke in tongues but they had to, they'd have to write it but they had to promise us they would not exercise their gift while they were at Liberty University. And in 1979, when I took over the deanship of the seminary, at that time we took that out of the application. And Jerry said, "It doesn't make any difference." He said, "We, we," he said, "I can take care of the preaching. I'll just let them know, 'We're Baptists but it you're Pentecostal, your welcome.'" So he opened his arms in 1980 but in 1985 he went to PTL down in Charlotte and then he had done, he identified with them and that was...see, Jerry Falwell had the way of making statements when the camera came on. You can say all you want to in writing but when he went down the waterslide, he said to every Pentecostal everywhere, "I'm one of you and you're one of us." And from then on, Pente...I think we probably have, today, 2010, we probably have seven hundred, give or take, people who are Pentecostal persuasion. But not on, they would not call themselves Pentecostal but some would come from a tongue-speaking background such as Calvary Chapel. We have, maybe, as many as a hundred from Calvary Chapel background.

**Hall:** (22:29) So that, that change sort of come about in the '70s?

**Towns:** (22:32) It started out in 1979 when that was taken out of the application.

**Walters:** (22:38) What about details in the second coming? What does a person, over time, can they be Tribulat...uh...pre-Trib, pre-Millennial or can they be mid-Trib, pre-Millennial? Any...

**Towns:** (22:53) Our doctrinal statement says that Christ is coming and then it says the Tribulation will follow. If the person can sign our statement...now, I would be very strict for either the seminar or the school of religion. We'd be much more strict on those people than we would on others. And I think that some people who might be mid-Tribulation because even though they, they say, "I'm mid-Trib," they believe that Christ came at the middle of the Tribulation and the Great Tribulation didn't come until the last three and a half years so technically they can sign our doctrinal statement. And probably, I don't know that this happened, probably some came in at that time and if they're at another school, that was not considered a problem.

**Walters:** (23:38) Ok. What about Calvinism, Arminianism? Does...

**Towns:** (23:43) Liberty's position, from the beginning, we are not anti-Calvinist, we are non-Calvinist. See, we're not anti-Pentecostal, we're non-Pentecostal. And our doctrinal statement says that we believe that whosoever will may come; that Christ died for the world. We're Universalists in that sense. So that puts us down but we have said very carefully, "We are not anti-Calvinist. We have no fight with Presbyterians or those who are of that persuasion." And we don't try to correct them if they come in. They, they get the teaching like anyone else. And so, we want to go on record, matter of fact, we want to go on record as saying, "We are non-Calvinist and we are not anti-Calvinist."

**Walters:** (24:30) Ok.

**Hall:** (24:34) That uh...those pretty stringent qualifications, that still applies all the way down to the present time, present-day faculty?

**Towns:** (24:42) You mean for the school of religion?

**Hall:** (24:44) Well, to, to faculty in, as a whole.

**Walters:** (24:46) Yeah, speak to, if you could, speak to our, our evolution, so to speak, of the requirements for the general faculty, like even myself as a librarian or Dr. Hall as a historian.

**Towns:** (24:58) Well, you have to be interviewed by a board of three or four. If there's only three, some people have to take two roles in that interview process and you have to be interviewed by four different means. First of all, theology, second of all, your home life, third, creationism, and fourth, separation, basically. No, that's your life, separation, home, creationism, uh...your lifestyle. Anyway, to this day, we are concerned about

those issues. Now, when we say early age, I believe in an early age but I think creation probably took place somewhere between about twelve and fifteen thousand B.C. Some people think its closer to four or five thousand or six thousand B.C. Some people have stretched it all the way up to fifty thousand, you know, fifty thousand years. Why? Because even in the world of evolution, the big bang said something happened then. Our problem is we would not hire an evolutionist. We believe that God created everything out of nothing. An evolutionist has to start with something; there's the big difference right there. They have to start with something and because they start with something, we would reject that person who has eternity of matter or whatever. And so we make a big difference when we are interviewing someone there. We sometimes have trouble finding people who will agree with us on the end times issue, sometimes on creation issue. And there have been people who have been rejected sometimes because of wrong doctrine. Sometimes people rejected, they just don't know the doctrine at all and therefore, they would not be worthy to come and teach at Liberty.

**Walters:** (26:50) Ok.

**Hall:** (26:51) Now, at one point the word Baptist was removed from the seminary title, Liberty Baptist...

**Towns:** (26:57) You're right.

**Hall:** (26:58) and then it was put back, I, I believe...

**Towns:** (27:00) Right.

**Hall:** (27:01) What was the position here? Why did that happen?

**Towns:** (27:05) I don't know [*laughter*].

**Hall:** (27:06) [*laughter*]

**Walters:** [*laughter*]

**Towns:** (27:08) That's not what I, no. I know it was and I think it was put back in when I became dean. I think that I was the one who put it back in. Now, Cline, twice it was removed.

**Hall:** (27:21) Oh, twice.

**Towns:** (27:22) Yeah. The dean before me, Dr. Hughes, had it removed and when I became dean, Dr. Diemer came to me, he said, "It's been removed. No vote was taken. It just, it was a PR thing." I said, "I want it in." He said, "I want it in." He said, "If you

can get it put in,” he said, “I’ll back you.” So we got it put, I said, “Jerry,” Jerry said, “Put it back in.” Now, Ergun became president and he removed the word Baptist thinking it could, it could be much broader, get a lot more people to come in. Now, I don’t know why he removed it for a short period of time and it was put back in, but I’m thinking there’s a Liberty Baptist Seminary, there’s a Liberty Theological Seminary, at least on the books, and I think they informed us that they had that name and we could not use it and therefore we had to go back to Liberty Baptist...

**Hall:** (28:16) [*laughter*]

**Towns:** (28:17) I think that’s what happened but if people quote me, I want them to quote me with qualifications.

**Walters:** (28:25) Well, in the previous interview, we also talked about the PTL situation and the things that happened immediately at that time, but then Liberty went through the 1990’s in very dire financial straits and...

**Towns:** (28:40) It started in the late, the late ‘80s.

**Walters:** (28:41) Ok.

**Towns:** (28:42) Ok, because Jimmy Swaggart went down and Jim Bakker went down, they dragged everybody on television down. Matter of fact, Jerry called us in on a night, it was a prayer meeting night, he said, “Tomorrow morning the *Charlotte Observer* is going to have a great expose on Jim Bakker.” He said, “Now, it’s going to hurt us.” He said, “I want you to get prepared. This is going to absolutely change the face of Christianity. When they go down, they are so big...” Jerry was a prophet in, not a, well, a prophet...he could predict the future, he said, “It’s going to drag us down, Billy Graham down. It’s going to drag Crystal Cathedral, all,” he said, “You can be respectable but people are going to put, paint us all with the same paintbrush. He said, “It’s, we will not face the same. Get ready for hard times.” He said that before hard times came. When hard times came, we were, our budget was about twenty-seven million dollars a year income. After two or three years, we were down to two million dollars a year income.

**Walters:** (29:45) Now, this is the University or Thomas Road and uh...?

**Towns:** (29:48) Well, uh...University.

**Walters:** (29:50) Ok.

**Towns:** (29:51) We were twenty-seven million dollars income and a lot of that was brick money. We were building building after building after building. What year did you come, Cline?

**Hall:** (29:59) '77.

**Towns:** (30:00) '77. So you know these days.

**Hall:** (30:01) Yes.

**Towns:** (30:02) You, you know, Jerry called the pastors in at the school of religion, "These, these are the ways its going to go down." And boy, within two or three years, it got to be bad. I mean, we didn't have money, um...matter of fact, nobody had a budget. You had to go beg for everything, you know. So, the school of religion, I would go beg. I said, "Jerry, we got to have this, we got to have this." And, and then, it got worse and worse. We kept borrowing money. We, we would put our assets up for loan and couldn't pay off the loans and lose. We lost Liberty Mountain, five thousand acres. We lost the old shopping center, shopping fair downtown with the shopping center, we lost that. We lost the, we had a network, a television network, we lost that. So we owed six, seven million dollars on that network and Southern Baptist took it over and took the indebtedness from us so that debt went away. We owed around a hundred and four million dollars total. I think that's a ballpark figure and we started, there were several men who saw us through the dark days. One of the men was um...let me see. Give me a minute to think of his name. Um...Dan Reber. Dan Reber went out to people we would owe money to. We owed thirteen million dollars to an Amarillo, Texas bond company. They went bankrupt. The state of Texas took them over and Dan Reber went out to talk to the people of the state of Texas. They looked at Dan and said, "If you'll give us two million dollars, we'll cancel the thirteen million." So he called Jerry and said, "Two million." And Jerry Said, "Well, I don't have two million." Jerry, Dan said, "I'll tell you what, I'll buy from you X." And it was something worth five million and Jerry sold it to him and so he took the two million, paid it off and we, we were thirteen million to the better. That happened about five or six times. We, um...there was a big loan company out of Chicago we owed sixteen million to and about two million of that we paid. We, we sued them and we paid off, negotiated out of court. We got it down to about fifty-two million dollars and...

