

It was the Sunday morning before Christmas, 2008, and as John and his siblings gathered in their parents' kitchen, both their mom and dad's eyes were filled with tears. What John's 87-year-old father held in his hands was small, but it was obvious he was deeply touched by it. He said little as he pored over his first Christmas present of the season, but his expression spoke volumes.

John had carried off a well-planned surprise, but there was a surprise for him that morning, too.

The story started seven years earlier, when John's parents returned to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, from a fifteen year stint as missionaries in their "retirement" years. During those years, John's father had been asked numerous times to give meditations when their missions community would celebrate a monthly Communion service. As a Classics professor, he would draw on his knowledge of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew languages and cultures to bring fresh insights. John dug through his father's computer, hoping to find the file or files with the notes from those talks.

Finding nothing, John wrote to a colleague of his father, who produced a file that contained twenty-six of those talks. Unfortunately, the format was not compatible with John's word processor, so he spent hours of painstaking work, extracting the text from lots of formatting gibberish. There were tears at times as he sensed the significance of preserving the precious words.

Then, John just sat on the file, not sure what to do next, or when to do it.

Fast forward to 2008, when John, his wife Gail, and their youngest daughter Julianne were invited to help staff an Author's Training School over the summer in England. After obtaining a leave from his job at AT&T, and making arrangements for their older daughters to take care of their Ocean Township home, they were off for a summer of adventure.

One of the speakers at the school was a writer's agent named Patti. John got an appointment with her to discuss another writing project: a book on marriage based on his parents' stories. As an afterthought, he showed Patti the file of his Dad's meditations. She got excited and felt it was publishable.

The school leader, Sandi, suggested that each meditation be paired with the text of a hymn. John immediately embraced the idea, as his Dad is a long-time lover of hymns, often teaching about the stories behind their composition. He quickly found a hymn to match the theme of each meditation.

Meanwhile, Patti continued her travels to visit publishers elsewhere in the U.K. The week after their talk, she called John from Ireland to tell him she had a publisher interested in publishing the meditations...by that Christmas!

Now the crunch was on.

Sandi and John got busy editing the manuscript. He contacted some artistic friends who collaborated on a cover design; one of the friends contributed a striking drawing of two hands breaking bread.

John also approached several key people to provide endorsements for the back cover: first was Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, previously the family's pastor in Bethlehem and later the Chaplain to the U.S. Senate. Next was Dr. Loren Cunningham, the founder and president of Youth With a Mission (YWAM). Third was Dr. David Aikman, previously a foreign correspondent for Time Magazine in Moscow and Beijing. Each of them agreed, based on their warm personal friendship with John's father.

The finishing touch was a beautiful foreword written by Greg Funfgeld, the organist at First Presbyterian Church in Bethlehem, Music Director of the Bethlehem Bach Choir, and a longtime friend of John's parents.

Once everything was turned over to the publisher, John focused attention on planning a book-signing party at his parents' church. After discussing it with his siblings, he decided to let his mom in on the secret, to make sure dad would be at the right place at the right time, well rested for the excitement. They decided on the Sunday before Christmas, which meant they had to present him his first copy that morning at breakfast.

With all the siblings and as many spouses and grandchildren as could come, they jammed into their parents' kitchen as breakfast wound down. John gave a little speech about a small present that they were sure dad would like, then let him open the gift-wrapped book. Cameras clicked, and a video camera whirled. The air was thick with emotion as he gradually became aware of what he held in his hands. For a while, all they heard was, "My word....my word!"

Then came the surprise for John. His dad looked up and said, "So, someone must have written these talks down!" That was John's first clue that the file he had received seven years earlier was in fact a labor of love, carefully transcribed from recordings of the talks given verbally without notes.

In the days that followed, John learned that his father had subsequently tried to recreate those talks from memory. Alas, his recollections had been too sketchy, and friends had encouraged him instead to work on writing down other stories of his youth.

When John's son-in-law, David, first met John's father a few years back, he asked Dr. Feaver if he had any regrets. Without hesitation, he mentioned his failure to publish those Communion meditations from years ago.

Little did Dr. Feaver know that a good friend and colleague had taken the time to capture those talks. Therefore, holding a published copy of those long-lost words took on extra significance for him. Signing his own books that afternoon was a dream come true. For John, it made all the work worthwhile.