

Announcer:

Welcome to The Carey Nieuwhof Leadership Podcast. A podcast all about leadership, change, and personal growth. The goal? To help you lead like never before in your church or in your business. And now your host, Carey Nieuwhof.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, hey everybody and welcome to episode 328 of the podcast. My name is Carey Nieuwhof, and I hope our time together today helps you lead like never before. Today's episode is brought to you by The Ascent Leader cohorts and Pro Media Fire and my guest today, none other than Mark Driscoll. I'm really excited to have Mark on the podcast. He is the lead pastor of the Trinity Church in Phoenix, Arizona. And prior to that, served at Mars Hill. Mark has certainly made headlines in his time in ministry. And we talk a little bit about his time at Mars Hill, and I think you get a glimpse into what it's like to be at the center of controversy the way Mark was. If you're a regular listener you may have heard my episode with Francis Chan. Same thing. We just talked about, what is the price of being in the public spotlight sometimes for things you say or do? So Mark and I talk a lot about that. We talk about what's different now in his life and he's got a brand new book as well. So really glad you're tuning in. Hey, welcome to all of you who are new listeners. This has been an incredible year for the podcast. And what's really fun is like, we got over 300 episodes now of just backstory.

Carey Nieuwhof:

And what I love to do, I think of this as the case method where we just kind of break down the behind the scenes leadership story of the leaders that we interview in the business space and in the church space. So really, really glad you're here. Particularly young leaders, your encouragement means the world to me. As this episode airs, I am landing in Australia so I think we're doing a six city tour. So hey, if you're in Oz ... I know a lot of you are. There are thousands of subscribers to this podcast in Australia. Hope to meet you face to face. Your encouragement means the world to me. And speaking of young leaders, one of the transitions that's happening in the church right now is the transition from boomer and older Gen X pastors to Millennials as senior pastors. Sometimes of very large churches. I've gotten to know Sean Morgan and the folks over at CDF Capital and The Ascent Leader. And I got to tell you, they're putting together some pretty cool cohorts. And when it comes to succession transitions, a lot of people think hey, you know what, it happens when there's a baton passed, but if you're a young leader and there's a ton of young leaders who are listening to this podcast. Guess what? You've inherited someone else's board, their staff, their culture, their rhythms, and their expectations. And how do you lead through that?

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well, The Ascent Leader has actually designed some cohort experiences that pair new lead pastors together with your peers. Often based on similar church size. They've got years of experience. They've helped over 100 churches through the transition. And they partnered with Barna to enhance the learning around how new leaders lead forward in transition. There are limited spots available, and you have to apply. But if you find yourself in that position, you're a new leader, you've taken over for someone else and now you're like, now what? Head on over to TheAscentLeader.org. That's TheAscentLeader.org. We'll have the links in the show notes as well if that's helpful to you. And then in my Art of Better Preaching course, one of the things we talk about is the process of preparing messages. And one thing we know, there's a lot of work in putting a series together. And you guys spend a lot of time on that, those of you who like me, preach. Well, have you ever worked on the next sermon series

with your team, arrived on a great name, and then you discovered the work's just beginning? Because you've to get, if you're going to do it well, graphics, announcements, social media, a commercial, a sermon bumper, and maybe your team isn't fully capable of doing it.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Or perhaps you have this vision in your head of what it could be and then you have the reality of what it is. Well, let Pro Media Fire close that gap for you. You can hire their entire creative team of professionals for a fraction of the cost of expanding your staff. And because you listen to this podcast, you get 10% off all plans for life if you head on over to this site. Go to ProMediaFire.com/Carey. That's ProMediaFire.com/Carey. And well, you'll get 10% off for life, and I hope you do that. I think the church is the best at creating great series and then abandoning them. But if you get social support for that they can live on for a long, long time. Well with all that said, I am so excited to bring you my conversation with Mark Driscoll.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark, welcome to the podcast.

Mark Driscoll:

Good to be with you, buddy.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah so, hey, we're going to talk about spiritual warfare, but I want to sort of back up a little bit. You've been through a lot in your ministry. How many years have you been in as a pastor? How many years now?

Mark Driscoll:

My little story is, at 17 I met a girl in high school, she was a pastor's daughter. Adored her. And she gave me a bible. I became a Christian at 19, we married at 21, graduated at 22. So then I did college ministry like 22, 23, 24. Started a church plant at 25. Had no idea what I was doing. And I'll be 50 this year. So I've been in ministry since I was 22. So I guess I've been in ministry the majority of my life. And I've been a senior pastor for about half of my life. And my wife Grace and I today, we've got five kids and yeah, we've been together a very long time.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Your upbringing, I don't know a ton about your childhood. I'm sure a lot of our listeners would. But was it like anomaly Christian home, totally pagan home, how would you describe it?

Mark Driscoll:

Irish Catholic. And so we were the O'Driscolls from County Cork southern Ireland and ended up here during the famine with everybody else. And then was very, very Catholic. I mean, after my grandpa died, my grandma joined a lay order of pre-Vatican II Latin mass Catholic nuns.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Oh wow.