**Walters:** (32:18) And this was about what year do you think?

**Towns:** (32:20) Ok, uh...it went down, matter of fact, in the tough days, A. L. Williams came in and, in essence, he saved the University. On three or four occasions, he made up payroll and every time payroll would come, Jerry would try to borrow from something. This material is in the book called Falwell Inc. and you could find...it's a really good of

the financial side. Now, that book doesn't show the spiritual side of Jerry, the leaderships. All it does, it shows the financial side of Jerry. But, brother Cline, you remember we missed salary...

**Hall:** (32:55) Yes, couple times.

**Towns:** (32:56) as faculty, couple times, but the vice presidents missed it more than that and so I don't want to say, I don't want to, we call that poor-mouthing, I don't want to be poor-mouthing here but we missed several times or many times Jerry would say, "Now, we're going to give you your checks all summer long. Don't cash a single one. Can you make it until the students come back?" "Yeah." And so I just put them all in an envelope there and then go turn them in at the end of the year so we, you know, in essence, you loaned the school money. And there were many of us who did that; loaned the school money to get us through.

**Hall:** (33:28) I've often heard it said the school almost closed. Is, was, how close were we to closing down?

**Towns:** (33:34) Well, let me just say, do you remember the day that Jerry, in the, in chapel, or wherever it was, said, "You know, we don't even have enough money to buy toilet paper." Do you remember that? And I, the next day, I came in with two or three bags of toilet paper for the school of religion and I thought, "Boy," you know, "I look like little Jack Horner; put your thumb in the pie." You know, what a good, I could, boy, there were about five or six guys walking in with bags of toilet paper all over the school. I mean, it was just almost, nobody talked to one another; we just all showed up with bags of toilet paper.

**Walters:** (34:08) But you can't remember what year this was or...?

**Towns:** (34:10) Boy...

**Walters:** (34:11) In the mid-'90s or...?

**Towns:** (34:12) That was, that was the late '80s, the toilet paper issue.

**Walters:** (34:14) Oh, it was? Ok.

**Towns:** (34:15) Now, A.L. Williams sent three CPA's here. "Here's the, here's the deal." He, he said, "Jerry, I'm tired of making up your payroll." He said, "We're not getting anywhere closer." He sent three CPA's and they spent two weeks going through every book we had and they put a number on every employee's forehead. "Here's how much..." they took all the people, whether you were a janitor or whether you worked in maintenance or whether you were a dean, every person had a number. "Here's how

much you cost the University.” It’s you plus cost to fund which was insurance and everything and roads and maintenance and everything. Everyone had a number on their forehead. “This is how much it costs you.” And then everybody had a second number, “Here’s how much you bring in,” you know, depending on classes. So, on one day, Black Friday, you remember Black Friday, don’t you? I remember Black Friday. I was dean of both and on Black Friday I got the list from Pierre and I went from thirty-seven to sixteen employees, that’s over a third, in one day. Uh...almost a half in one day. And they went through and there were five Ph.D.’s I lost. And the Ph.D.’s tend to gravitate towards the esoteric, the better class; the smaller seminar classes, and if you didn’t make enough money, you were cut. And I remember some fellows having an M.A. I had to keep and some fellows who had a Ph.D. I had to send off. And that was Black...and A. L. Williams called Jerry and said, “Jerry, I want you to leave town on Thursday night and don’t come back until next Tuesday.” He said, “I got to come back Sunday.” He said, “If you come back Sunday,” I think the thing was, “you can fly in, go straight to the church, preach, and when they’re having the closing prayer, leave because if people get to you, you’ll put them back in.” And there were deacons who were cut, there were charter members of the church who were cut, there were people who were best friends of Jerry who were cut, people he had hired who were cut. You know, we didn’t know who was going to be cut on that whole list. But people who made money...now, that was the making of the school because after that, we became a very good entrepreneurial school because we began to say, “Hey, we’re only going to add those...” by the, that day, chemistry program went that day. You remember that, chemistry?

**Hall:** (36:46) Yes.

**Towns:** (36:47) And didn’t biology go also?

**Hall:** (36:48) Well, it reduced and things like wrestling team...

**Towns:** (36:53) Oh, just whole programs went that couldn’t pay for themselves. And um...

**Hall:** (36:58) I believe even the drama classes.

**Towns:** (37:01) Oh my, just, just all kinds, you know, but the school was brought into bearing. So we, now, the one thing is we live in a commonwealth and in a commonwealth there was a law on the books that go back to the Constitution. It’s a part of the Constitution that a church cannot be closed, you cannot sue a church, you cannot take the property of a church. A church is an entity that stands; it’s, it was in the Constitution. Now, we had applied in our lowest days for a bond issue, a public bond issue and it was granted, we were sued, we went to the Supreme Court and lost, and the Supreme Court said that, “Liberty cannot have a public bond issued. They are a church.”

That saved us. The loss of that bond issue pronounced we were a church and when people tried to sue us and take our property, “You can’t take our property, we’re a church. The Supreme Court calls us a church.” And so, that bad word that they gave us saved us. Nobody could sue us on the courthouse steps and take our property and so Liberty was there and we couldn’t pay all we did. We had hammered everybody down to one percent or no percent on the interest. You know, we still owed all this money, fifty-two million dollars. We had, we had just hammered it down to fifty-two million. And then we faced accreditation in 1995. Jerry writes, Jerry tells the story in *Fasting Can Change Your Life*, that’s a book that both of us wrote, and he tells the story. I show up on Sunday morning and I walk in the backroom. I said, “Look at you.” You know how friends thought, “Look at you. You lost all this weight. What kind of a dumb diet are you on now?” Exactly words, I called him dumb because if you’ve, if you know anything about Jerry Falwell, he’d lose, put it on, lose, put it on. He’d always laugh, “I lost two thousand pounds,” you know. And I said, “What kind of a dumb diet?” He said, “I’m not on a dumb diet, I’m fasting for fifty-two million dollars.” I said, “I’m sorry.” He said, “Can you tell?” I said, “Can you tell? You’ve lost a lot of weight.” He said, “Well, I haven’t eaten in twenty-five days.” And so he went straight to the pulpit and announced he was on a forty day fast. He was fasting for fifty-two million dollars and in that forty day fast, he, he ate, he drank coffee and diet Pepsi, that’s all he had. And a Centrum multipurpose vitamin pill everyday. And he said, “God kept saying to me, ‘Jerry, quit looking for my pocketbook. Find my heart. Quit looking for my pocketbook. Find my heart.’” You remember those statements, Cline, he’d say? And he came to the end and he said he realized, “Even as I ended, I’m not going to get the money.” And so he immediately began doing what accreditation demanded because they had said, “You must, you must pay your indebtedness or we’ll take accreditation.” Plus all these other things. So, what he did, he went through all the other things. He immediately had family members taken off the Board of Trustees; I got kicked off then. And I, remember I said I got through the previous one but this one I was put off the Board, Harold was put off the Board. Anybody who was employee of the school according to accreditation cannot be, it’s a conflict of interest to be an employee and to be over the school. So we were all put off the Board. Any board member who was a member of the deacons was put off. Any deacon who was a board member who was a board of LCA was put off. They cleaned the boards completely. We did everything, they came in and of Pierre Guillermin, they said, “You have not been in the role of the president. You’ve allowed Jerry to do things that the president should have done.” And there was pressure, I don’t think they actually said, “You have to get rid of Pierre,” but there was such pressure there that Pierre voluntarily resigned. And I’ll, you’ll have to ask him about those questions. And Borek was, was hired and in the interim. Now, when um...twenty-five days later, when we did all that we had to do, one morning, it was September the 25<sup>th</sup>, Jerry woke up and God says, “You can fast and ask me now.” And he went on a second forty day fast and in that

second forty day fast, he said, "I really got sick," because the first, you know, the first forty days without eating, no protein, you really get very weak. The second forty he said was, was very hard. Now, I've been on a forty day fast. The forty day fast is easy. I think it'd be a killer to go on a second one. And he said, "The hardest thing I've ever done." He had an aneurism and I remember asking Jerry, "You had an aneurism, you almost died." He said, "If I could, I would die for the University." That's one of the great unpublished statements of Jerry Falwell. He said, "I believe in the University that much." And at the end of the second forty day fast, about, oh...ten or twelve days, A. L. Williams called him. He said, "Jerry, I'm sending a check. I'm going to take care of your fifty-two million dollars." And so Jerry called me, he said, "Get down here to the office." And I'm down to the office and there were about four or five of us in the room. And Jerry, this man came in. He flew into Lynchburg in a private plane, came over to the office, and brought Jerry a check for twenty-seven million dollars. I seen the check. I said, "Let me hold it Jerry." He...

