

## Transcript

**Dr. Michael McMullen, BHHM Board Chair**  
**Episode 35: "A Message About Giving"**

### Episode Introduction Transcript

**Andy Braams:** In this month's episode of Biblical Perspectives on Aging, we have a speech from Dr. Michael McMullen, who is the Chairman of the Board of Baptist Homes and Healthcare Ministries. This speech took place at our recent Christmas dinner, which is an annual event, where the trustees come to the Baptist Building in Jefferson City to have a dinner the night before the end-of-year board meeting.

Dr. McMullen shared about giving in the context of the life of William Wilberforce. Dr. McMullen is Professor of Christian history at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, so he has a lot of context for this and given his background being from Great Britain, he brings an element of humor to the subject as well in talking to us here in America.

The first several seconds of this audio recording, were not able to be captured properly so this starts about 30 to 45 seconds into the actual speech. But you will get almost the entire context of the speech. And at the conclusion there is not only an ending prayer by Dr. Rodney Harrison, but also the group that was there that night singing the first verse to *Amazing Grace*.

I hope you enjoy this episode of *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*.

### Episode Transcript

**Michael McMullen:** *[audio recording started late]* ...a ministry that really is a blessing to so many people. Or maybe given the season that we're in, I would be expected to reflect on not just how wonderful that gospel is, but how amazing that God uses people, such as us, as his ambassadors of reconciliation, that we ourselves have become recipients of. Or maybe I was to speak about the truth that it doesn't matter who you are or what you have because God delights in using the weak and the foolish things of the world to shame the proud and the strong, and to bring to nothing the things that are. Or maybe lastly, I was to share on the beauty and the majesty and the mercy and the love of God in Christ. Again, especially as we celebrate here today, remembering those very truths. But no, I was told it was on giving.

Hmm. Giving to a bunch of pastors and active lay people who are already involved in giving so much of themselves anyway, you know, giving – a subject that so many of us as pastors, especially, either dread preaching on or avoid altogether. Well, I thought at least I could share some of the good jokes that I know about giving. Ones that you probably know as well, including the one about the very popular circus strongman who would display incredible feats of strength every night.

He would conclude each performance by concentrating all his incredible strength in squeezing a lemon and that juice coming out with just the strength of one hand. And then he would say, "I'll give \$200 to anyone here who can squeeze just one more drop of juice

from that same lemon.” And then one night, a thin older lady with a walker slowly made her way forward and using her pretty arthritic and bony hand, she picked up the lemon and started to squeeze and to everyone’s utter amazement, including the strong man’s out dropped one more drop of juice.

And the strong men could hardly believe his eyes. And for the first time ever, he had to make good on his promise and handed over the \$200. Now he just had to ask her how on earth that was possible. So, in front of everybody, he just said, “How?” And she said, “Practice. I’ve been treasurer of my church for almost 50 years.”

[laughter]

Oh, maybe I could tell about the two men who were shipwrecked on a desert island and one man passed back and forth. The other man was just laid there, some bare thing drinking coconut juice. And the first man said, “Aren’t you afraid that we’re going to die?” And he said, “Oh no, not at all. I earn a lot of money and I tithe faithfully to my church. They’ve just begun a capital campaign. They’ll find me.”

[laughter]

Then I was actually a bit sad because those of you who’ve had the blessing of not hearing me speak...interesting...you’ll be able to say, “All I’ve ever heard that Brit talk about is money.” [laughter] Now, hopefully what you will hear really has very little to do with money this evening. Now it’s true. Baptist Homes are in the initial stages of a major fundraising campaign, but tonight really isn’t about money.

It’s a very simple reminder that the God that we love and serve is a God who gives unconditionally and that’s why we’re here tonight, really, because of Christmas, He gave the most precious thing that He had – His one and only begotten Son. And He was given absolutely, and in such a way, that the Father had to, as it were, temporarily turn off the sun while His own Son bore our sin on the Cross.

So, of course, this subject of giving has to include all the things are previously thought of. It is a reminder that the ministry that we’re involved with – showing Christ-like care through Baptist Homes – is a great and blessed thing that we’re privileged to be a part of; that it is having eternal consequences.

And, of course, again, God-like unconditional giving is only possible because of the gospel. We only give anything of ourselves because he first loved us and gave himself to us and for us. And now, as those weak and foolish instruments, God does delight to use us as his ambassadors of reconciliation. The angels were tasked with announcing the birth of Christ.

We’ve been tasked with sharing what that birth and life and death and resurrection really mean. Dr. Harrison and the other leaders and the nurses and the staff do this every day at all the various Baptist Homes as they deliver Christ-like loving care and compassion. Now, Dr. Harrison has shared a little about me.