Mark Driscoll:

Real Catholic. And I had a mom who loved the lord. She got healed at a Charismatic prayer renewal and so she was a Charismatic Catholic. I didn't know the Lord. And I didn't have a bad experience with the church, I just ... I was more interested in making money and playing baseball and getting my driver's license and so I didn't really have much interest in anything that was related to God until I was in college. When I grew up, my dad was a union drywaller. He hung sheetrock until he broke his back. I was the oldest of five kids. We were working class poor. And just a hard working blue collar family, that's what I come from.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark can you walk us through like what was the defining moment for you spiritually as a teenager? I think you said you were 17 or 19 when that happened?

Mark Driscoll:

19 when I became Christian, yeah. I was in college at state university. I think I was the first male in the history of my family to go to college. And I didn't really think much about Jesus or Christianity at all. And then it started coming up in all the classes. So they're hammering on Christianity and philosophy, sociology, anthropology, history. It seems like a dogpile on Christianity at the state university. And I realized, I probably need to decide what I think about all of this for myself. And so, I had to read Augustine for a philosophy class.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Mark Driscoll:

He was talking about pride and his own self righteousness and I thought man, that's me. I didn't do drugs, I didn't drink, I was most likely to succeed, student body president. I was this moral, non-believing, proud kid and so then I read that Augustine really liked the apostle Paul. So that got me reading this bible that Grace, my now wife gave me. And I actually got saved reading Romans in my dorm just out of curiosity. Like literally the switch flipped. The Holy Spirit just kind of did his work and that's when I started reading the bible pretty voraciously, found a really good awesome first church that I'm so grateful for. And the pastor there was a really good bible guy and really helped me learn to study the scriptures at a very young age. Yeah in God's providence, everything was just kind of perfectly set up to really be a blessing to me.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you know ... Because a lot of people at 19 have no idea what they're going to do with their life. But what was your plan for you life before you found faith or found a call to ministry?

Mark Driscoll:

I was thinking probably communications. So somewhere in that realm. And that's what I ended up getting my undergrad degree in and then got a masters in bible. But I was 19, I was at my first men's retreat. I didn't know the evangelical subculture. I didn't know there was Christian music. I didn't know you'd go on retreats. I didn't know any of this stuff. So the men had a retreat at the church so I went and they said, "Hey, everybody needs to go spend some time with God." And I was like, "I don't even know

what we're talking about. I don't know what we're supposed to do." So they said, "Well just go for a walk and talk to God like he's there with you. Just talk to him conversationally." I was like, "Okay." So I did. And God spoke to me audibly. At that time, I didn't know he still did that. He said, "Marry Grace, preach the bible, train men, and plant churches." Told me to do four things. And so I went and I told my pastor, I'm like, "I think God spoke to me. Does he do that?" He's like, "Yeah, he can do that." I said, "Well here's what he said." And so my pastor said, "Well that's the word of the Lord to you. That's what you need to do." So for the last 30 years, that's what I've been trying to do is those four things.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's so fascinating to me Mark, because numerous guests on this podcast have said that they felt God speak to them. Can you drill down on that a little bit more? Was it a voice? Was it an impression? And then, how did you know it was God and not the pizza?

Mark Driscoll:

Well this one was audible. And at first I thought-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Really?

Mark Driscoll:

Yeah. Like some buddies were making a prank on me or something. I'm looking around just wondering what is happening. I've had God speak to me with impressions, I've had visions when I'm awake, I've had dreams when I'm asleep. I'm in the book of Daniel right now. And Daniel gets a lot of that kind of thing. To me it's not constant. But there's been some significant moments in my life where God has showed up to reveal himself in supernatural ways, either to help or deliver me and my family or help or deliver someone else.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well I'm not somebody who hears from God every day, but I've had supernatural charismatic experiences as well and I'm not naturally charismatic. So I get that. Bring us up to date. I want to touch on ... Let's actually start here. When you look back at what happened at Mars Hill Seattle and there's a lot that happened, a lot that's been written. But I would love to know just from a different perspective, what are you most proud of? Like when you look back on that season of your life. Because as I argued in a post that we'll link to, lots of good happened in Seattle.

Mark Driscoll:

Yeah, I had a great honor. I mean, I was 25, newly married, no kids, no theological education. I started a bible study and I didn't expect anything to happen. We were in one of the least church cities in the country. But I really wanted to see people, especially young men meet Jesus. Once I met Jesus I knew that everyone needs Jesus. And so I just started a simple bible study that met at night. It was not a big deal. And eventually it morphed into a very small, struggling church plant that moved around a lot. And the first three years I worked as a volunteer and had a full-time job. We really struggled. And in God's grace, I just kept teaching the bible and trying to learn and trying to do the best I could to learn how to lead people, how to love people, how to teach God's word. And next thing you know ... It was 18 years of my life. I got to preach through a couple dozen at least books of the bible. And the thing that was

most amazing is I think we baptized around 10,000 people. Mainly college educated single men. Which as you know statistically, just don't go to church. They don't read their bible and they're not living for Jesus. And so, doing that in a difficult context was challenging.

