

#240 – April 3, 2009

Interview: Michael and Bob

[Easley:] I think to look at a hundred and twenty-three year old legacy ministry - to what can you compare Moody? The doctrinal statement unchanged, to know that they subscribe to the inerrancy of Scripture, to Christ alone as the way of salvation, this is an other-worldly place. It has problems and challenges, but my hope is not in Moody, my hope is in the God of the Moody Bible Institute

[Lepine:] This is *inContext* with Michael Easley. I'm Bob Lepine. And today's program is going to be "something completely different" as our friends across the pond are fond of saying [Laughter] because this is the final program that we're doing on *inContext*.

[Easley:] Should we end it like the BBC? "And that's the end of the news." [Laughter] "That's the end of the program."

[Lepine:] No, we are here to let our listeners, give them an update on you and on what's going on, your new assignment. First of all, I think we ought to just answer the question, "How's your back?"

[Easley:] The short answer is I live with chronic pain. I probably will unless God intervenes in some wonderful way, which I believe He can, I hope He will; but I want to be faithful even if He doesn't. You know, Bob, I do want to thank our listeners. We have gotten so many remedies and recommendations over the years now since this has been a public issue, but I've seen some of the best surgeons in the United States and experimented with a lot of alternative things. But the short answer is I live with chronic pain and I will and I try to manage that the best I can.

[Lepine:] And the chronic pain you've been experiencing was one of the significant factors that led to the decision you made a year ago -

[Easley:] Right.

[Lepine:] - to step down as president of the Moody Bible Institute.

[Easley:] Right. After my second back surgery, an extraordinary surgeon at Northwestern, I was coming out of the anesthesia in my, you know, addled state, he says to Cindy and me, "The absolute worst thing you can do with your back is to get on and off airplanes and in and out of a car on the Eisenhower."

[Lepine:] Hmm.

[Easley:] And it became a defining moment that, you know, for the kind of job that this is, that it requires, the ministry deserves a person who has that type of physical stamina and ability. And the trustees have been extraordinarily kind to Cindy and me. I just can't bless God enough for how wonderful they have been to us. So, as a lot of decisions are in life, they really aren't that hard because you look at the wisdom and the information and say, "I can't continue doing this." And they need someone who can do it, and God provides.

[Lepine:] At the same time, you didn't come to Chicago, three or four years ago now, and take this assignment with the idea that it would be a short-term assignment.

[Easley:] No. We felt it would be a ten plus year commitment and that, again, was part of the decision matrix, was, well, “Lord, I thought we came here for a time. I thought we were coming here for a season. We’re barely getting started and settled.”

But, you know, our plans aren’t His and submission to Him, submission to His Word, is the best place to be no matter what our circumstances want to tell us.

[Lepine:] Did you have to battle with a range of emotions in making that decision?

[Easley:] I really didn’t. It was harder for Cindy than me. She would tell you that if she was sitting here with us, Bob. But, no, it became a function of survivability. The level of pain I was living with and the probably July to December timeframe of 2007 was excruciating, and getting treatments and all types of help. But I lived in such pain I could not sleep, I had a hard time sitting, I had a hard time doing anything. You can’t function. And there are levels of pain where you can function if you have a bad headache, you can ignore it. But when it’s a migraine you take a nap and go take some medications.

When you have chronic pain of this kind you can’t turn it off so you have to back up and say, “Okay, Lord. I can’t function with this kind of pain. I’m a distraction to everyone. I can’t make good decisions; I have a short temper, on and on and on.”

So, no. It wasn’t a hard decision; it was a decision of, “Okay, Lord, I’m going to trust you. I’m going to submit. You have something else for us to do and that’s okay.”

[Lepine:] Today you still deal with that pain. Is it more manageable than it was eighteen months ago?