I was a fireman. I was a nurse. I was also a high-school teacher then. I was an ordained Baptist pastor in Scotland before I was called to Midwestern 25 years ago. I now have the dubious honor of being the longest-serving full-time professor at Midwestern. I was born in Hull, Yorkshire, in England, the same city that the great abolitionist, William Wilberforce, was born, exactly 200 years after him.

So, it's been an incredible privilege for me to spend the last 15 years bringing to publication his previously unpublished spiritual journals. And I'm now working with professors in England to do the same with his unpublished diaries and with our in notes and annotations, probably 12 to 15 volumes. It's significant that despite everything that Wilberforce achieved, both in Britain and across the world, because, of course, Britain controlled so much of the world at that time, despite his incredible impact on society, he's been pretty much ignored by scholarship.

Rather than being remembered as the great British statesman that he was, secular scholarship have sought to marginalize him primarily because he was an evangelical. It's why 200 years later, God is using this weak and foolish instrument to remind the world, especially the church, of the incredible ways that God blessed the world through Wilberforce.

He noted in his journal that it was of God's unmerited goodness that he had been selected to live and to act as an agent of usefulness in this world. God's unmerited goodness – what an incredible description of grace. And being an agent of usefulness, meant for Wilberforce that he would end up giving away his wealth.

He would end up giving away his health, really, and in a sense end up giving away his life because it was all expended on fulfilling God's call on him. He wrote this "To Thee, O God, I fly through the Savior. Enable me to live more worthy of my holy calling, to be more useful and efficient, that my time may not be frittered away unprofitably to myself and others, but that I really may be of use in my generation and adorn the doctrine of God my Savior."

You know, being useful is loving. It is serving. It is giving. So, Wilberforce not only spearheaded the campaign for abolition, he also impacted society in an incredible way with the gospel. He was an active creator, member, leader, or supporter of at least 69 very active societies. Vice-President of 29, treasurer of one, governor of five, and on the boards of five more.

Every year, he gave away between a quarter and a third of his income to the poor. Some years he gave away more than he earned. He spent his time and energy in campaigning for the poor, for chimney sweeps, the uneducated, for children working in horrific conditions in mines and factories. He helped to found the Church Missionary Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society, the London Missionary Society, which would send Eric Little to China and Livingston to Africa.

He sacrificially gave to support dozens of evangelical and humanitarian institutions, including fever hospitals, asylums, infirmaries, and prisons. He founded schools for the deaf and the blind lending libraries and schools for the poor. He helped to found the School for

the Blind in York, near where I'm from, the National Gallery in London, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, all four of which are still flourishing.

He financially supported the artist, William Blake, Patrick Bronte through school, and the widow of Charles Wesley by giving her a pension for many years and all these things he would do in secret so that people wouldn't know.

He also gave to projects to help improve people's lives, including Michael Faraday's research into electromagnetism, Sir Humphrey Davy's research into the safety lamp for miners, and Edward Jenner's research into smallpox vaccinations.

He gave incredible time and energy to support domestic and foreign missions, especially Baptist missions. He would meet and work with the British Baptist, Andrew Fuller. He spoke at the annual meetings of the British Baptist Missionary Society.

He was very influential in making it possible and legal for missionaries like William Carey and others to serve across the world. He saw the slave trade abolished at the age of 47, slavery itself at the age of 73, dying just three days after it was achieved. And yet, all the while, he suffered from incredible challenges, not least of which he was only five foot tall, so he was actually shorter than me, which is a miracle in itself.

He suffered from ulcerative colitis, an incredibly painful and debilitating inflammation with sores in the intestines. He suffered from depression and hallucinations as a result of the narcotics that he would take to help with the pain. He wore a hidden metal frame under his clothing in an attempt to correct the painful skeletal issues that he also had.

He also inherited a very severe and painful eye disorder, which at times, caused him to be almost blind. Added to this, the many years of exhausting conflict that he endured in parliament took an incredible toll on his health. To work to end slavery was both unpopular as well as potentially dangerous. He quickly became the target of verbal, and actual physical, assaults.

He survived two assassination attempts. That required him to then travel with an armed bodyguard. Even the great British hero, Admiral Nelson, said that he would oppose the damnable doctrines of Wilberforce, believing him to be a traitor to England's national interest in trying to abolish slavery, which he was convinced would undermine the economy of England.

Now, I share all this about Wilberforce because I believe him still to be an incredible challenge to Christians today. He knew he wasn't perfect, far from it, but he gave himself to God to be used however God might use him. And so, he became an imperfect, godly, Bible loving, evangelistic, winsome agent of usefulness.

And of course, God is just the same today. But in a sense, the challenge is all the greater. The present-day horrors of slavery, human trafficking, abortion, and the targeting of children in so many vile ways and on a scale and in a manner that Wilberforce simply would

never have been able to imagine. Therefore, if we're ever tempted to give up the fight to forget what the fight is all about, as some churches sadly have done, or even to throw away all that we have in Christ – His Life and Words should still challenge.