Mark Driscoll:

But yeah, I was just grateful to be able to teach the bible and I was grateful to see a lot of people meet Jesus. And so, for me, I just consider it a great and tremendous honor. If anybody gives you the honor of helping them learn God's word, it's such an incredible honor to be given. And so, yeah, I'm just really, really grateful for that opportunity and that honor.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm curious as somebody who also preaches and thinks about what messages connect with the culture. Looking back on it Mark, do you have an idea why that style of teaching that you became so well known for connected so well with so many people who many would say were unreachable?

Mark Driscoll:

Yeah. I think that the Holy Spirit shows up to help people learn the bible in a way he doesn't show up for anything else. I don't think there's anything wrong with going and taking a history class in college or I don't think it's wrong to binge on Netflix. But I don't think when you're sort of absorbing that kind of content, that the Holy Spirit shows up in the same way that he does when you're talking about Jesus and you're opening the bible. I believe there's a supernatural element to it that is a God factor that just defies all sense. I would preach for an hour plus. I still do. I tended to preach verse by verse through books of the bible. I still tend to. And people would show up. But I think we live in a culture that they're looking for significant and substantive content. And I think that the answers that they have been given are generally not working. And I believe that they are open to at least hearing what the bible says because it's not like there is a rejection of the bible for most, there's an ignorance of the bible. Most people just literally don't know.

Mark Driscoll:

And I think that's where sometimes teaching through books of the bible helps people learn what the bible actually says and how to read it for themselves. And you know as well as I do that there is power in the word of God that we can't explain or control, and when people encounter the God of the bible through the word of God, things happen that we have no ability to direct or control. He saves people, he changes lives, he heals them. We just get a front row seat to watch God work.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Do you think that's changed at all as culture's changed over the last five or six years? And to nuance that a little bit more, you moved from Seattle to Phoenix where things are really, really different. Have you see that change and if so, how have you seen that change?

Mark Driscoll:

Well, I'm older. It's interesting in leadership, you can only lead out of whatever experience you've got. So first church plant, we didn't even have kids yet when we started the church. And you're mainly college and singles in the church and so now that I'm a dad with five kids, three boys, two girls. The oldest is married, the second oldest probably will get married here before long. It's a very different

season of life. And so for me, I think like a father. I feel like a father with people in my church. And I think that changes your tone and your disposition. I think when you're 25, you're a brother, when you're 35 you're a big brother, when you're 50 maybe you get to start to be a dad and maybe when you're 65 you get to be a grandpa. And I think the tone changes and the level of authority adjusts and I think ... Yeah, I think it's really incredible. So I still teach about an hour a Sunday. I'm in Daniel so doing a chapter a week, holy smoke. I mean, I've got Daniel 8 this week. Pray for me, it's going to be interesting. But the people-

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, that's where it gets really interesting in Daniel, right?

Mark Driscoll:

Yeah, it really picks up. But I mean I'm teaching for an hour and the church is healthy and it's growing and people come to learn the word of God and we do sermon based small groups to help them work it out in relationship and so, I don't know. I don't think the way I do it is the way everybody should do it. I don't believe that there's a one size fits all approach to Christianity or Christian ministry. But I just know, if I get excited and teach the bible, I find that sometimes other people join me in that excitement.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So just as we're going to morph to what you're doing these days, but as we think about what happened in Seattle with Mars Hill and where you are now and I'll want an update in a few minutes on what you've been doing for the last five years. A lot of things were said about you, a lot of them unfair, but a lot went down. How are things or how are you different now than perhaps five or 10 years ago? What did you learn out of that season of your life? How have you grown and how would you say, "Okay, I'm leading differently today as a result?"

Mark Driscoll:

I have a tremendous amount of gratitude for literally every opportunity that God has given me. And I think sometimes when you're just in the middle of ministry, especially if it's a growth cycle or a busy season, you're not really taking the time to fully appreciate and enjoy all that God is doing and all the opportunities that he provides. And yeah, so God spoke to us, released us, we transitioned out of obedience to God. I'm confident of that. And I took I think about 18 months just as a break. I'd been going very, very hard for 18 years and twice just blew out my adrenal glands, twice intestinal ulcer. I mean, just pushed beyond the limits of health and really just decided, I just want to be healthy so I can have a healthy relationship with the Lord Jesus, my wife Grace, our kids, and then whatever God has for me to do. And so I just took 18 months. Disappeared from social media, canceled all work, canceled all travel, and spent time with Jesus, Grace, and my kids. And met with some Godly older pastors that we submit to their authority, and we appreciate them. I just wanted them to speak into our life and help us make sure we were healthy.