**Walters:** (42:47) [*laughter*]

**Towns:** (42:48) said, "No, nobody holds this check. It goes straight to the bank." I said, "I just want to touch it, I want to touch it." He said, "Look at it, look at it." "I want to touch it." "No, you can't touch it." We laughed about it and I, if I had known in those days, if I had a camera phone, I would have taken a picture. Now, when Jerry Jr. heard that story, he said, "Elmer, nobody's going to send a, a twenty-seven million dollar check. It was a, a wire, it was a bank transfer." I said, "No, it was a check. I saw it." He said, "No, no, no, you're wrong." Two days later he went and checked, he said, "You're right. There is a check. We have a copy, copy of it on file." But, it wasn't just the twenty-seven million. He took the next twenty-five million, he went through all of our indebtedness that we owed to different people and he took and he transferred and he, he said, he said, "Jerry, I don't want to pay off all of this." He said, "At no percent interest it's foolish for me to pay off." He said, "I'd rather pay it off over a period of time." And he said, "I can make money off of this." And so he took the whole fifty-two million. He gave us the twenty-seven million we had to pay. We had, we were way back in social security payments, we were way back in withholding tax that we hadn't paid. We, we got all of that paid up and that was a couple of million dollars right there. And we paid off all of our indebtedness and then when he did everything, he turned around and gave us a second seven million for the big six story dormitory down at the end of our property. And so he was a great friend to us at that time. And, and so Jerry tells the story in the book *Fasting Can Change Your Life*. That's a book that I wrote with Jerry. I'd go to his office, we would put the speakerphone on, and interview all of these people about fasting. And I think we made twenty-seven thousand dollars, not million, twenty-seven thousand dollars and that money has gone into a, a fund for, it's a chair, endowed chair the, the co-founders Chair of Evangelism...

**Hall:** (44:47) Oh, ok.

**Towns:** (44:48) and so, so two or three of the books that we wrote together the money went back to the University.

**Walters:** (44:55) You had talked about that accreditation situation in '94 and '95...

**Towns:** (44:58) Yes.

**Walters:** (44:59) I believe you said, um...

**Towns:** (45:00) Borek, who was on the Board of Accreditation, who came here in, he was sent here by the accrediting people and was so hard on us, you know, and then Jerry just turns around and hires him...

**Walters:** (45:11) Right.

**Towns:** (45:12) and said, "Do you want to be a college president?" and Borek tells the story, "I came to Lynchburg," he said, "just on a visit and I was so impressed with Jerry Falwell," he said, "I have to go home and tell my wife, 'We're moving to Lynchburg.'" And he said, "I was just that impressed with what God was going to do there." And I think it changed the life of Borek. You want to get Borek and you want to get him here. He's now in town on a regular basis and he's the Chairman of the, of um...TRACS...

**Hall:** (45:41) Oh, ok.

**Walters:** Oh, ok.

**Towns:** (45:42) he's Chairman of the Board of Directors of TRACS and so he comes to town on a regular basis. So you, you need to get him here and tell his story.

**Walters:** (45:47) Sure, sure, we'll do that. Yeah, well, during that, is that when the University, were they pressured, were you pressured, the University pressured to change the wording of chapel to convocation at that time?

**Towns:** (46:03) No, that was, that, that was in the late '90s. See, after Jim Bakker fell, IRS came here, they put a team, the same team that had gone through PTL came here and they went through all of our dealings. We used to own a different North Campus, the old Cradock Terry building...

**Walters:** (46:28) Right.

**Towns:** (46:29) down on the highway; multimillion dollar building.

**Walters:** (46:32) Kind of near the Post, the one Postal...

**Towns:** (46:35) Yeah. Anyway, we owned, that used to be our, our executive building there.

**Walters:** (46:38) Odd Fellows Road, is that...?

**Towns:** (46:39) Yeah.

**Walters:** (46:40) Yeah, ok.

**Towns:** (46:41) And they had these five men and one day I was down there talking to one of the guys who knew me from his church in Charlotte. And this IRS, IRS man, we went over, we happened to meet in a Coca-Cola, get, we're both getting Cokes and I said, "What are you finding out?" you know. He said, "Let me tell you something," he said, "I went through Jim Bakker," and he said, "I was astounded at how much money they could blow and how foolish they were." He said, "Jim Bakker would bring in a big executive party and go out and buy everybody a [montblock] and just write, you know, sign for twenty-two thousand dollars." And he says, "I come up here and I find Jerry Falwell bringing these big guys in. He goes to Kentucky Fried Chicken and buys two or three buckets of chicken and comes back to the church and feeds them chicken." He said, "The man who owns one of the biggest companies in all of Canada gets Kentucky Fried Chicken for fourteen dollars and Jim Bakker would give him a brand new [montblock]." He said, he said, "You know," he said, "I came as a real skeptic but I'm a real believer in Jerry Falwell." He said, "This place," he said, "they have poor books. They need a bookkeeper." He said, "But I found no fraud here anyplace." He said, "Every once in a while I found money missing in the books, but I found no one ever took money." He said, he said, "If you ever found it missing, you'd find two or three hundred dollars missing here or there." And he said, "We're not talking about fraud, we're just talking about poor bookkeeping." He said, "Jerry Falwell is an honest man." Now, he couldn't say that publically but when he said it to me I've said it to everyone...

**Walters:** (48:20) Sure.

**Towns:** (48:21) that I know.

**Walters:** (48:22) Sure. Now, how did the, back to the original...

**Towns:** (48:24) The end of that IRS investigation uh...and they were determined whether we should keep our tax-exempt profit. They said, "Alright, you need to do two or three things." And it was there that they said, "You, you need to call it chapel and not convocation...call it convocation, not chapel." There were about three things that they

said we needed to do and I forget what the others are. Right now it's inconsequential to my thinking.

**Walters:** (48:55) Sure. But that was separate from the accreditation visit?

**Towns:** (48:58) Well, no, that was separate from the accreditation.

**Walters:** (49:01) Right. Now back to, you were talking about cutting, cutting certain curriculum at one point when you were looking to save money and cutting back.

**Towns:** (49:11) We were cutting courses.

**Walters:** (49:12) Right.

**Towns:** (49:13) Faculty, you know, in other words, if they would cut all the chemistry department, all the faculty went...

**Walters:** (49:18) Right.

**Towns:** (49:19) and they would go in and, they looked at courses and what happened is they'd say, "You're offering too many courses that are too small." And they studied the curriculum and they would cut courses and they went...for instance, at the time the school of religion had twelve majors because we had a lot of students. They cut it down to one major; one major.

**Hall:** (49:43) One.

**Towns:** (49:44) And it was basically a, a pastoral major...

**Walters:** (49:47) Right.

**Towns:** (49:48) and then we could call them concentrations or minors and what that did, when you cut all this, you just lost all kinds of courses...

**Walters:** (49:55) Right.

**Towns:** (49:56) and so the catalog shrunk...

**Walters:** (49:58) Right.

**Towns:** (49:59) I don't, I can't tell you how big it shrunk but in a lot of places they just went through and cut courses almost with no other consideration than, did they make money?

**Walters:** (50:09) Right. But you would have had to have some sort of chemistry here to have the nursing program continue, it never stopped, right? You're saying that they, they cut certain majors as well, so...

**Towns:** (50:21) They kept the programs that were, were necessary...

**Walters:** (50:23) Right.

**Towns:** (50:24) matter of fact, they went through the whole catalog and they determined how many hours a student needed so he lost all of the flexibility in his electives. And the flexibility was gone and they, I remember, we only had like two or three electives in the school of religion and, boy, you would say, "What were they?" The Gospel of John, Genesis, Romans, not many, and so, today, we are back with quite a few more of our majors...

**Walters:** (50:54) Sure.

**Towns:** (50:55) than we used to have.

**Walters:** (50:56) Because we can afford in more.

**Towns:** (50:58) Yes.

**Walters:** (50:59) Now, as that financial crisis played out and as we recovered from it, did that affect the theological base of the University in any way? Did we become more inclusive as a result of that or did it just play out and we didn't have to do anything with that?