[Easley:] In God’s kindness I’m okay. I’m off all narcotics; I’m off all the heavy duty pain medications which, I have, again, good doctors helping me. I’m trying some alternative things that the jury’s still out on whether they’re going to work. The future is not bright, again, unless the Lord intervenes. I have very bad [Laughter] news in my future. So, again, part of the transition out of Moody into a different ministry that gives me a little more flexibility and an ability hopefully to still serve Christ with the gifts and skills that I may have.

[Lepine:] When you resigned from Moody, you didn’t know immediately -

[Easley:] Right.

[Lepine:] – what the next step was going to be for you. Did you have some idea of what you thought it would look like in general?

[Easley:] I’ve always felt I was a churchman. I wrestled with that in the first couple of years of being a pastor; but over, you know, twenty-nine years of marriage now, Cindy and I thrived in the local church. Our kids did well in the local church. We loved the life and rhythm of a local church, whether it was traumas, funerals, worship services that brought tears of worship and joy to our eyes and all in between.

So, I think at my core I’m a churchman. So, in the back of my mind, I didn’t know where we were going or how, but I knew I had time to breathe, I knew we were at a place

financially and, you know, Cindy and I, again, we live under our income, we give consistently and faithfully, we save a little, we've done it all our married life and, you know, when you follow God's plans for your finances you don't worry and fear when things like this happen because you have resources.

So, we couldn't complain. And to choose to look at the blessings of God in our life to say, "God will take care of us."

Don't know what that means. Cindy thought about working full time, if I'm an invalid, what that would look like in our relationship. So, we have a great marriage, we talk about this stuff all the time and I'm greatly blessed to have a life partner like her.

[Lepine:] Back in September of last year you announced that you had decided to assume a new role -

[Easley:] Yes.

[Lepine:] – as a lead pastor at a church in Franklin, Tennessee. And you've stepped into that role -

[Easley:] Mm hmm.

[Lepine:] – starting at the beginning of this year, back in January. Tell us a little bit about this new assignment.

[Easley:] You know, we had a handful of churches come after us very quickly, which was humbling and nice, but we also knew we didn't have to rush into anything. The conversation, as I like to refer to it, with Fellowship Bible Church of the Nashville area, was simply that. I've known some of these folks for ten plus years now and they're good men, it's a good church, it's a thriving ministry.

And as I got to see what the Lord was doing in Nashville, Brentwood, Franklin, the surrounding areas, we were so excited. A young church, ten years old, forty-five hundred some people, capacity groups, everything's full, kids were full, the auditoriums are full and the more we got to know them and talk to them we felt this would be just an honor to co-labor with them.

So I have a great, great job in the job side of things and I get to work with some great men and women and I'm just thrilled to be in Nashville.

[Lepine:] You've been preaching through First Thessalonians -

[Easley:] Yes. Yes.

[Lepine:] - in recent days.

[Easley:] It's solving the end days and the second coming of Christ and it is a timely message for us, Bob, because Paul is telling the Thessalonians, "Be encouraged when your fearful, when you're terrified, and an uncertain future because we know the ultimate future."

That's the message of Thessalonians.

[Lepine:] In this internet era -

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] Some of our listeners want to know if those recent messages -

[Easley:] Yes.

[Lepine:] – are accessible and available.

[Easley:] Yes. Yes. And, in fact if you Google the “*inContext* with Michael Easley” kind of information you can find your way to the website. We will not only have all the podcasts, they're all free, you can get all that you want and then some. But we're also enhancing some of these materials because people have asked. And so we're trying to resource folks and so find your way to incontextradio.org. One word: incontextradio.org.

[Lepine:] So how does it feel to be back in a local church and to be preaching on Sundays again?

[Easley:] I've given the advice thousands of times to others and myself. You always trade a set of known problems for a set of unknown problems [Laughter] whenever you go in life. So Fellowship gets to see the problems with having Michael Easley on board.

We're thrilled. The quality of life in the Nashville/Brentwood area is just wonderful. It's a nice climate, it's a great culture. But, the privilege of being in a local church, Bob, and you know this well from your own experience, what a blessing to be a part of this church.

