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Interview: Charlie Boyd

[Boyd:] I believe that Jesus makes it very clear invitation. That is, we receive eternal life by trusting in Him and if children know what it means to trust a parent or a friend to keep a promise, then they can understand what it means to trust Jesus to keep His promise to forgive our sins and give us His life both now and forever.

[Lepine:] This is *inContext* with Michael Easley. And Michael, a lot of our listeners grew up learning Bible stories, but it took them awhile to understand the story of the Bible.

[Easley:] One of the big challenges in every church, Bob, is how do we communicate Scripture in a childlike way without adding to or embellishing or taking away the simple, but profound message of the Gospel? I was in seminary with a guy named Charlie Boyd. We sat across from each other in what was then euphemistically called “Baby Greek.”
[Laughter]

[Boyd:] Yeah, but no babies.

[Easley:] Yeah, but we cried all the way through it. [Laughter] And this guy was sitting next to me and I found out very quickly he was the smartest guy in the class and another mutual friend, John Pitt, and I said, “We got through Dallas Seminary on Charlie Boyd’s coattails. [Laughter] And Charlie was always ahead of us, he was always studious, he was always helping us and, of course, it reinforced his learning style, but it really did carry John and me through seminary. And so, Charlie, it’s great to have you on *inContext* today.

[Boyd:] Well, thank you for having me and talking about how I got you through seminary, now you’re the President at Moody Bible and I’m writing children’s books, so . . .
[laughter] I don’t know who got who through! [Laughter]

[Lepine:] Now, we should say, Charlie is the pastor at Southside Fellowship in Greenville, South Carolina and Charlie and his wife Karen have spoken at Family Life’s “Weekend to Remember” marriage conferences all across the country, so its not just that you’re off writing children’s books at the beach. Although, this children’s book that you’ve written, Charlie, is your attempt to take what some people call the “meta-narrative” and make it understandable, not just for children, but for the parents who are reading it as well, right?

[Boyd:] That’s exactly right. In fact, about six or seven years ago I had the opportunity to talk with a man who had moved from the Northeast down to the south and this guy was telling me how he had never been raised in a church. His parents didn’t go to church, his grandparents never went to church, and he said, “I moved to the south and people go to the church on Wednesday night. I just don’t get it.”

And a friend of mine in the church had basically tried to share the Gospel with him using a four spiritual laws kind of presentation and the guy just looked at my friend and said, “You know, I know you’re sincere about your faith, but I just don’t understand what you’re saying. I don’t see how it all fits together. Why are you quoting something here from what you say, “John,” and something here from Romans and something here from Ephesians? Just tell me the story.”

And my friend kind of stumbled over that. He said, "Well, you're going to have to get some help." So, he called me in.

[Lepine:] You need to talk to my pastor, right? [Laughter]

[Boyd:] Right. Right. But, we went to lunch and I realized that this man, even though he had been presented with the jewels of the faith, he didn't have a setting. He didn't have a context in which to set them and so he basically said, "Let me just ask this question. If God is so good, why is the world so messed up?"

And I said, "Well, to answer that question, we've got to go back and answer another question. A more basic question and that is, 'Why did God create the world and people to start with?'"

And from that starting point, it led to a way of sharing the Gospel as a story line and not just propositional.

[Lepine:] So in one sense, this book for children, is kind of an evangelistic tract that you put together to help people understand the big story of the Bible, right?

[Boyd:] Yes. It wasn't long after that, I was at a funeral and a man pulled up next to me and he said, "You know, I can't figure out why my brother, who was forty-two years old, why God would take a young man like that. And I turned to the Bible for answers and I just don't get it."

He said, "What's the Bible about, anyway?"

You know, and I, as I attempted to answer, I found it was more difficult than I expected because he didn't understand the Christianese that I had become so comfortable speaking. So he just continued asking me questions, you know.

"In the beginning, what did God want?"

"What went wrong?"

"Why is the world the way it is today?"

"What's God doing to make things right again?"

"How's it all going to come out in the end?"

And those questions became the hooks to share the story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

[Lepine:] Michael, there was a time in our culture when those kinds of questions were almost universally understood and answered. It's not so today, is it?

[Easley:] No. The Biblical narrative has fallen out of the lingua franca. You don't see it in newsprint. References to Sodom and Gomorrah and Goliath, and all these assumptions that we have about the stories of Scripture, for those of us raised in a church context, they're foreign to our culture. And Charlie's done a good job.

Charlie, you and I used to talk about the notion, “A personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”

We used to say, “What does that mean?” We don’t find that chapter and verse, but it sort of connected in the Seventies and the Eighties. People got it. They said, “Oh, that’s what I’m after is a relationship.”

