



RAY EDWARDS

LIVE WITH JOY. LEAD WITH PASSION. PROSPER WITH PURPOSE.

Interview with Donald Miller Episode 151

Hey everyone, this is Brian Holmes, from BrianHolmes.com and the Strategic Living Podcast and you're listening to thought leader, faith builder, business innovator and overall great guy, my friend, Ray Edwards.

Welcome to episode 151, in which we interviewed Donald Miller. I'm so excited about this. Donald Miller is one of the most influential Christian writers of our day. He is beloved by Christians and non-Christians alike. His books evoke strong reactions and for many they strike accord like no work before them. His new book, *Scary Close* is available today as we air this podcast.

In this interview we'll discuss how he came to write it, and why the message of this book is so important for today. This is a special interview only of the Ray Edwards Show, so let's get right to it.

Interview

Ray: Scary Close; Dropping the Act and Finding True Intimacy, is that true?

Donald: Is what true? Is the promise of the book true?

Ray: Yes. Do we get the steps, the 10 step program on how to drop the act?

Donald: There's actually 12 ½ steps. I hope so. I hope it's a book that increases the talk-ability that we have about relationships. I'm hoping it's the kind of book people will read and just have a little more to talk about, more words they can use to connect with others. The premise of the book is basically, the more honest we are about who we are, the more we can connect with folks and we're beginning to live in a culture that's becoming less and less honest, even though we're communicating more. Less and less of that is the truth.

Ray: One of the things that struck me as I was looking through the book is, I just went through your **Creating Your Life Plan** Program. There's an exercise about relationships in that program, not to give too much away. I was shocked when I went through that exercise to realize how many relationships in my life I have first, and how many of them are not really very real.

Donald: I'm with you.

Ray: Looking through this book and seeing that you're dealing with that issue, you make a statement that's intriguing to me. You said I'd spent a good part of my life as an actor.

What does that mean?

Donald: Early on I got known for writing books and being somewhat intelligent. I'm not as smart as people think I am so I began to hide that part of me. I would go backstage and sit in the green room and develop parts of my personality that I wanted to show to the world, and it didn't work. The more I did it the more isolated I became. I have a friend who's relatively famous and he said, he never realized that once he got famous he would become completely isolated.

The reason is that when he goes out in the world people want him to be the characters that he plays in movies and television and when he shows them that he's just this normal guy with insecurities they don't know how to deal with it. So he began hiding that part of himself and here he was semi-famous, completely isolated and lonely and nobody knew who he really was. And we see this with many famous people, they have a lot of issues that we're always surprised at, because they think they have everything.

In the age of Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, we can present a perfect family and meals we're eating, great times that we're having, but in reality our lives don't actually look like that. Therefore, when we project an image we're more tempted to isolate than we would be if we were just ourselves. The reality is, if we're completely ourselves we're going to impress fewer people, but actually connect with more and I argue that health comes from connecting with people not with actually impressing them.

Ray: You went on a yearlong journey that led you to writing this book.

Why did you start on that journey?

Donald: I had to. Sadly, my patterns in relationships were so bad that something had to change. I had dated several girls and the relationships were terrible. My pattern was that I'd be attracted to a woman because I wanted to feel heroic and to be the knight in shining armor. Then I would get in the relationship and slowly realize that this isn't the relationship I'd want, but I'd said all these things that were promises and getting her heart riled up and then letting her down.

That happened for the last time in the most serious of those relationships and I broke off that relationship and it hurt her badly, it hurt me and some of my friends pulled me aside and said Donny, you can't keep doing this. So I went off to a therapeutic retreat center called On-Site, 9 months of therapy in one week. I learned a lot about myself. I learned I was co-dependent and that part of my self-esteem was given to some of these girls that I liked so if they liked me I would be okay.

I was really just using them to be validated and I learned that my patterns in relationships had come from and walked out of that retreat with new tools to use to help myself have a better healthy relationship. About six months later I started dating a woman who is now my wife and that relationship looks completely different than any of the relationships I was in before. The main thing that's different is that Betsy's a better person because she dated me and married me.

A lot of the women I dated became worse people because they dated me. They were more insecure, lonely and frustrated. So getting healthy for me wasn't just about me being happier it was about discontinuing the pattern of hurting other people.

Ray: I think it takes a lot of courage and transparency to even admit that, because you're in the same position as your friend in a way. To many people you're famous and this well-

known author who has all the answers, because you've written all these books, and yet you're stepping outside that. That's part of the message of *Scary Close* isn't it?