[Lepine:] Mm hmm. And the great blessing is to see how people sitting under the ministry of God's Word are transformed, are excited -

[Easley:] Yes.

[Lepine:] - how they're love for Christ grows and how that translates into change in their lives, in their marriages, in their families, in their careers. It's thrilling to see God at work through the ministry of His Word.

[Easley:] I was probably, I don't know thirty-five or six and I had never thought about this, but someone was quoting me in a conversation of something I had said in a sermon and it was like an anxiety attack. I remember being nervous about what they were saying. And long story short, not that they're quoting Michael Easley, but if I said something that came clearly out of a verse or a passage of the Bible and God in some mysterious and marvelous and wonderful way imprinted that on a person's brain and they said, you know, “Michael said this,” on Tuesday morning when they're facing something in their office or their kid or whatever, what a privilege.

And, wow, when you're used for Him there's nothing better on this earth.

[Lepine:] As we're having this conversation, the Moody Bible Institute has not yet named a new president. This is about the time when they expect that announcement might come, but, again, we're not sure how that time table may have fill out and it may have already happened or it still may be a few months away. But talk a little bit about Moody's future –

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] – and about the years that you spend in the role of president.

[Easley:] Well being the shortest tenured president at the Moody Bible Institute is my distinct legacy. Cindy says, "Well, you set the bar low for the next guy." [Laughter]

I think to look at a hundred and twenty-three year old legacy ministry - to what can you compare Moody? The doctrinal statement unchanged, 1928 clarified in some ways, to know that they subscribe to the inerrancy of Scripture, to Christ alone as the way of salvation, on and on and on as we've talked about why we believe what we believe. This is an other-worldly place. It has problems and challenges, as any human organization does, but my hope is not in Moody, my hope is in the God of the Moody Bible Institute.

Broadcasting, publications, undergraduate, graduate, distance learning, aviation, efforts around the globe that Moody's involved with; there is no place like it. Joe Stohl, the seventh president, often referred to Moody as a Christian conglomerate. That's a good word because it's not simply a Bible Institute; one of the older broadcasting efforts, one of the older Christian publishers. So the legacy here is extraordinary and I have every confidence in the Lord, in the trustees and in the next president that they will stay on course.

[Lepine:] In the last hundred and twenty years we've seen a lot of schools, –

[Easley:] Yes.

[Lepine:] - theological training institutions, that started strong and drifted into liberalism, drifted away from the teaching of Scripture. Was there ever a time in Moody's history when that was in danger, do you think?

[Easley:] Oh, many times, many times. In fact, the most familiar story between Moody and Torrey. Moody was not a theologian proper, he was an evangelist. He was an entrepreneur and he was smart enough to bring along guys like Torrey to guard the doctrine. In the Twenties, the issue of liberalism and modernity, we would call it, came to a head and all truth is God's truth was Frank Gaebelaine's attempt at this. These were watershed issues in those days.

[Lepine:] Yeah.

[Easley:] Moody could have very easily drifted over into a liberal school and become an altruistic, social organization.

[Lepine:] This was when the controversy was happening at Princeton University over their seminary.

[Easley:] Right. Right.

[Lepine:] And Westminster began –

[Easley:] Yes.

[Lepine:] – because Princeton was moving away from the Scriptures.

[Easley:] I have a phrase that “institutions never list ‘conservative.’” We always go liberal. And to hang on to these tenants we’ve mentioned before, Andover, Princeton, Harvard, Yale, all would be considered evangelical bastions of seminaries in their day; and, of course, today you’d be hard pressed to find anything like that other than parachurch organizations that are clinging on.

[Lepine:] So how has Moody stayed the course?

