## **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: (1:59:09)

Notes:

**Walters**: (0:01) Welcome to this interview in the oral history project of the Liberty University archives. This interview is being conducted on August 10, 2010. Today is the fourth 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...

**Hall**: (0:19) Good after...

Walters: (0:20) Greetings, Dr. Hall.

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

**Walters**: (0:22) And greetings, Dr. Towns.

**Towns**: (0:24) Good to be here, and I think that Dr. Hall ought to tell us; what year did you come to Liberty?

Hall: (0:29) In 1977, first year on the campus here.

**Towns**: (0:32) So you've been here through a lot of, [*clears throat*] a lot of these things I've been talking about.

Hall: (0:35) Yes.

**Towns**: (0:36) And you um...you are in the department of mathematics?

**Hall**: (0:41) History.

**Towns**: (0:42) Department of history...

**Hall**: (0:43) Yeah.

**Towns**: Ok, next to the department of mathematics.

**Hall**: (0:44) [*laughter*]

**Towns**: (0:45) Ok. And Lowell, you are?

**Walters**: (0:48) I'm the associate dean of the library and computer labs; the ILRC, integrated learning and resources center.

**Towns**: (0:53) And I, I congratulate you for this project.

**Walters**: (0:57) Well thank you. Well, in, at the end of the third interview, we were wrapping things up and you asked us specifically to ask you about the Liberty Baptist Fellowship. So let's pick up there today.

**Towns**: (1:09) Technically, it's an organization that was originally called Liberty Baptist Fellowship for Church Planting. And what happened, in the year, about 19, 1981, we needed a class in church planting. We had gone for ten years motivating people to plant churches, to go out and start churches and they did it just like Jerry did it. Jerry started with buses, they started with buses. Jerry started knocking on doors, they started knocking on doors. And so, I began a class on church planting in 1981 and I tried to put together all the principles I had learned from Jerry and other Independent Baptists. Now, there's a book called Getting a Church Started in the Face of Insurmountable Odds With Limited Resources and Difficult Circumstances to the Glory of God. Now, it was a John D. Vincent Publishing Company out of Nashville that's got twenty-seven words in its title, and why so long? I was on my way to the, the Post Office to mail the book off and I stopped by a Christian bookstore and I noticed some of the cute, ditsy little titles. And I decided, "I'm not going to have a cute, ditsy title. I'm going to be like the old Puritans, who put the whole thesis in the title of the book so when you read the thesis you know what the books about." So I, I started writing and I ended up with twenty-seven words. Now, let me tell you where that book came from. In about the second week of Liberty, I was sitting on the platform and one of our church planters was here and he started preaching and about half way through, I realized he's telling the story of his church and I, I, I panicked. I grabbed a pencil and I started taking notes. Took him out to lunch and I interviewed him and I wrote a story on how he planted his church; it was fascinating. And then, throughout the rest of the year, men who had been influenced by Jerry Falwell and others, I would ask to come and conduct a chapel on, "Tell the story of how God used you to plant your church and how Jerry influenced you to plant a church." And so I

got ten chapters together, ten book, and remember my first book was The Ten Largest Sunday Schools, these were ten church planting book. But I didn't want to call it that so I called it by that long thesis. Well, I used that book as a textbook but I went in and took the stories out and left all the principles naked and I taught the course. And over the next one or two years, I began to modify the course as I talked to Jerry, listened to other people, listened to students. And the course was really modified over the next ten years. But about the end of that first year, I said to Jerry, "We need an organization for church planting." And so he gave me his blessing to go ahead and so we called it Liberty Baptist Fellowship for Church Planting Inc. Now, we tried to get it uh...a 501(c)(3) and the IRS turned us down because in those days there was growing criticism of Jerry Falwell and, and the SEC and other critics and so they said no; just flat out no. So, students of ours way back had started their own organization. They had gone to a lawyer here in town and they had organized themselves into um...oh, my mind slips me. I should have prepared it and had it here. They organized a, a 501(c)(3) and got it approved by the government. And that was a, a church planting organization by the students and they had a yearly conference. And this yearly conference had started in about late '70s and extended through the early '80s. And those people who started that organization left school and when they left school the organization floundered. Now what I mean is that Dan Henderson went to Seattle and Dave Early went to Columbus and some of the others who had started that organization left and the organization floundered without the pioneers, founders and so we took the organization. We had a lawyer modify its name and purpose and it is now the 501(c)(3) Church Planting. So I was the executive vice president in the early days. Jerry Falwell was the president. Dennis Fields was the executive secretary. Basically, Dennis Fields and I ran the organization without any money for ten years, meaning we took no money out of it. We took postage out of my department, his department. We, every time we had a, a meeting, everybody had to pay their own meals. So, in other words, every last penny went into church planting. We raised money. We went out and we asked people, "Would you give back to Liberty Baptist Fellowship?" Now, we didn't need to get our income tax receipt because we were receiving it from churches but a few individuals gave some money. And so over a period of years there were around, around a hundred churches that were planted through Liberty Baptist Fellowship from about 1981 to '91 and we planted churches and uh...great churches. Steve Reynolds...matter of fact, I went out to ninety-three different churches and we would organize a church. Organizing a church is an old Baptist experience. They would bring people together and say, "You can't baptize, you can't do anything, you can't serve the communion until you become a recognized church." And you had to be recognized by another church to become a church. It's an old landmark thing. But here, Liberty Baptist Fellowship became the church recognizing agencies to organize these and I went out and, as I said, I organized ninety-three of these churches. Dave Early would be one, Steve Reynolds would be one, David Rhodenhizer. So we

organized these churches and we began paying uh...we would pay, in the early days, six hundred dollars a month based on their ability to raise six hundred dollars a month. If they could raise six hundred, we would give them six hundred. Then it got to be eight hundred and eight hundred and I think now, at the present time, it's up to about twentyfive hundred dollars a month. Why, because, part of that is we had a very successful run because if a young man couldn't raise money, he couldn't get our money but by forcing him to raise money, he became a fundraiser; he demonstrated success. Matt [Chittem] is an example of that. Matt [Chittem] was my grad assistant, my grader. And he would travel with me in meetings and everywhere we go, he would, I would call on him to pray and I said, "Tell us, tell us about your burden." And he would stand up and talk about his burden of going back home to Columbus, Ohio and planting a church. When he would do that, uh...then I would say, "Some of you pastors out there, talk to Matt and have him in to come and give a testimony at your church or take him on for financial support." And therefore, he raised his money. Now, I do remember that Dan Henderson went to Seattle. He had raised a tremendous amount of money. He had cars given to him, computers given to him, all types of equipment given to him. Lot, in the early days we needed songbooks, songbooks given to those, like, a church would go through and buy new ones, they would take one or two hundred old ones and give them to these new churches. And so this was our way of cooperating. So Liberty Baptist Fellowship, only in the early days, only chartered Baptist churches. Then we opened it up to non-Baptist churches like Faith and like Practice. And so we opened it up both for supporting churches and churches we would plant. And so the churches had to endorse the, the doctoral statement of Liberty to go out and be planted. And how many have been planted? I hear figures but I want to suggest Liberty graduates have planted at least, on a very conservative, a thousand churches. Maybe, if you want to stretch it, maybe two thousand. But I think that there's almost no way to document that figure. That would have to be an estimate based on an educated guess.

**Walters**: (9:30) So these were planted wherever the willing person was willing to go or there, or was there a particular demographic study for each...

**Towns**: (9:40) Well, in this class I would teach, I would come up, I think I had about thirteen points; how to find a city. And we would go through how God lays a city upon your heart and we would answer all of these questions about going to...it was a very practical church planting class. And each person had to be called of God and demonstrated a call of God to go and plant a church.

**Hall**: (10:01) Well is uh...the organization still in existence now?

**Towns**: (10:04) Yes it is. Now, as...

**Hall**: (10:06) Active or...?

**Towns**: (10:07) of this month, it just changed its name.

**Hall**: (10:10) Oh.

**Towns**: (10:11) So don't ask me what it is, so I don't know.

Walters: (10:12) [laughter]

**Towns**: (10:13) But that could be documented by some other source.

**Walters**: (10:15) Sure.

**Hall**: (10:16) But it's still an active organization?

**Towns**: (10:17) Yes, very active, very active. Matter of fact, about six, six or seven years ago, we got all the churches that supported Liberty, LBF as it was called, could have a student go through and take an online subject, tuition free. And it used to be you had to give a fifty dollars, then it was a hundred dollars, now, it's two hundred dollars. And it used to be two or three, now it's only one staff member because many of these staff member come back and get a doctor of ministries and that's, that's an expensive degree. But by giving to LBF, they give to LBF but they get free from the University. So the University has asked us to work together with them, with LBF, and there's a much closer tie today. The LBF office is at the, in the University facilities. The LBF office, they've accumulated a lot of money because a lot of churches want their staff members to go free. And so financially, they have more money to give than people to go plant churches and so it's a very strong organization today and Lee Ditman is the, I think he now calls himself the president of that organization. The first was me, as executive vice president, and then I turned if over to um...the next person, the president after Jerry in 1992 took over was Lamar Mooneyhan and um...and he had a man under him. What happened, many of the pastors said, "We want to take it away from Liberty. We don't want it controlled by Liberty. We want to control it as the churches." When we gave it to the churches, it's kind of like giving a car to a nine-year-old son; he wants to drive but he shouldn't have it. And so the churches kept it for a couple of years and squandered whatever money was there that didn't come. When we brought it back to Liberty, it got healthy again. So, it's now a very healthy organization. And Liberty is perhaps known for church planting more than any other college. Now, there might be a couple of small fundamental schools that might have a heavy church planting plank in their platform but I don't know of anyone else who has a stronger emphasis and visibility, maybe because the writings I've done on church planting have brought visibility to what we've done. The, the numbers, the men...I used to keep a, a notebook, I would pull out my day timer, and I'd say, "Let me tell you how good Liberty is." And people say, "Eh." I'd say, "I'm going to read a list to you." And I would say, "There's seven men who planted a church,

they're Liberty graduates, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary graduates, they're college graduates and they're running a thousand." And I would read, you know, David Rhodenhizer and I would read Al Hindson and these different names. And then it got up to be ten and then it got up to be fourteen and somewhere along the line I quit doing that. I just, you know, it's like in the book of Acts; the early church talked about its numbers. There were three thousand and the five thousand and they, they numbered...and after a while, numbers are not important. Like measuring your children; when they're small, you measure the children in poundage and height but after a while, that's not important.

**Walters**: (13:35) Sure.

**Towns**: (13:36) Same thing with, with Liberty today.

**Hall**: (13:38) Now, the money that you, that was given to the pastors, did that, was that coming through the church?

**Towns**: (13:43) That came, that came through LBF, LBF had its own bank account.

**Hall**: (13:49) Ok.

**Towns**: (13:50) And it took money from all the churches and, and then from that, they would make a monthly stipend to the pastor but he didn't get paid unless he had to give a report of how many, how much, and what was happening and how member, members are attending and how many people are getting baptized and that was our way of, of ensuring the, the proof of it. Now, over the years, when we had church planting conferences, because of the credibility of our guys planting churches, lots of people came here and set up booths and recruited our guys to go to plant Evangelical Free churches, Conservative Baptist churches, North American Conference Baptist, North American Baptist Association, Freewill Baptist. They've all come here because they've seen the strength of our men, that they put money in our men and our men do plant a church something as a result of it.

**Hall**: (14:47) Ok, let's shift gears a little bit. What is your relationship to Thomas Road Baptist Church? Are you considered an associate pastor or...?