He said, "Accustom yourself to look first to the dreadful consequences of failure and then fix your eyes on the glorious prize, which is before you. And when your strength begins to fail, and your spirits are well-nigh exhausted, let the animating view rekindle your resolution and call forth in renewed vigor, the fainting energies of your soul."

In another place he added, "Let Christians boldly assert the cause of Christ in an age when so many who bear the name of Christian are ashamed of him." If that was true then, 200 years ago, in supposed Christian England, how much more true is it today? Just this week, for example, UK government prosecutors, the lawyers who work for the British government, argued in court that parts of the Bible are "no longer appropriate in modern society."

In Luke chapter six, Jesus gives some very important words. He said, "Therefore, be merciful just as your father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom; for with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

We're to show great mercy, because our Father is merciful. We're to imitate him in showing mercy, just as we've been shown mercy. We're not to easily pass judgment on others – a thing that's actually hard to do if we're showing mercy. And if we do judge in that kind of unmerciful way, we're going to be judged in a similar manner.

But this is so taken out of context by the world because, in just a few verses, Jesus will command judgment by the presence of fruit, both of ourselves and of others. You know, God lavishes unconditional love and forgiveness on those who will respond, but it's not an unconditional approval of what people choose to do. And neither are his people to offer that kind of approval.

Maybe you saw just last week more fragmenting of the United Methodist Church as committed believers leave the main body as they cannot condone unbiblical lifestyles being promoted. Then in Luke six comes the giving, "Give and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, so much it has to run over." Now the reference, of course, is to Jewish measures, usually for grain and other dry goods. A good measure is being used. It's generous, not dishonest. It's pressed down to get more in. It's shaken again to even get more in. It's not just leveled off to get the least in the measure, but it's heaped up and running over, because God is the God of generosity.

And Who, but Jesus, could encourage his followers to believe and move and live in such a plane where they would never have to fear that they would become the losers in their God-like giving. And, of course, we can apply these words rightfully, even in such a thing as this fundraising campaign. But boy, it's so much more than that.

And when Jesus speaks here of putting this overflow of good measure into your bosom, you know, he's speaking of the long robe that Jewish men would wear and there would be a belt around the waist and you could pull the top of that cloak up and make a kind of pocket where this good measure could be poured into.

And the image I usually get from that, is like a kangaroo's pouch where so much could be put in. And we're told here, plainly, that we have the greatest motivation to live and move in God's economy of giving. Because, with whatever measure we live by toward others, that's how it's going to be measured back to us.

It's not just a wonderful thing to lavish love and mercy and forgiveness and goodness on others. Our lavishing becomes the measure God uses toward us. And when it comes to judgment, as we've said, we're not prohibited from judging others, but how we judge, the standard by which we judge, should be the standard by which we ourselves would like to be judged by.

In fact, in Jesus's death, some rabbis thought that God had two measures by which he judged people. One was a measure of justice. The other was a measure of mercy. And whichever measure you wanted God to use with you, you were to use that same measure toward others. The great thing here, though, is that Jesus didn't just say, "Give," He pulls back the curtain a little, and He declares the result of giving, "Give and it will be given to you."

I mentioned the Methodists earlier. John Wesley preached a pretty famous sermon. It was entitled *The Use of Money*. Probably, one of Dr. Harrison's ancestors in England assigned him that title for the sermon.

[laughter]

But the three main points were, "Earn all you can, save all you can, and give all you can." Wesley later said that his followers were ignoring the third part of his sermon, and that the primary reason for the ineffectiveness of the Methodist movement was due to their failure to give all they could. Tragically, as I shared earlier, I believe that, today, the ineffectiveness of that particular movement has more to do with what they've failed to hold onto, not their money, but sadly Biblical truth.

Now few people know that with the popularity of his books, unlike me, Wesley became one of the wealthiest men in England, a multi-multi-millionaire, but he didn't start out that way. In his day, a single man, like Wesley was, could live comfortably on \$35 a year, then. When he started out, that's what Wesley earned, but he limited his expenses so that he would have something, \$3, to give to the poor each year.

Now, the next year, his income doubled, but he still managed to live on that same small amount. So, of course, he had more to give. In the third year, his income doubled again. He was still able to live on the \$32, so he had even more that he could give. In the fourth year, he was now earning four times what he had four years earlier, but his expenses were still at \$32, which meant he was giving away more than a hundred dollars a year.

Of course, that was the equivalent of three salaries. He so limited his expenditures by not buying the kinds of things rich people would, that, in 1776, not the best year for the Brits...