What would you say the central message of *Scary Close* is?

Donald: Hopefully it's an invitation to let the people around you know who you really are and deeply connect with them. There's a caveat in the book, I talk about the kind of people who are not healthy and trustworthy with which to really reveal yourself to. There's a chapter called 'The Five Kinds of Manipulators', and those are people who, until they take accountability for their own actions, we don't need to open up to everyone and not everyone needs to know everything.

But, to the degree that we allow ourselves to be known is the degree that we're going to feel intimate and connected, and the truth is, when we connect with people we get stronger and healthier. So, it's by confessing who we really are to others and being accepted by them that we gain strength, and it's counterintuitive because we think by hiding our flaws and projecting an image of strength, fun or intelligence or whatever, we think that makes us stronger but it doesn't it just makes us weak, because now we're hiding who we really are.

Ray: So you're in the business of writing books and helping people create messages for their life and businesses.

How do you experience this dichotomy of this image people have of you versus who you really are?

How does that play out in your real life, being authentic in business and in being a writer?

Donald: You know, it's probably cost me some. I think there are people who aren't drawn to my books because I don't have the kind of squeaky clean religious image that a lot of people want in a leader and they want that because it makes them feel secure. I probably costs me something, but what I get in exchange for that is an actual deep connection with the people that I interact with. I wouldn't trade impressing hundreds of thousands of people for connecting with three any day.

What our souls really want isn't actually to be impressive, but it wants deep connection. Just the other night I was lying in bed and had been troubled by something for over a year. My wife and I have been married just a little longer than a year. We dated for two, so we've been together for three years, getting to know each other. There was one thing that I hadn't told her from my past, and it wasn't a sin. There wasn't anything sexual about it, nothing scandalous, but it was a weakness that I didn't want her to know about.

I had heard someone in the afternoon as we filmed a series on marriage and I heard the counselor say, if you're 90% known you just won't experience a deep level of intimacy. Betsy was stirred and awake and she asked if I was okay. I said I'm not, I haven't told you about this thing that happened 10 years ago. She laughed when I told her because it wasn't anything from her perspective, but to me it was embarrassing. I felt so much more connected with her after I let her know that than I had before. I'd hidden it from her because I didn't want to be perceived as weak.

I wanted to be perceived as strong and it was a failure in my past. And yet from her perspective, she saw me telling the truth and building a connection there and that to her was strength, because it takes someone who's really strong to tell the truth about themselves. So I think it's counterintuitive. We think projecting an image of strength is going to make people think we're strong, but really, when we tell the truth people go wow he's strong.

So I wanted to tell the truth to connect with people and then there was a side benefit of people thinking I was a great guy. I'll take the cake and the icing if that's the way this thing works.

Ray: Well said. In this business and in life, you've talked about people's social media profiles and I've often remarked that many of these people have a Photo-shopped life and I realized I did too, so I struggle sometimes with the line between what I should reveal that's being transparent and authentic and when does it cross over into stuff people don't need to know?

When we set ourselves up as this perfect person who has it all together, doesn't it really cause people to distance themselves from us?

Donald: It does and there's much at stake. In the book I talk about one of my fears in getting married so late was Betsy and I having children and the children wouldn't like me. They would get into their rebellious stage right about the time I'm in a wheelchair because I got married so old. It was a fear and I ended up calling a few friends who have kids in their late teens and early 20s, who are doing exceptionally well.

They're healthy, emotionally together, productive in life and enjoy life, the kind of kids we all want. What I noticed was that each of these families have parents, especially the dads because those are the ones I knew since I was friends with them, they have dads that are more or less willing to confess their sins to their own children. Meaning, they were willing to be human in front of their kids they didn't pretend to be perfect.

I noticed that those families were healthy and then I have a few acquaintances who are Christian leaders and put up the image of perfection. They really have it all together. They don't sin. If you disagree with them about something they fly off the handle and nobody really connects with that kind of guy, so they don't have many friends. I noticed that they had very unhealthy children. They were emotionally unhealthy. They dealt with substance abuse. Two have children that have even committed suicide.