**Towns**: (14:55) Yes. Over the years, when I first came, I was called an assistant or associate pastor to Jerry Falwell. When I first came, I was called the Sunday school superintendant and for two years, from '71 to '73, I was the Sunday school superintendant and I ran the weekly Sunday school teachers meeting. Now, in that meeting, I taught the Sunday school lesson to all the teachers and they in turn taught it on Sunday. The Sunday school teachers meeting went from six thirty to seven thirty on Wednesday nights. And the first thirty minutes Jerry Falwell would come in and promote

what was going to happen. That was big, promotion; that's casting the vision. And then I would come in and teach the lesson and give a lesson outline to everyone. And then the next five or ten minutes, departmental superintendants would share with the teachers how to apply it. Now, those teachers would come late to prayer meeting because prayer meeting was at seven o'clock. And then from that, I became an assistant pastor. I told you I was gone for three years, I came back and I did not come back into the Sunday school position. We had hired someone, Eldridge Dunn, a deacon was hired to do that fulltime. And so I came back and, and when I first came back, I didn't have an elected position. And then after a couple of years, I was made dean of the seminary and in an attempt to give visibility to it, Jerry told me, "From now on, sit on the platform." And I sat on the platform for about, let's see, 1981 to about 2001. For about twenty years I sat on the...and that's very confining, you have to be there because people count who's there and its very confining and it, you think it's prestige, well, prestige can only last so long, you know, and, and you do it because you're up there and what that does, what that visibility um...I did a lot of hospital visitation when I had more time. Hospital visitation when I took over the Sunday school class. I took over Dr. Falwell's pastors Bible class, it's only had four teachers in its existence. And the first Dr. Falwell taught the pastors Bible class. Now, he did that until about 1974. Now, what happens is, in Baptist Bible Fellowship churches, the pastor has the ministry of teaching and preaching according to Ephesians 4. So you preach at eleven o'clock, you teach at ten o'clock. So all BBF churches, the pastor was the only adult teacher. So Dr. Falwell turned that over to Ed Hindson in 1974 and he kept it until about 1982. And in '82 he turned it over to Ed Dobson and Hindson left. Now, for four years Dobson was the pastors Bible teacher and in 19 uh...1986, I took over the job. Now, it's interesting, there's something about Jerry Falwell; you should never tell him you're interested in another job. Two or three people, I won't name their names, disappeared around here because if you come back and tell Jerry you're interested in another job, boy, that's like a man telling his wife, you know, "I'm interested in another woman." You know, you're not going to have any peace around the house. It's going to be terrible. So, Dobson came, he went to a church in Baltimore, big church of about two thousand and came back and said, "Oh, they're begging me to be their pastor. Please pray for me." And that got to Jerry. Didn't say anything. Then a big church right across the George Washington Bridge in New Jersey, across from downtown New York. It also had North Central Bible College or Northeastern Bible College in this big church; church of two thousand. And Dobson said, "Boy, they're begging me to be the pastor of the church and president of the Bible College. You pray about it." And then he turned it down. Then he went up here to Grand Rapids where he ended up going and he came back and said, "Oh, that's Dr. Duhant's old church and they're begging me to come. I want you all to pray about it." Falwell goes right to the pulpit, he says, "Next Sunday Dr. Towns is going to be the teacher. Ed Dobson is going to Calvary Bible Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan." And

afterwards Dobson said, "I didn't have that church. I didn't, I didn't mean it that way." And I said, "Mm hmm, you'll learn." [laughter]

**Hall**: (19:23) [*laughter*]

**Towns**: (19:24) Well anyway, that's the way it happened and so simply because of that, I took the class over and I've taught it ever since. It's been one of the greatest blessings because I've learned, I've, I've stretched, I've written many of my best books I taught in class. I taught the, the names of the Holy Spirit. I taught...well, let me go back. I taught the names of Jesus and it became a really good Bible study book for Sunday schools. Then I taught my Father's names, a good Bible study book. These were, these were Regal Books. And then I said, "You know, I'm a Trinitarian. I'm going to write a book on the names of the Holy Spirit." I began to do research, there was no Google in those days, and no one had ever written anything on the names of the Holy Spirit; I found a few little things in some Pentecostals. So from scratch I began and I taught a series for thirteen weeks and I published it and it won the Gold Medallion for the Evangelical Publishers Association and the Christian Booksellers. The Gold Medallion for the book of the year and that was either 1995 or '96, I forget which one. The Gold Medallion, now, I've won four or five Silver Medallions, that means second place, but the Gold Medallion was the one. And it was, it was one of the, it was really a good book. It was very, it was very complete and comprehensive and a lot of Pentecostals used it because they are really exited about the names of the Holy Spirit. So, that came out of my Sunday school class.

**Hall**: (20:53) Now, the Sunday school class serves a larger purpose too because you're on television. Did you have a lot of people corresponding with you from outside...

**Towns**: (21:02) The funny thing about, the second or third week, Jerry said, "Next week you're going to be on television." He said, "They need to get the lines warmed up and to get established and therefore, you might not always be on there in whole but they're going to put part of you on." And I said, "Whatever is fine." And so from the very beginning, it was on television. And I've never seen myself as a television preacher. I'm a, a, I don't see myself as, like, a television ministry. I haven't tried to get any mailing, any money, or anything from it. It's just a way of teaching the Word. Now, out of that class, over the years when I first started teaching it, if you remember, everyone back in 1986 was required to be a member of Thomas Road Baptist Church if you taught here. So, everyone came to that class and so I started with a class of, really, about two thousand. And then one of the IRS directors came down; "You cannot make them come to church, you cannot make them tithe, and you cannot make all members do that because that's a conflict of interest." And therefore, they could go wherever they wanted to so they slowly started going out and attendance in the class went down. But I can remember

the early days, you could look out and tell the maintenance guys and the lawn guys because they would come to church without a tie on and everybody else...

Walters: (22:25) [laughter]

**Towns**: (22:26) you know, had a tie on and those were early days. And, and so that class has continued to this day.

**Hall**: (22:32) Now, a lot of students, of course, attend the class.

**Towns**: (22:35) A lot of students have attended it over the years and over the years I've made my notes available and I probably, out of that class, I probably have published oh...let me think. I would say...fifteen books. You know, you, you do all that study and you don't want it to waste so I sit down and I write it up and I send it to a publisher and every once in a while I will have autograph copies at the end out in the lobby so, you'll sell two or three boxes that way.

**Hall**: (23:06) Is there ever a time that the students got credit or academic credit for attending this class?

**Towns**: (23:11) No, they, they never got academic credit for attending that class, no. What I would do, I would get, I would make it a reading report if you came...

**Hall**: (23:18) Ok.

**Towns**: (23:19) it could be a reading report. Now, there was a time when they got academic, academic credit for prayer meeting. Back in the '80s when we were just bursting the seams and we could not get all the students in a prayer meeting in the old church building and I came up with the idea, "Let's use modular classes, three hour classes, six to nine." Prayer meeting was from seven to eight, eight thirty, sometimes nine. So, we offered, I taught for years theology 201 and 202 during prayer meeting and the largest room we had over at the old auditorium. Now, Jerry didn't want us to come back to the school and offer it because that's too academic but we could offer it in church rooms. And so for years Dr. Wilmington taught Bible, I taught theology, several of us taught many of what are called the core courses; that's the New Testament, the survey, the two theology courses. David Beck would teach Philosophy 201 and there would be a three hour course and it would be a modular course and so we would teach those. And then along about that time, two or three other things happened in the mid '80s. I had taught way back in the '60s, when I was at Trinity Evangelical Divinity school, at a school that used to be called the [Bedowulf] School of Theology. [Bedowulf] was a very famous Presbyterian evangelist in his day. We're talking 1890's up to about 1940. [Bedowulf] was an old fashioned Presbyterian evangelist. Now, not well-known because

he didn't write a lot of books but he was very brilliant. And he had this school, he had Ph.D. from some school in Germany, and he brought two or three people in and he started his own school and he would offer modular education, unusual, and you could get a Masters of Arts, a Master of Divinity and he started a seminary program. And so it was very famous and it was later called the Winona Lake Summer School of Theology, after he died. And later that was, it was transferred to the University of Chicago. We used the divinity school but it was, had nothing to do with the Univ...we, other than we rented that facility, and it was sold off; the facilities the library, everything was sold off to Grace College and Seminary. But back there, I would teach these classes. And I said, "Wow, we can do that here at Liberty." So we started teaching one week modular. You would start at eight in the morning and you go to five in the afternoon with an hour break. And then we figured you get all these ten minute breaks between classes so we could, we could do what is called contact hours. And probably the first one was probably a class that I taught, I don't, I don't know which one it was, and it, everybody, it just caught fire. "Boy, you can come if you, if you flunked a course, you miss a course, you didn't get all your courses. Come and make up a course." One week before school starts, one week after school starts. And of course we made it very famous and it's been a, a great contribution to education today. So it, I like to think that Liberty was on the cutting edge at that too.

**Hall**: (26:39) What is Acorn Publications?

**Towns**: (26:41) Acorn Publication, I had nothing to do with that. Acorn Publication began about the time I left to go for those three years. And we had all these classes that we were teaching. Janie DeSaegher had something to do with that and um...let me see, there was another woman, I'll think of her name in a minute. They decided to start publishing the Sunday school lessons that they taught to our children; the nursery class, the beginner class, the primaries, and the juniors. And therefore, they just took those and it was based on the King James text. At the time, most of the reliable publishers ventured away from the King James. You've got David C. Cook, you've got Gospel Light, you got Scripture Press; they started using New King James or NIV or whatever. And therefore there was a, a very, a niche and in this niche market, a lot of people wanted just the King James and what Thomas Road taught. And so, that got to be very big and it grew very big until, I think, 1995 in our really financially hurting days. There were two people who had worked for us and instead of giving them severance pay or back pay or whatever we owed them, we gave them Acorn and...now, one was the vice president and I cannot remember his name, the other was Judy Furlono, who was head of human relations department and they took it off and um...I, I just haven't heard of anything since it, I don't even know if it's still in operation today.

Hall: (28:23) Ok. So, but it did publish a lot of the Sunday school lessons and...

**Towns**: (28:28) It got, it started...

**Hall**: (28:29) sold...

**Towns**: (28:30) I would say it started in about '73 and it reached its heyday in about early '80s and then, and then it didn't continue to improve. People had it because this is the fundamentals of the faith and they got it because it was Fundamentalism. But after a while, the, the artwork was second-class, everything was kind of second-class, kind of like homemade, and so people wanted first-class literature, first-class and uh... therefore, it went aside.

**Walters**: (29:08) You've been involved with Sunday school quite a, quite awhile. Tell us about the evolution of Sunday school ministry at Thomas Road and in general in Christianity in the United States. What have you seen over the decades for both children and adults?

**Towns**: (29:25) Are you aware of the fact there's a, there's an encyclopedia called *Towns Sunday School Encyclopedia?* 

Walters: (29:31) I think I have seen that.

**Towns**: (29:33) Oh, ok. If I re, if I ever do it again, it'll be called Towns Sunday School Wikipedia [*laughter*].

**Walters**: (29:38) [*laughter*]

**Hall**: [laughter]

**Towns**: (29:40) Basically, I've told you the story of how I was reached for Christ through Sunday school, didn't miss for fourteen years.

Walters: (29:46) That's right.

**Towns**: (29:48) And when I first came out of seminary, I was young and for about three or four years, oh....let's stretch it to about six years, I was known for youth ministry; that was the most popular course I taught and my first book was called *Teaching Teens*. And then I did the book on the ten largest Sunday schools and I discovered Jerry Falwell was number nine of those ten. And Falwell had a strong Sunday school and, very strong Sunday school, strong Bible teaching Sunday school. He had all these ladies come and they basically had literature from other churches they brought in; they came out of the old Park Avenue Baptist Church. And then Jerry took a trip to Tennessee Temple Schools, today it's called Tennessee Temple University, and there he said he got the vision of a Sunday school. Help me out, who was his supporter? James um...

Hall: (30:49) James Robertson?

