

10 Lessons Learned From the Resignation of Mark Driscoll

This week I learned that Mark Driscoll, the pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington, resigned from leading his church. While those involved with him denied he was disqualified for ministry, the overseeing board of Mars Hill concluded Driscoll had “been guilty of arrogance, responding to conflict with a quick temper and harsh speech, and leading the staff and elders in a domineering manner,” but had “never been charged with any immorality, illegality or heresy. Most of the charges involved attitudes and behaviors reflected by a domineering style of leadership.”

My heart goes out to Mark, his family, the Mars Hill church, and to all those negatively affected by this situation. I hope and pray Mark and his wife have someone they trust who will minister to them and love them back to their divine calling and destiny.

It is very interesting to me that, in the past several years, other well known evangelical pastors in the Reformed camp have stepped aside for similar reasons (C.J. Mahaney of Sovereign Grace for arrogance, and John Piper took a leave of absence from the pulpit because of pride and to work on his marriage). This indicates a new and important trend in leadership expectation since, in the past, well-known ministerial leaders would only step down for the scandalous sins of adultery, financial fraud and other so-called “big sins.”

I have followed the story of the challenges related to Mark’s leadership style since it broke several months ago, and the following are important lessons we can all learn from his unfortunate situation.

1) There is less tolerance for a top-down leadership style in

today's culture.

Today's culture is much more egalitarian than the previous generation. In the past decades, most churches and people would sneeze at the charges laid against Mark Driscoll—but not so anymore. God-glorifying leadership has to go beyond a one-man autocratic leadership style to one who leads through empowering teams around him to accomplish the mission. Strong, secure leaders are not afraid of pushback from other inner-circle leaders, and they enjoy having others involved in the creative process of vision, problem solving and execution.

2) There is much more scrutiny today because of social media.

In past decades, Mark Driscoll would probably still be the pastor of Mars Hill. What helped take him down was the vast social-media enterprise that elucidated many of his remarks and retorts from his opposition on the blogosphere. Right or wrong, everybody in the pew has a voice now, and they can say whatever they want about their pastor, the sermons, the church and others on Facebook, Twitter and other social-media platforms. The result is, every leader is now living with the most scrutiny than ever before in human history—and it will only get more intense as time goes on! (Which is why every leader should have a social media task force to deal with unwarranted and negative things said about them on the Internet.)

3) Love is more important than achievement and results.

First Corinthians 13 teaches us, the greatest of all attributes is love! God is not impressed with what we accomplish as much as He is interested in why and how we do the things we do. When we objectify the people in our church to get the results we want we are de-humanizing them and are missing the point—even if we seem to get great short-term results!

4) All executive leaders and lead pastors need both internal

and external accountability.

It seems as though there was nobody in the group of elders of Mars Hill with a strong enough voice to stop Mark from his abusive leadership style (which he has acknowledged in public). When the internal structure of accountability fails and/or if an elder cannot stop their leader from deleterious behavior—then said elder should have an outside overseer to go confront their lead pastor. There always has to be several layers of recourse in an organizational infrastructure to deal with malfeasance or toxicity in the corporate culture and/or leader.

5) The church often elevates gifted people who are not emotionally mature

Over and over again I see Christian churches and organizations elevating people who are emotionally broken and immature people—merely because they have great charisma or preaching or singing ability. All of us have to grapple with the fact that at times our talent can outpace our level of spiritual formation and character. Not every popular preacher is an emotionally healthy and mature Christ follower.

6) When we do not build on character and integrity, our foundation is sand.

We need to build our life upon the foundation of character and integrity—not our gifts and talent. Jesus speaks about the “be attitudes” before He calls us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:1-16). A life built upon gifts and talents without commensurate integrity and character will not finish well; it is a train wreck waiting to happen!

7) There are no shortcuts to success.

One of the things Driscoll was accused of was the way Mars Hill used its vast mailing list to purchase a newly released book he authored (supposedly) from church members to ensure

that said book would make the *New York Times* best-seller list. While what they did was not illegal, it was not ethical in regard to the biblical ethic according to some critics. Consequently, Mark repented of this and took the *NY Times* best-seller status off of his bio.

8) Know who your true friends are before the crisis hits

Too often leaders hit a wall, lose their influence and find out they have few friends who will stand with them and help restore them. One important lesson here is to identify leaders and friends who love you for who you are and do not need or desire your influence and power. These are the only ones who will love you unconditionally if the day comes when you are in a vulnerable place. Woe to the one who falls and has no one to pick him up! (Eccl. 4:10)

9) Leaders need to prioritize spiritual formation in the midst of a busy schedule

One of the ways the enemy gets us to fall is to get us so immersed in the “Lord’s work” that we neglect our walk with the Lord. There are times when I am so busy I know I am doing violence to my soul! When we do not have a sacred rhythm in their life with times of regular Sabbath and renewal, we are not allowing God to have space in our life to bring inner transformation. This will eventually lead to burnout and a career crash.

10) It is not how you start but how you finish that matters most

Many young leaders have started out well with amazing church growth and popularity. Consequently, thousands of other young leaders are enamored and begin to emulate them and model their life, ministry and doctrine. I have learned a long time ago that we can never judge the ministry or mettle of a man until “they go through the fire.” Jesus told us that only those who build their house on the Rock will be able to stand once the

storms and fiery trials of life hit (Matt. 7:24-27).

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