



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: 7 More Men And The Secret Of Their Greatness – Part 1

Guest(s): Eric Metaxas

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- Dr. Dobson: Well, hello, everyone and welcome to Family Talk. I'm your host, Dr. James Dobson. And we have a very exciting guest to be with us virtually today. He is my good friend, Eric Metaxas who has been on this program, I think, six or eight times through the years. He is a prolific writer of best-selling books, including my favorite, *Bonhoeffer*, and *Amazing Grace*, and *If You Can Keep It*. There are so many others. Eric also hosts his own syndicated radio program heard on 300 stations across the nation. He is a regular contributor to The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times and the New Yorker. And he's a senior fellow and lecturer at King's College. And he founded the interview series, Socrates in the City. Eric is a friend of mine and it is so good to have him on the program. Eric, you there?
- Eric Metaxas: I am right here. And I got to tell you, the idea that you would consider me a friend of yours, I feel like I've accomplished something in life because I have really followed you for so many years. And I just feel honored to call you friend and to know that we are working together to do what the Lord has called us to do. Thank you for having me on this program to talk about my books. And of course, I'm always excited to talk about them because I write about some pretty amazing human beings. And I think we need to know their stories. So thanks for giving me the opportunity to share that.
- Dr. Dobson: It is, like I said, good to have you on. You're one busy guy. God is obviously blessing your life, isn't he?
- Eric Metaxas: Well, I'd like to think so. The answer to that of course is yes, but I think like you, I'm the sort of person that it's never enough in the sense that I want to do so much, because I know that as a culture we're so broken, and we need voices like ours to be multiplied because we have so many people hungry to hear truth, to hear different perspective. And I just never feel that I've even gotten close to what I'd like to do. But I'm on God's timetable. And that as far as I know is the best way to be.
- Dr. Dobson: I certainly understand that. I've been at this for more than 50 years now, and there's still more to do than I can get done in any given day. So I'm huffing and puffing like you are, but it's been an interesting life and I'm just grateful that the

Lord has chosen to make use of us and give us an opportunity. Let's go back to *Bonhoeffer*. This is a celebratory year for you, isn't it?

Eric Metaxas: Well, it is. It occurred to me probably at the end of last year that this year, 2020, marks the 10th anniversary of my coming out with the book *Bonhoeffer*. And in many ways, my career really opened up as a result of that book. Now I can be blunt and say the Lord called me to write this book, and I knew it when I was writing it. I don't say that kind of stuff very lightly. I just had a godly sense while I was writing it, that He was calling me to write this, that He made me to write this book and that His hand was on the book. I never dreamt that it would be as successful as it was. And I really mean that.

By now it's sold over a million copies, it's been translated into 20 languages. And I know that it's because the story of Bonhoeffer is one of those stories. When you read about the life of a saint, like his life, it just cannot help but speak to you. And that's I think why I've written so many biographies at this point. The Lord has made it clear to me that we need to study and learn the lives of people who've gone before us, because we can learn so much more from looking at the life than from bullet points or teaching points.

Dr. Dobson: Yeah.

Eric Metaxas: The *Bonhoeffer* book, we came out with a new 10th anniversary version of it. It's also the 75th anniversary of Bonhoeffer's going to his death in 1945. So the book has a new design and I wrote a 7500-word introductory essay, kind of ruminating on the book, the book's reception, on the writing of the book and so on and so forth. I'm excited that I was able to do that. And so people who aren't familiar with it, they'll get an updated version if they get this one. But I'm very excited about it.

Dr. Dobson: You may remember that that's the book that we talked about the first time I met you. I didn't even know how to pronounce your name. I think I had to take a couple of runs at it because we were just getting acquainted. But you came and we did two or three programs on that book, and it's still a classic for us. In fact, if you have new material in this new edition, I'd love to talk to you again because that's a subject that fascinates me.

Eric Metaxas: Well, it's an amazing story. And I think the Lord does certain things sometimes to keep us humble. And one of those things is I did not write this book having any sense of what it was that I was doing. It's clear that the Lord just led me to it just the way he led me to the Wilberforce book that I wrote before it. And it's only in retrospect that I can look back and say, "Holy cow, it's so obvious that God had His hand on my life and called me and in fact created me to tell these stories." But if you would've talked to me 15 years ago, I wouldn't have had the beginning of a clue that He would use me this way. So it's His way of making sure we know who's leading, who's following and I'm thrilled that I get to follow the Lord.