Mark Driscoll:

And so, those were really incredibly rich months, and we did Sunday church home together as a family with Grace and the kids. And just really got to travel some with the kids. I asked them, "Hey, where do you want to go? Dad's finally got some free time, what do you want to do for fun?" I saw Disneyland a lot that year. And I just felt like it was another gift from God before he had a new assignment for me. And so we just tried to enjoy that. So honestly I could say physically, mentally, spiritually, emotionally,

by the grace of God, I'm in the healthiest season of my whole life and my family's in a really healthy, joyful place. And life is honestly remarkably incredibly wonderful. I mean I'm not just saying that. I woke up with a profound sense of gratitude for God's provision and when you take time out of ministry, you kind of find out, was I reading my bible, was I praying because I had a message to prepare and a ministry to lead, or was it really that I like Jesus and I need him? I can honestly say my life with Jesus didn't alter in any way even though I wasn't in ministry.

Mark Driscoll:

And that was good. That was honestly, for my soul, it was good because I hear some guys and they say, "Boy, I transitioned and then my faith wavered or my marriage hit the rocks." Or, "I walked away from the Lord for a while." And just praise be to God, I actually got closer with the Lord and really enjoyed significant time with him that previously I'd just not had.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Was it because ... You know, I kind of hit a wall too. You said you were running full speed for 18 years and it was after a decade that I kind of hit a period of burnout. And I'm not saying that's what you hit, but was there anything that was particularly difficult in that season for you to sort of recover? Because not everybody could go from 100 miles an hour to zero easily. You know what I'm saying?

Mark Driscoll:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Well for me, part of it just on the very practical, I have seasonal affective disorder that's pretty severe. And you live up in Canada so you know three, four o'clock the sun sets, it's dark. For me, if I don't get some fresh air, sunshine, physically I just don't do well. So moving to Arizona has been a life change. I mean, we're talking now it's February. I don't know when this'll air, but when we're done, I've got the top off my jeep and I'm driving to my son's baseball game and it's going to be 75 degrees out in February. Which, for me, it really might sound sort of small, but it's life changing. I eat outside, I study outside, I go for walks. My wife jokes that I'm solar powered.

Carey Nieuwhof:

It's that big a difference, Mark. I appreciate you sharing that. Really. But that's been like night and day for you?

Mark Driscoll:

Life changing. I went into my doctor and got my blood work done and he's like, "I'll see you next year. You're great. This is the healthiest you've ever been." It's like, okay.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow.

Mark Driscoll:

Yeah. It was like there was a spiritual burden that lifted. There was a transition season of recovery. There was godly wise counsel to walk with us. There was a lot of time with Grace and the kids. And I'm a guy who really, really, really is energized by and deeply loves being with his family. It's just a joy of my life to be with Grace and the kids. And then a change of scenery. I mean you put that all together and ...

So where I'm at now, I think I'm healthy, and I love the people in our church family the way I love my kids and I kind of feel like a dad to be honest with you. That's how I feel.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Let's talk about Trinity Church, which you planted how many years ago now? It's not that long.

Mark Driscoll:

Three years old. Yeah.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah. Three years old. What was the same about your approach to planting Trinity and what was different?

Mark Driscoll:

The same is teaching the bible. What was different was the kids were the ones that really wanted to plant this church. When we transitioned and moved, I wasn't sure I was going to plant a church. I knew it was a possibility but it wasn't in pen, it was in pencil. And so before we moved down, I met with some of the, I would say the apostolic spiritual fathers of the valley that I hold in high regard and met with them. And just said, "I'll answer any questions in closed door and I'm thinking about coming to Phoenix and if we do come I would want their blessing and approval because I want to be a good member of the larger body of Christ and I want to honor the spiritual authority that God already has in place regionally." And they were very kind and welcomed us, so we moved down and then we were attending a good church and getting the kids settled into school and just figuring out life. And the kids came home one Sunday from church and they said, "Dad, we want to call a family meeting." And I was like, "Okay." That means they got something to talk about. So I was like, "Okay, that's great. What do you guys want to talk about?"

Mark Driscoll:

They said, "We want to plant a church." Okay, I said, "Well why do you want to plant a church?" They said, "Well the first one you planted, we weren't even born yet and by the end pickets, protests, death threats, police escort, I'm in a bullet proof stab proof vest on some high alert Sundays." My kids couldn't really be involved and we moved a lot for safety issues and there was a lot of opposition and complexity for many, many, many, many years. And so, the kids really weren't that involved. In large part it was safety issues. And they said, "But now we're a family and we all love Jesus and we can do it together."

Carey Nieuwhof:

So Mark, we'll go a little bit more into the story of Trinity. But you said those last days of Mars Hill, where things were just crazy. And I mean, you kind of casually breezed through death threats, bullet proof vests, the whole deal. How do you recover from that?

Mark Driscoll:

Yeah, it wasn't just at the end. It was most of my time. I mean it was well over a decade of ... I mean we moved many times for safety issues. Address to the house would be posted online. Critics would show up. They tended to post the address when I was out of town and Grace and the kids were home alone. We had a safe room built at one house. We have had people arrested on property. Rocks thrown at the

kids playing in the yard. Media for gotcha. I mean, just a little bit of ... It was crazy for a very long time. And so as a family we had security protocols. We had to live a very, very, very careful life. And so the kids ... They couldn't go for bike rides, they couldn't go for walks alone. They couldn't just walk around church alone. We were on high alert. And one of the things that's really been great I think with the move is, the kids just get to do normal. They can go to the store, they can go for a walk, they can ride a skateboard, they can just get to do normal. And that's been really incredible. And the kids really like having a little bit more freedom for sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Can I ask, was the opposition from the church, like Christians? I mean, the Capital C church or was it more from other people in Seattle or was it widely distributed?