[Easley:] There was a great study done called the rise and fall of Andover Theological Seminary and the study basically concludes presidents and board members are what keep an organization on track. And I think Moody’s longevity of presidents, the longevity of trustees who sign a doctrinal statement, keep it that way. Moody is one president or one trustee away from liberalism. And, in fact, my final message and encouragement to the board of trustees was, “Your selection of the next president in the 1928 doctrinal statement must be supportive, adherent, be able to teach and defend this doctrine because of issues like emergent issues, post modernity, the roles of men and women, all these issues, tolerance, inclusive theology, all these things, the openness of God; these are always pushing against the doctrinal statements.”

Faculty members can move off those things. So, another unique piece of Moody’s great history is every year we all sign, we subscribe, to the doctrinal statement. There’s no tenure here.

[Lepine:] You re-up.

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] Huh.

[Easley:] So the trustees, and it was, I don’t know quite why, Bob, but it always brought me to tears. We would sit in the board room at Moody, we would read the doctrinal statement, we all signed it and dated it and put them in a file folder. That we as the board of trustees were committing ourselves to one another and before God, “We will uphold these doctrines.”

And I would say from time to time to the faculty, “If you can’t support and teach that subscription, you should leave. You don’t have a choice, you signed it.”

And the genius of not having tenure in this world is that you can’t be granted tenure and then change your opinion about Christology. You’re signing a document. And Moody has historically removed faculty because they have wandered off the theological page.

[Lepine:] I know over the last four years that you have been involved with Moody there have been many highlights. I think back to the Founder's Weeks that you've been a part of and the great preaching you've heard during those times, the pastors conferences, I know this program has been a highlight for you, but I'm guessing that probably the greatest highlight you've experienced has been the interaction with the young men and women –

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] - on campus.

[Easley:] Well, even in recent weeks up here hanging out with some of the students. To see these young men and women who are so passionate about serving Christ. When I moved I needed some students to help me with my library and I had three, two young ladies and a young man, help me pack and repack about thirty-five very heavy boxes of books. And to hear their heart, to hear their passion. Asking questions like, "The best part of Moody? Worst part of Moody? What'd you learn? What are you going to do?"

Their wholly naiveté about how God's going to use them to change the world for Christ. I miss that. And when folks come to the campus, we have tours all of the time, you can come anytime and we'll give you a tour. Go down to the student dining room, known as the SDR, and just walk up to any table, sit down with a bunch of tired Moody students who are running between classes and ask them about how they came to Christ, why they're at Moody, what do they want to be when they grow up and it will encourage your heart.

[Lepine:] All of the Moody students are involved in off campus service projects as a part of their educational experience, right?

[Easley:] Dating back to Moody's idea, it's now called "Practical Christian Ministry," PCM. They're required to do a minimum of two hours a week in some local thing. And it might be an AWANA game circle at an inner-city church, it might be leading music, it might be doing some service oriented thing in a hospice, in a soup kitchen. But when you talk to the students, if you ask them, they'll get excited about PCM. That's what they want to talk about, not so much the chapel that I had just given or the class. [Laughter]

[Lepine:] The class they have a test in next week.

[Easley:] [Laughter] But they'll get real excited about this kid they're working with or this church they're apart of and their eyes brighten up and they come alive. So, that really is a legacy that D.L. Moody himself put fingerprints on this place; that you are taking what you're learning out there into the community and what an extraordinary privilege.

You know, I want to say, Bob, just as a personal note, thanks for doing *inContext*. This has been fun.

[Lepine:] It has been fun. For me, it's been all about this pizza. You know that, don't you?

[Easley:] [Laughter] Coming to Chicago and recording these programs and-

[Lepine:] Our friends don't need to know this. We get ill at lunch because Lepine insists upon getting Giordano's or Luminani's or some other evil pizza, we eat too much of it.
[Laughter]

But it's just been an honor to have you come and, again, to Dennis Rainey, what a great friendship we continue to have. To loan you to Moody to come do this, thanks so much.

[Lepine:] Well, it has been a real joy for me in part because we've had the opportunity over the past year to talk about a lot of subjects –

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Lepine:] - that don't make it on *Family Life Today*. [Laughter] I mean, there are a lot of topics that we've covered that don't get covered there. And I remember when I first sat down with Dennis, this was back in 1992, and we were talking about the possibility of me coming and helping to launch *Family Life Today*, one of the things Dennis said is, "What makes you weep and pound the table?"