**Towns:** (51:15) I don't think it affected the theological basis at all.

**Walters:** (51:17) Ok.

**Towns:** (51:18) I think what it was before...well now, let me say, we didn't lose faculty in our darkest days, brother Cline. People bought into the vision, the power of Jerry's vision. You know, we really believed that we could train young people who would change the world and some of our greatest young people came from the hardest of times. I think in back of those student back in the '70s riding buses all over the place. I think in the, the mid-'80s, dark financial days, the kids stayed here, the kids stayed with us. They believed in the training they were getting and there was such a degree of commitment, "We came here to serve God. We're going to become champions for God."

**Walters:** (51:59) Well I know I was here from '87 to '91 and I'd never sensed that there was that many financial issues in the background at that time, you know? I guess they came to a head in the '90s but, yeah.

**Hall:** (52:12) Do you see that same commitment from students now as you did in the '70s and '80s?

**Towns:** (52:17) Do I see it now? No, I don't. Kids come with a lot more money, we're charging them a lot more money. And what is the one thing that keeps America from having revival, that keeps the church from having revival? Money. And so, I think money is making a difference in our kids. I think the kids um...it's not that they don't believe the way we believe theology, they just don't believe it as deeply.

**Walters:** (52:44) Ok. Well, we're going to shift directions here a little bit. Let's talk about your writing career.

**Towns:** (52:53) Ok.

**Walters:** (52:54) Now, you've talked before, in the previous interviews, about your book about the ten fastest growing churches or Sunday schools. Let's just ask you a little bit about the writing process. Does it come easy for you and how many books have you written all together? Can you just expand on that sort of thing?

**Towns:** (53:09) Ok, there's a young man, I brought his name last time and I forgot to give it to you and I forgot to bring it this time, who's doing his doctoral dissertation at the, at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary on the, the theological um...the theological perspective of Elmer Towns, something. He started out in the educational philosophy of Elmer Towns. I said, "I don't have an educational philosophy, I have a theological philosophy." And so after he interviewed me, he said, "You're right." So it's a theological perspective of Elmer Towns and the building of Liberty University. And I spent that whole concept, my idea of the church and the leader and such as that. And he says that I have a hundred and seventy books I've written. I hate to talk about how many books because people cannot deal with it. You know, if you say, "I've written seven books," they can't deal with, "Seven!?" But a hundred, how can you deal with a hundred? Now, of those hundred and seventy, thirty are co-authored with someone else. So I, I really think about I've offered, I've authored, oh...about a hundred and forty books that have my name on it.

**Walters:** (54:12) Is this the same fellow that you talked about earlier that said if it's less than a hundred pages, it's a pamphlet or...

**Towns:** (54:18) That was my son in...

**Walters:** (54:20) Oh, ok.

**Towns:** (54:21) his first doctoral dissertation. But he follows the same format...

**Walters:** (54:23) Sure.

**Towns:** (54:24) if it's less than a hundred, it's not a...

**Walters:** (54:25) Ok.

**Towns:** (54:26) Now, when I became teacher back at Winnipeg Bible...no, back at Midwest Bible College in the late '50s, there were no books on youth work anywhere in the church. There were just nothing there. And I taught a course on Christian education of youth and I pulled from here or there and I had been a youth pastor and I, and I put together ideas and I taught this course and it was like [*makes noise*] lightning, [*makes noise*] lightning; it just really went. And so the next time I taught the course, word got around, "This is a really hot course." And so I planned to have a course and to do a seminar and invite all youth pastors in the IFCA to come to, to Big West Bible College for a two-day seminar on how to be a better youth pastor and I had several come in. And so that was going real well so I said to the kids, "Let's write a book," I said to my class, maybe thirteen, fourteen kids. And so, late one night when the office closed at five o'clock I took these electric IBM typewriters up to the third floor, kind of like a conference room. I took the mimeograph up to the third floor. I took the punch, all the office equipment up to the third floor and the kids sat down and I had written different chapters. I had some of the kids write up my lectures, other kids were typing. And we sat there from about five o'clock to nine o'clock working; sent out to pizza, came back. I went out and bought ten thousand sheets of paper. I went out and bought a hundred plastic binders and so, and I bought um...two hundred front covers and back covers and that night, we produced a book; a hundred page book called *Teaching Teens*. And, you know, I don't know where I got the money from and so I put, we put together a hundred page book and I gave two copies to all the kids who were there. We sold them to the people who came to the youth clinic for five dollars each and boy, they were just scooped up and that was really great. Now, that's my first book called *Teaching Teens*. So, I'm innovative and so I take all of the mimeograph stencils, those black inky things, I put them in sheets of newspaper and take them home. I said, "I'm asked to preach all the time about youth work. I go to church to preach on youth work. I'm going to sell me some books." So, I take, one day, the mimeograph machine home, I buy another ten thousand sheets of paper, and I sit in my basement, [*makes clicking sounds*] ten thousand times and then I go home, [*makes clunking sound*] you know, put them up. So I do it myself over a period of two weeks. And then when I got ready, I say to my kids, "Alright kids, I'll take you to McDonald's if you help me put together books." And so we would wrap it around the basement over the washing machine, over the dryer, over the ping

pong table and my kids would walk around putting the thing together and we'd put it together and I said, "Let's go to McDonald's," and, "Yeah!"

**Walters:** (57:30) [*laughter*]

**Hall:** [*laughter*]

**Towns:** (57:31) So, my kids, and I would say, "Kids, I'm going to preach tonight." "Let's go to McDonald's!" I said, "Ok, let's go make the books." And so we'd go down and make the books and they got to take it out. So, I did that two or three times over the next two years and finally, I went to Winnipeg Bible College. When I got there, they had a room for the yearbook, a little old room, and in this yearbook room, they put together a yearbook. And they had a, a drafting board and a T-square and all of this and I said, "Oh." So I set out, took my book and had it typeset. I went downstairs and I pasted it, we used to call them waxing in, you waxed in all the sheets of paper. I got a man to draw me some cartoons and put them in there and I had him print me up some books. And so this was my first printed book, *Teaching Teens*, and I'd sell it for five bucks. And I was at a convention and somebody said, "Boy, this is a great book. Why don't you sell it to us, Baker Book House." And I said, "Ok." I didn't know how to get an author, I had no idea. Baker Book House took my book and they sent me a check for five hundred dollars. "Good night, this is great." Now, this is much better than the president of a school who wasn't getting paid going out and flipping hamburgers. So I started writing to make money because it's a sophisticated thing you can do at home at night. And I'd write and write articles all over the place. And some articles you get printed, you get notoriety. Others you get five dollars, you get ten dollars, you get fifteen. And so I started writing Sunday school literature a penny a word, you know. And so I just, I started writing to make money; baby needs shoes. The most basic motivation of all work; you got to have money for your family.

**Walters:** (59:23) Sure.

**Hall:** (59:24) How'd you go about that, did you type it or did you write it our longhand or...

**Towns:** (59:27) I write it out longhand....

**Hall:** (59:28) No computers yet.

**Towns:** (59:29) and I'd give it to my wife and she'd type it.

**Hall:** (59:30) Oh, ok.

**Towns:** (59:31) And it's because, it was together, this is how uh...and then I got, I started writing Sunday school literature for the Union Gospel Press, the old international uniform lesson at a penny a word. And then I wrote for some other publishing houses a penny a word. And, how much does a penny a word get to you? I think um...oh, I would get fourteen dollars for each lesson. Fourteen dollars times twelve, so almost two hundred dollars for writing a quarterly. And so there were a lot of those that were out there, that I did that. So, and then after I did this first book on youth, I did a second book on youth and I called it *Successful Youth Work* and then a third book and a fourth book and then the fifth book was the *Ten Largest Sunday Schools*. I was out there and I saw the, the *Ten Largest Sunday Schools* became a big seller. And it, it stayed on the best seller list for about almost two years, you know, because it was, it was explosive. It, it said something that no one ever said before, "Here's how a church can be successful," and so that got to be big. Now...

**Hall:** (1:00:36) How many copies did it sell or do you know?

**Towns:** (1:00:38) How many? Eighty-two thousand.

**Hall:** (1:00:40) Ok.

**Towns:** (1:00:41) And then I did *America's Fastest Growing Churches*, that was a bout a hundred and ten thousand, and *Capturing a Town for Christ*, about a hundred and twenty-seven thousand. Back in those days, a hundred thousand was really a thumb mark of being a great book. Today, you got to be a million seller and um...technically I don't have a million seller by myself. The Nelsons Children Bible, I was one of three authors for that. I was paid five hundred dollars and we sold two million copies of that Nelson so, that's where they make there money off those things.