**Towns**: (30:50) No...

**Hall**: (30:51) No, not uh...

**Towns**: (30:52) the guy who came here and played the trumpet, worked with Jerry for a while. He hired him away from Tennessee Temple to become his Sunday school director and because of Lee Robertson, he came back and instituted a bus ministry. And whereas he originally began building the church with door knocking, then he went into big bus ministry. Jim Vineyard was the bus minister from about 1968, '69 to '71; probably the most effective bus minister we ever had. And he's the one who double Jerry's Sunday school attendance. Matter of fact, in the early days in prayer meeting, I remember a man who would come in, his name was John, and every day he would pray, "Lord, I thank you for the day that this old drunk was sitting on the front porch and Jim Vineyard came by and led me to Christ. Lord, I thank you for the day that I poured it out; I've never had a drop since. Lord, I've been a soul winner for Jim Vineyard. Wherever Jim is today, whatever he's doing, God, bless him and use him." And probably more people were converted under Jim Vineyard than any other associate pastor Jerry ever employed. There was an anointing upon him...now, he had a terrible temper. Oh, he got a terrible temper and he was just un-Godly and un-Christian the way he would treat some people but if people didn't do right, he would just fuss at them and dress them down; he would be perfect Army sergeant at boot camp. You know, and matter of fact, he left here, went to work for Jack Hiles, and helped build Jack Hiles' big ministry and then he went and started his own ministry south of Oklahoma City and he gets, he had a small Bible college, about a hundred or less, and he gets them all up at five in the morning and they do calisthenics, and so it's more of a training camp than a Bible college.

**Walters**: (32:48) Are you still in touch with him?

**Towns**: (32:49) What's that?

**Walters**: (32:50) Are you still in touch with him then?

**Towns**: (32:52) I haven't been in touch with him for about twenty years.

**Walters**: (32:54) Ok.

**Towns**: (32:55) I, but I still hear about him...

**Walters**: (32:57) Ok.

**Towns**: (32:58) so I'm repeating second-rate information on that. Now, Sunday school, when I came, we taught the Sunday school and therefore, Jerry went from Sunday busing and he...well, by the way, Sunday, even after Jim left in '71, busing was strong up until the mid-'80s here. We had some other bus pastors, some good people, all very good, and the bus ministry, there was a brother and sister Mack who would, on Diamond Hill. Now, Diamond Hill is a black community in downtown Lynchburg. It's not quite innercity but it's a black community, an old community, and brother Mack and sister Mack had a reputation for not having less than one hundred riders on their bus every Sunday morning for ten years. And they would go out on the Saturday, knock on doors and brother Mack had his pockets full of penny candy and give away to every kid. They'd see him coming, he'd run up, and he would, like a pied piper, walking the streets and giving away candy. Today, they would probably investigate him for being some type of a, a child pervert or whatever. He just loved kids. He, and I'm not suggesting anything. He had an impeccable reputation. But brother Mack was, was reflective of the people at Liberty. There were people who never heard Jerry preach. They loved Jerry Falwell, saved under Jerry Falwell, they'd come to church, crank up an old bus, go out, pick up kids, bring them in, put them on the bus, take them home everyday, and they would do that for year in and year out. Big uh...one of the strengths of the present-day Thomas Road is that children all over Lynchburg were brought to the church on bus ministries and children all over central Virginia and West Virginia came to Treasure Island. Jerry would give away a week of camp free, down on Treasure Island. Treasure Island had belonged to the um...it's, I think, the Boy Scouts or the YMCA...

Hall: (35:05) The YMCA.

**Towns**: (35:06) the Y.

**Hall**: (35:07) The YMCA.

**Towns**: (35:08) The YMCA. And this cannot be verified, but it is said the YMCA got rid of it because they had to integrate it and they didn't want to integrate it and they sold it to Jerry who later integrated it. And they sold it to him for a very low price and therefore, he used it for the glory of God. Kids came to that, that camp and when they were, you know, nine, ten, eleven and thirty and forty years later they came to Thomas Road Baptist Church and got saved and so that's been uh...you plant the seed and it may take thirty or forty years to give the harvest, and so there are a lot of people who had very good feelings about Thomas Road because of that. Now, the church at Thomas Road, the, the Sunday school always grew but all of the sudden Jerry preached a sermon in about 1980 or '81, it was a, it was from 1 Corinthians 1; the offense of the cross. And the year before he had been on the cover of *Newsweek*. He had been voted *Good Housekeeping* Man of the Year. Everybody loved Jerry; didn't have an enemy in the

world. But when he preached the offense of the cross he said, "You won't believe me, what I'm going to say, but you're going to see the city of Lynchburg, half of it's going to turn against us because of my stand on abortion." He said, "You see this Good Housekeeping?" He said, "I, I may be revered, but," he said, "media will curse me." He said, "You have to understand, these men and women have little girls who are going to get pregnant and they're going to cover it up." And he said, "They're going to kill their little babies." And he said, "People will not give up their sexual freedom, their sexual addiction, their sexual," um...things he called them. He said, "They'll not give them up and in turn anybody who threatens that will be attacked and vilified and that's going to happen to us." He said, "There are people sitting here tonight," he said, "you will leave this church and turn against us because of our stand." But he said, "God has given me a mandate and I must make this stand." And that was, to me, one of the key point turnings, from then on, attendance began to...I could see a plateauing and I could see people begin to leave the church. Now, some people went to other fundamental churches that didn't take Jerry's stand. Some went to churches that would support their position, those might be denominational churches. Some went to other fundamental churches who would take the same fundamental stand as Jerry but not on abortion; they didn't say anything and therefore, they could be comfortable with it. That, to me, was a significant...Moral Majority hurt the attendance at Thomas Road Baptist Church. And did it hurt the attendance at Liberty? Probably not because students who agreed came. But it, you would agree with me brother Cline...

Hall: (38:11) Yes.

**Towns**: (38:12) it did hurt the attendance at the church, it started going down, slowly, until Jerry finally, I, I can't give you the date when he said, "I'm closing down Moral Majority. I'm coming home to build the University." Because he realized his stand on Moral Majority had hurt the University. And he said, "The one place where we can make the greatest contribution to the Great Commission is through Liberty University."

**Walters**: (38:34) I'm pretty certain he announced that when I was a student here in the late '80s, from '87 to...

**Towns**: (38:38) What, about closing Moral Majority?

**Walters**: (38:40) Yeah.

**Towns**: (38:41) Ok.

**Walters**: (38:42) And then *Fundamentalist Journal* stopped being published in those days too, I believe, but um...

**Towns**: (38:47) It, it had everything to do with money.

**Walters**: (38:49) Sure.

**Towns**: (38:50) You remember, I was, I was the editor of it. It went in evolution of about three different names. Oh, the, the *Journal Champion Newspaper*, I think it was, and it was something else. Then we, Jerry published the book *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* and that was about a 1984, '85 book, in the strength of Fundamentalism, and he tried to determine how strength...that was an Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson, he wrote that for him. I think it was Zondervan and it got pretty good press and therefore, based off that, they called it the *Fundamentalist Journal* and the *Fundamentalist Journal* was used to stand for the things and then later it became the *Liberty Champion*, maybe. And I think it's called the *Champion* today and uh...

Walters: (39:39) *Liberty Champion* is the school newspaper.

**Towns**: (39:41) Ok, probably about seven or eight years, the *Liberty Champion*, when it was called *Fundamentalist Journal*, was paid for by Dr. John Rawlings' son. John Rawlings was a friend of Jerry Falwell. He was the pastor of Landmarks Baptist Temple and he stood with Jerry on these moral issues; he was a fighter. Street fighter is a term we called of him; Jerry Falwell was a street fighter. And John Rawlings had three or four sons but one of the sons became, had a very large law firm, firm in Houston, is my understanding, and that son set up a foundation and the, the father could spend anything he wanted on the foundation and they built many camps, Baptist camps, around the world but they kept, they paid each month for the *Fundamentalist Journal*. And so that, no matter how much it would cost to put out, he paid for it, it came in. And so we kept that running, to stand for the issues of the day.

**Walters**: (40:42) Sure.

**Hall**: (40:43) How does a Sunday school differ now from, say, twenty years ago? Is it as effective as a tool?

**Towns**: (40:51) I'm still a believer in Sunday school and to say Sunday school is going down hurts and I don't want to say that because I might contribute to the demise just by saying that but it's an honest fact. Sunday school has lost its impact. When we talk about the demise, I saw some statistics and we talk about 1973 is the tip point year. Tip point is a term used by sociologists to describe when a neighborhood is no longer white, it's called black. And it's not a statistical average, it has to do with many contributors to cause something. And Sunday school was always the dominant force in the church. Sunday school attendance was higher than church attendance, Sunday school offering was higher than church offering, Sunday school was just, it was, it was the source of

energy for a church. And then it lost that energy. And there are many reasons why it lost that energy, society, societal reasons happened, but about that time, other things were happening in the church. The evangelistic meeting was losing its impact. VBS had been a strong evangelistic outreach, was losing its influence. The Sunday evening worship service, because of television and many other reasons, was losing its, its influence. At one time, the Sunday evening service was the biggest thing of the week, sometimes bigger than Sunday morning. But it began to lose television and therefore, uh...why, why did, why did evangelistic... I have always said, the working mother hurt the church, probably, because when mother stayed home all day, she got, what I call, cabin fever. When husband came home, it didn't make a difference whether he was tired or not, "Let's go to church. Let's go to revival meetings. Let's go to," you know, and therefore, they went to prayer meeting, everyplace. But when she got home, she was tired because she had another day of work to do and therefore, that meant...so society...in other words, culture impacts the church. You can't impact...in one sense church influences culture, culture influences the church. In here, the strong American hedonistic self-pleasure society, the boomer, all that we got influenced the church in negative ways. And so today, churches are going to multiple services to get more people into praise worship. I use the phrase, there's been a role reversal; all that the morning service was has become the Sunday school and all that the Sunday school was has become the, Sunday uh...the Sunday school has become the worship service. And what I mean by that, at one time Sunday school was known for its energy, its paper chains, its excitement, its clapping, its singing, its, its cheering, all of that. And that's all we do in worship today; we cheer we clap we praise God, we sing songs, we stomp, you know, every...and what has happened? In the old days, church was what? It was the sincere people, the dedicated people, the people who meant business for God. They would come to church, you know, what happened today? Sunday school is the people who mean business for God and the crowd doesn't go to Sunday school today, it goes to church. And so, Sunday school is hurting today but church as a broad, broad term is hurting today. If America keeps its present course, the American church, because it's given up on Sunday school, will be as weak as the English church that gave up on Sunday school. Now, you go back two hundred years, Sunday school was born in England and Sunday school, perhaps, was the one organization to keep England from going through the French Revolution because it was a revolution from the, the grass roots up. People began to read and write and the great Sunday school was the three R's; reading, writing, religion. You know, reading, writing, arithmetic, and number four; religion. And as a result, England had an educational revolution instead of a French Revolution and out of that came a great movement from England; John Wesley into the states where Sunday school became, really, the supplier of our moral fortitude in America.

**Hall**: (45:26) So now we're talking about Sunday school, what are, can you tell us about the Sunday school museum [laughter]?

**Towns**: (45:31) Oh...yes...

**Walters**: (45:35) We keep bringing that up.

**Towns**: (45:37) Ok, what's that?

Walters: (45:38) We keep bringing that up.

**Towns**: (45:39) Ok. Now, I want to tell a story.

**Hall**: (45:42) [*laughter*]

**Towns**: (45:45) My son went off to college and the first night, God got a hold of his heart. He went forward to the alter and surrendered to preach...this is Sam Towns, who died in '0, 1902, and Sam went to the alter, surrendered to preach. I could tell, I, if ever a young man was called to preach, it was my son Sam. So we, afterwards, we went out to a place, uh...a restaurant. Oh...what's the kind of a restaurant with a big old, Big Boy's.

Walters: (46:14) Buffet?

**Towns**: (46:15) No, Big Boy's.

Walters: (46:16) Oh, a Big Boy.

