

*Make Me Care About...*

Make Me Care About...Wrap Up  
Podcast episode 13 transcript

**Jen Hatmaker:** Hi everybody. I am Jen Hatmaker, and this is Make Me Care About. You guys, today we have a very special bonus episode. I am talking to someone you might have heard of. Let's see, she is a philanthropist, she is this genius businesswoman, she is a fierce advocate for women and girls all around the world, and, maybe most notably for this particular show, she's the co-chair of the Gates Foundation. I am obviously talking about Melinda French Gates. I have loved her for so long, admired her, respected her, learned from her. Today we are so lucky, because she is on the show telling us why she cares about these topics and what's up next for the Foundation.

Melinda, I am so glad to see you. It's been five years since I've seen you.

**Melinda French Gates:** Too long, Jen. I'm so glad we can do this again.

**Jen Hatmaker:** Absolutely. I have so much enjoyed working on this podcast and it's been fascinating to me. I have learned so much, dove into topics I had never really even heard of, much less knew anything about. I would get off some of these recordings and then talk ad nauseum about what I learned and what I heard. For example, ancient grains, I didn't know about that.

**Melinda French Gates:** You mean it's not an everyday topic for you in your household?

**Jen Hatmaker:** Exactly.

**Melinda French Gates:** Or poop? I heard the poop one. I was in Southeast Asia, I'm like, "Wow." We talk about that at the foundation, but I thought, "That's not an everyday topic."

**Jen Hatmaker:** No, it really isn't, and yet I managed to work it into a party discussion, so credit goes to me for finding a way to thread the poop conversation into a social setting.

**Melinda French Gates:** Nice.

**Jen Hatmaker:** They ran the gamut and they're all massive issues, and then obviously central to the work at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, but let me ask you the question that we've posed to the listening audience, which is why do you think the rest of us should care about these issues?

**Melinda French Gates:** I think because these are issues that are facing everyday people. We don't really think about them necessarily day-to-day ourselves. Any person, let's just say in our own country, who's ever had a baby, you can remember how difficult that was. Then when you think about, wow, we're in a crisis situation where women are dying in childbirth, and it might not be in your neighborhood but it might be in this next state over, I think caring about that and understanding and saying, "Is there something we can do about it or I can push my government to do about it?" I think that's really important.

**Jen Hatmaker:** I walked away from basically each and every episode with that exact feeling, that this matters to all of us and what affects our neighbors halfway around the world affects us. It is this sense of a rising tide lifting every single boat in the harbor.

You and I last spoke in person, which was so fun, in 2018. It was right when *The Moment of Lift* was released and that's what we were discussing, which was such an incredible book, I read it cover to cover. Let's hear a little bit about you, because fast-forward, five years later, it's been weird. In 2018 we did not know what was ahead. You've been busy in your whole life, certainly, but definitely at the foundation. I'd just like to hear from you personally, what is the Foundation up to right now that's exciting you the most, the one where you feel like this is the momentum that I love, the wind is at my back, on this particular space?

**Melinda French Gates:** We have really put our foot on the pedal on women's economic power, because when women have true economic power it changes everything in their household, in their community, in the world. It lifts up global economies. We all, since 2018, went through a global pandemic that none of us ever thought we were going to go through.

**Jen Hatmaker:** That's right.

**Melinda French Gates:** Yet, many women lost their jobs and making sure they come back and come back in full force is really important. That doesn't happen, we saw it in the US, unless they have a good childcare option. That's not true just in the US, that's true of a women's scientist in West Africa or a woman who works in the informal sector in South Africa. The foundation is really making more investments now and calling for policy changes on things like childcare infrastructure around the globe, on making sure we have more women in leadership positions. More female leaders in a congress or a parliament means they make more good policy for women and families. We're making sure that women can use their phones, and they have them around the world, to have a bank account of their own to save money. You did a whole episode, money is power and we often don't talk about that. I'm excited about the foundation's investments in programming with our partners around those areas.

**Jen Hatmaker:** Me too. That was my favorite episode of the entire series, when we talked about digital money, particularly in a global conversation and what it meant not just for individual women. I think that's what you were drilling into a second ago, but empowering women in every way certainly, but definitely financially, is absolutely the best news possible for every community, every country, GDP, health, education. Its ripple effect is astonishing. This conversation is so exciting and the needle is moving forward and there is progress being made.

I'd like to hear, from your perspective, what feels like great news around this conversation right now? Where are you seeing something really shift or reverse or start to rise or lift or change, be it either domestically or it might be a story abroad? What's a little bit of hope that you can drop into this conversation for why we should keep caring about this?

**Melinda French Gates:** If you look back a decade ago, we didn't have this tool called a cell phone to use in development. Now, do we not only have cell phones and are they not only available around the world, we can buy goods and services, we can transfer money to relatives or for school fees. When I travel to places, women will literally tell me, "Look, when I can save a dollar a day, \$2 a day," no matter whether they live in a remote village somewhere in Kenya or a remote village in India,

they say, "Everybody looks at me differently when I have money." If it's in India, "My mother-in-law looks at me differently. I bought my son a bike so he could bike to school, he looks at me differently. My daughter, I'm paying her school fees." You hear these stories of women having more power and the power dynamics shifting in a household when they have money individually.