**Walters:** (1:01:18) So most of the, the subject matter of your books is about Sunday school or youth or what...

**Towns:** (1:01:24) Ok, now, I talked about those different doctoral dissertations. Alright, the third doctoral dissertation was done by Dr. Gabe Etzel who's big here in online education. He went through and he said, "The first books that you wrote, Dr. Towns, had to do with youth work. And then you went into a five year cycle of Sunday school work, almost a ten year cycle. Then you went into a ten year cycle of, of church growth where you became really known for church growth and evangelism. And then you've been in about a fifteen year cycle of spirituality." So I've gone from one cycle to another. Now, at the same time, I've emphasized, I've...ever since I've started writing, I've written about two books a year, or published about two books a year I should say, and uh...why? Because I've got ideas. I, I study, I learn something new, and I start writing. And so I, I enjoy, I get up every morning and I write. And in the last ten years, several of my books

have come out of my morning devotions. I'll, I'll get up and...I heard Ed Hindson speak in chapel here in about 19...2002, 2003. He, he spoke on emergency prayer, desperate prayers. "Desperate prayers," I said, "Boy, that is so good." The next morning I had my devotion, I'm meditating on desperate prayers and I said, "I don't want to steal his sermon," but Hannah was desperate so I wrote a sermon on Hannah and desperate prayers. And I said, "Well, that's pretty good." And I said, "Hmm." Over then next day, I came up with about five more chapters and I said, "I'll take a chapter a day." And so each morning I talked about alienated prayers, small prayers, you know, supernatural prayers; all the different kinds of prayers until I came up with fifty-two and so that's a book called *How to Pray*, and it's a pretty good selling book. And when I did that book, I kept thinking about, there were prayers that have an other side, the other side of prayer, so I did a second book on how God answers prayer, the prayers that God answers; from God's side, not from man's side. So that book came out and um...now, my biggest selling book of all times is my *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough*. That's a 1996 book and it sold about three hundred and seventy-five thousand, maybe four hundred thousand copies but that's legitimate sales. Now, I don't count some of my others as legitimate. For instance, I was on the board from 1995 to the year 2000 for Billy Grahams foreign missions. And on that board I said to Billy one day, "Billy," I said, "you give away free books. I want you to give away my book called praying the lord's prayer." And that was, that was about a 19...after, the one year after I did the fasting book, I did that in 1997. He said, "Why should I give it away Elmer?" I said, "Think about it. Episcopalians, Catholics, Anglicans; think of all the people who pray it and they're not saved. If they pray it right, they'll get saved." He said, "Let's do it." And so he gave away two hundred and fifty thousand copies of that and that was given away on December, 1999. And then I said, another board meeting I said, "Boy that went well, Bill, I got another one for you." "What's that?" I said, "Let's give away a book on the greatest chapter in the Bible that everyone knows; praying the twenty-third Psalms." "You got a book on that?" I said, "Sure," and I gave him a copy. He said, "Oh, we'll do it." And so, he gave away two hundred and fifty thousand copies of those. Those were free gifts...

**Walters:** (1:05:08) Sure.

**Towns:** (1:05:09) so you can't count those...

**Walters:** (1:05:10) Sure.

**Towns:** (1:05:11) and I've had this one in the Book-of-the-Month Club that they sell, basically, to everyone who buys a Book-of-the-Month Club um...oh, that company upstate New York up on the Hudson River. I forget it right now, but they did my, I did a, a novel on the life of Jesus and they gave away that book so...

**Walters:** (1:05:35) Ok, well in 1995, you did the names of the Holy Spirit and got a Gold Medallion Award...

**Towns:** (1:05:41) Yes.

**Walters:** (1:05:42) Did you, do you want to comment on...

**Towns:** (1:05:43) Ok.

**Walters:** (1:05:44) is it, how many other books got awards, but if you could comment on specifically on that one...

**Towns:** (1:05:47) Ok, there was several Silver Medallion...

**Walters:** (1:05:49) Ok.

**Towns:** (1:05:50) The Silver Medallion is second place but...

**Walters:** (1:05:51) Ok.

**Towns:** (1:05:52) no, you know, who remembers second place [*laughter*]?

**Hall:** (1:05:53) [*laughter*]

**Walters:** [*laughter*]

**Towns:** (1:05:54) Ok, now, in about the late '80s, about 1988, I was teaching Sunday school here and I did twelve series on the names of Jesus and I clustered them together about his lordship names, his cross names, his second coming names; those kinds of things. And that became a Bible study book and it was pretty good, you know, twenty, thirty, forty thousand copies. And I said, "Oh, that's great." And so I did a second book called *The Names of the Father*, I mean, the, *The Trinity Names*. And that did the same thing; it was a Bible study book and boom, boom, boom, it sold about thirty, forty thousand copies. And so I said to myself, "Oh, I'm a Trinitarian. I ought to do the Holy Spirit." And I, and I said to myself, "I hope I can find twelve names to write about because if I can find twelve names to write about, I can have twelve chapters in the book," you know. I said, I thought about a book and I started studying and I found a hundred and twenty-six names to the Holy Spirit. Now, the Evangelical Press Association in the Christian booksellers, they come together to give out the Gold Medallion. It meant something up until about four years ago. They stopped giving it with any significance. But it was always with a big banquet and a lot of fanfare to recognize the best in the, in the field. And so their criteria, it must be one of the first books written on the topic; it had to be first. It had to have quality artwork, quality

editing work, meaning the English had to be good, the artwork has to be good. It has to be um...appeal to all denominations; therefore, it can't be a very narrow Calvinistic or Pentecostal book. And the fifth one, I forget what it was...oh; it had to be spirituality appealing. And so that won book of the year, the Gold Medallion in 1995, wasn't it, it won that? So the book came out in '93 probably, maybe '94 and that's been translated into quite a few languages. Now, we, you, you want to talk about foreign languages?

**Walters:** (1:08:18) Sure.

**Towns:** (1:08:19) Ok. I have about a hundred and sixteen titles in foreign languages. I work with many different publishing companies to put them in foreign languages but most of my work is done with Regal Books which is Gospel Light where I serve on the Board. Now, Regal Books has a foundation called Gospel Light Worldwide that's basically a, it's a print publishing Evangelistic endeavor to the world; they get all their literature of the world. And so five percent of my royalties go to Gospel Light Worldwide and that five percent, they have money on hand and they work with publishers from all over the place. "Would you like to take Elmer Towns' thing? I can give you a stipend to help you with that." So a lot of publishers, foreign publishers is, "Ok, good," you know. If they can get enough money to get the print run covered, they can probably make enough money on it so they're very careful, they do all the advance work for me as my agent and so probably *The Names of the Holy Spirit* is in about twelve or thirteen languages, fasting is about twelve or thirteen languages, the Lord's prayer is in about twelve or thirteen languages; I forget how many. But I have thirty-five books in Korean. Why? Because the Korean students come here, they know me, they translate them and so...

**Walters:** (1:09:46) Sure.

**Towns:** (1:09:47) like they always say, "Dr. Towns, you are so famous in Korea. Why are you not more famous here?" They don't realize that's kind of a, that hurts a little bit to hear that, but I say, "Because the pastors in Korea know me. In America, preachers know me but maybe not laymen that much..."

**Walters:** (1:10:02) Sure.

**Towns:** (1:10:03) "and I understand that." But I'm very willing to work with publishers to get my works in foreign languages because that's, that's where you can reach the world. Now, one of the books I have is called *Nama-Nama Allah*. It's an Arabic, it's in Arabic, it's the names of the Father and it is one of the biggest selling of all my foreign titles because Muslims all over the world are real big into the hundred names of Allah and mine is called *Nama-Nama Allah*. And so they order that from all over the world. And, anyway, that's, that's a book I'm very proud of...

**Walters:** (1:10:36) Sure.

**Towns:** (1:10:37) that's foreign.

**Walters:** (1:10:38) Sure. Now, Dr. Hall pointed out a, a few questions ago about the fact that you were using a typewriter and a mimeograph machine and all that. Are any of your books just strictly in digital format right now? How many e-books have you...

**Towns:** (1:10:52) Oh. If you go to my website, e, um...[elmertowns.com](http://elmertowns.com), you'll find about fifty books that are there that are free and are downloadable.

**Walters:** (1:11:04) Ok.

**Towns:** (1:11:05) Now, it's all the, all my books are out of print are free and you, you don't have to pay to download then there; it's free to download.

**Walters:** (1:11:11) Sure.

**Towns:** (1:11:12) And um...now, there are others in digital format. There's a company out of Atlanta that has five or six books that and they have a, a ministry, they sell tapes, audio tapes. A lot of people...well, they don't sell audio tapes anymore, they sell CD's...

