

#0055 – July 18, 2008 – George Foreman

[Lepine:] Today on *inContext* Dr. Michael Easley has a fascinating visit with former Heavyweight Champion George Foreman.

[Foreman:] I met Doc Broadus in 1967, of course, and I told him I wanted to be a boxer. I heard he was a Boxing Coach. He said, “Well, you’re big enough, you’re ugly enough, come down to the gym.”

[Easley:] We’re talking today on *inContext* with George Foreman. George is known obviously for his illustrious career as a tremendous Boxer.

George, one of the first questions people want to know is, you know, some people don’t like fighting and boxing. How do you respond to that?

[Foreman:] And I’m the number one person who do not like fighting and boxing. I wish I had been a golfer. Believe me, I was broke without another chance in life to feed my family and I didn’t know how to use the golf clubs at all. I had to go back into boxing. It was probably the oldest profession of all time and I had to do that to take care of my family.

[Easley:] Wow. Well, there’s got to be a competition element to it, right?

[Foreman:] And when you do something like, boxing is like any other job. You must be the best at it to be productive.

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Foreman:] I had to be the best not because I wanted to beat or hurt anyone, that was never, especially the second time around, never a punch in anger. It was all about taking care of my family.

[Easley:] Wow. Before we talk about your new book, George, the other question folks want to ask is about this George Foreman Grill. I mean, this thing has been just phenomenal. Talk about that.

[Foreman:] Oh, probably other than boxing is the only thing that’s intimidated me is to walk down the street and little children recognizing me, 6, 7, 8-year old. And I’m thinking, I’m feeling like a hero and they’ll say, “That’s the cooking man.” The grill took over.

[Easley:] We had a men’s conference here at the Moody Bible Institute last year and one of our guys, Dennis Swanberg said, “How many of you own a George Foreman Grill?” And I don’t think there was one hand that wasn’t up in that auditorium. So it’s a big hit with guys.

[Foreman:] It was a privilege to be associated with such an item.

[Easley:] George, in your new book on fatherhood, you mentioned about the impact of an absentee father. You didn’t have a dad when you grew up.

[Foreman:] And this stings because you almost think that the world is like that, when you don’t have a father, you think that the mother is everything; and my mother was the best she could be. But without a father, let me tell you, there was a big emptiness there. And a boy is almost left out, like hanging in space without a father.

[Easley:] How many brothers and sisters did you have, George?

[Foreman:] There were a total of 7 of us, 4 boys and 3 girls. That includes me.

[Easley:] You stay in contact with any of them?

[Foreman:] Oh, my family has become probably the most important thing in my life. As a matter of fact, I went back and I really went into boxing so I could help my brothers out to get their education and help support them, be some help to my mother. They were younger than I.

[Easley:] George, you have had an extraordinary career but your real passion now is talking about family and fatherhood and kids. You have 10 children of your own.

[Foreman:] Ten kids, five sons, of course, five daughters. I named all my boys George Edward Foreman for obvious reasons.

[Easley:] Well, talk about that. People want to know, why are all these kids named George Edward Foreman?

[Foreman:] Well, I remember going to Africa and all I could hear was, "Ali, Ali". I said that's one name I would not call them. And Joe Frazier fighting me to death. There would be no Joe Frazier in the family. But I wanted the kids to have something they could cling on to, be a family. If one of us does well, all of us do well. If one fails, cause a blemish, it's on all of us, not, not -- give us that name so that we could be one in that area.

[Easley:] Now, are they second, third, fourth, fifth, Jr's? How do you do it?

[Foreman:] Yeah, you have to give 'em all numbers. I'm number one on George, of course, and then numbered all the way down to five. Number six, I'm sorry, George VI.

[Easley:] I bet they've been trading bills and this is your George Foreman bill, not mine, huh?

[Foreman:] You know, there was a time when a bunch of them were in the school at the same time and the teachers would call home and say George is in trouble. I was afraid to ask which one. George is not doing his homework. That's where the problems were.

[Easley:] That's great.

[Foreman:] But then I know which George it is.