When you started writing *What God Has Always Wanted*, where were you dialing in to telling the story from a Biblical perspective, but how it connects with this audience today?

[Boyd:] Well, we, in the book, use the term “friendship with God” and basically what we say, “What God has always wanted is to live in friendship with the people that He created both now and forever.”

And the way that I came to that was I read the beginning and the end of the Bible over and over again. And I began to notice that in the first few chapters of Genesis, that God created this world, a very good world, where people could see that God Himself was good. And God lived in the midst of the people that He created. He wanted to be with people. Well, you flip to the back of the Bible, the last few chapters in Revelation, and what do you see? You see God coming down to dwell with His people.

That’s the bookends of the Bible and so it just makes sense that everything in between would run that straight line. And so that became, you know, Second Timothy talks about cutting the Scripture straight. Well, I cut a line from Genesis to Revelation and saw that the Bible was about God wanting to live with the people that He had created in personal relationship, in friendship with them.

[Easley:] When you wrote this, how did you intend someone to use it?

[Boyd:] Well, what happened is I had been sharing my faith in this storyline approach over and over and over again and I was sitting in church one Sunday and we had just begun videotaping people’s stories of how they came to know Christ. And, obviously, we have a lot of children coming to know Christ and so when they would tell their stories, I would listen. And, I don’t know, after about twenty of them, I had this “Aha” moment, which was kind of a ridiculous “Aha” moment in one sense; and that was, the vast majority of those children telling their stories of how they came to know Jesus said that they came to know Christ because a mom or a dad had shared the Gospel with them.

And it dawned on me, “You know, we’re not doing anything as a church to equip parents to share the Gospel with their own children in a way that they could understand.” We teach them Bible stories, but we don’t teach them the Bible’s story. And I wanted, and again, because I was learning to share the Gospel with adults in simple, non-jargon type of language from Genesis to Revelation, I thought, “Boy, we need to do this with kids.”

So, I told one of our staff members about it and she said, “Well, what would you say?” And so I just started and went right through and she said, “You’ve got to go write that down right now.”

[Easley:] Mmm hmm.

[Boyd:] And I did and came and back and then we storyboarded the whole thing out and it just took off from there. But I am fond of saying that this is really a parenting book disguised as a children's book.

[Lepine:] Charlie, do you think it's - is this something that children at ages four, five, six, seven, can grasp in a saving way, this message of the big story of the Bible?

[Boyd:] Yes, I do. I think the Bible and the story of the Bible is simple enough that if someone can understand that "I've got this thing in me, this "I want my way" kind of attitude-" Which is what we call sin. In the book we talk about selfishness. Sin is the, "I want my way," kind of attitude. When a person can understand that, I think they can understand the remedy for that; and that is to trust in who Jesus is and His promise to forgive your selfishness and to save you from it, to rescue you from it and the penalty of it.

And in the book itself, there is a spot where you can pause and it walks you through how to talk to your child about trusting Christ. And I, this is going to sound a little heretical, but I know we're fond of telling children that they need to ask Jesus into their heart. And it is true that Jesus comes to live in our hearts, but the Bible never tells us to ask Jesus into our hearts. It tells us to trust Him. And so, I'm very careful in the book to help a parent use, what I consider to be Biblically accurate language as they present the story of the Bible, the story of the Gospel, who Jesus is, what He's done and what He promises to people who will take Him at His word.

[Easley:] Charlie, you and I have both talked about this many times. Child like faith is simply embracing, it's trusting, it's believing the message.

So the content of the five-year-old child saying, "I've trusted Christ that He died for my sins," I don't think we're necessarily challenging his or her faith by asking them, "What does that mean? What did you do?" as they get older.

Charlie, what would you say to a child four, five, six that says all the right things but perhaps you're, as a parent, are not real sure that, you know, Johnny or Sharon has got it?

[Boyd:] Well, I can't really look into a child's heart and know what's happening there. But I believe that Jesus makes a very clear invitation. That is, we receive eternal life by believing in Him, by trusting in Him. And if children know what it means to trust a parent or a teacher or a friend to keep a promise, then they can understand what it means to trust Jesus to keep His promise to forgive our sins and give us His life both now and forever.

And so, I believe it's that simple. It's trusting in who Jesus is, who He claims to be. He claims to be God who has come and He's died on a cross and He was raised from the dead and He stated over and over again in the Gospel of John that, "If you will trust that I am who I say I am and that I will do for you what I'm going to die and rise again to prove to you. If you'll trust me for forgiveness and life, I will give it to you."