**Walters:** (1:11:28) Right.

**Towns:** (1:11:29) but they have about five of my books on CD's and I have a few in my garage I sell from time to time just to, if people want, they said, "I don't want to read a book, I want to see a book on television or listen to it," I have that for them.

**Walters:** (1:11:44) Sure.

**Hall:** (1:11:45) Is the...

**Towns:** (1:11:46) But the three I have are *The Names of the Father*, *The Names of the Son*, and *The Names of the Holy Spirit*. Those three books are the ones that are content driven books.

**Hall:** (1:11:54) I know it's probably very hard to do but anyway that you could say what you feel is the most important book?

**Towns:** (1:11:59) Oh, the most important book, I...well, let me tell you my favorite.

**Hall:** (1:12:02) Ok.

**Towns:** (1:12:03) My favorite book is the Gospel of John. I've, the very first year here at Liberty I taught John, for many years I've taught John, I love teaching John. And, and so, my Gospel of John is called *John: Believe and Live*. I wanted to call it *John: the Greatest Book in the Bible* and the publishers wouldn't let me call it the greatest...they said, "It sounds like you're bragging about your book." I said, "No, John is the greatest." He said, "No, we won't call it that." So it's called *John: Believe and Live*. And it's an AMG publication right now. It used to be um...let me see. It was uh...Revell had it for several years and so it was rereleased by A, AMG out of Chattanooga. And I love it because it's the Gospel of John from the Greek text for the English reader. You know, so it's, it follows the format of Kenneth Weiss who did many books like that through the New Testament. It's the Greek testament for the English reader.

**Hall:** (1:13:07) Now you've been also editors of some encyclopedias.

**Towns:** (1:13:11) I've done two encyclopedias. The first one is called *The Sunday School Encyclopedia* and that was a Tyndale House publication and I basically went through and thought of everything that a Sunday school teacher would need to know; practical and theoretical and historical and philosophical and it was about a seven, eight hundred page encyclopedia. It was called *Towns Sunday School Encyclopedia*. And it was never a big world beaters publication, it was just so-so...and then I did the *Encyclopedia of Evangelism and Church Growth* and I had twelve editors do that and that was under the Society for Church Growth which is a professional organization and I was the general editor but probably, if you go look at all the articles that are signed, I probably did eighty percent of the articles in the encyclopedia. But it was when uh...Sunday, uh...when church growth was a growing science. Church growth was really big in the '80s, began to decline in the '90s, and not many people are really into church growth today. But church growth is a science, it's a science. And a science attends to establish laws or principles. And the impact, the, the long rang impact of church growth is that it established many principles by which churches grow and much of what you see today at the big large community praise, worship churches have come out of that movement. Therefore, it was the foundation for all of those churches.

**Hall:** (1:14:42) Now, we haven't said anything about the Liberty Commentary.

**Towns:** (1:14:44) Oh, we haven't, no.

**Hall:** (1:14:46) Which, of course, came out of the seminary, I guess.

**Towns:** (1:14:49) No, it came out of the, both schools;...

**Hall:** (1:14:50) Both, ok.

**Towns:** (1:14:51) the school of religion and the seminary. We had faculty from both. The Liberty Bible Commentary was done through Thomas Nelson. I was the general editor at the time for Jerry. I come back, it was right before I became dean of the seminary and Jerry was called the general editor and Ed Hindson was called the managing editor of it and I think I did, I did Deuteronomy and maybe half of John in that book and at the same time, the Liberty Reference Bible came out and I did the theology footnotes there, a hundred and ninety-four, a hundred and ninety-six footnotes dealing with theology, and I did those in that Liberty Reference Bible. And that's with Thomas Nelson and that was called the Liberty Reference Bible. Then Thomas Nelson said, "You can't sell it because Liberty, a lot of people don't like Liberty." A lot of people do, so they called it the King James Reference Bible and then they really upped the price because for the last twenty years, of the three or four best selling Bible references, it's always like number three or number four. It's always, pretty high but not the best. Why? Because it's general conservative Christianity, it's, it doesn't take you on any wild turkey chases, wild rabbit chases, and so, it's a, and it's also practical and local church but it's not committed to a Baptist church and so they now call it the Thomas Nelson, boy, they put a price tag on it and really ran their price up to about, really nice fine leather, it may be hundred and fifty, two hundred dollars. But, so, it's still out there and still has a great ministry. And it's amazing, Jerry Falwell said, "It's amazing what you can do for God if you don't care who gets the credit." And so, that one doesn't have our name on it but God gets the credit so we're happy for Thomas Nelson selling those.

**Hall:** (1:16:49) But basically it is the work of the Liberty people.

**Towns:** (1:16:55) Yes. Dan Mitchell, Ed Hindson, Borland, Wilmington, Hawkins, a lot of those people wrote in those. Just a lot of people...it's amazing, when you think of Liberty, think of how many people have been here twenty or thirty years or more; especially in the school of religion. I could go up and down the hallway and I'd say over half of our people have been at Liberty for over twenty-five years. That shows the stability of a school, you know, they haven't come in and out. They, they really believe in what we teach and what we do; they believe in training young champions for Christ.

**Walters:** (1:17:36) Well now, it seems like some of those people who got cut in the '90s are, have come back too. I know some of those...

**Towns:** (1:17:42) I think Dan Mitchell was cut on one of those days. I, I'm not sure about that but I know that, yes, several others have come back.

**Walters:** (1:17:49) Now, you've talked about Dr. Falwell's forty day fasts, you've written a couple of books about the benefits of fasting. Could you briefly share your thoughts and experiences in that area and did you and Dr. Falwell discuss fasting quite a bit or...?

**Towns:** (1:18:10) When the school was, like, seven months old, in that first year, I had my budget together; hundred and fifty, two hundred and fifty-eight thousand dollars. I was proceeding on the budget and we talked about having five thousand students. But something happened in Jerry's thinking. He began to think in terms of fifty thousand. We're trying to find, by going back through the recordings, when he first started talking about fifty thousand. Brother Cline, you were hear back then. It was, it was early on, very early on. And at the end of the first year, he announced from the pulpit, "We're going to fast and pray for a million dollars." I said, "Jerry, I don't need a million dollars." And he said, "Elmer, you have no idea how much money this school's going to cost." And he was right. I had no idea. He said, "You have no idea how big we're going to be and all the things that we're going to need. We're going to fast and pray for a million dollars." At that time, the church had just reached a million dollars for the first time in its history and so that's like asking the church to double, which is what Jerry was always doing. And so I remember slaving over that, boy, I said, "Man..." I had heard, you know, "Eat so you don't get sick." Your grandmother would say, "Eat," you know, "so you won't feel bad." And so I began to pray, "Lord, help me to make it through. Help me make it through." And everyday I said, "Lord, I'm going to fast. I'm going to do it but help me make it through." And it came and I got through it and it was not that hard. It was really easy for a one day fast. And God answered my prayer; I made it through. And about a month later, I said to my wife, we owned a house here and in Chicago. We couldn't sell the house when we came here. I said, "Ruth, let's fast and pray that God sells that house in greater Chicago." On the fifteenth day is when we owed our house payment there and the first is when we had our house payment here. And so, we fasted, nothing happened. Second month I forgot about it until I wrote that check, we fasted, nothing happened. That happened six months in a row; nothing happened and, and we're into the summer time, you know, going into the second year and nothing has happened and finally I got a call and I went there. A year later, I went to the closing in Chicago. I'm sitting there talking to the guy, just making light chatter while they're looking through the papers and he said, "I looked at your house about a year ago." I didn't pay attention. And he gave me the date. It was the sixteenth day of the month, the first day we had fasted. I said, "Oh my goodness." And I remember the hairs on the back of my...I said, "God did this. God did this." And I began to think, "What would have happened if I gave up after one fast? Or, what would have happened had I not asked Ruth to fast with me? What would have happened I hadn't fasted at all? And so I, I, from then on, I was committed to fast. And so, that was my first successful fast, to sell our house. And then there were two or three other occasions for which I fasted. I'm not sure that it was one a year, it might have been once a year. Every time Jerry would call for a fast, I would enter into it. And then in about, the first year I came back, they said to me, "The RA's, we have a, they come back a week early. Would you teach a session on fasting?" I said, "Boy, I can do that. I can...sure, one hour." And so I went to Isaiah 58;