**Towns**: (46:17) Big box...

**Walters**: (46:18) Yeah.

**Towns**: (46:19) you know, a big...ok, we went out to this place...

**Walters**: (46:20) Sure.

**Towns**: (46:21) and we're talking about and I says, "Tell me what's on your heart." He said, "Now dad, I know you're a preacher and I'm just going to be a preacher. Tell me what's on your heart." And I told him, "I, there were about four things I want to do and I don't have them now, they'd be in my prayer Bible. One thing was I want to build a Sunday..." "A Sunday school museum? That's interesting." So, we prayed, he prayed and, "Give dad a Sunday school museum." That was on, like, a Thursday night. Now, Saturday I'm speaking at a Sunday school convention in Philadelphia. I'm, oh...what's the name of that auditorium? It's up near University of Pennsylvania, overlooking the city, you know, and I'm preaching in this convention and there's another man in that convention with me. And we get to talking about Sunday school and I said to him, "Now, after this meeting is over, I'm going to go up on the hill. I know there's only one book left in existence of Robert Raikes' first Sunday school book. It's called

Readmadeasy," all one word; r, e, a, d, m, a, d, e, a, s, y, made easy. And he said, "What do you know about that?" I said, "I went there one time and I saw it. I want to go back and take some pictures of it." He said, "Why?" I told him I was interested in Sunday school. And I said...oh, by the way, *Readmadeasy* is a book that's the size of a Sunday paper of the New York Times pulled fully out, size. And it is hundred and eighty pages and every page is typed in headline size. You hold it up in front of a class. It's like a book that's a, a flannel-graph. And so you would read this book; everybody in the class would read it out loud together. So, I was talking to this man, I wish I could remember his name, and he said, "You know," he said, "I've got, I got a bunch of...I used to work for the American Sunday School Union where all the stuff was held; downtown Chestnut Street in downtown old Philadelphia." He said, "I came to work one day and they were getting rid of Sunday school." And he said, "They put all this stuff in a trash can," and he said, "I, I said, 'You can't do that." And he said, "I went back out, got my car, and loaded it up with all this museum stuff right out of the trashcan." And he said, "I picked up, I picked up this frame and on the frame there was a, a ring," oh...what was the name of the girl? There's a very famous ring, it's in two or three history books, and it was not there. "And I said, 'Oh my, they even lost the ring.' And I just turned my head and looked across the sidewalk and there it had rolled up against the building. And we go and picked it up and put it back in." So uh...he said, "I put the ring in there." And it was a special ring about a girl who attended Sunday school that has a big story but he said, "I've got all this stuff," and the man said, "I'm very old." He, I said, "I'm going to build a Sunday school..." he said, "I'll give it to you." I said, "You'll give it to me?" "Yeah," he said, "I'll give it to you if you'll use it for God." I said, "I'll use it for God." And so he, I, I got all this stuff, you know, and I, I took it to Savannah and I got a Sunday school museum. And I had this Sunday school museum and I, I got, I bought cases and I had pictures framed and I put together a Sunday school hall of fame, history of the great Sunday school influences since the beginning and um...I, I wrote the *Ten Largest Sunday* School "Pastors," and I said, "can I have your Bible?" and had a, a museum of their Bibles out there. Jack Hiles' Bible, Beauchamp Vick, Jerry Falwell's Bible, you know, I had all kinds of historicals of...I have a copy of the very first Sunday school book ever printed. The first crest that they made and some plates. And so I had all of this stuff and I opened a Sunday school museum in Savannah, Georgia and in this Sunday school museum, I figure if I can get a hundred people to come through, and I'm only going to charge them a dollar a day, a hundred dollars a day, that's five hundred dollars a week, I can pay salary, I can pay everything, you know, insurance and everything. I couldn't get a hundred people a week to go through it. And it was a nice building right across from The Pirate's House, first building in Sayannah historical. By the way, the City Council of Savannah advertises itself as the birthplace of Sunday school. It's not true. I wrote an article, it was published in the Oxford Journal, to say that the first Sunday school was started in, in England and that was Robert Raikes, the Sunday school enthusiast, who was

the editor of a newspaper, started this Sunday school; that's why, that's why it was a newspaper. So, I went through, examined in this article all the prior claims and determined what...and then I said, "Even in America, Raikes would not have been, I mean, John Wesley would not have been the first Sunday school there." But anyway, I had this museum and so I...then it, something happened. I said, "You know, I can't make money, I'm losing money." I'm just losing, you know, couple thousand dollars a month. And this went on year after year.

**Walters**: (51:53) In what years was this then? Can you...?

**Towns**: (51:56) '73, '74, '75, '76.

Walters: (52:02) So this was in part during that time that you had left Liberty.

Towns: (52:04) That's exactly...part of it I had this...and so, but I had a great big room. What had happened, I got a bank to, to almost let me use the bank for free. Now, let me tell another story. I'm just moved into Savannah and I'm going to get my Sunday school museum set and there was a little church building, little old building, let me tell you, it's about as, it's about twenty feet by twenty feet; just a little old church building. And it had fallen into dis...so I paid a lawyer a thousand dollars to find the title deeds and clear the title and to take title deed of this thing. Well I had this little old church building and I had a Sunday school museum in it and I had an office. When I was in Savannah, I had an office in this little church building and I'd go to the office and study. And so, one night I come home and it's about eight o'clock at night and I had been out, it was a Saturday night. It was raining and I left the car running and the windshield wipers running and I ran back in and I threw open the door and there was a boy who had broken in the building, was going through my desk. I said, "What in the world are you doing? Sit down, son!"

**Walters**: (53:21) [laughter]

**Towns**: (53:22) He sat down and I'm, my first reaction is, "I'm as scared as you are." I walked over, I said, "I'm a preacher. And you're going to steal from me, a preacher?" And, you know, so I'm talking to him and he said, "I'm sorry." You know, "Do you go to Sunday school?" "No." You know, "This is a Sunday school museum. What were you looking for?" And he said, "Any type of money, you know." This kid was about seventeen years old. So, about that time, my wife runs across the street, when she hears me, tells the lady, calls the police, and comes back in. When the police shows up, she comes in with the police and the lady from next-door and they're standing there and they watch me lead this boy to Christ. So we kneel down and pray and he receives Christ. Well, he was the son of a girl who went to high school with me. So anyway, long story short, I said, alright, the police are getting ready to arrest him, I said, "No sir. I won't

sign your papers." And so the police said, "Alright, you got a year to sign this piece of paper." I said, "Son, if you will go to Sunday school for the next year, I will not sign a warrant for your arrest." And so I said, "I will attend Sunday school a year," and I made him sign it and so in the middle of the night, grandparents call me, "Oh, Dr. Towns, you're so wonderful," you know. And again in the middle of the night, another phone call from upstate New York, upstate Georgia, "Oh, Dr. Towns, you're so wonderful to not put my son in jail." I said, "You make sure he goes to Sunday school. Make sure he goes to Sunday school." So, about a week later, I hear from this bank president. He said, "If you've got a chance, I want you to come down and talk to me." Because I had just opened an account in the bank; Atlantic Bank and Trust Company. So I go down, he says, "My secretary watched you lead that boy to Christ." And come to find out, he was a dedicated Presbyterian, remember my background was Presbyterian. He said, "Yeah, I, I had heard about you," he said, "you know," and I told him my Sunday school museum. He said, "I've got a building downtown. I can't sell it because of banking laws." And he says, "I will rent you that building for five hundred dollars a month." I said, "I can't pay five hundred." He said, "Wait a minute, we got a drive-in bank down there and I will pay you four hundred and fifty dollars for the drive-in bank per month and you can have the building for five hundred and move your museum there." I said, "Ok." So, that's where the museum was for almost three years; in this bank building. And the boy, I even told the boy, I said, "If you, if you go to college, I'll pay you, I'll pay your tuition to go to college." He never did, although, I understand, he turned out pretty good in life. He didn't turn out a thief, you know, and he didn't keep his perfect record of Sunday school. He went when he could, so I'll leave it at that.

Walters: (56:22) Sure, sure.

**Towns**: (56:23) But anyway, this Sunday...when I moved here to Liberty, it was in the library, it used to be in the um...the, in the library, you know, the, the Sunday school museum.

Walters: (56:32) Oh. No, I didn't know that. When it was in the education hall?

**Towns**: (56:36) Nope. When it was...see, the library used to be down...

Walters: (56:38) Downtown.

**Hall**: Downtown.

**Towns**: (56:39) in the seminary building...

Walters: (56:40) Sure.

**Towns**: (56:41) Now, that was...no, we had two libraries. When I took over the deanship of the seminary in '79, we had a seminary library and a college library. And the seminary library had about ten thousand volumes. DeWitt Braud, who was a member of our board who owned the Shreveport Electric and Gas Company, millionaire, had gone with one of our early seminary professors to England and they walked through used bookstores, picking up books, buying books, and they bought about ten thousand books over there, shipped them over here. Outstanding library, just a good old, it was a research library that was all...some of the books were so old they were not usable for just regular seminarians but if you go, you find they're still over there, you'll find imprint. So, when I became dean, I said, "Jerry, I'm going to save you three million dollars." He said, "I'm always, I'm all ears." I said, "Ok," I said, "I'm going to make it possible to put together the seminary library in the college. We don't need, we need one." He said, "But they tell me, accred..." I said, "People, when they want to get their will, they, they use the club called accreditation. 'You got to do it for accreditation." But I said, "There is a new wind blowing and accreditation people want one big, strong library for multiple use rather than separate libraries throughout a University system." And um...Ernest Little, we called him in, he sat down. Ernest Little said, "Dr. Towns is right." He said, "We can use it." And Jerry said, "I don't want to get out on a limb and lose accreditation." We had just gotten accreditation. We got a letter from SACS and we put the two together. And so when we put the two together, my Sunday school museum, because we didn't have space in the educational building, my Sunday school museum went in boxes and it stayed there ever since.

**Walters**: (58:45) Ok, well before we leave the, we kind of got afield [laughter]...

**Towns**: (58:48) Ok.

**Walters**: (58:49) far afield here from the Sunday school theme, couple more follow-up questions with that. In interview three, I think it was, you started to talk about church growth and the influences that, well, the things that, the strategies that people have taken over the decades and one of the things that I recall that you pointed out was the next decade might be cell groups or small group interaction. Do you remember saying about that in the...

**Towns**: (59:18) I probably gave a history of methodology.

Walters: (59:21) Ok, and then the...

**Towns**: (59:22) Ok, in the '50s it was visitation, in the '60s it was...

**Walters**: (59:25) Right.

**Towns**: (59:26) busing, in the '70s...

**Walters**: (59:27) Right.

**Towns**: (59:28) it was advertisement or saturation, in the '80s great preaching, in the '90s it was the um...Bill Heigles, Rick Warren, and their whole concept of what...

Walters: (59:38) Right.

**Towns**: (59:39) church ought to be, and now in, maybe the next decade, in the year 2010, it's going to be small groups. That's where the Sunday school at Thomas Road Baptist Church is going.

Walters: (59:50) Ok.

**Towns**: (59:51) The Sunday school at Thomas Road is not your traditional historic Bible class where a teacher explains the Bible to classes. They, they are driven by discussion groups, they are driven by group dynamics, they're driven by individual needs. Half the time, half the time is given over to fellowship and discussion, fellowship and eating. The other half is given over to a discussion group by facilitators. And so instead of having small groups in the home, we have it in the church on Sunday morning.

**Walters**: (1:00:22) Right. And so then the larger the church size, the more the fellowship is built around that? It seems that that seems to be the thrust of the megachurches that are out or at least around Lynchburg.

**Towns**: (1:00:34) Thomas Road, probably, is leading the way with the small group or the cell group or whatever you want to call them on Sunday morning. Many of the others have them during the week. Dave Early built a church of two thousand, eventually went away from Sunday school on Sunday morning and put them all in small groups during the week. And especially among Pentecostals, you're going to find a lot of small groups. Now, Bill Heigles did, he said, when he looked at it, he thought he had a great small group program, he said, "I only had ten percent in small groups." And so, he felt that was one of his weaknesses and one of his failures. But most of your mega-churches have small groups instead of traditional adult Sunday schooling.