Again, if you think about it in our own context, if I have money to spend, I probably spend it differently than my partner in the household or my children. But at the global level, I was in India in December of this past year, they have weathered COVID far better because of these digital bank accounts that men and women have. The government put their social protection payments through the women's accounts because they knew the women would spend the money better on their families. It kept the country afloat and they weathered the shock better because of it. Given that, the other nations around the world who are low income are saying, "We want that now. We want to make sure we put it in place so that not just men, but women can use this what we call digital money or digital public infrastructure in the right way." I think you and Deon Woods Bell had a good conversation around this, she's very dynamic. It is a game changer, honestly, for people around the world.

**Jen Hatmaker:** It was so energizing. I told her, I said, "Look, I don't care. It doesn't affect you at all if women are empowered or disempowered. If you just care about your country succeeding, if you care about your businesses doing better, if you care about the advancement of your community, then you should care about this." Women are good news for the world when they are healthy and educated and financially empowered.

**Melinda French Gates:** Guess what? Their husbands will say to you, "I'm glad my wife has her own resources. It's good for our household. There's more resources, and guess what? She's not tapping me for them."

You had so many good episodes. Which one do you think provided you a new perspective on a topic that maybe you hadn't really heard about or thought about before?

**Jen Hatmaker:** First of all, it was so interesting to talk to Crystal Kane about which grade was the most indicative of future success for a student. She posed it to me at the beginning and I said, "I think kindergarten," I just took a stab, maybe it's like emergent literacy, but it was ninth grade. That was news to me and really fascinating that that is a grade to watch, and not just loosely and ambiguously, but there are real clear markers to put into place to increase the success rate for our kids, starting with what we can observe and the interventions in ninth grade. Fascinating.

But I think as I mentioned at the top of the show, ancient grains to me, I couldn't have known less about ancient grains than when I went into that conversation with Chef Thiam. It was such an important conversation right now around climate change and sustainability and the next generations. To me, it was such a hopeful lesson on the possibility of continuing to feed the world in a way that is sustainable, good for the Earth, better for our bodies, good for the farmers, it's local. There's no downside.

I could have talked to him forever. I laughed so hard, Melinda, because I got off that interview and I called my guy, Tyler, and I was like, "I just had the most fascinating conversation about ancient grains." He was like, "No one has ever said that sentence to me." I'm like, "I know."

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**Melinda French Gates:** I know, I know. I sometimes feel like we hear so much negative news because things are difficult, let's be honest, but when I learn something new from a topic I never knew anything about, but it's hopeful and it shows you that progress and solutions are possible, it just makes my whole day better. I always feel like I want to then get up and dance and, like you did, call somebody and tell them, right?

**Jen Hatmaker:** Totally. I think that's what listeners will experience in the whole series. Yes, we are talking about major issues, most of them systemic in nature, pretty complex issues with complex solutions, but even baked into the work is so much hope, there's so much progress. The folks that we had on the show, the experts in their fields, are among some of the most brilliant people I've ever spoken to, absolute heroes in their respective areas, and tirelessly working on making the world better. I keep telling people, I'm like, "Look, I know you may see the name of an episode and go, 'That feels hard.'" I'm like, "It is hard, but wait till you hear what we have to say." It's hopeful, it's good news.

**Melinda French Gates:** Well, the other thing I really liked about the various series and episodes were one of the huge privileges I have in my work is I get to travel the world and people often say to me when I come back home, "Oh my gosh, was it devastating?" and I say, "No, the topics are big, but the people I've met and the ingenious solutions they're coming up with are hopeful." It's almost like you're, through the podcast, taking people around the world to see these places and these glimmers of hope. That's what I get in my job and that learning that I just love so much, so I'm so glad you did this podcast for everybody.

**Jen Hatmaker:** I can't thank you enough for inviting me to be a part of this podcast. As you know, I have long admired you and certainly the work of the Foundation, which is profound and just unprecedented work that you're doing in the world. It matters and it's making such a difference. It's changing people's lives, it's saving lives. It's turning around not just communities, but countries. It's really a marvel to bear witness to and to learn about. In a world where everything feels like it's constantly on fire, it is wonderful to get to peek in the windows of what the Foundation is doing right now and how beautiful the work is on the other side.

On behalf of myself and all of our listeners who've been coming along with us in the series, thank you for caring about just all the right things and putting your influence and your hand to work in some of the most profound ways I've ever seen. I just love every second of it and I love being a part of it.

**Melinda French Gates:** Well, thanks for giving everybody a peek in the windows and bringing some light and some hope to the world, I think it's really important. So glad we could do this.

**Jen Hatmaker:** Same.

This has been Make Me Care About. I'm Jen Hatmaker, and I just want to say personally a huge thank you to every one of you who has gone on this learning journey with me. It has been fascinating getting to know so many outstanding people doing some of the best work in the world, getting to know why they care about so many important issues and the incredible solutions they are coming up with and putting into place. I'll never forget this. I have learned so much, I have grown and I have changed.

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We have been so pleased to share these with you. Thank you for being here, thank you for sharing your favorite episodes with your friends, thank you for your thoughtful and interesting feedback. It has been just a delight to have this experience with you. You guys, for more information about any of the guests and their work that you've heard on this series, just click on the link in the show notes. Thanks again for being here.

Make Me Care About is produced by Jesse Baker and Eric Nuzum of Magnificent Noise. Our production staff includes Sabrina Farhi, Hiwote Getaneh, Julia Natt and Kristin Mueller. Our executive producer is Eric Nuzum, and I'm the host, Jen Hatmaker.