“Is this not the fast that I have chosen?” And through that, God gives nine things that will happen when you fast. And so I took the nine things and put them to a sermon and I taught the young people for ten years, week before school, how to fast. I would, you know, matter of fact, for fifteen years. And so, I’ve been fasting many times and I work with Gospel Light Regal Books. And they asked me about 1992 or ’93 to bring in a list of what new books they should have to publish. And right in the middle of the list was fasting. They said, “Fasting, yeah, we ought to do a book on fasting. Who can we get? Jack Hayford?” They, they were talking about everybody and they couldn’t come up with anybody and they were talking about, “We need to, we got to…” I said, “Hey guys,” I sheepishly put my hand up and said, “I can write you a book on fasting.” “What do you know about fasting? You’re a Baptist.” And I told them about, I said, “You know, for years I’ve taught our students, when they come back, to fast.” They said, “Ok, write your book.” And so, I started writing the book but I couldn’t get the introduction done. I couldn’t get to the first page. And so I’m telling my wife I couldn’t get it done. She said, “Well, I’ll tell you what you do, big boy.” And I said, “What?” She says, “Fast about it.” I said, “Yeah.” And I remember fasting for one day for just, Lord, for the book. And so I fasted what is called a twenty-four hour fast from sundown to sundown. It’s called a Yom Kippur fast. And we, I broke my fast, we went out to eat at the Crown Sterling that night, and I’m talking to her. She says, “I want to know what God said to you.” And I had this piece of paper with all these things on it, I said, “I said this and this and this and this and this.” I said, “I’ve studied all day, I don’t have a clue how to write the book. All I’ve got is one sermon with nine points.” I stopped. I said, “I’ve got it, God just spoke. I got a book with nine chapters. I’m going to make each point into a chapter.” I went home and basically I made it a Bible study book on fasting the nine things that God has done will do for you because he’s done for other people in the Bible. And there are nine Bible studies of that and that’s why it’s been such a great fast, not, not from me, not from my stories. It’s what the Bible teaches from nine different people on nine different results and nine different ways to fast. And so, that book has kind of been like the main, the main deal for anybody doing fasting and I appreciate all of the people who have used it and it, it keeps, it stays, just, every month, right up at the very top of the list. It’s usually within one or two percent of the best sellers on Amazon almost every month.

**Walters:** (1:24:53) Do you know when and how Dr. Falwell started to fast, way back in the ‘50s or…?

**Towns:** (1:24:59) Before I met him because, just, one day from the pulpit he announced it. So I don’t know how he started, I can’t tell you that answer. But I think it might have been uh…with uh…when he was at that, that Sunday school meeting, you know, it might have been when he had that key and he went into that, that empty dorm room his first year at Liberty, first year at Baptist Bible College and he was reading all the great books. It might have been then when he started fasting.

**Walters:** (1:25:30) Ok. Ok. Let's talk about your journal writings. You've written over two thousand articles for journals. What are some of those journals...

**Towns:** (1:25:40) Journals and...not just journal articles, journales and popular.

**Walters:** (1:25:46) Sure, ok. Who were your critics?

**Towns:** (1:25:49) Who were my critics? I would say my biggest critics when I first started journaling was at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. They had a publish or perish, you had to write a significant book each year or two journal articles and to keep your job, that was just part, part of your contract. A significant book and the dean determined whether your book was significant or not. And it's interesting, he did not consider the *Ten Largest Sunday Schools* a significant book. And...because it wasn't scholarly enough. And so I used to write for the *Christian Education Journal*, matter of fact, I would go to the library and as I was doing work at, at Garrett Theological Seminary, every time I wrote a term paper, I would say to the professor, "Can I write this term paper in journal form so that I don't have to write it twice?" And he, they'd always say, "Yes." And so if you look at my early on journal articles, every time I had a course, I, I wrote two or three articles on John Wesley. Early, the history of Christian education from the point of view of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, all the great, I would go back and search them and then that became a book called the *History of Religious Educators*. So journal articles turn into books. And then I did um...I took a bunch of classes on counseling. Counseling the aphasia, counseling the mentally retarded, counseling the educable, counseling the trainable, you know, the different, you take these courses, you wrote these papers, you'd send them off, you get them published. And it was as simple as that and so I forget half the stuff I've written on back...

**Walters:** (1:27:35) Sure.

**Towns:** (1:27:36) you do it with a term paper, you know, you do it for a professor whether you have to or not.

**Walters:** (1:27:40) Sure.

**Towns:** (1:27:41) And then I started writing for the *Journal of Church Growth* and I would, I think I've come close to writing an article in every journal, article since they started printing in 1985. Then uh...those were journal articles. I've, I've splattered, I'd probably only have three or four in the ETS Journal. And, so anyway, you get your critics for those. Those are called...when you go into a journal, you have to have professionals who are proven, two or three people who read it before it'll go in and those are called refereed of journal articles.

**Walters:** (1:28:19) Or peer review.

**Towns:** (1:28:20) Peer review, absolutely. And so those, you know, those you know have passed muster, so you're always proud of those that you do.

**Walters:** (1:28:30) Sure. What, what controversial opinions or philosophies or stances have you gotten the most kickback on, if any?

**Towns:** (1:28:38) Oh, two or three.

**Walters:** (1:28:39) Anything that's particular...

**Towns:** (1:28:40) Oh no, no...

**Walters:** lightning rod or...?

**Towns:** (1:28:42) Ok, oh yes.

**Walters:** *[laughter]*

**Towns:** (1:28:43) My strong support of Sunday school when the mainlines were giving in, up on Sunday school and my strong support of the mega...probably the biggest kickback was my support of the mega-church on the ten largest. At the sophisticated faculty at Trinity Evangelical School, they would sometimes say, "Here comes the ten largest Towns," or something like that. My name was used in derision that way. These, all these superficial churches, these soul winning churches, these busing churches, all these big churches. And I would speak at ministerials and they would say, "How about questions?" And I would always have somebody uh...I probably spoke every year at the Chicago ministerial and they would be big. It'd be three, four hundred. And somebody, one guy challenged me one time and he says, "I doubt, I doubt if there are as many large churches in America as you say." He said, "You say that there are," um...I think I said that there were five thousand. He said, "I look around the room here," and he said, "I look around our city, I can't name more than twenty." And he started naming people and I remember I said, "It's very interesting to me that you say that. You didn't include any black churches. If there are twenty white, I would imagine that there are twenty black, maybe forty black." And one of the black brothers on the platform, I said, "Am I telling the truth?" He said, "You are, you are." I said, "Ok, so triple your number." And then I began to say, "Let's talk about Latino. You know how many big Latino churches there are down on the border?" I said, "Let me talk about how many, how many Korean language churches there are in America. Have you ever thought, how many? You don't know? Five thousand." I said, "Now, let me ask you this question," we get blinded by race, "how many Korean language theological seminaries are there in the United States? You probably think there are none. There are fifty-nine and they're all in big, huge,

Korean churches. And all over America you're probably going to find two, three, four hundred large churches of a thousand or more in attendance, big enough to have a theological seminary. These are old seminaries that are night school classes that are probably half seminary, half Bible institute, but still, they are called seminary, and many of them are accredited by the Korean government, not by Americans." And he said, "Ok, I give up, I give up, I give up." You know, so anyway, that was a big deal. People would challenge me all the time on the floor of ministerials about my stand for the big church. When no one else stood for the big church, I brought an academic respectability from Trinity outside to the Baptist Bible Fellowship because they had some of the biggest churches in America.

**Hall:** (1:31:53) There is such a thing as called Church Growth Institute?

**Towns:** (1:31:57) There is a...

**Hall:** (1:31:58) And how did it come...

**Towns:** it's still in existence...

**Hall:** (1:31:59) about?

**Towns:** it was here in town. It was owned by Larry Gilbert and he, it was a non-profit organization. And Larry Gilbert was a Bible Institute graduate who started Church Growth Institute and published numbers of items, items. It used to have about a five billion dollar budget, it was out here on Waterlick Road. I was not the owner, I was not on the board. I was their dominant publisher. I don't like the business part, I like the Word part of it; the preaching and teaching. And Larry Gilbert moved back to Delaware, Newark, Delaware and it works there today and it operates out of his garage. It's about a seven hundred thousand dollar organization but at one time they were very big but they downgraded and so it's still there and some of my writings, for instance, the Friend Day can be found and you can buy it through Church Growth Institute.

**Hall:** (1:32:54) Ok. How do you see door-to-door evangelism? Is that vogue, still in vogue or is that declining or...?