**Walters**: (1:01:15) Sure, ok.

**Hall**: (1:01:16) Now, does your wife still uh...she's taught some, I guess, and the seminary and bible uh...

**Towns**: (1:01:20) She taught in the very first year but back in that first year, she didn't have a degree; she taught a women's course. She came back and when she got back, she

got to be a realtor. She loved, she loves houses. And um...so, one day, about the first year I'm teaching my Sunday school class, that's to be 1986, I go through and I'm getting real cute with Romans 12. I talk about seven different spiritual gifts and I talk about the gifts of helps; the Jim Moon gift. And the gift of, you know, encouragement, I forget who it was, but when I said the gift of mercy showing is the Ruth Towns gift. She's got the, I said, "She is the, she is a spiritual motive, helper. She is a counselor." And she said to me driving home, she said, "Do you think I'm a counselor?" And I said, "Absolutely. Yes." And I began to, "Look at this, look at this, look at this, look at this. You..." She said, "Well if I, if I'm such a counselor, what am I doing selling real estate?" And I said, "You sell real estate because you like houses. But," and I didn't want to put her down, I said, "you're not a very good salesman but you can close the deal because you can get them to love the house." She said, "Well, if I'm a counselor, I want to be a counselor. I want to go back to school." I heard that. She never finished college. She went to school to get, not a, a, she went to school to get an Mrs., not a, not a B.A. So she got, she got me married, then she didn't care. Then when I taught at Midwest, she took a course. Then when I taught at Winnipeg Bible College, she took a course. You know, everyplace I went, she took, she taught, in this first, you know, so she's taking courses; she had courses all over the place, but she never graduated. She said, "I'm going to go back and finish." And low and behold, it took her almost two years, although she had almost three and a half years of credit. And she went back, met the requirements, and got a B.A. in counseling. She especially wanted to get it in counseling. When she found her gift, she was motivated, so, boom. Now, when I became dean of the seminary, we had never broken a hundred and fifty. So, I got up to a hundred and forty-nine and I wrote her name in, and now she had a B.A., so she came and took a course; I had a hundred and fifty students. Now, the next semester, I needed to break a hundred and sixty; wrote her name in. And then I needed a hundred and seventy; wrote her name in. Then I needed two hundred; wrote her name in. So, but anyway, she went and took the courses and I said to her one day, I said, "You've got twelve hours of credit. Now, do you realize thirty-six hours will give you an M.A. in counseling? And you love M.A., why don't you finish it?" This week, Menerith Meyer, famous counseling people, were coming to do a seminar. I said, "Why don't you go take that course?" She said, "Ok." I said, "Now you got fifteen." And she said, "Ok." So she got in and finally finished that M.A. in counseling from the school. So she has, but she had to take the last two or three courses online. So her, she, her M.A. is not from the seminary, it's from the University online.

**Walters**: (1:04:36) I believed you mentioned some of this in the first interview but I don't think we got the whole perspective in that when as to...

**Towns**: (1:14:43) Oh, ok. Well, anyway...

Walters: (1:14:44) as to how she came about the...

**Towns**: (1:14:45) then, once she had an M.A., about that time, Doug Randlett left to go and take a uh...be the educational pastor of a church down in West Hollywood, West Palm Beach. And he took with him his wife, who had been, we had one course in women's ministry. So Les Wemp had taught it and Doug, Mrs. Randlett had taught it, and so immediately Jim Steven said, "I'm going to plug your wife in." I said, "Ok." So she, so she came, so she's been teaching this course and the course had such momentum it's become a major now. And we have three, we have two fulltime in that; Dr. Monica Rose and the other is Dr. Debbie Benoit. She's not doctor yet, she's ABD and she will, those, those will be our two fulltime teachers in that course and so we have almost a hundred young ladies who are training to be directors of minis, women's ministry in local churches. So they're not, they're going to go out and, just like you have a director of education or a director of recreation, they will be directors of women's ministry in local churches. That is a growing phenomena. Matter of fact, there was a separate department at the Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention just for that department. So, my wife still teachers her one course in that department.

**Walters**: (1:06:06) Well, let's talk a little bit about your relationship with Jerry Falwell on a personal level, as much as you feel comfortable talking about it.

**Towns**: (1:06:14) Ok.

Walters: (1:06:15) You've told us a few anecdotal things...

**Towns**: (1:06:17) Ok.

Walters: (1:06:18) a few stories, um...what...

Towns: (1:06:20) When I first came, he said, "You know, I think I've finally found somebody to be my close friend." And within a week or two, we had dinner at his house on a Friday night. Now, Macel, it's famous that she doesn't cook, hates to cook, and never cooks. We all know that, don't we Dr. Cline?

**Hall**: (1:06:41) Yeah [*laughter*].

**Towns**: (1:06:42) Anyway, I saw her about a month ago, we were sitting in the back room, I said, "Macel," I said, "I bet you haven't cooked a meal since that day when Sam and Debbie and Polly were little kids and we came over to your house on a Friday night and your kids were there and my kids were there and we sat around the dining room table and you cooked a great big meal and I remember my son loved your mashed potatoes and gravy and you had all that." And I said, "I bet you haven't cooked a meal since then."

She says, "Elmer, did you look in the kitchen that night? What makes you think I cooked it that night?" [laughter]

**Walters**: (1:07:17) [*laughter*]

**Hall**: [laughter]

**Towns**: (1:07:19) And I said, "Probably right." Because Macel just doesn't like to cook and, matter of fact, my wife is like that; she doesn't like to cook. I come home tonight and I said, "What are you making for supper?" She says, "Reservations; where do you want to go?" [laughter] So, now, you ask how close we were. On July the 4<sup>th</sup>, 1971, before the school got started, didn't have anything to do, I get a phone call, "Let's go for a picnic." And he said, "Don't worry about it, Macel will fix the picnic lunch." So we get in his car, and he had a big Buick, and we drive up through Bedford and stop at the Kentucky Fried Chicken. Now, his idea of Macel fixing lunch was to get two or three buckets of fried chicken. We go up to Peaks of Otter and there's a place called Sharp Top; it's two miles straight up and we start up Sharp Top. Now, Jerry Jr. was not there, he was out with his buddies, and Debbie was not there, she was out, but they were not out together. But our, his two youngest kids and my two youngest kids were there and we start walking up. And half, well, we weren't that far and, "Oh, dad, I can't do this." And so I pick up Jonathan, put him on my shoulders, and I walk almost two miles straight up carrying Jonathan on my shoulder. And Jerry picks up Genie and puts her on his shoulders and we, in those times, I was thirty-nine and he was thirty-eight; we were in good shape. We carried our kids to the top of Sharp Top. Now, we got almost to the top and I put Jonathan down, you know, and about that time Macel said, "I'm going to win, I'm going to be the first one." So we all start running and I had to outrun her and get there first. So that's how friend, we were very friendly. In the first year of the school, Liberty rolled up the sidewalks at sundown every night. There was nothing much here. So our house was almost open house every night. We, we fed a bunch of the kids and we always had ten and twenty of the students over to our house after church. And we would have ice cream or we would have pie or we would have something to eat or we would go by and get McDonald hamburgers when you could get them for, oh my goodness, twentyfive cents...

**Walters**: (1:09:42) Right.

**Towns**: (1:09:43) twenty cents each, you know, bag of McDonald's. And Jerry used to come over all the time. He said, "You know, that's the way." So we, we became close, but he said, "You know, I've never had a close friend." But I think the greatness of who Jerry is, he's the kind of a guy you never got close...I don't think he ever had a close friend. Now, Ron Godwin was a close friend and Duke says he was a close friend. Jim

Moon said, "No, I," he will tell you, "No, I was never close to Jerry." You know, although he probably was closer in the high school years than any of us, you know, so...

Walters: (1:10:17) Sure.

**Towns**: (1:10:18) I don't think Jerry...but I always, I heard John Maxwell say one time, he gave a lecture on how to minister to millionaires. He said, "Millionaires have kind of a, a fence about them. It's something in their personality that they don't reach out to others. But if you want to get close to a millionaire, you have to go to him and be their friend and not go for money." And so I determined, "I'm going to be a friend of Jerry Falwell. I'm going to be there for him." I, you know, I've never asked for money, I've never asked for a raise. When I first came the first time, he said, "How much you want to get paid?" I said, "You tell me." And so he said, "Well, I'm getting paid such and such." He said, he said, "I'm getting paid eleven thousand a year and the highest paid person I'm getting paid on staff is making two hundred a week. Can you live with two hundred a week?" I said, "You know, that's exactly what I'm getting now." So that's ten thousand, four hundred dollars a year is what I started out at. And the second year, we hired Harold for ten thousand, four hundred dollars. He was head of the Bible Institute. And the third year, we hired Dr. Hughes for ten thousand, four hundred dollars a year. And so I worked for ten thousand, four hundred and when I came back, Jerry said, "How much am I going to pay you?" I said, "I'm making more than ten, four but I don't know exactly how much it is. Have your bookkeeper call the girl at the other school where I was working and get that." So, I've never asked about money on that basis. So I, I was a friend for life. Now, if you know anything about Jerry, he calls early in the morning to do something. And I've always been an early riser. He'd call at six o'clock, "Let me talk to Elmer." And Ruth would say, "He's out running." "I don't believe that. He's in bed. Get him up, wake him up." "No." And no matter what happens, at six in the morning he said, "Alright, get out of that bed." And I said, "Jerry, I'm up." You know, matter of fact, that was the way it'd go. But then on Sunday morning, for somehow, when I got the class, he'd go, "What are you teaching on this morning?" And I would tell him what I'm teaching on and I'd said, "Well alright, we got some prayer, some things you ought to know. People in the church I, I found," and I would share with him and once he would lock into it and walk in there. So, and then after two or three times, "Well, let's just pray now." So I would pray. And so we began praying together, probably for eighteen years we would have prayer together every Sunday morning. And if I didn't call him or times I would call him and not get him, maybe he was in a shower routine or whatever, sometimes he was fixing coffee or whatever, he, and miss it. So he'd call me, you know, but I would always call him, seven o'clock, right on the dot. He told me seven o'clock so at seven o'clock I'd call him and if I didn't get a hold of him, I didn't try past two, three, four minutes afterwards. Then, I usually got called about seven thirty by him. So that's, that was a personal thing we did together. Another thing is that he loved to show off the

campus. I'd call him, I'd say, "Hey Jerry, when you go for your tour today, inspection tour," I said, "I want to go." And so he'd go, "Ok." And then he'd be coming down the road and he'd say, "Alright, get out in the street in one minute." And so I'd get out and get in his truck and he loved to drive around and show things. Now, I remember one day having two accidents in the same day with that, one of those great big old trucks of his, you know, as he called them. And one of them was going down the back entrance by River Ridge Auto, remember River Ridge Auto down at the bottom ridge? And if you go down, there's a stop sign and once you hit the stop sign, you stop and then you go. And so we went down to the stop sign, we stopped, and when we were down there, this student comes down, looks back, and just rams right into the back of his car. Just tears the student's car up; it doesn't hurt Jerry. He's more concerned about the student so he runs into River Ridge, Vito Dematti owned it, and talked to him and said, "Come, come out. See this boy. Fix him up," you know. Then he gets in the car and we're driving around, uh...where were we? We were driving on a place that he wasn't supposed to go. And I remember, you know, he would always put it in four wheel drive and he put it in four wheel drive and he was going up and he slipped to the side and scratched up a fender pretty bad all in one day. And so I, I always, you know, I told you these little vignettes, talk about his greatness but I would always say, right before he preaches, "You got a word from God for me today, preacher." I always called him preacher. Dr. Wemp called him bishop because he ran the church like a...

Walters: (1:15:09) Sure.

**Towns**: (1:15:10) bishop. I always called him preacher...

**Walters**: (1:15:11) Sure.

**Towns**: (1:15:12) and I remember the greatness of Jerry Falwell the preacher. I can hear the sermon the eighth time...matter of fact, if you look in one on my old Bibles, not the one I'm using now but a previous Bible, every time he preached on a topic, I'd put the date in the margin. I got it from Frank Schmidt who did the same thing. And on some Bible passages, I will have five different dates when he preached on that same passage. Brother Cline, have you ever heard him preach on a passage more than once?

**Hall**: (1:15:42) Oh yes, many times [laughter].

**Towns**: (1:15:44) Ok, well I, I got those many times and so I, I used to document them. Now, in this Bible, I didn't do it; it got too, too much to do.