So to me, it's as simple as trusting a promise. Now, when the child actually crosses that line, I don't know, but that's the way that I would keep presenting the message. And,

again, that's why I believe this book is so helpful is because you can read it and reread it and it continually stresses what it means to live in friendship with God through what Jesus has done for us.

[Lepine:] And the book gives you as a parent and your child a common language or a common understanding. You can come back to things over and over again with the child to reinforce this big story of the Bible. So that if you're living with a child and the child's acting in a way that's disobedient, you can say, -

[Easley:] No, never. [Laughter]

[Lepine:] - "Are you trusting what God wants to do in your life, are you believing? Do you want to follow Jesus? You said you did, we're not seeing it lived out."

You can, again, reinforce these kinds of things because you've got a common vocabulary through what the book presents.

[Boyd:] Yeah, that's a good way of putting it, Bob; finding a common vocabulary. And one of the things that I've added in the book is a glossary in the back that as questions arise, a parent can go back and look in this glossary and - I tried to write the book with a mindset that I actually had a child sitting on my knee and I just had this book of pictures and how would I explain in real simple language? How would I tell the story? Well, I did that with this glossary in the back.

Let me just read, "There are several ways the Bible describes living in a relationship with God. God is our Creator and we are His people. God is our King and we are His servants. God is our Shepherd and we are His sheep. God is our Father and we are His children. God is like a Husband and we're like His wife. Friendship with God includes all these ideas. Most of all, friendship with God means coming to know Him so well that you trust what He says."

And I think that's the key and so we do need a common language for that and its something that parents and grandparents need to adopt as their role. Not the churches role, not the children's ministry's role, not delegated to the student ministry; but this is first and foremost what parents are supposed to do, and that is live our their faith and pass on their faith.

[Easley:] Not long ago I was having a little bit of a challenge with my fourteen year old son and I decided to take him for a walk. I walk about forty-five minutes to an hour every day and he hates to go walking with me.

And so I said, "Come on, buddy, we're going for a walk."

And I said, "You're going to walk with me and you're going to keep up with me." Because he notoriously will try to aggravate me by walking really slow behind me. And so, we were walking along. He was doing great and it was very quiet and very somber and he started to lighten up and little bit.

And I said, "Hey, buddy." I said, "Do you know where we are going?"

And he said, "No."

And I didn't say anything more and then a minute later I said, "Do you know how we're getting there."

And he said, "No."

And then I asked him, "Do you know how to get back home?"

And he said, "No."

And so, I just carried this on very quietly and after about twenty minutes of walking he starts asking, "When are we going to get home? How are we going to get there?"

And I just used it as a great opportunity to say, "You know, I know where I'm going, I know how to get us back home. Right now you need to stick with me and trust me because the only way you're getting back is to be with me."

[Boyd:] Wow.

[Easley:] And it was a great lesson for him and it really dialed in and he got it. I said, "You know, Devon, this is the Christian life. You have to trust God at His Word for not knowing your ultimate destination, but you know He knows how we're going to get there."

[Boyd:] Wow. Yeah. That's great.

[Lepine:] And, Charlie, you mentioned, too, that you use the expression of selfishness in the book as a way to help children understand the whole concept of sin. That's really what's at the core for all of us, is the desire to, I'm thinking of what D.A. Carson refers to the "De-Godding of God."

We want to be in charge of our own lives. We want to be in control. We want what we want and we don't really care what God wants, right?

[Boyd:] Right. That's the root. It's living as if there was no God or is no God. It's living as if I am God. I get to choose what is good and bad rather than trusting in God and His goodness and how He has defined good and bad.

[Easley:] Charlie, I just pulled up Amazon.com and I'm finding seven reviews that all gave it five stars. [Laughter]

[Lepine:] And nobody gave it less than five stars?

[Easley:] No, no. That's all its showing on this particular screen.

[Lepine:] So your family has been busy.

[Easley:] Yeah. Yeah. You've got different names you're submitting these reviews in. [Laughter] But here's one that I like. It said, "I'm twenty-six years old and this book really reached out and grabbed me. Even though it's a kid's book, don't be deceived. All walks and all ages can benefit from giving this one a read."

So, I think it's a good testimony, Bob. To taking the complexity of Scripture that we love and yet putting it in a way that a child could grasp and a parent and an adult could say, "Okay, this is the big picture of what God wants in a relationship with us."

[Lepine:] And understanding the big story makes all the rest of the stories make sense, doesn't it Charlie?