[Easley:] Now George, this has become a passion for you about talking about father. Your new book, *George, God in My Corner: A Spiritual Memoir*. And, I mean, obviously you're dealing with a lot of kids who don't have a mom and dad around. What motivated you to produce this?

[Foreman:] Oh yeah. So when I talk about my, my -- I had -- I did everything I could to keep my family together and understanding at last all my kids needed me. A mother, a loving mother is so important. But making certain that father image is there. That father person is there. It became -- I, I remember almost going to prison a few times, almost getting into deep trouble because I didn't have a father to steer me. It became one of my obsessions to make certain all men out there would understand that a father is very important. Doesn't matter if you're with your family, if you happen not to be with your family, still have an input into your children; don't give up on them ever.

[Easley:] You tell quite an interesting story about hiding under a house. It says, "You say to yourself you're a thief, you're no good. Why would you be hiding like this? I said if I can get out from under this house and the police don't grab me, I'm going to do something with my life."

[Foreman:] Isn't that strange because my mother always told me there never been a thief in the family and that a liar was the same as a thief, and things like that. And I'd going into robbing on the streets, a mugger and a thief, and there I was under a house covering myself with mud so dogs wouldn't sniff me out like criminals did on television. And I realized that hey, you are a criminal, you're a crook. And it took that incident to make me realize that that's what I had fallen into. I said if I get from under this house, given a second chance, I'll never steal anything from anyone else; and that was the turning point in my life. I found the Job Corp. at that point. Went to Grant's Pass, Oregon. And I even found out later on how to be a boxer doing the vocational program. My life was changed because of that 'bout. I don't like for any boy to come to that point in his life and that's why a father is necessary.

[Easley:] George, how did you come to know Christ?

[Foreman:] I had this wonderful experience after my last boxing match in the '70s where I had an experience where I was dead and alive again in a split second in the boxing dressing room. I didn't believe in religion let alone anything else. And there I was fighting for my life. You gonna die in a dressing room. And I tried to make a bargain because I had money. I offered this boy. I said, "Look, I'm still George Foreman. I can box and give money to charity and cancer." And the voice answered me back, "I don't want your money, I want you."

[Easley:] Wow.

[Foreman:] Well, in a split second I was gone, over my head, under my feet, nothing, just sorrow and emptiness. And I got mad. I said I don't care if this is death, I still believe there's a God. I just didn't believe in religion at all. And when I said that like a giant hand picked me out of a dump yard of everything and brought me back and I could feel life in my body, blood flowing through my veins. And I started screaming I'm dying, I'm dying for God. But as I laid there on the table I felt blood coming down my forehead and I saw it. I told everybody in the room remove your hands because he's bleeding where the thorns. The thorns on his head are making him bleed. And I looked at my head. I said Jesus Christ is coming alive in me. I saw blood. I haven't stopped since.

[Easley:] Wow.

[Foreman:] It's been 31 years now that I've been telling that story.

[Easley:] Wow. George, a lot of statistics out there; 85% of youth who are in prison, some from a fatherless home, 71% of high school kids drop out don't have dads. You established the Foreman Youth and Community Center back in 1984. Obviously, you know, this has been something you got a big passion about.

[Foreman:] Oh, yes. I was -- I left athletics alone completely, walked away from it. I just wanted to be a preacher from '77 all the way on. And one day I stopped by a boxing gym and some people tried to get me interested in some kids and I said, "Bring them to church. Boxing is not going to help them." But I inquired about this one particular kid and he had been arrested robbing a store. He had even shot the storekeeper as the storekeeper shot his friend. I felt so bad. I took the money I had saved up to live happily ever after. My brother Roy and I started the George Foreman Youth Center. And I said, you know, I'm not going to preach to the kids, I'm not going to do anything but just be there for them. And

this thing was started, this was 1983, and I've had it going then. I just wanted to be there for the kids just to let them know I care about 'em. That I'm going to be their father.

[Easley:] Is the center still operating?

[Foreman:] Still operating, going strong. As a matter of fact, I went back into boxing to get it going, to keep it going, and even acquired more property, and I've never preached one sermon but you can believe the kids have come there preaching to me.