**Walters**: (1:15:53) Sure. Now, were there ever times when you disagreed with his decisions and how did you work that out and did he take your track or your take on anything or...?

**Towns**: (1:16:05) You, you learned that when Jerry made a decision, "Make a decision, make it work," you, you couldn't change his mind; you couldn't go to him and get him to change it. And Ed Hindson and I, on several occasions...if you get together with someone else, you go to Jerry and you tell him, "This decision was made," and you don't criticize what he did but you come with a better, "This is what we think is a better thing should, this is what we should do." [coughing] Excuse me. If you don't make it ad hominem, you don't talk personally about why it was wrong. You don't [coughing], don't ridicule him and say, "We made this decision." But Hindson and I, Bill Paul and I, "We think this is what we ought to be doing because," and such reason. "Ok, let's do it." You know, and if you know anything about Jerry, he never did a post mortem on something went wrong. We never talked about things that went wrong. He always talked about the next thing he was going to do right. And he could be going and then just go straight off on a right angle and never say we've changed. You're just, you're just going different way. He'd never say he changed. That was...never let them see you sweat is a worldly expression but that was...never let them see you make a mistake was Jerry's concept.

**Walters**: (1:17:26) Sure.

**Towns**: (1:17:27) And every once in a while, Ed Hindson or Ed Dobson and I would get around and we start talking about some of the old programs that Jerry started that failed. But they just, like Arabs, they would just fold up those tents and disappear at night and then go away; America's um...America's something Bible Class, America's Favorite Bible Class. A man who owned, who was president of Diner's Card, who turned Diner's Card into a credit card and started the whole credit card revolution, got saved somewhere associated with Jerry Falwell, resigned, and moved here to make Jerry bigger than Yonggi Cho. Now, Yonggi Cho had the biggest church in the world by small groups all over the city of, of Seoul, Korea and it, the bigness of the church was in the small groups. And so this guy comes and sells Jerry, "Let's have America's Favorite Bible Class." And so we bought hundreds and thousands of tape recorders and tapes and Jerry began making tapes. He said, "Alright, now you write in and we'll send you a tape recorder and tapes and you can have Jerry Falwell at you house." He said, "If you live, if you watch me on Sunday morning," well, then he says, "here's what I'll do, invite your friends in. Have a small group." And Jerry said, "If I've got ten thousand listeners, I can have ten thousand small groups of ten each. I can have a hundred thousand people." You know, and so, and, boy, Yonggi Cho, Yonggi Cho had seventeen thousand small groups and a hundred and seventy thousand people when we went to Korea. So Jerry, that was Jerry's ambition. And boy, we worked, we cranked out...do you remember that? America's Favorite Bible Club.

**Hall**: (1:19:29) No, I don't remember that.

**Towns**: (1:19:30) Oh, that was one of the big publicity, he pushed it and...oh, I was writing lessons for Jerry and somebody else was writing lessons for, I forget who was, we were writing lessons and say, it flopped miserably. I'm talking about less than ten people who wrote in.

**Walters**: (1:19:45) Oh really?

**Towns**: (1:19:46) Oh, I'm talking about flopping miserably and just suddenly, it went away and the guy went away. And there used to be, over now where what we call East Campus, do you remember that was going to be a Liberty retirement center? Didn't happen. It went under. Another guy came along, tried it a second time. It went under. Remember we tried it twice?

**Hall**: (1:20:06) Yes

**Towns**: (1:20:07) Then we went across the hill and it didn't work there. Jerry was very, very...

**Walters**: (1:20:11) Sure.

**Towns**: (1:20:12) famous for covering up his mistakes.

**Walters**: (1:20:13) Sure. Now let's talk about his tenacity and, and that sort of thing. He always encouraged people to never quit. What made, motivated him to be so determined and what made him so durable?

**Towns**: (1:20:27) I think that on a program, he was not committed to a program if it didn't work. But at the same time, if it was a biblical principle...I think he had a clear mind; a Bible principle and a Bible program. The program of door to door visitation, he didn't do all of his life. He began and got started and then he went to the radio and then went from the radio to the television and he, he, every time he found a new program, a new method and it worked for him. But I think his walk with God uh...when you think in terms of Jerry Falwell, he had a walk with God that was real, that was honest. Toward the end of his life, I found he quoted this verse quite a bit more at the end than at the beginning; "Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Hebrews 11:6. And Jerry spent time with God every morning and that was the secret. I think he talked to God and God talked to him and he had a faith that he believed God would come through. There have been times...I, I remember writing stories about when he prayed for the five million dollars. And I went to Macel, she said, "Oh, Jerry really believed that." He said, I said, "Now, come on Macel. Wasn't there a..." "No, no. He really believed it." I went, "Now Jerry, this is Elmer. Now let's get real." He said, "God was going to send the five million. I never doubted it." And I believe he, he was true when he said, "I

never doubted it." He knew that God would...when he was right on requesting and prayer and the goal was biblical, he knew God would do it. And so he had a faith in God. The greatest thing about Jerry Falwell was his faith. Now, yesterday, I was interviewed on television and they asked me about the accreditation of the law school, you know, we just got full accreditation. And they said to me, "Now, what would Jerry Falwell say about full accreditation?" I looked in the camera, I leaned in, I said, "Jerry would lean over the banister rail of heaven and say, 'I told you so."

**Walters**: (1:22:56) [*laughter*]

**Hall**: [*laughter*] Now, when it comes time for the Moral Majority and he created the Moral Majority, did you agree with that concept?

**Towns**: (1:23:07) Oh, I...

Hall: (1:23:08) And...

**Towns**: (1:23:09) probably, I sat down with him and on this whole issue and I remember him saying to me, "Write me a couple of sermons on abortion; why it's wrong." And so we, I sat down and I put together some sermons. I helped Jerry with his sermons. He never preached them word for word. You give them to him and he always added, he took away, and...now, I've got a book, books, two hundred and fifty sermons I've done for Jerry in his lifetime in different books, you know, that are there. And...

**Walters**: (1:23:50) Will you bequeath those to the archives at some point [laughter]?

**Towns**: (1:23:54) Well now, I, I've wanted to give my whole library to the, to the archives but nobody has accepted, nobody...I write letters and so...

Walters: (1:24:03) We'll have to talk to Dr. Barnett about that.

**Towns**: (1:24:05) You talk to Dr. Barnett because we've talked about giving everything I've got because at Fuller Seminary, the five founders of Fuller Seminary used to have little um...what do you call those places where you study in a library?

Walters: (1:24:22) Study carrels.

Hall: (1:24:23) Little carrels.

**Towns**: (1:24:25) Carrels, carrels. They had carrels surrounded by stained glass and they had the Wilber Smith room, the Gleason Archer room, and all those kinds of things. And so I said, "We ought to have that kind of a..." if, if you guys want to do it, I'll give you all my library, you know? My papers, my libraries...now, the original manuscripts,

I, I was going to keep all of those and years ago I thought, "Eh," and just threw them away [laughter].

**Walters**: (1:24:47) [*laughter*]

**Hall**: [laughter]

Walters: (1:24:48) We'll have to talk to...

**Towns**: (1:24:49) Yeah, who cares about the manu, original manuscripts?

**Walters**: (1:24:51) Well, we're going down a path here away from the topic but um...back to the Moral Majority, in the previous interview...

**Towns**: (1:24:58) Ok...

Walters: (1:24:59) you talked about your phone...

Towns: said I had wrote some...

**Walters**: (1:25:00) conversation that...

**Towns**: of his sermons. No, Ron Hawkins made an observation one day, and this was in the early '90s. He was leaving here to go and be president of Western Conservative Baptist Seminary. He said, "Elmer," he said, "I know why you stay." He says, "I've listened to you. You and Jerry probably agree ninety-eight percent, you agree with everything that Jerry does, ninety-eight percent." I said, "Yeah." He said, "I'm probably at eighty-five percent and I'm pretty high." And he said, "There's a lot of faculty that'd be down around seventy, seventy-five, eighty percent." He said, "Agree with him on theology, with his interpretation of scripture," uh...things such as that. The only time I ever heard where he really disagreed with me on scripture is when I would teach his children and his wife in Bible or theology and then he would stand up in pulpit and disagree with me and attack me, for instance. They were always little things. Who are the two witnesses in Revelation chapter 12, the two who didn't die? Enoch went to heaven and didn't die, Elijah then went to heaven and, and he said, "That's nonsense. It's Moses and Elijah. Everybody knows that."

**Walters**: (1:26:13) [*laughter*]

**Towns**: (1:26:14) And I didn't say anything. And, but there were several places where the kids agreed with me rather than their dad and I don't, I think that that kind of irked him. But those were so minor, I would say his disagreement with me or I with him. It's amazing how close we were on Baptist doctrine, how close we were on theology. Matter

of fact, you can probably go down the line on so many things. How do we agree? We agreed basically from, from reading the same Bible, Scofield Bible and everything, so I was always very comfortable with Jerry Falwell.

**Hall**: (1:26:53) What has been some of the uh...are, are there people that uh...was his, you say he didn't have any really, what you might call, close friends but people who would support him in times of disappointment and trials that uh...

**Towns**: (1:27:09) Ok, people on the phone that he talked to.

Hall: (1:27:11) Ok.

**Towns**: (1:27:12) Now, I, I think that if you could really get down to it, one of his closest friends were people like him. Jerry Vines has been a close friend over the phone over the years. B.R. Lakin was that close friend. Now, I remember John Rawlings always wanting, he said, "Tell Jerry to call me. Tell Jerry..." you know, I think he wanted to be in the place of B.R. when he died but he never did. He, he was alright with Jerry but he wasn't very close with Jerry. I think he might have been too old for Jerry. I'm trying, I'm sitting here trying to think who that Jerry um...

**Walters**: (1:27:48) He seemed to mention Adrian Rodgers in his later years.

**Towns**: (1:27:50) Adrian Rodgers, he mentioned certain people he respected but he, I don't think he was close to Adrian. He, he, it was a friendship of respect and not intimacy. Same thing with um...oh, the, the...Francis Schaffer. He talked to him...you know, people say, "He and Francis..." no, they were not very close. He, he knew very little about him and I think it was a friendship of, of respect and not of intimacy there. But there were certain preachers he was very close to more so than others and, and he kept up with those by telephone. Those he called the most were those he would, would...and he would have them come here and he would go there.

**Hall**: (1:28:30) Was he close to the Rice family, I mean, John R. Rice?

**Towns**: (1:28:35) I think he respected John R. Rice and John R. Rice respected him. Now see, when I left here, I wrote for John R. Rice the back page of *The Sword of the Lord*, for fundamental churches and I, I would go ahead and write the strength of those churches and so that put me in very close to John R. Rice and, and John R. Rice and I, we got to, you know, I, I spent some days with him and [coughing] um...when Jerry said to me, "Call..." when we put the Board of Directors together for, for the Moral Majority, he, he gave me the list and he said, "Call these men and ask them if they would be on the Board. Tell them what it is first and then ask them if they'd be on the Board." I think he didn't

want them to turn him down personally so I called all of the one. Curtis Hutson, he was, he was never close to Curtis and didn't like Curtis. He was never close to Hiles and did not like Hiles. And um...matter of fact, there was a cool relationship between those because I think the ego of Hiles and the ego of Hutson were so much bigger than Jerry and um...and uh...I, I don't think that...you see, they only came to preach here when they had to.

Walters: (1:29:55) Was Bob Jones called at that time? Did he turn...

**Towns**: (1:29:58) No, no...

Walters: (1:29:59) things down?

**Towns**: Bob Jones was an, attacked Jerry on several occasions and uh...

**Walters**: (1:30:02) Right. It was never very cordial then?

**Towns**: (1:30:04) He was never cordial, no. He, he, Bob Jones Jr. was the one who called Jerry um...didn't he call him Anti-Christ at one time?

**Hall**: (1:30:12) Yes.

**Towns**: (1:30:13) I think he called him Anti-Christ. Matter of fact, the last time Bob Jones came here to speak, he was, he was jumping on us in the back room about, what, he was talking about the compromising of your students doing this and that. The hair being a little bit too long...