He showed me the way. I had no dream when I was writing the Bonhoeffer that it would have the impact that it did. And I think that's because it has a prophetic element. I think it's a story of how the church failed to stand and the results were monstrously evil. And I think it's a kind of a warning to the American church today that if we do not stand for what is right, we will go down the way the German church did, hanging our head in ignominy, in shame for decades and decades. The Church has to lead the way when it comes to the business of a nation. And I really think the Bonhoeffer book is a true prophetic warning to the American church. I had a sense when I was writing it, that that was the case, but over the last 10 years, that's become stronger and stronger. And I don't think it's been ever more relevant than today. And I'm actually sorry to say that, but that is a fact.

Dr. Dobson: Who can know the mind of God? It's my speculation that the Lord led you to write that book because it's a way of finishing what He was doing with Bonhoeffer. And in that case, it cost him his life. And I wonder if we're willing to pay that price to follow him, but it's a wonderful story. We want to talk today about your new book entitled *Seven More Men: The Secret of Their Greatness*. And this is clearly a sequel to the wildly popular book, *Seven Men*, where you explain in the introduction to this book why you're taking another run at this. Explain that to us.

Eric Metaxas: Well, it's interesting. I mean, it goes all the way back to why I was writing biographies in the first place. I always say I never had any ambition to write biographies, to tell the story of other people. I always joke around that I'm far too self-centered to want to spend that much time focused on somebody else's life, but the Lord had another plan. And when He called me to write the Wilberforce book, it was one of those strange things where I just never dreamt I would write a biography, but I knew He wanted me to write it and I wrote it. And then of course I thought, well, maybe I could write another one. And I thought of Bonhoeffer for many reasons because my mother grew up in Nazi Germany. My grandfather was killed during the war and the book is dedicated to him.

People keep saying, "Who are you going to write about next week, who are you going to write about next?" And I realized I don't have it in me to write a big book on everyone who's worthy of a big book, but maybe I could write a book like my book, *Seven Men*, where I tell the story of seven different men, but do the shorter version of it and was so successful. It had really surprised me because so many people said, "I'm not a reader, but that book I'll read because I can read a chapter on Bonhoeffer. I can read a chapter on Wilberforce. I won't read the whole book." And of course there were five other people in there, but it really struck a nerve. And people kept saying, "Well, why don't you write *Seven Women*?" So, I wrote *Seven Women* and it was the same kind of thing.

And of course you start thinking my goodness, those *Seven Men* and *Seven Women* don't begin to cover the list of great figures that need to be written about and that most people don't know anything about. So, the most obvious

thing in the world was to write *Seven More Men* and just to continue kind of where I left off to pick seven great men, and we're working on *Seven More Women* right now. But I said, there's a part of me, Dr. Dobson, where I sort of feel everyone needs to know these stories. They're inevitably inspiring. When you come close to the life of a saint of God, somebody who has walked with God, even with flaws, you just say, "Wow, I want to be like that. I want to be more like that." It gets me thinking about my own life.

Dr. Dobson: Let me name the men we're going to talk about: Martin Luther, George Whitefield, George Washington Carver, General William Booth, Sergeant Alvin York, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, and Billy Graham. That's quite a lineup out of thousands you could have chosen. How in the world did you select those that would make the book?

Eric Metaxas: Well, that's the whole thing. The only thing that I'd say is a non-negotiable is you can't be in the book unless you're dead. So in the first book, Billy Graham was not in the book because he was still living among us. My friend, Chuck Colson was not in the book, but then right at the end of, as I was writing the book, he passed away and I said, "Boy, if there's ever a story that needs to be in this book." So I put him in the book.

Dr. Dobson: He was like a brother to me, Eric. And we talked on the phone two weeks before he died. He had a great influence on my life.

Eric Metaxas: Well, he did on mine as well. It's a funny thing because I always revered him. And then I got to work for him on BreakPoint. And when my Bonhoeffer book came out 10 years ago, I think he read it and it really hit him in a way that not many things hit him. And so he really sought me out and wanted to help promote the book. He gave me kind of like a father's blessing because I always revered Chuck so much, but to get to know him as a friend right at the end of his life was one of the greatest honors I've ever experienced, and a blessing. And I think that the Bonhoeffer story summed up a lot of what Chuck's life was about. And so there was a reason that it appealed to him because it talks about religious liberty. It talks about all the stuff that he was always talking about.