**Towns:** (1:33:02) Well, I say there are anointed methods and it seems like almost every decade for the last fifty, sixty, seventy years has been a different, a different method that gets hot and then it gets cold. Prior to the 1960's, the dominant method was door-to-door; Jerry Falwell went door-to-door, Lee Robison went door-to-door, W.A. Criswell went door-to-door. That worked in the '50s. In the '60s, the hot method was busing and that became the busing of bringing children to church on...and then into the '70s it's what I call saturation evangelism. Churches began using every available means to reach

every available person at every available time. That's a Jerry Falwell note and we did the book on *Church Aflame* to talk about saturation evangelism and capture your town for Christ and he talked about using radio, using television, using mailing, using placards, using billboards, using all these means. And then in the '80s there was a, a turning against mechanics. John McArthur had his day and John McArthur, the '80s, it was preaching evangelism. Remember he talked about every pastor ought to spend forty hours a week at your desk studying and, and great preaching builds churches? And in the '90s came the seeker churches, the seeker evangelism, and all the Bill Hybels stood for. And seeker evangelism is creating a church where people can seek God with contemporary music, with contemporary skits, with contemporary everything, and you plan a service for the seekers. Then the year 2000 and beyond, it's been almost worship evangelism. We see people building churches on praise worship, Pentecostal, Community, Southern Baptist; all denominations are building it on praise worship today. Now, what's going to be the future? What's going to be the next method? You want me to tell you?

**Hall:** (1:34:56) Yes.

**Towns:** (1:34:57) I think it's...

**Walters:** (1:34:58) Please.

**Towns:** (1:34:59) going to be, it's going to be small group evangelism. And Thomas Road Baptist Church is changing their Sunday school philosophy from your traditional Sunday school, they're bringing Sunday morning into the Sunday school class; what has been called house movement or cell movement or whatever. So that seems to be the next, next, at least, that's what I see as the next movement of God.

**Hall:** (1:35:22) This, the Innovate, the Innovative Church Conference that they had, is that part of the, the changing...

**Towns:** (1:35:28) Yes, that's, that's very much a part of the changing times. And everybody ought to go to that conference.

**Hall:** (1:35:36) How has televangelism tied into the growth over the years? I know it was part of the saturation approach that you just brought up but uh...and then the PTL scandal and the Jimmy Swaggart thing kind of really bit into the business side of things here, but what's the rule of televangelism now? I mean, we have a good half dozen...

**Towns:** (1:35:59) I don't see televangelism working at all.

**Walters:** (1:36:02) Ok.

**Towns:** (1:36:03) The idea of uh...there was a time when televangelism worked real big and there was a man who created a company and sold and how to do televangelism and how to organize your people to do phone calls and all of that and then the phone tree and all that goes with that. But I don't see that working at all today. People today want a human contact; they want to talk to people and relationship evangelism is the key. When they go to church...they don't go, people don't want to go to a big church, they want to go where they know somebody. Remember old *Cheers* on television? They want to go where everybody knows your name...

**Walters:** (1:36:37) Everybody knows your name, yep. Yeah. Now, you were able to rattle off pretty quickly here those methods of evangelism over those decades and you've been a trend watcher for the evangelical world, how do you do your research and what do you do with the, the results you find other than write? How do you put that stuff in the...

**Towns:** (1:37:00) When I began writing, I think I, I was taking twenty-six magazines a month and I'd read them all. What do I do with trends today? I've got a friend who does all my research for me. His name is Google.

**Walters:** (1:37:17) [*laughter*]

**Towns:** (1:37:18) [*laughter*] I'll tell you, I wrote the book *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever* with, the first time I really got into the computer. Up until that, I, I had a computer on my desk because everybody at Liberty had one but, you know, I could, I just didn't use it, you know, I could just read when somebody sent me an email. And one, one day, it was raining out, I was supposed to go play golf with Matt Chitem, my grad assistant, and he said, "Well, let's go play golf." I said, "What do you mean? It's raining." He said, "Come on." I walked in his office and he put up the Memorial which is in Columbus, Ohio and he taught me how to use the, they, you know, and I began, you know, we played a whole eighteen holes. And I remember watching it and there's Jack Nicklaus telling me what I did wrong and Johnny Miller telling me what I did wrong and I, I got, and we got finished with playing that game and I said, "I got to do a research on St. Patrick of Ireland. What can you find there?" He went to St. Patrick and started pulling up art...I said, "Wait a...whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Don't go so fast. I got to write this..." He said, "Don't write it down." And he showed me a little icon called print. You should have seen, "Wow! Print! Good night." And I sat, I sat there for two hours doing research on Patrick and, you know, when I left I said, "This would have taken me eight hours at the Northwestern University Library to put this article together. Wow." You know, so I came back the next day, didn't even have to help me. I found Google, Google found me, and I started doing research and I found something. The book on *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever* is a fairly good book. I had it with a publisher who

wasn't well-known, wasn't academics so it didn't get the impact it should have gotten. But, instead of going to evangelicals which, were anti-signs, or instead of going to Pentecostals, which is pro-signs, I felt both sides had a, an agenda, a hidden agenda; both sides were either saying it was right or wrong. And so I went to newspapers and I wrote most of my article from newspapers. And from the newspapers I found them to be more objective. And if you go to the newspapers and trace the great revivals for the last three hundred years, you can get more insight. You'll find things there, great source of stories. But anyway, let me tell you, that book talks about the methods, we just talked about methods, every great revival seemed to be born or came out of a new method. There was a new method with every revival and that method, as long as the method was effective, the revival was effective and when the revival died, the method died. And so, tent meetings was the laymen's prayer revival. Street preaching was the first great awakenings. And so you can go...brush harbor was the second great awakening. The invitation, the gospel invitation was the general awakening under Finney. So each one of the revivals had its own unique method. The trouble is, we, today, try to resurrect an old method and many times the old method is dead...

**Walters:** (1:40:29) Ok.

**Towns:** (1:40:30) and so it doesn't work anymore.

**Walters:** (1:40:32) Well, we only have a minute or two here yet. We're obviously going to have to schedule another interview to cover the last ten questions or so. But can you, tell us a...let's, let's close by having you tell us about the Global Pastors Network and what that is about.

**Towns:** (1:40:52) Ok. The Global Pastors Network was a great endeavor to do something for God that worked great for four years and died. It came out of the Billy Graham Amsterdam 2000 meeting. In Amsterdam 2000, there were about fourteen of us who were planning with Billy Graham to have this great conference to bring ten thousand people to Amsterdam. But when we did the survey, we found out, "How are we going to train all these people to do it the way Billy did it?" Billy kept saying, "Bring them here. I want to teach them to do it the way I do it," meaning a Billy Graham crusade. "Not all crusades," he said, "just a one way." And when we began to talk about bringing people from every nation in the world, that's why we chose Amsterdam; there's a flight from every capital in the world to Amsterdam. It also has the largest conference center in all of Europe; the RAI. And it's also one of the easiest nations to get in and out of as far as, as far as the passport and the visa and such as that. So we planned it, we pulled this thing off but we found that around the world, in Africa, for instance, eighty percent of the African pastors had an email address and in America, thirty percent of African-American pastors had an email address. We could reach them so we decided, we had ten days of

training. It took us thirty-five million dollars. We decided to put together a program and put it on the web and send it free to pastors all over the world to train them. And so we go together here at Liberty. Jerry Falwell and I got on the phone and Bill Bright and James Davis got on the phone and we began calling pastors. We would have a round table, "Do you want to talk to Jerry today? Want to talk to Bill Bright? Want to talk to John Maxwell? Call in." And we asked every pastor to give us a hundred dollars or to put us in their missionary budget for a hundred dollars. So we raised, over a summer, about a million dollars for this big program and then we began to sign up every college president, every seminary president we could think of. Dallas and Fuller and Biola and Trinity; all of them came aboard, all the denominational. Then we went down and got all these people to give us a course that we would put on the computer, a web-course that would be put on a DVD to mail out. And we came up with a hundred and twenty-eight courses; a big program. It got to be very big and all of the sudden, we turned around and we found the place was way in debt. We had spent a lot of money we didn't know about so instead of going into bankruptcy, all of us who were on the board got together, paid off the debt, and it died...

**Walters:** (1:43:38) Ok.

**Towns:** (1:43:39) Ok, now, all of those tapes are properties of Campus Crusade for Christ. We used the platform Campus Crusade for Christ had to come up with fifty, sixty thousand dollars. John Maxwell came up with fifty thousand, I came up with fifteen thousand. We all paid off our...we just thought it was not the Christian thing, but it died. So it was a great endeavor, it didn't get to much...

**Walters:** (1:44:02) It didn't expense into anything.

**Towns:** (1:44:03) work. Not everything I have put my finger to has worked in this life.

**Walters:** (1:44:06) Yes. Well, that's understandable.

**Towns:** (1:44:07) Ok, you asked the question and it's a little embarrassing but that's the truth of it.

**Walters:** (1:44:12) Sure. Well, and with that we'll conclude today's interview with Dr. Elmer Towns. This interview has been conducted as part of the oral history project of the Liberty University archives.

*[end of interview]*