**Walters**: (1:30:32) Right.

**Towns**: (1:30:33) wasn't, wasn't shaved like Bob Jones and this and that. And I said, "Well brother Jones," he liked to be called Dr. Jones, I called him brother Jones, probably out of a little Johnny humbling, I said, "at least I don't go to movies when I go to New York City. I understand you go to, to New York and you go see the preview of all the movies. Is that right?" He said, "Well," he said, "you got to see them to know what's going on because you got to be, you got to be trained in the theatre and," and such as that. I made my point, I didn't...

**Walters**: (1:31:00) Sure.

**Towns**: (1:31:01) have to say anything more.

**Walters**: (1:31:02) Now, we've talked to people who were here in, like, the '60s and '50s and they talked about Oliver B. Greene coming here.

**Towns**: (1:31:10) He was very close to Oliver B. Greene, yes.

**Walters**: (1:31:12) And did he ever maintain a relationship with his brother? Jack is still around, Jack Greene. Did he ever have is brother speak here or any...

**Towns**: (1:31:22) I never heard of him, never heard of him...

Walters: (1:31:25) Oh, ok.

**Towns**: (1:31:26) So I, I can't answer that. But, Oliver B. Greene came every year...

Walters: (1:31:30) Right.

**Towns**: (1:31:31) and he was a Bible teaching evangelist and, kind of like Bob Harrington came every year for about ten or twelve years. And Doug Oldham was his friend; he was very comfortable with Doug and Doug went with him to the Holy Land and he would go over to Doug's house to eat on several occasions and, and so Doug was a, a close friend. I can remember when we went to the Holy Land, you know, two or three trips we took together, Doug and Jerry and I and wives would eat together and enjoy...Doug is very open, you know, and very effervescent, so, I think Jerry liked him, liked him around.

**Walters**: (1:32:07) Well, I do believe, since we are talking about some of the relationships with other well-known pastors and such, did not Jack Van Impe come out with a book at one time, something about heart disease in the church or something that, and defend, somewhat, Dr. Falwell and some of the thing that were going on with Bob Jones and that sort of thing or don't you know anything about that?

**Walters**: (1:32:32) I don't remember that incident. Jack Van Impe um...I think Jerry's very first long play record he would offer on television and make money off of, I think it could have been a Jack Van Impe tape or it could have been a Bob Harrington tape. I remember being in the back room and Edie Cormick, Edie Corbin who, who little, she, she was kind of like the manager of the back room, she was the sound manager...

Hall: (1:33:02) I remember her.

**Towns**: (1:33:03) she worked all over the place. On a Sunday morning when Van Impe preached, she put in a, an extra tape, it was live and she put an extra tape. We had not been taping local messages in those days and we had a tape of Van Impe and it was like, the coming world war, or whatever it was, and so Jerry just said, "It's mine because you preached it here." And he got up and sold it and Van Impe said, "Hey that's my money. You can't sell that." There was a, there was a disagreement over money, or not so much

money, over the rights. Jerry wanted to give him an offering as, for preaching, you know...

**Walters**: (1:33:38) Right.

**Towns**: (1:33:39) but he didn't want to do it and so, and I think Jerry just, he said, "Ok, get your own audience." And he stopped using it, you know, but he went to other people, he went to Bob Harrington and...

Walters: (1:33:49) Sure.

**Towns**: (1:33:50) other people after that. Van Impe would not have been called. Jerry tried to make up with him probably 1985 or '86 and we gave him an honorary doctor's degree and, anyway, I don't think he was appreciative of it.

**Walters**: (1:34:10) Oh, ok. Well wanted to, we only have about twenty minutes here left in the recording here and we'll, we want to wrap things up, but I want to drive to a little bit about the future here...

**Towns**: (1:34:21) Ok.

**Walters**: (1:34:22) and as we transition into that thinking, tell us about knowing Jerry Jr. and Jonathan as they grew up, the new leaders of Thomas Road and Liberty University. How have they grown in leadership and maturity over the years and how have they done as leaders of the University and church to this point?

**Towns**: (1:34:41) Well, first of all, both of the boys call me Elmer. And...even, lots of times, even in private, Jerry would call me Dr. Towns because that very first day or two at this college, he said, "We don't have any respect." Rodney Dangerfield, you know, "We don't have a..." but he said, "I want everyone," he said to the students, "I want everyone to call him as Dr. Towns. He is Dr. Towns and he is the academic head of the school and I'm Jerry." So that was always the, they key from there on, except his sons called me Elmer, and I, it didn't make any difference to me. So I watched the boys grow up and Jerry Jr. didn't cause much attention, didn't make many waves, he was very quiet. Jonathan was always, he as the red headed boy running around, hugging the old ladies, you know, uh...you know, he was the guy with the camera running around taking pictures all over the place. He was the guy with an entourage; he always had four or five boys with him everywhere he was running, you know. So, that was Jonathan and that was Jerry Jr. Now, when Jerry Jr. graduated from law school, I remember the significant day Jerry said, "For the first time in my life I'm going to cut Sunday morning. Sunday morning I'm going to be up on the green at um...at...I'm going to watch my son get his doctor's degree from UVA. I'm going to be up there." He said, "I want you, I want to

put it out front and I don't want criticism behind my back. I don't, I'm going to be up there," you know. And he said, "Now, you have the permission," he said, "when your son graduates from UVA, you can do the same thing."

**Walters**: (1:36:17) [*laughter*]

**Hall**: [laughter]

**Towns**: (1:36:19) And, and Jerry Jr. came back and he became very outstanding in real estate law and Candler's Mountain Mall, he became a partner with that organization. And so, several of our real estate deals, it was not well-known but he was the man underneath, back of the scenes, doing the things. When Jonathan was playing around, Jerry Jr. was the one doing the work. Many of the financial problem, where can we get money to pay, where can we get money to, to meet salaries, and all that, and Jerry Jr. was the one who um...therefore, when Jerry died, Jerry Jr. just stepped right in and was doing what he was always doing. When people say to me, "It's too bad that Jerry died, why did God take him?" I said, "Two reasons; Jerry Jr. and Jonathan. Both boys could take over and run." And so both of the boys have done an outstanding job. I am very optimistic on the future of Liberty University. Now, technically, when I think in terms, I did something way back called *The Sociological Cycle of Church Growth and Death*; what makes churches grow and die. And we talk about um...an organization will only remain true for one generation and the next. You go back to Joshua, let's see, Judges chapter two, verse, oh...about seven, eight, or nine. It says, "Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua and the elders that outlived Joshua. Then Israel sinned and went after Baal." In other words, you can only be responsible for your generation and the next. And Jerry's responsible for his generation and the next, the elders that out, the sons that outlive Jerry Jr. So I believe that the University will be stronger under Jerry Jr. than they were under, under Jerry Sr. Stronger in what way? Stronger financially, that's always already proven true. When Jerry died, we had a bout twenty million dollars in endowment, we have a hundred million in endowment now and so we are very strong because of Jerry Jr.; paying bills. Jerry Jr. wouldn't let me fire anybody. You know, I, I had to go and almost prove a guy was a heretic before he would let me get rid of a guy, you know, so...what happened is sometimes something would happen and I would fire a guy and he'd go to talk to Jerry and Jerry would forgive him and put him back in and so, you know, did I have a disagreement with him? Yeah about six or seven times...

**Walters**: (1:38:57) Yeah.

**Towns**: (1:38:58) people I wanted to dismiss he wouldn't dismiss. And because I, they, they got very sorry and they repented and went to him and he put them back in, so. But that's Jerry's, he had a great heart. And Jerry Jr. will let you get rid of people. If they, if they're not doing their, you know, he will support you. So I think you're going to find

the school is going to be more, it will be as professional as Jerry wanted to be but it could not have been because of him because he was too, too heart driven but it will become as professional as he wanted it to be...

**Walters**: (1:39:33) Sure.

**Towns**: (1:39:34) and I think we are, we are more academic than ever before and we will continue to be more academic than ever before. So, I'm very high on what Liberty is now. Now, the answer is Jerry Jr. has to become Jerry and he has to train people to follow him. He has to train the next generation; who's going to be that next generation, in other words, in essence, Jerry Falwell's spiritual grandchildren who will carry on. And a, a lot of good hires are being, taking place around here. So I'm, I'm encouraged about the future of Liberty. Both Jerry Jr. and Jonathan talk about going to the elders to get opinion. I'm asked quite a bit by both of the young men, "What about this or that?" Jeroboam and Rehoboam, Rehoboam rebelled and therefore, Jeroboam didn't ask the elder men, elders for their opinion. He went to the youngers and got himself in trouble. And so I've, I've been very pleased about things that Jonathan has come to me and said, "What should I do?" And I said, "This is what you should do." And the same thing about Jerry Jr. I said, "This is what you should do." So, and I'd have to say, I don't remember them asking my opinion on any hard decision that they have not done it. Maybe not because I said it, but maybe they were leaning that way and I just reinforced what they were going to do. So I want to put it up, they had the right idea, they just needed someone to stand behind them and say, "That's the decision you must make."

**Hall**: (1:41:03) What is, to sort of summarize here at the end, the status of the school of religion? How many majors do you have? How many faculty members in the school of religion right now?

**Towns**: (1:41:13) I have thirty-nine fulltime and about, about eight part-time. Now, of the part-time, that would be Sue Willmington, who is in sign language, and my wife who teaches one and others who teach one course only, but thirty-nine fulltime. Now, that seemed like big but you have to understand, we teach all of the Bible courses for all students. We teach all of the philosophy courses for all of the students. We teach Evan 101 for all of the students. And so the, the school of religion has higher standards, especially spiritual, spiritually, than any other school because it becomes the rudder to keep the University straight, the same with the seminary. And I let my, my men and women know, "I expect more of you." I said, "If one of you," we have a rule against drinking, "if one of you sipped beer, wine, just sipped it, teaspoon full, I'd fire you." I said, "I may let you finish the semester but I'd fire you." I said, I said, in the old days, I told Jerry, I said, "Jerry, I'll wrestle you to the floor." I said, "Because of my background and how I've been," I said, "Jerry, I will not put up. Don't..."

Walters: (1:42:31) Sure.

**Towns**: (1:42:32) I said, "if anybody, if I fire them because they're drinking, don't you dare put them back in. I will, you and I will just have a wrestling match right here." And he'd always laugh and, "I like that, I like that," you know. But I expect higher spiritual standards for the school of religion and the seminary, higher professional standards; the idea of church attendance and loyalty to the church. I had a professor one time who I called him a couple of times, I said, "I'm getting questions about, that there's doubt about the New Testament Epistles being written by the people who say they are. That Paul didn't write all of his letters." He said to me, "Oh, no, no, no, no. I don't believe that." Well, in one of these modular classes, I had a man come in and he was an older man and he thought he was a little slow so he taped the messages, but he didn't mean to, but he just took the tape recorder down, he had a, an old attaché case, and put his tape recorder right on top of the attaché case, you know, so he could just hear it. And so he came in at lunch time, he said, "Your man says that Paul didn't write this." I said, "No, he didn't." He told me, he said, "No but he said it." I said, he, he said, "He went down the line, he said he doesn't believe this, this, this, this, and this, Paul wrote it." And I said, "Oh, no." And so I took the tape, walked in and gave it to Judy Furlono. I said, "I want this typed out." And she said, put anything else, just sit down and stenographic, just bang it out. It doesn't have to be perfect, doesn't have to be comma'd, doesn't have to be cap-spelled with, just get it down." And about, I got it about three o'clock, I highlighted what I need, I walked over to his class at three thirty, asked him to come in...well, I had gone up, I got a check. I paid him for, that was the summer school class and I paid him for the rest of the course and also the rest of the summer. It was like in May and his contract ran to the July the first and I said, "Here's your check for boom, boom." And tomorrow, the next day I had to have somebody else walk in and teach the class. And he said, "Well, I knew you'd catch me." So that one ended easily. Now, so, you know, if somebody um...if somebody is not true to the fundamentals, you have to pull the string, so I've done that two or three times. I don't think I'm known as a firing dean but I'm known as a, you know, somebody who believes...