Mark Driscoll:

You know, 18 years things ebb and flow, different issues blow up and different groups have an issue. And some of that I'm not going to say I'm Jesus and I've never done anything wrong you know.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Mark Driscoll:

And so, but in that it just kind of ebbed and flowed but most of it was internal and it was theological in nature around the issue of transgender-ism and same sex marriage and a lot of what was the energy behind it was ultimately against bible teaching.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Wow. Well thank you so much for sharing that. So that was part of the 18 months where you kind of unplugged and sought some healing and counseling and that kind of thing in the process.

Mark Driscoll:

Yeah. And we had prior to transition some Godly older pastors that we just really appreciate. One's a clinical marriage and family expert. And just invited safe Godly people into our life, into our marriage, into our family and just said, you know, "Be honest with us." Because it's not good to self diagnose. This is true for anybody. Even if you're a good pastor who does a good job of diagnosing and helping others, you're probably not the best person to diagnose yourself. That's why a doctor still goes to a doctor. And what I find is, if I'm just talking on the leadership side, usually everybody in the church gets a pastor except for the pastor and every family gets a pastor except for the pastor's family. And so for us in that season, it was okay, who's our pastor and who are our pastors? What will they instruct us? And we believe in spiritual authority so we will listen to that, submit to that, and try and come under that authority knowing that we'll be healthier if we do that. And God was so gracious to allow some really remarkable people to just really be a blessing to Grace and I and the kids. I mean we just feel tremendously just grateful. Just grateful for the support that we've gotten. And it was a great healing season and the kids had to heal up as well.

Mark Driscoll:

There was one day where they flew a helicopter over the house and it was sort of a gotcha interview to get us to flee the property through the gate because there's was critics and a news crew waiting. And I saw a helicopter over the house. It was just kind of surreal, bizarre. And it was hovering over the yard and I was like that's weird, and then I looked and I was like, "Oh my gosh, I think we're getting sieged here." So I pulled the kids in the house and then later ... And we were all kind of shook up because it was just so bizarre. And then later that night my youngest son came down. He had kind of a kids' military jacket on and he had his airsoft gun and he looked at me and he said, "Dad, is this jacket bulletproof?" I said, "Little buddy, no it's not. Why do you ask that?" He said, "If the bad guys come back, I need to protect my sister." And so in his mind, it was snipers. And so he's thinking ... Because if you're a kid you watch movies, helicopter flies over and they're spraying bullets everywhere. That's what he thinks is happening to his family.

Mark Driscoll:

And I said, "No little buddy." I tried to explain it was a news helicopter. But he didn't sleep in his bed for months. I couldn't leave them alone in a room. He'd have a panic attack. He wouldn't go on a baseball field. I mean he was really, really shook up. And he felt like he was constantly in danger as a little kid. And so, you know, some people are like, "Well why didn't you fight back and go in the media and tell everybody?" It's like because honestly, we're not doing very good and I don't want to win a war, I just want to love my family.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark, that breaks my heart. Hearing you talk about that. And I don't know, in God anything's possible, but I don't know how you recover from that. Like I really don't. And I think for so many people who just sort of read the headlines and tear strips off people on social media, I really appreciate you sharing that to see the human cost of leadership and I'm sure they're-

Mark Driscoll:

Well.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Yeah, go ahead.

Mark Driscoll:

Well in that too, my kids love the Lord and they love each other.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's unreal.

Mark Driscoll:

My 14 year old son ... He's now 14. We were driving in the jeep last night coming home from church and I was like, "Okay little buddy" ... He's now a big buddy. I'm going to be the shortest one in my family pretty soon. But you know, "You're going into high school next year and what are you thinking?" And he's like, "Dad I want to go maybe play baseball in college and study the bible." And he said, "I want to be a pastor. I want to learn how to preach." And he said, "Someday when you retire I'd like to be your successor." And I'm like okay. I mean, I don't know if that is what God has for his future, but right now

that's what his interest is. And so, for me it's like, I don't want to regain a platform. I don't want to prove myself in any way. I just want to teach the bible, love my family, and with my family, serve people. And just whatever happens we'll just say, "Praise God." But I can't tell you how proud I am of my wife. And I think the kids get their resilience and their determination from their mom.

Mark Driscoll:

Her name is Grace and she lives under a lot of it. She's the most remarkable, incredible, resilient, devoted, joyful, consistent woman I have ever met. She's my dream girl and I can promise you, I did not bounce back without her and the kids would not have bounced back without her. And she really is the heart of our family.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Well I know you're going to play baseball with your big buddy soon or go watch him play baseball, which is good. Thank you so much for sharing that, Mark. I know a lot of people have questions and this has been tremendously helpful. I want to talk a little bit about your new book, which is on spiritual warfare. You and Grace wrote it together. And I know we have pastors listening and Christians listening and non-Christians listening. But, why did you write a book on spiritual warfare?