And so when I wrote my Seven Men book, I'll never forget it. Chuck was on his death bed and I knew it. I was there when he had his stroke. And I said, here's a classic example of a man who everybody in the world would say he had it all. And there were two examples in his life right after he had his born again experience in the early 70s where he did something so self-sacrificial that you cannot help but admire, deeply admire him. My Seven Men book starts with George Washington who had two similar things. And Chuck Colson who had two things, two examples of a case where anybody else would have said, "No, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to do the sensible thing." And Chuck said, "No, I'm going to do the right thing. And maybe I'm crazy. But I believe this is what God is calling me to do."

The first one was to refuse to take a plea bargain. He was just born again. And he just said, "I really believe I've got to do the right thing. And if I go to jail, I go to jail." And it was such a heroic thing for this man to do. He had so many good reasons to take the plea bargain, all of his lawyers and everybody telling him to do it. He did this outrageously heroic thing because of his new faith. And it led him into the ministry that he spent the next four decades working in prison fellowship ministry. And it's such a lesson to all of us that if we follow God, we cannot go wrong. We have no idea where he's going to lead us. So I was so privileged to put him in my Seven Men book.

But as I said, once you're done with seven men, you think there's so many others. So even picking the seven in this new book, I'm leaving out all kinds of people. I don't know if I'm going to get to do a series or whatever, but these are lives that we really need to know. And many people, if not most people, don't know these lives. As the years pass, and you know this, every generation forgets. I mean, you ask a young person today who Chuck Colson is, and they look at you funny. And folks like you and me think, "How can you possibly not know Chuck Colson? He's a giant." But that's the way life can be sometimes.

And so I think it's part of my role is to reintroduce some figures. In the new book, a classic example of that is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Young people today, they weren't around in the 70s when Solzhenitsyn exploded onto the scene as one of the greatest champions of freedom in the history of the world. And so I thought, well, young people need to know about him. So anybody younger than me, which is most people when they encounter the great Solzhenitsyn, they will learn a little bit of history, which is always my goal, but they will also see a truly heroic, great man.

Dr. Dobson: Eric, there are young people out there, like you just said, who never heard the name Solzhenitsyn. Just give us a thumbnail sketch of who he was and the role that he played in history.

Eric Metaxas: Well, it's kind of funny because in a weird way, it ties back to our friend, Chuck Colson, that we were just mentioning. I knew Solzhenitsyn as a kid growing up in the 70s. His name was out there as a Soviet dissident, as someone who dared to speak against the communist Soviet regime. And you want to talk about courage. Wow. Because we know what they did to people who spoke against them. I mean, his story, it's a crazy story because it's a story of a lot of people. He started out believing in the communist revolution.

And at some point I think it was in the 40s, even though he was a believer in the Soviet system and in the new communist system in Russia, he wrote a letter to a friend, kind of making a joke about Stalin or criticizing Stalin. And that letter was enough to land him in the Gulag. And the Gulag was these prison camps in Siberia and similar places that were utterly horrific. These are the kinds of places you go to die. You go to suffer. You work hard in the bitter, bitter cold. Many people didn't survive. And this is where they sent their political prisoners. And so Solzhenitsyn goes there. And I even had the privilege of interviewing his son,

Ignat Solzhenitsyn, on my radio program. I guess it was last year. People can find that on YouTube. You pick up so many things about this man's life, about his heroism.

But where Chuck Colson comes into the story is that when I first got saved, I was reading Chuck Colson's book, *Loving God*. And the first chapter is about somebody in a Gulag, in a Soviet prison camp who becomes a Christian and you turn the page to chapter two and you realize that man was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. And so his story is he goes into this death camp, this horrible place. And in that place by the grace of God, he returns to the Christian faith of his youth. And this leads him on a path to be so brave against these horrible Soviet communists. And he begins writing books on tiny paper and he smuggles them out.

And eventually he writes a book, his most famous book, and everybody needs to know about this, it's called *The Gulag Archipelago*. And that is the book that blows the lid off of the evil of these Soviet prison camps and it smuggled into the West and it's published. And it was a phenomenon when it happened in the 70s. I mean, it was such a big deal that they had to kick him out of Russia. They didn't know what to do with him. And he's just one of the most heroic voices. And if they had just executed him, they would have looked even worse. And so, I think that he was fortunate, in a way, to just be kicked out.