And I knew the right answer if I wanted the job was to talk about marriage and family [Laughter] and I said, "Well, honestly what makes me weep and pound the table is theology. It's studying God." I said, "Now, to the extent that marriage and family is a part of God's purpose and agenda and it's on His heart, then that makes me weep and pound the table –"

[Easley:] Right.

[Lepine:] - but, ultimately it's about knowing and understand God and His purposes and His plan."

Now, I have to say, over the last sixteen years I've been involved with *Family Life Today* I have seen powerfully how much marriage and family is on the heart of God -

[Easley:] Right. Right.

[Lepine:] - probably in a way that I did not understand it when I first got to *Family Life Today*. That core unit of the family and the core of marriage are fundamental to what God is doing on planet earth.

But we've had a chance to have some conversations along the way –

[Easley:] Yeah. Some fun.

[Lepine:] - on subjects that wouldn't make *Family Life Today* and it's been a privilege to be a part of that and to get a chance to listen to your teaching on a regular basis.

[Easley:] As we conclude this great friendship and a thank you to our listeners and those who've written emails and sent contributions, what a humbling thing to hear from those who listen in. Those who are newer and perhaps have just stumbled across *inContext*; you know Bob Lepine and myself, the men and women at Moody Radio, our greatest longing it for you to know Christ.

[Lepine:] Right.

[Easley:] If you've never come to that place in your spiritual curiosity and your questions about world religions and God and who is there in times of terrorism and war and economic upheaval; God has this thing figured out. And you need to come to the place where you trust in Christ and Christ alone for your salvation. You can never be good enough to get to God –

[Lepine:] Mm hmm.

[Easley:] - but God was good enough to come to you. He lived, He died, He was buried and He came back from the grave. He proved He had power over death. And, my friend, put your trust in Christ. Believe in Him, put your faith in Him and He will give you a gift of everlasting life.

[Lepine:] And it really is as simple as that. Acknowledging the reality of your need for a savior and then turning in surrender to Christ to be your Savior and your Lord and your Master. And then beginning the lifelong journey of growing in your understanding of who God is and what salvation is all about.

And, again, we want to point people to a resource we've been talking about here for the past several weeks and that is the *Moody Handbook of Theology* that's a great tool for growing in your faith. And there's information about that resource on our website, incontextradio.org. And, Michael, we hope that whether it's longtime listeners or newer listeners, folks will stop by the website and stay connected with the ministry of *inContext*.

The web is the best way to do that in the days ahead since, on many of these stations, the program won't be heard either in this time or at all starting on Monday. So, thanks to those of you who have listened and we hope you'll stay connected with us through our website, incontextradio.org.

[Easley:] And, again, Bob, we just want to say thanks to all those who've listened, who've supported, who've written notes and emails and to Moody Radio for their incredible resource and support of *inContext*, and thank you, Bob, for doing this for the past couple years. I've so appreciated your encouragement, your friendship and your professionalism. We just love you and appreciate you so much.

[Lepine:] Well, it has been an honor for me too. It's something I've been humbled to be a member of the *inContext* radio team. And we ought to give a shout out to those who have helped too. To Nate McMillan, and Dan Anderson, Tim Svoboda and Keith Lynch who have all played a part in bringing this daily program to our listeners.

And I want to encourage folks not only to stay connected with *inContext* at our website, incontextradio.org, but on many of these same stations beginning Monday, Moody is rolling out a new program called *Today in the Word*. You'll continue to hear great Bible teaching from messages that have been delivered at Moody Bible Conferences over the last four decades. And that begins Monday. The program's called *Today in the Word*. And I hope you'll tune in on many of these same stations.

On behalf of the whole *inContext* team, I want to say thanks for listening and we'll see you around our website, incontextradio.org.