[Easley:] Now, there's an individual in your life name Doc Broadus.

[Foreman:] Oh, wonderful man who never gave up on me. I met Doc Broadus in 1967, of course, and I told him I wanted to be a boxer. I heard he was a boxing coach. He said, "Well, you're big enough, you're ugly enough, come down to the gym." And I tried and I tried boxing for the first time. It was frightening. I couldn't do it. I tried to wrestle. They made me put the guy down and laughed me out of the gym. But he never gave up on me. Kept telling me, "Come back, George. Come back, George. Bought me some boxing shoes. Don't give up. You can be an Olympic Gold Medalist." And would you believe in October of 1968 I became a Gold Medalist all because Doc Broadus never gave up on me.

[Easley:] We're talking to George Foreman today on *inContext*. George is an Author of a new book released by Thomas Nelson called God in My Corner.

George, who have been some of your fiercest competitors in life?

[Foreman:] Oh, I've been in the ring, I've had some competition like you've never seen. To be facing the Smokin' Joe Frazier across the corner. A man I knew he'd never give up. You'd hit him, he liked it. He'd just get up and laugh about it. And then, I thought be the easiest fight of my life when I fought the Great Mohammed Ali. I beat him, give him everything I had, and at the end of the day he screamed, "That all you got, George?" Too much competition in my life.

[Easley:] Outside the ring, George, who have been your fiercest competitors?

[Foreman:] Oh, you know, I've had a rough time because, you know, to raise children is the best competition. That every morning you got to get up and forget about everything bad they say to you. You got to practice this forgiveness. And competing with myself to make certain that I would be the best human being I could be to my family. That's been the competition, the best I've had.

[Easley:] You defined love as T-i-m-e.

[Foreman:] If you got time, that's all children want. I remember one year I was so successful making so much money, I was even working for HBO doing the boxing, and one of my kids had gone on an undefeated football team and I hadn't seen one game. And I realized that in the end those kids didn't want a lot of gifts, or didn't want private school money, that was good, they really wanted me. And I found out that if you want to really define love with children, give them time.

[Easley:] When you look at parents today a lot of them have double-incomes, they have mortgages, houses, they're trying to pay off boats, cars, and the kids are kind of, you know, incidental. How do you encourage parents to, to take time with their kids?

[Foreman:] And the reality is for a lot of us we've got to have these extra jobs. We just got to have the extra money to take care of a family. But nothing can prevent us from giving our kids extra time. And I

know there's a lot of times I can watch a wonderful basketball game on television that takes 45, sometimes an hour and a half or a football game, that's quality time I can give to my kids. And I'll stop what I'm doing sometimes, grab my kids, put them, hold them in my arms for a second, take a ride with them, even go fishing. Children need time. That's more important than any amount of money and bread that you can put on the table.

[Easley:] The spoken word has a lot of power in people's hearts and minds. How do you encourage dads especially to talk to their kids and encourage them?

[Foreman:] Oh, children -- and that's the one thing. You'd be surprised that kids, when they do something wrong, we always find time to kind of get harsh with them. You must straighten him out. He's not doing well in school. We all have time to straighten our kids out. If we can have the same amount of time to just love and embrace them, talk to them, they'll turn out just fine. If we can take the time out to scold them, we can also take the time out to love them. Kids love to be talked to. They love conversations with their dad, with their fathers. Being told old stories, things about our life. Find out that their lives are pretty much the same.

[Easley:] George, when you look back on the influence in your life what have been some of the statements that have really encouraged you and ministered to you?

[Foreman:] Back to my life, that's Doc Broadus, of course, never gave up on me. Told me I could be an Olympic Gold Medalist. My mother told me, "Son, you just don't ever steal. Always remember that honesty. Never tell lies." Those words are pretty much been the instruments to really make who I am today. I hate to say if I'm a good man today it's because of a woman, my mother made a good man out of me.

[Easley:] You know, in the African-American community, George, some areas of our country, this is really the greatest need, is a lot of women are raising kids without a dad.

[Foreman:] Oh, there are so many women and they do the best they could.

[Easley:] Yeah.