Mark Driscoll:

It actually came out of a conversation with Grace and I. And that is that Satan didn't even show up until Adam and Eve were married. Did you know?

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's funny.

Mark Driscoll:

It's true. He could have just wiped out Adam, but he waited until after the wedding. So our point is, after the wedding comes the war and when our first parents didn't win spiritual warfare, we've been paying a steep price ever since. And so, we thought it would be interesting from a theological practical level to look at spiritual warfare and to work through it together as a married couple. And so for us, we're trying to unpack the theological ... There's men like Michael Heiser with the Unseen Realm, and others who have done some really groundbreaking work in the realm of biblical theology regarding the supernatural. And so we wanted to lay some significant theological framework and then get really into practical. So I'll give you one story. So, it was the Sunday after I resigned back in 2014, I think it was. I didn't even know what day it was. My head was just scrambled eggs, and it was a rough season.

Mark Driscoll:

I came out and Grace and the kids were all sitting in their pajamas in the living room. And they looked kind of organized and a little bit official. And I was like, "Hey guys, what are we doing?" And they said, "Well dad, do you know what day it is?" I said, "No. I don't." And they said, "It's Sunday." I said, "I didn't even know it was Sunday." For 18 years I knew every Sunday but I didn't know what the day of the week was. And they said, "We can't go to church, but we decided we're going to have church at home as a family." And I was like, "Okay." So one of the kids said, "Hey dad, I'll lead worship." The other said, "Hey, I'll read scripture." Another said, "Hey, I'll lead prayer." My youngest son went and got a bucket and said, "I'm going to collect the offering." And he literally had a single mom picked out ... We'd pick one

out, or more, every Christmas that we would help. And so he picked one out and wanted to start the offering.

Mark Driscoll:

And they said, "Dad, you get to be the bible teacher." And I'll never forget, I just was really emotionally spent, broken. The family was really kind of in trauma and crisis at that moment. And so I bowed my head and I prayed and I was like, "Okay, I don't have a message ready, Lord. What should I teach on?" And God led me to Ephesians 4. And it says to forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you. And I'd never seen it before. I'd taught it a million times, but don't give the enemy a foothold. And I looked at my kids and I said, "The doorway to the demonic is unforgiveness. Satan and demons are never forgiven, they're never forgiving. And as soon as we choose unforgiveness we're welcoming the demonic into our life." So I asked their forgiveness for my sin and contribution. We prayed as a family for our enemies and we prayed forgiveness and blessing on them and we really committed ourselves to being a family that practices forgiveness. Because I didn't want a demonic element to be in our family.

Mark Driscoll:

So there's things like that that we learned through that season where sometimes you think of the demonic as sort of extraordinary. Oftentimes it's just ordinary. You're hurt and you don't heal. You're bitter and you don't forgive. A lie is believed and gives birth to pain. And much of the spiritual warfare I think is covert, not overt. I think it is ordinary, not extraordinary. And a lot of it quite frankly is around the relational and emotional. And I think those are where a lot of the demonic problems come in.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I'm so glad you go there in the book and I had a chance to look at it, Mark. Because I think Christians often go to one extreme or the other. Either there is no such thing as the spiritual, it's all natural, you're just mad at me or I'm just mad at you and it's as natural as two human relationships or whatever. And then other people over spiritualize. And everything is spiritual. The fact that I missed my appointment or my iPhone broke is like some kind of demonic attack. Do you want to explain a little bit more about where you land on that? Because I think that's an interesting thing what you just said about actually it's pretty normal sometimes.

Mark Driscoll:

Well, I think there's either no bible teaching or bad bible teaching oftentimes when it comes to the unseen realm and the demonic and demonic beings and Satan and all of that. But it is a very prominent theme throughout scripture. And being a bible teacher ... You won't find it on the internet because I did not do a good job. I tried to preach through Exodus some years ago and it was like a four year old driving a stick shift in traffic. I mean there was a lot of dents. It was rough. But when I was preaching Exodus I found that everything God creates Satan counterfeits. And even the counterfeit kingdom of God Pharaoh is a counterfeit son of God. There's counterfeit priests that do counterfeit signs, wonders, miracles. The whole backdrop for Daniel is the same. It's the kingdom of God versus all the kingdoms of man. So this is a major theme in the bible. The backdrop of Job is spiritual warfare. Satan has attacked Job and he doesn't see what's going on in the unseen realm and God reveals it.

Mark Driscoll:

So there's a lot of storyline in the bible that just fits into this supernatural realm and it fits into this paradigm. So for me, you can't think biblically unless you think supernaturally. It's just sort of required.

Otherwise, what the bible becomes is just moralizing. Just here's a guy who had good morals or bad morals and we can learn practical lessons, which is helpful but it's not the fullness of the story for sure.