I wandered then if there was a common denominator. There are all sorts of reason that kids go off track. They meet new friends, get into things, etc. so that's not a blanket statement, but I wandered if growing up in a home where it was okay to be human and okay to have flaws and you were accepted whether you succeeded or failed, didn't set you up for a healthier life than growing up in a home where your flaws needed to be hidden because down at church we wouldn't be accepted as the leaders if they find out the truth about us. Therefore, the dad hides from the mom and the kids and the kids learn to hide from the mom and the dad, which leaves them with no one to talk to because they're afraid to be themselves.

I think there's a lot at stake. We talk about authenticity and vulnerability and they're kind of buzzwords. We think about the shock jock, the person who's going to say the offensive thing because that's just who they are. That's not what I'm saying there's no

excuse for that. If you're a jerk you are. If the real you is a jerk then you won't be accepted. In fact, if the real you is a jerk then you're the only one who needs to hide the real you. Honestly, I'm talking about the ability to just be ourselves, have flaws, work through them and be in a functional relationship with God and the people around us, which involves telling the truth.

Ray: It's so important, not just for us but the people around us to let them realize that they're safe with you and let you know the truth about them.

Donald: For sure and there are safe people and safe people... you know, Henry Crowd and John Fountain have this book called *Safe People*, its one of my favorites. To define a safe person, someone who tells the truth and is also gracious, they're not judgmental. Those are the kinds of people we can really be ourselves around, not the people who enable us and say oh Don that's fine, everybody struggles with that.

No that's not a good friend either, but when someone says hey let's work on that and get better at it. I love you just as you are. Those are the sorts of people we tend to thrive when we're with them. Those are the kinds of people we need to be.

Ray: So this book *Scary Close*, now I read a lot of books in self-development and other books in that genre and most of them are full of how-to lists, checklists and steps and this is a very different book.

How would you describe the way you wrote it and how does it compare to the other books you've written?

Donald: Well, my journey was from trying to impress a lot of people and even getting a relative amount of family, but living in a very private darkness and then moving into the light, learning what was wrong with me and why I wasn't connecting, not just with a woman but even with friends and the people I work with on my team. They were very real processes I went through. I learned about shame. I learned about co-dependency and those things are also covered in the book.

I don't think there are actual steps to being in better relationships, but I hope that by sharing my story there will be a lot of people who say, this is my story too and nobody's ever talked about it or said it in such a way. I've always felt alone in this and I don't feel alone anymore because of this book. I hope that's the result people have when they read it.

Ray: There was another teacher who told a lot of stories and I thought He did a good job, so it's a good model I think.

Donald: I think so.

Ray: **If I recommend this book to someone, what do you think the benefits are for them when they read this book?**

Donald: Hopefully you'll feel permission to be free and more open about who you are and hopefully, you'll be able to look in the mirror and like yourself a little more because the curtain has been pulled back and you can see behind the scenes that we're all really faking it. The pressure is taken off for you to be someone you're not. I hope that's one of the results, that people just like themselves more after reading the book.

The second result is that I hope people experience a deeper level of intimacy, because of the stories that are in the book, stories of people who have dealt with their wounds openly and talked about them. The stories they tell, my friends in this book, they all signed off but they're incredibly vulnerable. Big time people who sold 20 million books are confessing hard stuff that has been for them, a dark journey into the light. I hope that folks who have been hiding parts of themselves, not sinful ugly parts but parts that are embarrassing, will feel more at home in their own skin after reading this book and be able to connect with others because of it.

Ray: **The lessons you learned and share in the book apply to all relationships not just marriages, right?**

Donald: Absolutely. There's a chapter on parenting. There's a chapter on building your team, so it's about community and friendship. It begins with the break-off of a relationship and me at rock bottom and it ends in a wedding. I hear comedies should all end in weddings, so hopefully this is a happy book.

Ray: Well you followed the form.

Donald: In real life and in the book.

Ray: **What's your process like for writing a book like this?
When you initially had the idea, how long did it take you?
How did you work through what you were going to include and not include?**

Donald: It was an interesting process. I tend to write in the morning. I get up early and write and if I can I go off to a cabin for a few days, if my schedule allows for it and get work done. I really choose a point in my life when I was in a dark spot. I'm no longer in that spot and I have a wonderful healthy relationship that's a lot of fun and I go okay, what were the critical plot points of how I went from point A to point B and then, what are the plot points that are universal that every human being would identify with?

In a book I'm hopefully not only telling my story, but I'm telling our story, human stories. We've had a lot of people read this book and they're often writing me back whose lives are nothing like mine and they're saying I felt like you were telling my story and to me that's when I know I've hit a homerun and did my job in telling our story. Our story is really very common. We're all deeply insecure. There are tools we can all use to understand where our wounds come from and then there are tools that we can use to connect with others and finally start a path towards help.