**Walters**: (1:44:56) You have to have your scruples...

**Towns**: (1:44:58) What's that?

**Walters**: (1:44:59) You have to have your boundaries and...

**Towns**: (1:45:00) Yeah.

**Walters**: enforce them.

**Towns**: (1:45:01) Yeah, I, I'm true to the fundamentals.

**Walters**: (1:45:04) Well...

**Hall**: (1:45:05) Now the size of the seminary, what's the number of students and how many faculty?

**Towns**: (1:45:09) Students had, this past year, five hundred and seventy students. Now, they had five hundred and seventy students on campus; now, online is a separate thing. Online, the seminary had five thousand online students and there're five hundred, five thousand, five hundred so they almost had six thousand total. And online we had, four hundred...four thousand online majors that are not, you know, that's online majors, Bible majors, and we had like, six hundred majors. Now, when I say we had six hundred majors in the school of religion, we never have a whole lot on the record book but we have about six hundred graduates a year. In other words, what happens is, these guys don't declare their major until the very end, for three or four reasons; so they can get TAG money and you can't get it...

**Hall**: (1:46:14) Oh yeah, of course.

**Towns**: (1:46:15) so they don't declare it until the very end and all of the sudden they jump out of the general and they jump in and so, anyway, we have about, I'd say, if you want to find out how many students we really have, look at our graduates and project back four years; that would tell you how many we really have. So, so the school of religion is a good school. I enjoy that. Now, you ought to ask me, "How did the name Towns Religion Hall get named?"

**Hall**: (1:46:42) Ok.

Walters: (1:46:43) Well, how did the name Towns Religion Hall get named? [laughter]

**Towns**: (1:46:45) Well, it was always B.R. Lakin school of religion and I started pestering Jerry about ten years before it was built. One day when we were out in the truck, I said, "I want you to go down here." We drove down in back of the school of religion, it was a, it went down to a deep ditch, if you remember it down there, and here was an ugly trailer down there that they had stored like a warehouse, it was stored stuff, didn't use it for offices, and I drove him down there and I said, "Jerry, look at this perfect amphitheater." I said, "We can put walls around this thing like a tabernacle and I can teach a thousand, twelve hundred students here." And he said, "Boy, that's sure, that'd make it good." He said, I said, "In the summer time we could come right out here, we got trees, we got shade." I said, "Sometimes, I just leave if I can come along and, and bring some logs in here and put them in the, I can just sit on the logs and teach here." So we talked about this outdoor, you know, I, I thought about an amphitheater, we could do things in the summer time for camp and such as that, and he always said, "That's fine."

And that, that went on for four or five years. You know, and I come back, I said, "Jerry, let's talk about it." And he'd come back, he said, "No, that's the wrong place. Let's talk about putting it over to the side toward the liberty bell." And so that also had a going down. He said, "You know, it won't be as steep and we could put the liberty bell," and he said, "really, you could get fifteen hundred down here." Well, Jerry drove by one day and he drove from the school, he was going down the highway, 460, and when he drove out to look to DeMoss with the columns, he realized, if we built the school of religion there, it would obstruct the view. So he calls me, he said, "I'm over here on the highway. I'm coming to get you." I said, "Ok." And so I'm, I'm standing out front, he gets in the car, he said, "Now, you don't know where I'm going." I said, "Ok." So we drive down and we get on the highway. He said, "Now, I want you to see something here." And I said, "Ok." We're driving down real slow on the, the edge and as we drive down he said, "Now look, you see the school of religion?" He said, "Now, what do you see there?" I said, "DeMoss." He said, "It's the best view you get of DeMoss." He said, "If we put you school of religion building there, it's going to block DeMoss. Elmer, that's a bad idea. Why don't you go with what I've always said, it should be the other place?" And he had a way of doing that. It was my idea to be over, I said, "Ok, let's do it." And so we drove back down and back in and looked around, he said, "Now, let's look at this." And so we talked about it for a while. And he said, "You know, I got a problem." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Jerry Jr. doesn't want to do it." Five years I've been, you know, he's been putting me off, putting me off, "Jerry doesn't want to do it." So I went over to see Jerry. I said, "Jerry, your dad tells me you don't want to do it." He said, "There's an easement problem there." He said, "The state highway has an easement; we can't get there." I said, "Did you know that the theatre right down the highway is an easement problem?" He said, "How'd you know that?" I said, "Somebody told me one time and it's just back up here." He said, "Good." And he says, I said, "Now Jerry, let me tell you why you want to build it." "Yeah, tell me why." I said, "Suppose we have a thousand seats and we have a thousand students taking Old Testament survey three times a week. A thousand times nine hundred tuition is nine hundred thousand dollars. Now, suppose you do that one, two, three, four, five times a day." I said, "Now you're talking about four and a half million dollars." He said, "Let's do it. Let's do it."

**Walters**: (1:50:29) [*laughter*]

**Hall**: [laughter]

**Towns**: (1:50:30) And I said, "Ok, let's do it." And so, then he went down and applied and got the variance on the mission and so uh...I had been promising all my D.Min. students, "I'm going to ask you for money. I'm going to come back and ask you for money; I'm going to ask you for a thousand dollars." And so, I sat down and wrote all the students, every D.Min. student we ever had, I said, "I want it from either you

personally or some account in your church." And out of a list of about five hundred D.Min. students, these are seminaries now to pay for that auditorium, I probably got two hundred, right about half of them came up with a thousand dollars. Now John Maxwell gave me um...I think a hundred thousand dollars. He told me, he said, "I get a hundred thousand dollars for just one sermon. I'm going to give one to you." And so, he's also promised he'll give me another hundred thousand when we get ready to build our seminary building. And then the other man who gave us two hundred and fifty thousand. Jerry went to him and he said, "Jerry, I've got money. What should I do?" Jerry said, "I want you to give this amount of money for the Towns Auditorium." And so, because I raised a lot of the money and because I was, I pushed it all the while, all of the sudden, Jerry just stands up and says, "We're going to call it the Towns," uh...

Walters: (1:51:48) Sure.

**Towns**: (1:51:49) "First of all, we're going to call it the Towns Alumni." He said, "It's for you and it's for the alumni." And that's the auditorium in the back. and that was fine. Next thing I hear, it's going to be the Towns Religion Hall. So...

Walters: (1:52:00) Sure.

**Towns**: (1:52:01) so I, I got both of them. I said, "But, now, B.R. Lakin." He said, "Ok, it will be the school of religion." So the school of religion is called the B.R. Lakin and the building is called Towns and so...but I want you to know, there's a, there's a gym, there's a, there's a women's dorm in Winnipeg Bible College where I spent five years and I really helped that school with accreditation and everything, and they have a Towns women's dorm. It's a two story dorm, and upstairs the girls live up-Towns and downstairs the girls live down-Towns. So, but that, I went there, you know, and I spoke and I, I went and walked over to the dorm and you know, I didn't get any warm fuzzies whatsoever to have my name on a building. And Dave Early, because I really helped him, has the Towns Sunday school building and I get no warm fuzzies out of my name on a building, or this one, because I know if you go to Davidson Hall in Dallas, I don't have a clue who Davidson is. Stearns Hall, I don't know who Stearns is. And, you know, twenty years from now, who in the world is Towns? They won't know. And so, you know, what you do for God, you do now and that's the most important thing, what I do for God, I'm going to do now.

**Walters**: (1:53:14) Just two more questions here as we close. Looking back you're your life, don't limit yourself just to Liberty, what would you do differently, if anything? Any, any regrets or anything that you would've done differently?

**Towns**: (1:53:32) Oh, I think I've always tried to follow the will of God; to do what God wants me to do and therefore, if I did it the first time in the will of God I probably...I

would try to be less egotistical. I'd like, I'd try to sin less. You say, "What is it?" I won't tell you.

**Walters**: (1:53:50) [*laughter*]

**Towns**: (1:53:51) But I, I would, I would, I've tried to follow God all the years of my life and so I don't, I think I've accomplished a lot more than I've set out to do and so I'm, I'm happy with that. And, but I don't, I really don't count myself as a giant in the faith, I just call myself as one of the faithful. I, I said early on coming here, I said, "You know, if I can be Melanchthon, and help Luther, you know, do something for God, the most important thing is we have a Luther, not a Melanchthon." You know, I wrote two or three articles on Melanchthon and the Sunday school movement. You know who he is?

**Hall**: (1:54:25) Yeah.

**Towns**: (1:54:26) Yeah, ok, that's, that's been my whole thrust, you know, all along.

**Walters**: (1:54:31) Ok. And then the last question, and you kind of started to drive to this a few moments ago but, oh, about 2075 or so, the three of us won't be here. What would you like to tell anybody who is listening to this tape in its form or its, this recording, what would you like to tell them in the year 2075 or what, what do you think, the United States will be like or what message would you have to someone like that?

**Towns**: (1:55:02) I would say, "You can always do the work of God bigger and better. Stand on the shoulders of the man who built Liberty, Jerry Falwell, and reach higher. Don't go back to you immediate predecessors, your immediate leaders. Look back to great men in history." Winston Churchill as a historian wrote, what is it, *The History of the English-Speaking People* and his whole concept was great people turn history around and his view of history. I did a, a book, one of my better books, called *History of Christian Educators*; the greatest Christian educators who've turned around history. And I would say "Go back and learn from Jerry Falwell," you know, "not Elmer Towns. Only as I talk about what Jerry is. Go back and learn from Jerry and go build another Liberty University to reach that generation, the generation of 2075, to reach that generation for Christ and to put out church planters and missionaries and educators." By the way, I just did a count and I found in my count there are nine college presidents who graduated from our seminary. And I think that's significant, you know, nine college presidents who graduated from our seminary. I didn't bring my list with me.

**Walters**: (1:56:18) Sure, sure.

**Hall**: (1:56:19) Do you have any concerns about the future of Christianity in America since we, Christian faith...

**Towns**: (1:56:26) Oh, I think Christianity is going to center not in American Christianity in the future, I think it's going to be centered in South America and the Pacific rim. I think Christianity is going to be under assault. I really think Babylon of the, of the book of Revelation is Islam. Babylon was not a city, Babylon was an empire that ruled the known world and we've got Islam that's going to rule the known world and it will be Babylon and it will incorporate other religions. It will not be as Jihadist as it is; it will be more incorporating in the future, if it's going to be the book of Revelation. And, and I think the world is going to get more and more evil. I think it's not going to get better. I believe 2 Thessalonians chapter three, these are peerless times, you know, and men shall wax gold or...so I think, I think Christianity is going to be weaker in America and the thing that's going to kill Christianity is the thing that made us big; money. We raised more money for missions and buildings and everything else and money is going to be our undoing, I believe. And so it's not the root of all evil but it's a root of all evil.

**Hall**: (1:57:35) Are you concerned about the growth of Islam in America and the...

Walters: (1:57:38) Around the world...

Hall: (1:57:39) controversy in there about the...

**Towns**: (1:57:40) Yeah, but...

**Hall**: (1:57:41) building of mosques in the United States?

**Towns**: (1:57:44) I heard just yesterday, there are two hundred thousand people a day come to faith in Jesus, Jesus Christ, and that's amazing. And so um...I think we may have just had, over the past weekend, one of our first martyrs, you know, the, the young man who was assassinated in, in Afghanistan. Now, I, I think that there will be other martyrs from Liberty around the world. There will be a lot more martyrs in the future. So, what do I think of Liberty and what would I tell them? I'd say, "Let's do it again. We've got the same God, we got the same power." Now, they may do it in Indonesia, they may do it in Singapore, but let's build another Liberty University. I would say, "Look carefully at the roots and the foundation that made Liberty great. Stick very close to that formula and you can build another school because the formula is what made Liberty great."

**Walters**: (1:58:47) Ok. Well I sure thank you for you time that you've given us today and the other, for the other interviews and it's been a pleasure and a delight.

**Towns**: (1:58:57) Well, my privilege. Thank you.

**Walters**: (1:58:59) 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]