[laughter]

...the English Tax Commissioners, English IRS really...you had problems with them as well... but they audited his return and they wrote him this letter. "Mr. Wesley, we cannot doubt but that you have silver by which you've hitherto neglected to make an entry." They were convinced that a man of his prominence must certainly have silver articles in his house, and of course, they were accusing him of failing to pay tax on it. Wesley wrote this back. "I have two silver spoons at London and two at Bristol." This is all the silver I have at present and I shall not buy anymore while so many around me need bread.

Giving is so at the very heart of God, that I actually believe He's built it into the very fabric of creation. So for example, the sun and the moon, they give us heat and light.

We're given beauty and beautiful fragrance from flowers as well as honey and medicines and perfumes, etc. Plants and animals give us oxygen and food. When God created Adam and Eve, he gave them each other. His first command to them was for them to give, to give themselves to each other. And then they were to give names to all the animals and then to give, watch, and care and dominion over those same animals.

It was give, give, give. That's how it always is with God. But then, what do we read in Genesis? You know, the enemy slithers up to Eve and whispers in her ear, "Hey Eve, you're not getting everything that you can. There is so much more. You know, God is all holding out on you and it all can be and should be yours. You can be like him and have everything."

And, of course, it was all downhill from there. And ever since Eden, mankind has operated as if the way to get more is always to grab more and more. But, of course, it's all a lie. It seems so counterintuitive, though, to think that we'll receive by giving away it's a truth the world simply cannot understand. So, the world will regard what it has as theirs to do with as they're pleased. The danger and, of course, the temptation is that believers might end up doing the same.

It was no different in Deuteronomy eight. "You may say to yourself, my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me. But remember the Lord your God for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth."

You know, the world has no interest in giving for no benefit. "The more I keep, the more I'll have for myself." But God loves to turn everything upside down. He did it when he broke into our world at Bethlehem and he's been doing it ever since.

And so, for a Christian, it means, the more they share, the more they will have to share. It's as Wilberforce argued, "We have been blessed to become a channel by which others can be blessed." We have been blessed to bless. When he said it, it was a pretty revolutionary

concept because the religious people of Wilberforce's day said, "The rich had been blessed by God; the poor deserved their place in life, and you were not supposed to intervene.

Will before said, "No. If we've been blessed, it's to bless others." We're simply giving out of all that God has given to us. As I've traveled back to England over recent years...I have to go back fairly regularly to kind of rejuvenate my accent because it gets messed up here...

[laughter]

...but there have been some amazing changes in Britain. They now have proms at schools. I mean, that never happened in the 19th century when I was there...

[laughter]

...they traveled to proms in limos. They graduate from the different years in school now. They even have Black Friday. Now, we've always had Thanksgiving in Britain. It's just that we celebrate it on July the fourth.

[laughter]

Recently, Brits are catching you up, though, in another area: the amount of stuff they accumulate. So all across Britain, now, self-storage facilities have been built to store all the stuff they can't put in their houses. And of course, British houses are so much smaller than yours, anyway. So much stuff.

Now, at least they still drive on the proper side of the road, [laughter] and we have got some revenge. All those roundabouts that are popping up throughout Missouri, [laughter] these traffic circles, I think you call them. Wow, of course, you drive the wrong way around them, even. So, it makes it kind of scary for me and especially when you are not trained to drive around them, people really don't know what to do with them.

I want to finish with two words from Scripture, one from the New Testament, one from the Old [Testament].

Paul, in all of his New Testament writings, never directly quotes Jesus once. The only time that there is a direct quote of Christ is in the book of Acts chapter 20 and verse 35. And, of course, the subject of that single non-gospel quote is about giving. "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus; how He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" And Solomon, in Proverbs 11:25, gives such a great word when he wrote, "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." Amen.

[applause]

**Rodney Harrison:** Thank you, Dr. McMullen. If you'd like to hear that sermon again, Alan Brock will be preaching it this Sunday [laughter] at some church in his association, so if you'd like to hear it in English, [laughter] again, this Sunday. [laughter]

**Rodney Harrison:** Father, may the words that we have heard, that are directly from your heart, may they be words that we put into action. Lord, we would remember the...we would remember those whose voices are silenced by society such as the aged; that we would remember, Lord, those who need benevolence. I look at Dan Stiles and I know that he's having to turn down people because they just don't have any way of coming to Baptist Homes.

Father, we thank you that men such as Wilberforce led not only in Word and deed, but by example. And Lord, not only did he give of his life and his money and his treasures, Lord, he gave of his testimony and through that testimony, a slave trader-turned brother in Christ.

And that slave traitor penned a song that will become our benediction in just a moment.

Thank you, Lord, that Wilberforce set an example that Lord, he learned from you. Lord, may we also follow your example of giving. Let us sing the first stanza of *Amazing Grace*.

**ALL:** Amazing grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
Was blind but now I see.