Ray: **Do you think social media has contributed to this kind of isolation and faking it that we're all so involved in?**

Donald: I do yes. I'm a big fan of social media. I have a Twitter account and Instagram account. If you want to see what my dog looks like just go to my Instagram account, because that's basically what I post and then rant about the Seattle Seahawks being so great. I think there's a down side to it, even though it's fun, that we can project an image that isn't true, totally.

We can project that our lives are lot more accomplished or successful or fun than they really are, so when we get into relationships with people who follow us on Instagram, we might feel this temptation to hide the parts of us that don't look as good as our

Instagram feed. That's dark trouble. If we start doing that then we aren't connecting with people we're just impressing them. When we stop connecting with others our soul begins to atrophy.

Ray: Yes. There's a show called 'Portlandia'.

Donald: Yeah, I love it. Coming from Portland it's really more of a documentary than anything. It feels very true to life.

Ray: I know. There's this one skit they do where the lady in the show, Carrie, decided to get off social media by deleting all her accounts. It demonstrated that she didn't exist to the other people once she was no longer on social media.

Donald: That's hilarious. It's something I would love to get off of, but honestly, my career depends on it a lot, so I am torn between this place of not wanting to know what everyone is doing and not wanting everyone to know what I'm doing, but instead, just connecting with people who are in front of me. Then also, I realize if I can't tweet about a conference we're doing or a book that's coming out then how am I going to pay rent. I think a lot of people find themselves in that very same place.

Ray: And that's the exercise in how to be authentic without spending so much time "connecting" with people online that you never actually connect with people in real life.

Donald: True.

Ray: I'm excited for you for this book. I've been a big fan of your work for a while and have read all your other work, *Blue Like Jazz*, *Through Painted Deserts* and loved your writing before, but I feel this is a new more authentic you and I think it will open up things for a lot of people. I see in the circle of friends that I have and we associate with some of the same, I see some people struggling with these same issues and for you to step out and open up and then get others to step out and open up is going to help others get more freedom.

Donald: I hope so. I hope it helps people to be more honest with one another and connect with each other. I hope 20 years from now we look back and see the culture we live in now, like the way you look back and see movies in the 20s and 30s where the characters are being over-dramatic. Whereas, real life doesn't work that way, so I hope we can look back on ourselves 20 years from now and think man, we used to lie to each other all the time and now we tell the truth.

Ray: It would be good. I think more truth telling is good. With graciousness as pointed out.

Donald: What is graciousness?

Ray: I was making reference to something you said earlier, but I would love to hear your answer to that question.

Donald: I think it's allowing people to be themselves without trying to change them. I really think that's the core of grace and that's God's grace. That God says hey, change is available to you. Redemption is available to you. Forgiveness is available to you, but I'm not going to force you to do anything and honor the fact that you're your own person, which of course is a beautiful invitation.

That's a non-controlling way to be in a relationship with someone.

Ray: Yes.

Donald: So for me, graciousness is that I have a hope for you and I know there are some better ways to live, but I honor the fact that you're your own person. Of course if someone is hurting another person, we have to step in and stop that, but aside from that, I think graciousness just allows people to be themselves. It doesn't celebrate sin, but let's them be themselves and live in their own freedom and guide their own lives.

Ultimately, that's the only way people change anyway is when they decide to do it.

Ray: Absolutely, and I've personally found it's much easier for me to love people when I give up my need to try to control them.

Donald: Me too. It is so much less exhausting for those of us who want control to stop and let people be themselves.

Ray: Indeed. I think this book will be a help to people. It's titled *Scary Close* by Donald Miller. It's fantastic and you should get it and buy copies for everyone you know.

Donald: Thank you so much, I sure appreciate that.

Take my advice, get this book and read it. You will not be disappointed.

In the meantime if you want to help us out, the best way to do that is to subscribe to this podcast in iTunes or on Stitcher. When you do that, not only subscribe but give us a star rating as well and write us a review. If you do those three things, it helps get the show in front of others.

Until next week's podcast, may God continue to bless you and do more for you than you can ask or possibly even imagine.

Transcripts of these podcasts are available by clicking the link in the show notes. Transcripts are provided by our friends at SuccessTranscripts.com, a great solution if you need your podcast, sermon, speech or other audio/video transcribed.