Carey Nieuwhof:

What would you say ... Because you divide the book into four sections. Your relationship God, self, others, and the church. Do you want to just walk us quickly through how Satan tends to show up or the supernatural tends to show up in each of those spheres where most likely you're going to find it?

Mark Driscoll:

Well yeah, we see this right in Genesis 3 where Satan shows up, attacks the relationship with God. Is God good? Did God really say? Attacks the relationship with self. He says, "If you eat of it, you will become like God." That's an identity issue. God already told them, "I've made you of my image and likeness." So they were made in the likeness of God and Satan then comes along and says you need to do something to become like God. It's an attack on their personal identity and relationship with self. The third category, obviously Satan comes to separate Adam and Eve and to destroy their relationship with one another. And then we see this come forth into their family and in the future to God's family, the church family. And all of the New Testament is large part written about demonic problems that are happening in the church. I mean Galatians talks very clearly that some demonic spirit has bewitched you. He talks to the Corinthians at communion. You guys are inviting demons to the Lord's table.

Mark Driscoll:

So whatever God builds, Satan tries to break. Whatever God creates, Satan tries to counterfeit. And my point is every day we make decisions to either invite heaven down into our life or pull hell up into our life. And that's truth versus lies, that's forgiveness versus unforgiveness. Just very, very practical things that are life decisions that are pulling one of those two final cultures up into our life. But I think God's a relational God and I think Satan is always trying to harm relationship with God, self, others, and then the church. And if that works, then you're separated from God, you don't know who you are, and you're confused or depressed. You're separated from others and you have a church hurt or a church wound that keeps you from being with God's people. Well that's the begin of a total decline of a human life.

Carey Nieuwhof:

How do you know? Because I have a test that I've used over the years. Because I believe the bible and I thought that all supernatural stuff must be true, but it wasn't until I got into ministry that I'm like, "Oh, it's not just true, it's real. I get it now." There's that light that goes on. Do you try to exhaust natural explanations for something before you turn to a supernatural explanation? That's sort of been a test I've used. Do you have something that sort of guides you to say, "Yeah, this isn't just two people not getting along, this may have a supernatural element to it?"

Mark Driscoll:

Yeah, in my life sometimes it's a dream or a vision. Sometimes something supernatural does happen and I got to ask was this from God or was it from Satan? But ultimately, I think that's a good test. I think the one that you proposed is good. We talk about in the book, group guilt. Oftentimes what happens is something happens and we just blame Satan or demons. It's a way of sort of abdicating our responsibility. I talked to a guy some years ago. He's like, "I must have a demon of adultery." I was like, "I don't know if you do or don't, but you're still guilty." You're still guilty. What happens in Genesis, Adam, Eve, and Satan all sin and God comes, holds Adam accountable, Eve accountable, and Satan

accountable and that's the concept of group guilt. Even if Satan is involved, we're still responsible for our participation to whatever degree. Believing a lie, doing something sinful, giving into temptation, we're still responsible for that. But I think sometimes people run to some sort of supernatural explanation because it excuses them from being responsible.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay, that's fair. Anything else you want to share on that? Because I'm sure we could spend another hour on it easily. It's a good book and it's not a small book too. It's super helpful. Anything else on spiritual warfare before we wrap up?

Mark Driscoll:

No, I just think for people ... I just would ask the question, if there was an enemy of God and an enemy of yours, and if he had a plan to harm and destroy you starting with your relationships, what would that plan be? And then to look at life and say, "Am I living in such a way to protect myself from that?" Because the truth is the enemy does have a plan. He has a plan to rob, to steal, to kill, and to destroy. And so God's people need to have a plan to not fall prey to that plan. And I think most people, they think about what's God's will for my life? Okay. I agree with that. What's Satan's will for your life? What's God's plan for my life? Well what's Satan's plan for your life? I mean, if the bible is true, you do have an enemy. He is an adversary and it would be foolish to not at least consider what he might be trying to do.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Okay. Tell us a little bit more about the book. What's it called, where can people find it. And where can people find you these days, Mark?

Mark Driscoll:

Well, MarkDriscoll.org. There's a bunch of bible teaching there for free. The book is ... Just got a copy sitting here. Win Your War. The subtitle is Fight in the Realm You Don't See for Freedom in the One You Do. And I wrote it with my wife, Grace. And some of the sections we worked on together. Some are from her, some are from me. It's a super readable book and it's very practical and pastoral. It'll work for marriage, it'll work for parenting, it'll work for ministry leadership. I mean we're married, we're parents, we're in ministry so we tried to make it as practical as we could while staying true to the scriptures.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Mark I really appreciate your time today. Thank you so, so much.

Mark Driscoll:

Yeah, thank you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I really, really appreciated what Mark had to say just about the impact on his family. And the whole story of Mars Hill has been chronicled in other places. I also will link in the show notes to that article that I wrote, now six years ago. Can you believe it? When Mark stepped back as lead pastor of Mars Hill and all that stuff went down. And I actually tried to find something encouraging to say. Here's just a personal conviction of mine. I really feel like we do a great job beating each other up and not enough building

each other up. So if you're curious and you want to have a look at that, yeah, that'll be in the show notes too, which you can find at CareyNieuwhof.com/Episode328.