But the funny thing is that he never stopped speaking out against evil. And in 1978, when he was in the United States, he gave a speech, a famous speech. I start my chapter in the book on that. He gave a famous speech at the commencement of Harvard University. And in that speech, he condemns the West. Now imagine here's a man, he's the hero of the West because he has condemned Soviet communism, but he comes to the West and he's offered this plum speaking role at Harvard commencement, 1978. And he condemns the West for doing similar things that the Soviets were doing, for being materialists and for really losing their souls in a different way. And of course, everything he said was true. You and I would agree with it. And we would say he is a prophet. What he spoke we see coming to play today in the cultural Marxist things that are right on the surface, but they were just beginning back when Solzhenitsyn was talking about them in 1978.

But he was just an unbelievable hero. He documented the evil of the Soviet communist regime. And I just have to say it makes sense that he became a Christian because you don't speak in that courageous way against communism for nothing. He really knew and said that the reason things have gotten the way they've gotten is because men have forgotten God.

Dr. Dobson:

Yes.

Eric Metaxas:

That is something that many in the West, as you know, they don't want to hear that. Just as the atheist communist didn't want to hear it in the Soviet union, many in America today don't want to hear it. And I think that his story and his

voice and his message are something that young people today need to be aware of.

Dr. Dobson: I've repeated that quote in one of my early books. It had a great influence on me. Tell me if he also was committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Eric Metaxas: Well, I do get the impression that he was. He was not an evangelical, but he was a serious Russian Orthodox Christian. You get the impression that it was far from just some cultural thing for him. He spoke about it. And whenever he was talking about God, I don't think he was talking about some energy force or anything. He was talking about the God of scripture. There's no question about that.

Dr. Dobson: Eric, how in the world are we going to deal with seven great men when we just barely got into one of them? And our time is almost gone. We've got two or three minutes left. Let me suggest that we get kind of a summary statement from you. But then tomorrow I would like to talk about George Whitefield. He played such a key role in the American Revolution and in earlier times, and I would really like to hear what you've got to say about him.

Eric Metaxas: Absolutely. Well then I will simply say that the seven men in this book, like the seven men in my first book called *Seven Men*, these are heroes. The seven men in *Seven More Men*, which is the new book, they're a little more flawed. You can point to things in each of them, not in every one, but I think it's important for us to know too that if you're a human being, you are flawed and we don't want to worship people as saints. We want to know that apart from the grace of God, all of us are capable of horrible things. But these are seven men who did some great things because of their faith. And I think we need to know these stories, especially young people. If you don't know these stories, it's hard to have a sense of history, number one. It's hard to have a sense of what it means to be a Christian facing different things. So that's really how I think God is using these books.

Dr. Dobson: I think, Eric, one of the most important messages in your book, *Seven More Men*, is that they were all flawed in one way or another. They were great men, but they were all somehow flawed. 1 John 1:8 states, "If we say we have no sin, then we are deceiving ourselves. And the truth is not in us." Romans 3:23 says, "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." So clearly this is the human condition, isn't it?

Eric Metaxas: It is the human condition and we need to understand it. And that is one of the reasons why I write about these flesh and blood people. They are real people just like we're real people and we can learn from them.

Dr. Dobson: Well, this is an inspirational book and we're going to talk about it some more next time, Eric. You could go on writing books on this subject forever, couldn't you?

Eric Metaxas: I think I could. If there's a publisher out there, I'll keep going.

Dr. Dobson: Well, it's always good to talk to you. God be with you. And we will pick up this topic tomorrow. As I said, I'd really like to talk about George Whitefield. What a man he was. You want to give us one sentence about him?

Eric Metaxas: Well, George Whitefield, I would say, just like George Washington, except we know who George Washington was, I would say, as a result of him, we have something called the United States of America. He was an evangelist, no more and no less, but he was probably the greatest evangelist in the history of the world. And his evangelism led not only to innumerable people coming to know Jesus, but to that thing we call self-government and liberty on the American model. And without him, we would not have the United States. So I can't wait to talk about him tomorrow.

Dr. Dobson: We're out of time. We'll give you a call in.

Eric Metaxas: Sounds good. Thank you.

Roger Marsh: Well, be sure to tune in again next time for the conclusion of this riveting conversation with author Eric Metaxas. Today and tomorrow's interviews center on his newest work, *Seven More Men: And The Secret of Their Greatness*. Learn how to get your copy of Eric's latest book by going to our broadcast page at drjamesdobson.org. Once you're there, you'll find a link to his site and get plugged in with what else he's doing as well. That's D-R-jamesdobson.org, and then click on the Broadcast button at the top of the page.

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