

5 Lessons We Can Learn From Pastor Mark Driscoll's Return

Much like the former Mars Hill Church based in Seattle, Westside Christian Fellowship in Southern California arose out of a desperate need to encourage Christians to seek God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. God has graciously honored our desire and is spreading His Word.

In my case, I was allowed to make most of my mistakes in the secular world before planting a church at age 41. Mark Driscoll was not afforded this luxury—he entered the pulpit in his 20s and had to work through anger, pride and control (by the way, most church planters struggle with these traits, myself included).

I'm not defending, or criticizing, I don't have enough information to truly speak to the issues on either side, but I want to remind all of us that Christians are fallible and make mistakes. We should consider the total portrait of one's life, character and ministry and evaluate on that basis. A few poorly chosen statements, angry outbursts or controlling decisions made over the course of many years shouldn't define a person. One's life and character speak volumes as to the sincerity of his or her ministry. We should extend to others the same grace that we desire and be patient with others.

With that said, here are five points to consider:

1. No matter what the endeavor, God must be central. In the case of church planting, men do not call themselves, they become aware of God's calling. Demographic studies and marketing strategies may have their place, and it's good to have a core team with a missional focus, but all of this pales in comparison to the call of God. Only God is able to build, sustain, and edify His church. And He often uses confrontation

and exposure to draw us back to Him. This new church plant in Arizona could be powerfully used of God.

2. Humility cannot be overlooked. C.S. Lewis said that “pride is the last sin to die.” Pride works against us and is the No. 1 liability for Christians, churches and church pastors. After all, we’re going to do things “the right way.” Jealousy, envy and bitterness will keep us from fulfilling God’s call. Humility is fundamental. He guides the humble and teaches them His way (cf. Ps. 25:9). On the flip side, an attitude of constant criticism toward Christian leaders often reveals an inner drive to exalt oneself.

Biblical unity encourages us to go directly to the source when possible. Where are we getting our information about a person, movement or ministry? Are we going directly to them and/or reputable sources, or are we looking to smear websites, gossipers and “heresy hunters” for the answers? Make no mistake, we are heavily influenced by what we read and who we listen to. Make sure they are God-honoring.

3. The fully surrendered life is crucial. Why do many endeavors fail? Why do many church plants fail? The reasons are many, but I believe that much depends on the spiritual life of the person and/or the pastor in regard to humility and brokenness. Prayer is the first sign of a healthy church. I’m not referring to a five-minute devotional, I’m referring to a deep devotional life focused on seeking God. Churches don’t need more marketing plans, demographic studies, or giving campaigns; we need men filled with the Spirit of God. Sermons should not come from pop-psychology or the latest fad; they must come from the prayer closet where God prepares the messengers before we prepare the message. In my opinion, it looks like Mark’s experience at Mars Hill can be a huge benefit here if brokenness resulted, which I believe it has.

My encouragement to Pastor Mark would be to allow this experience to continue to break, mold and shape. It takes

broken men to break men. The men who do the most for God are always men of prayer, brokenness and humility. "Preaching, in one sense, merely discharges the firearm that God has loaded in the silent place" (Calvin Miller). God will often allow difficulties to get our attention. If God is calling him to plant in Arizona, the lessons learned in Washington will reap a bountiful harvest – God uses broken people.

4. Ask, "Do I have a critical spirit?" This could also translate into a cynical or negative attitude. This is one aspect of Jesus' words, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). If you have a judgmental attitude, you've already turned a deaf ear to God's leading. Ironically, I've noticed that those highly educated in biblical doctrine can often be the most critical, cynical and negative. We do not practice what we preach. Of all the books I've read, the sermons I've heard, the people I've talked with, and the devastation I've seen firsthand, one common denominator was present: critical, divisive people who do not forgive or release bitterness, anger and hurt never experience freedom, happiness or true restoration. Ephesians 4:31-32 states: "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, outbursts, and blasphemies, with all malice, be taken away from you. And be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you." Simply stated, bitterness, negativity and anger will lead you in the wrong direction.

I am deeply saddened by the spiritual condition of many Christians. We love to be armchair quarterbacks and diss pastors and Christian leaders, yet we have no idea of the demands they encounter and the pain they feel. Our sinful tendency is to pull others down. We may think that somehow this makes us look better. If we are truly concerned about the body of Christ, we will hold our tongue. Self-righteousness has no place here. But I'm not referring to sweeping corruption and deception in the church under the rug. Wisdom is needed here.

5. Love is a “choice,” not a “feeling.” If love is the greatest commandment, it should be our first priority. Love hopes for and believes the best in others ... it is demonstrated through our actions and our words. Strive to develop the type of love that protects and defends others. For instance, why not believe that God is going to use Mark’s past to help others?

Stop yourself when you’re tempted to gossip or belittle others, and turn the conversation if someone is taking you in that direction. The Bible is clear: If you have not love, it profits you nothing (cf. 1 Cor. 13:3). You can be well-read in all 66 books of the Bible, preach as well as Whitefield, Moody and Spurgeon and have a Ph.D. in theology, but if you don’t have love, you have nothing. Make love, forgiveness and unity top priorities. They will not rise to that level on their own.