[Foreman:] You got so many women out there who they just take on the responsibility because so many men are just not being told how important their role is in making a family. The words just have to reach all of us men out there. Tell us, look, we need you. The mothers are feeding the kids, they're getting fed, even if they becoming NBA greats. They still need that father influence. And that's the problem and that's why I did the book Fatherhood; to encourage all the children, all the fathers out there get involved in your children's lives because even if they make a million dollars you read on the front page of a newspaper they've made big mistakes only because the fathers haven't been there to lay the proper foundation.

[Easley:] In your church that you pastor in Houston, Texas, George, talk about the ministries you have for kids and I imagine you got a group of single moms trying to raise sons and daughters.

[Foreman:] Yeah, there are a lot of women who come to church and what I've decided to do is not only preach the best sermons I can on Sundays, but be that kind of man who would be there for their sons and daughters all during the week too. I try to be a good father to all the people who go to church with me and sometimes it's by just listening. I don't have a lot of answers but I sure have two ears to listen.

[Easley:] Tell me about your wife, George. How has she been raising 10 kids and taking care of George Foreman?

[Foreman:] One thing about my wife, Mary, has been really I could say the old saying is that behind every man, every great man, there's a good woman but it's vice-versa. Behind every great woman is a good man. And I've been right there behind my wife. She has been like the foundation of the family. When I left, had to go back into boxing for almost 10 years to be Heavyweight Champion of the World, she helped me in all she could. Made sure that my kids when they could would visit me on the sites where I'd be boxing. I was a good cook around the house. I had these recipes. She took up the recipes when I left and when I got back in town have all the pots and pans ready for me to cook the meals that my children love. So there's nothing like a father but hey, you must have a mother there.

[Easley:] When you, when you look at Mary now and your kids ages -- tell us your kids' ages, George.

[Foreman:] Well, I have -- the last son we have is 8 and we called him Joe, but he's George Foreman VI. And then we have them all the way up -- I have a daughter who is 30. And the one thing about the girls, they don't want me telling their ages.

[Easley:] We won't tell. And grandchildren?

[Foreman:] I have 5 granddaughters all -- and you know what. They don't let anyone, they don't even let me know they're born until they've named them. They got a feeling I'm going to sneak a George in.

[Easley:] A Georgette, right. Got to have some Georgettes.

[Foreman:] Five granddaughters. I'm so proud of my grandkids.

[Easley:] That's fabulous. George, I want to ask you a question. You're looking, let's just say you're looking at Mary right now in her eyes and let's just say this was the last opportunity you got to tell her something. What would you tell her?

[Foreman:] Two words I say to my wife, Mary. Thank you. I don't have to pronounce I love you because we're always certain of that. But thank you. You can never say enough thank you's.

[Easley:] Let's turn it to your kids. You're alone with one of your George's, you're alone with him, and you're looking him square in the eye and maybe you just knew that in God's kindness this is going to be the last opportunity I have to tell George something. What would you tell him?

[Foreman:] I would tell each of my boys -- and I do it, I approached this like this the last time I see each of them. I reach out and say may I have my hug, please? And I asked, not tell. May I have my hug please? And that's the one thing a father sometimes forget, is to embrace their sons. You're never too old. And I'm having to hug some of these guys, they got big muscles all in their neck and their back, but they're still my baby boys and they'll always be my boys. I give them this hug.

[Easley:] How would, and obviously you can't speak for them, but how would your sons talk about George Foreman if I said tell me about your dad. What would they say about you?

[Foreman:] They all would tell you about here he comes with a sermon, here he comes with a sermon. They know me more as the Preacher George than anyone else. Here he comes with a sermon and a joke. They'll always tell you about that.

[Easley:] Now, as a Pastor, George, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in Houston, Texas, you've been there 27, 28 years now?

[Foreman:] Yeah. Well, actually it's been 29 years.

[Easley:] Wow, wow.

[Foreman:] Boy, time moves on.

[Easley:] And you preach every Sunday?

[Foreman:] Every Sunday that I'm in town and I try to make it from all parts of the world to get there just in time for my Sunday morning services at 10:00 and I preach. And we also have Wednesdays and Saturday evening services.