[Boyd:] Yeah. We typically think of the Bible as sixty-six separate books, but the reality is, it's one book. And I'm convinced that the ancient Hebrew people and the early church, I'm convinced they knew the story. But today, we've chopped the story up into Bible stories, each having their own moral lesson and we're not seeing that the stories of the Bible show us people who are struggling with their faith. They are sometimes believing and sometimes unbelieving. They are acting in good ways sometimes and they're acting in bad ways. But what we see is the story of the Bible is not about them, it's about God. It's His story.

And this is one of those things that has really reached out and just grabbed me as I teach and preach the Bible. Is that I want people to understand that the Bible is God's story and He's inviting us into His story. It's not so much about us inviting Him to become a part of our story, but He's doing something in the world. And the Bible shows us what He's doing from Genesis to Revelation and his invitation to us is, "Come, be a part of my story. See who I am. Find out how good I am and what I want to do with your life. And I'm convinced that, you know, Dr. Bill Bright, when he wrote out the four spiritual laws way, way back decades ago; and that first law, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life;" I'm convinced Dr. Bright knew that the wonderful plan was God's plan because that's how he lived his life. He lived as a part of God's plan.

But I think as we've run that language through a "me" generation, prosperity theology kind of culture, we've turned the story of the Bible around to where, basically, many times the Gospel is presented as the way to make your story better. And the Bible just isn't about that.

[Easley:] Charlie, there's a nine-year-old boy, a twelve-year-old girl who has just stumbled across this conversation between you and Bob Lepine and me. And they want to know what God wants of them. What would you tell them?

[Boyd:] I would say God wants to live in friendship with you both now and forever and to show you just how much He wants that, He came in the person of His Son Jesus and He lived a perfect life and He died so that our sins and our selfishness could be forgiven and taken away. And He was raised from the dead to put His very own life and Spirit into us so that we can live with Him now and forever.

And if you'll simply trust Him to do what He said He would do, He will come into your life, He will forgive your sin, He will give you a new kind of life that starts now and goes on forever.

Here's the key, Jesus has done everything that needs to be done for us to live in friendship with God forever.

[Lepine:] That's not just a great story, that's good news, isn't it? [Laughter]

[Boyd:] That's great news! That's the best news!

[Easley:] Charlie, thanks for being with us today on *inContext*.

[Boyd:] Thank you.

[Lepine:] You know, Michael, as we think about this big story that Charlie has been helping unpack for us today, I think there are a lot of grown ups, as he said, who haven't understood the big message, the meta-narrative of Scripture. And you think of this book as a book for children, and it certainly is helpful for children, but there have been a lot of adults who have benefited from reading through Charlie's book.

We have copies of Charlie's book available here at *inContext*. If you go to our website, incontextradio.org, and look under the resources tab, there's information there on how you can get a copy of Charlie's book sent to you. Again, it's called *What God Has Always Wanted* and the information is available at incontextradio.org.

There's also information on our website about some of the changes that are taking place here at *inContext*. In fact, we should let listeners know that you are in a new assignment as the pastor of Fellowship Bible Church in suburban Nashville, Tennessee, actually out in Franklin, right?

[Easley:] Well, the church is located in Brentwood, but, yeah, it's Franklin, Brentwood, all kind of rolls together with Nashville and have been here since the end of December and loving life in middle Tennessee. And, you know, I'm not missing the winter of Chicago too much, Bob.

[Lepine:] [Laughter]

[Easley:] I have to confess. But, no, back in the pulpit, back in a local church and thrilled to have the opportunity to keep on ministering through radio and through broadcasting. We'll take some different stations, some different formats and a little more activity on the internet. So, for those who want to follow us, we'll continue broadcasting and opening the Word on a daily basis.

[Lepine:] And if folks find themselves in the Nashville area and would like to come out to Fellowship Bible Church to hear you, you've been preaching through First Thessalonians recently, right?

[Easley:] We are. We're in the midst of talking about our hope is His coming. And awfully relevant in our current context with financial uncertainties and a new president in recent months and how this will all sort out. But we've got a greater hope and, you know, a hope and a King. So it's been a lot of fun studying and delving into that book to say, "How do we live with an uncertain future?" And our hope's pinned on Christ.

[Lepine:] Well, if folks want to stay connected with the ministry of *inContext*, the best way to do it, again, is by regularly stopping by the incontextradio.org website. And we hope you'll do that. Hope you have a great weekend this weekend and we hope you can join us back on Monday when we're going to look at why we believe what we believe about Satan. That's on Monday's edition of *inContext* with Michael Easley.