

George Foreman Knocked Out Hatred and Now Champions Forgiveness

Before he found Jesus, George Foreman knew nothing about the concept of forgiveness. He didn't want to know anything about it for himself, and he especially didn't want to give it to people he believed had hurt him.

But once God entered the picture, the former heavyweight champion of the world simply couldn't avoid it. It soon became a huge part of his life, as moviegoers will see when they go to theaters to watch the biopic "Big George Foreman," which opens nationwide on April 29.

Foreman admits that a great deal of hate once resided in Him. But that all changed once he found God.

"I went on this thing about asking people for forgiveness," Foreman told Charisma News' John Matarazzo in an exclusive interview. "Because you're dead (figuratively) and you're given another chance to live. All you think about is how wonderful it is to be alive. God's greatest inventions of all time are human beings, and I learned to love them."

Muhammad Ali, who passed away from complications of Parkinson's Disease in 2016, not only took away Foreman's world heavyweight boxing championship in Zaire—the bout famously referred to as the "Rumble in the Jungle"—but he also, Foreman believed, took away his dignity as a fighter.

Ali, who had held the world heavyweight title previously, came in as a 4-1 underdog against Foreman and many believed Ali did not have a prayer of beating Foreman. But in the eighth round, Ali knocked Foreman to the canvas, but the referee stopped the fight.

“When I lost the title to Muhammad Ali, he was probably the person that I hated most,” Foreman says. “I was devastated with losing my title.”

Devastated but not daunted, Foreman continued to fight and on April 30, 1976, after being badly beaten and bloodied by Jimmy Young, he thought he was going to die. That’s when God grabbed hold of Foreman and saved him.

“I had an experience,” Foreman told “The Today Show” in a 2007 interview. “In a split-second I was dead and alive. Of course, I’m [the] only witness to it because I was there. All around me there was nothing ... I started screaming. Jesus Christ was coming to life in me. I didn’t even believe in religion.”

More than 46 years later after his experience with Jesus, Foreman says he’s hanging onto the power of forgiveness. He knows that with God’s grace and mercy, he is also forgiven. But, he says, forgiveness is a powerful tool of the Lord.

Well into his life as a Christian, Foreman and Ali, a devout Muslim, befriended each other. Foreman forgave himself for the hatred he previously felt for Ali, and asked Ali for forgiveness for those emotions. Ali accepted his forgiveness.

“Muhammad Ali and I became the best of friends, even until his death,” Foreman said. “It was a love affair. We’d even say, ‘bye, I love you,’ things like that.”

Foreman returned to the ring years later and, in 1995, became the oldest world heavyweight champion at the age of 45. He also became a pastor and celebrity spokesman of The George Foreman Grill, which has sold over 100 million units.

 Of course, Foreman, who has 10 children, has enjoyed what God blessed him with later in life. But it’s the act of forgiveness that he clings to every day—and the cross of Jesus. And forgiveness, he says, is something the world sorely needs today in these chaotic, self-indulgent end times, when

people are vandalizing, stealing, shooting up schools and performing other acts of violence contrary to God's will.

"I always tell my kids that forgiveness is the subtle thread that binds both love and friendship," Foreman says. "You could have kids, but you can wake up tomorrow without a kid or a child, or even a husband or a wife, just because you didn't forgive."

"Forgiveness is the only thing that binds us and bonds us together. I have had to hold onto forgiveness. My wife has had to, I guess, to keep me around (joking). Forgiveness is very important. There's nothing good you can have in your life, as far as people are concerned, unless you are determined to forgive." {eo}

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