[Easley:] Give us a picture of your church for those who would never have a privilege of visiting. What would they find if they walked into your church?

[Foreman:] Oh, and basically the church is, it's a big building but it's a small congregation. I mean, it's filled up on Sundays and you, I can almost see 100 people sitting there. And then when the children leave out for Sunday School that leaves a lot of room for visitors. So I'm always hoping that if visitors come they'll come after Sunday School when at about 10:30 when the kids have gone out to Sunday School and then there's room for visitors. But basically we sing. Even my children, they get up and sing in church. We always have someone to testify about God's goodness. And I'll deliver the sermon for the morning and it's basically the Doctrine of Love; how human beings should love one another.

[Easley:] George, someone is listening to you and me right now and a dad who's abandoned his kids. He hadn't seen his kids in a long time or maybe years. What would you tell them?

[Foreman:] Oh, the fathers. Just find forgiveness in your heart for whatever is going on in your life, whatever reason you had to leave your families. Yesterday has nothing to do with it. It's only about today. We can just make up for the day, call our kids, write them a letter, send them a photograph; just let them know you love them. You don't have to have money for children. I've made millions and that hasn't bought anything when it comes to love. Children just want to know they have a father somewhere and that changes them. A little telephone call, a little telegram, even email now; stay in touch with them. Just let them know that you're there.

[Easley:] Maybe a dad has tried that a few times and his kids slam the door on him, his kids gotten angry and said, "Why would you call me? Leave me alone." What would you say?

[Foreman:] Don't even worry about that. Every child has that right to slam that first door. Hang down the phone. Tear up them letters. They all have to have that right to do it once or twice. Forgive them. As one fellow said, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." Keep doing it, keep calling. They just want to know that you really mean it.

[Easley:] At the end of your book, George, you talk about J.D. Foreman. What is it like to have reconnected with your dad? What is it like to think about him?

[Foreman:] J.D. Foreman. I remember my mom and dad broke up pretty early in life. Then growing up to see my dad falling in a ditch, drunk all the time, always intoxicated, and I'd have to sneak back, act like I didn't know him in front of my friends, and then go back and pull him out of ditches. And then one day

have him follow me around as a preacher. When I was preaching on the street corners, he'd always show up by way of busses and support me. The best friend, of the best friends I've ever had and J.D. Foreman became the absolute father to me in the end, and he found God and he made friends with Jesus Christ. What a connection.

[Easley:] George Foreman today on *inContext*. Man, the time went. Thank you, thank you, thank you, man.

[Foreman:] You know how to do it, I tell you. You're the best.

[Easley:] Well, God bless you, George, and I hope the church goes well and just thanks for your ministry.

[Foreman:] Thank you so much.

[Easley:] It's an honor.

[Foreman:] All right, bye.

[Easley:] Bye-bye.

[Lepine:] And Michael, if folks didn't get a chance to hear the entire conversation and would like to listen to it again or if they'd like to read a transcript of that conversation, they can go to our website which is www.inconextradio.org. The complete transcript is available there and you could also listen back to our conversation today with former Heavyweight Champion and now Pastor George Foreman. Again, our website is www.inconextradio.org.

Now, on Monday we're going to return to our study of God's Word through the Gospel of John and to help prepare us for that we're going to listen to the passage that we'll be considering beginning Monday. And here to read that for us is Actor Max McLean.

MAX McLean: After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed there a few days. When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts He found men selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So He made a whip out of cords and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves He said, "Get these out of here. How dare you turn my Father's house into a market. His disciples remembered that it is written "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." Then the Jews demanded of Him, "What miraculous sign can You show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days." The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple and You are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple He had spoken of was His body. After He was raised from the dead His disciples recalled what He had said; then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

[Lepine:] And again, that's the passage that we'll be looking at on Monday's edition of *inContext*.

If you're interested in the 2 CD set featuring Max McLean reading through the Gospel of John, you can go to our website www.inconextradio.org and find out how you can get a copy of these 2 CDs.

Have a great weekend. We'll see you back Monday for *inContext* with Michael Easley.