Carey Nieuwhof:

I've got a What I'm Thinking About episode coming up in just a few minutes, and guess what I'm going to talk about? How to handle your critics like a pro. Mark's had his share of critics. You perhaps have had your share of critics. How do you handle that stuff? I'm going to talk about that at the very end of this podcast. In the meantime, I want to give you a preview of what is ahead. A lot of you are really excited to see a few weeks ago I went into New York City. Spent a good amount of time with Tim Keller, which was like bucket list for me. So he's coming up on the podcast. We've got ... Let's see, who else? Gary Thomas. Michael Todd from Tulsa, Oklahoma. John Eldrige, Daniel Strickland, Nir Eyal, who I'm very excited about, and so much more. Here's an excerpt from the next episode. I've got the one and only, Joseph Sojourner. And we get into some really good conversations talking about what's happening on Instagram for real with sexually charged messages, the inappropriate side of social media, reaching celebrities and creatives, and finding your voice when you're on someone else's stage. It's a wide ranging and fascinating interview.

Joseph Sojourner:

I think the hardest thought ... And this is me being really transparent. The hardest thought was, I remember looking out there and I say I want to feel this crowd, but I can't feel them. I can't feel anything. I was just numb. It's not that I didn't care about them. I wanted to care about them. I just didn't even know how to feel anymore. I was just that burnt out where I said, I love them, but I don't know what to do anymore. I'm just too tired. And I think that's when I realized I don't want to be this guy standing on a stage.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So that's next time on the podcast. And hey, okay, let's get to What I'm Thinking About these days. How to handle your critics, which is not easy. Remember, you got to check out the cohorts that The Ascent Leader is offering. If you are a young leader taking over for an established leader and you want to get some help with that, head on over to TheAscentLeader.org and apply for one of their cohorts. And then get some help. You get 10% off for life on your social media on your graphics and all those things you're going to need to do a great job with your weekend series by going to ProMediaFire.com/Carey.

Carey Nieuwhof:

So what happens now when you get criticized? Well here's what I'm thinking about. Because we all have our critics. And I got to say, one of the things I'm very grateful for, and I try to strike this tone in this podcast and on my blog and in my writing and in my speaking. I try to find the middle ground. I try to find a place where even people who disagree can come together, but I have my share of critics and you know what, it stung a lot more when I was younger. So how do you handle your critics like a pro? Well the first thing I would say is there's probably something intelligent in what the critic is saying. I mean, usually when my wife has something to say or my kids have something to say or a staff member has something to say, I've learned that as a leader, yeah, they're probably right and I'm wrong. So what happens if it upsets you emotionally? Think of these as EI hacks.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Number one, just wait. Don't respond for 24 hours. You can even do this. It's really a good idea when it comes to online like some tweet or Instagram comment that you really don't like or an email that you got. Just don't respond for 24 hours. Just wait, get a good night's sleep, pray about it. And even in a verbal thing, where you kind of want to lash out. I'm an Enneagram eight. I'm pretty good at that. Just don't say anything. Don't say anything. That's really good. So just wait. Second thing. Ask yourself, is there any truth in this? Because usually there is. There's usually truth in what a critic is saying. Often it just takes time to see it so give yourself a bit of time. Number three, own what you can. Now, you're going to get some unsolicited criticism that is not fair and totally out of bounds. Even if they're 1% right, own the 1%. Particularly in interpersonal reactions, that's so much. It's like you're thinking okay, out of bounds, out of bounds, out of bounds, but you're like, you know what, sometimes I can be inaccessible. Or sometimes I can be this. Try to find the one thing that you can own because great leaders assume responsibility, weak leaders blame.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Fourth thing you can do, this is huge, is reply relationally. So if you get a nasty email, here's what you do. Call the person. Just call them. And if they blast you in a hallway between services or between meetings, don't respond in the moment and say, "Hey, can we talk about this later?" Maybe take them out for coffee. Nine times out of 10 you're going to take the air out of the conflict balloon if you do that. And then number five is just discard the crud. They're not all right. Okay, so you've owned it. You've taken to heart what you need to take to heart. And then just get rid of the stuff that doesn't stick and move on. Don't carry today's baggage into tomorrow. So those are five tips on handling your critics like a pro. Don't respond for 24 hours, ask yourself is there any truth in it, own what you can, reply relationally, and discard the crud.

Carey Nieuwhof:

That's really helped me. That's taken a lot of years. I know I can say that in four minutes, but it takes a lot of years to figure that out. I hope that's been helpful. Guys, I can't wait until next time. If you haven't yet subscribed to the podcast, please do. And maybe leave us a rating and review or give us a shout out on social media if this was helpful to you.

Carey Nieuwhof:

Thanks so much and we'll see you next time. And I hope our time together today has helped you lead like never before.

Announcer:

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