

Mark Driscoll Retracts Bestseller Book Status, Resets Life

March 17, 2014



(UPDATED) 'My angry-young-prophet days are over,' Seattle pastor tells Mars Hill Church. First step: He's quitting social media.

A note from Pastor Kevin Lea follows this article and the subsequent blog by Janet Mefford. CAUTION: Content of note is for adults only.

In response to recent controversies, Seattle pastor Mark Driscoll has written a candid letter to his congregation that attempts to clarify the significant staff turnover at Mars Hill Church and the [controversial marketing campaign](#) that gave *Real Marriage* bestseller status.

In short:

- Driscoll is voluntarily retracting his claims to "No. 1 New York Times bestseller" status, because he now sees the marketing campaign used for *Real Marriage* as "manipulating a book sales reporting system, which is wrong."
- Driscoll regrets how the recent "significant turnover of key staff members" was handled. "I am deeply grieved and even depressed by the pain we have caused," he writes, and expresses hope for reconciliation with former staff who have recently "chosen to air their concerns online."
- Driscoll says his "angry-young-prophet days are over." He plans to "reset my life," starting with quitting social media for the rest of 2014 (and maybe longer). "The distractions it can cause for my family and our church family are not fruitful or helpful at this time," he writes.
- Driscoll will likewise do "much less" less traveling, speaking, and writing in order to focus on being a local pastor. "I don't see how I can be both a celebrity and a pastor," he writes, "and so I am happy to give up the former so that I can focus on the latter."

In the lengthy letter via Mars Hill's online network, [The City](#), Driscoll reflects on what he has gotten right and wrong over the past 17 years, which have seen the church he founded grow beyond his expectations to an estimated 13,000 people worshipping weekly in 15 locations in five states. Many praised the statement on Twitter for its humility, while many others said it still left their concerns unresolved.

[UPDATE: The City posting was [viewed and republished](#) on Friday [March 14] by Warren Throckmorton, a [regular Driscoll critic](#) who often posts original documents. It was also [posted to Reddit](#) on Saturday [March 15], and is circulating widely today [March 17].

Mars Hill confirmed to CT that Driscoll did post a letter to The City "as a private family communication," but spokesperson Justin Dean said he could not confirm "whether each instance of the private letter posted online is accurate or not." Dean said Mars Hill has chosen not to publicly release the letter.]

Attempting to "do my best to clarify a few things without, I hope, being angry or defensive," Driscoll explains how he has changed his mind on the *Real Marriage* marketing campaign. He writes:

My understanding of the ResultSource marketing strategy was to maximize book sales, so that we could reach more people with the message and help grow our church. In retrospect, I no longer see it that way. Instead, I now see it as manipulating a book sales reporting system, which is wrong. I am sorry that I used this strategy, and will never use it again. I have also asked my publisher to not use the "#1 New York Times bestseller" status in future publications, and am working to remove this from past publications as well.

Driscoll has indeed [changed his official bio](#) ([media bio](#) as well), removing its [previous claim](#) to bestseller status. Now it simply reads: "Pastor Mark is the author of over 15 books, and has also written for CNN and *The Washington Post*, and been featured as a columnist for *The Seattle Times*."

Driscoll also explains his new view of his ministry calling:

In the last year or two, I have been deeply convicted by God that my angry-young-prophet days are over, to be replaced by a helpful, Bible-teaching spiritual father. Those closest to me have said they recognize a deep change, which has been encouraging because I hope to continually be sanctified by God's grace.

Then, acknowledging former staff whose criticisms recently started circulating online, Driscoll notes how he has been reconciling with many, but the process is not yet complete. He writes:

I understand that people who saw or experienced my sin during this season are hurt and in some cases have not yet come to a place of peace or resolution. I have been burdened by this for the past year and have had private meetings one at a time to learn from, apologize to, and reconcile with people. Many of those meetings were among the most encouraging moments in my time at our church. Sadly, not all of those relationships are yet mended, but I am praying that God is gracious to get us to that place of grace. Now that others have come forward, my desire is to have similar meetings with those who are willing.

Driscoll also states that Mars Hill has recently made "significant improvements to how we are governed and organized as a church." The church's Board of Advisors and Accountability [briefly described those changes](#) in a March 7 announcement, noting how Mars Hill joined ECFA in September 2012 and meets ECFA's standards for best practices for governance.

ECFA criticized the marketing techniques [used in the Real Marriage campaign](#) as "unethical and deceptive" in comments given to Throckmorton. President Dan Busby cited ECFA's guidelines on "Product Procurement," which conclude:

Where an organization attempts to mask the method of procurement from organizations that determine product ratings, ECFA believes such practices are not in accord with biblical truths and practices.

For his part, Driscoll now plans to "reset my life" and focus on only four things: Loving his wife and family, preaching the Bible, training male leaders, and planting churches. He writes:

Personally, I find this all relieving. The pressure and pace has increased every year since I started in 1996. I don't want to be burned out or angry, and I want to become more like Jesus every year. I want to teach the Bible, love well, and run at a pace to finish my race many decades from now.

The full letter can be [read on Reddit](#)...

To read this article in its entirety, go to:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2014/march/mark-driscoll-retracts-best-seller-status-resets-life.html>

Janet's Blog

True Repentance – The Ministry and What (Really) Just Happened

<http://www.janetmefferd.com/true-repentance-ministry-really-just-happened/>

March 20(?), 2014

Several days ago, Pastor Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church released a letter to his congregation, acknowledging that the church hired a company called ResultSource to enable him to secretly buy his way onto the New York Times bestseller list with his (and his wife's) plagiarized book, "Real Marriage."

WORLD magazine broke the story of the scandal just a few days prior to the letter, reporting that Mars Hill Church spent at least \$210,000 to coordinate specially timed individual and bulk sales of Driscoll's book, all in an effort to ensure "Real Marriage" landed a coveted spot on the most prestigious book list in the nation — and the effort succeeded, for one week, in 2012.

In a portion of his long letter, Driscoll addressed the issue: "My understanding of the ResultSource marketing strategy was to maximize book sales, so that we could reach more people with the message and help grow our church. In retrospect, I no longer see it that way. Instead, I now see it as manipulating a book sales reporting system, which is wrong. I am sorry that I used this strategy and will never use it again. I have also asked my publisher to not use the '#1 New York Times bestseller' status in future publications, and am working to remove this from past publications as well."

In the wake of the letter, many Christians who have long been silent on the topic of Driscoll scandals, in general — notably, for example, the serial-plagiarism scandal that has dogged him since my November interview with Driscoll — have come rushing out to laud the embattled pastor’s mea culpa.

At The Gospel Coalition website, Ray Ortlund — whom the Mars Hill website listed in 2009 as a church planter with Driscoll’s Acts 29 Network — wrote a column, called “*What Just Happened*,” at the group’s website. In it, Ortlund interpreted Driscoll’s letter as a definitive act of repentance that neutralizes the arguments of any who would dare continue to criticize him. “*Let’s understand what just happened*,” Ortlund wrote. “*His repentance just pulled the rug out from underneath all the Driscoll-haters out there. He shifted the moral burden to them.*”

First of all: *Driscoll-haters*? Is he really implying that if you have a problem with things like lying, stealing, fraud, hypocrisy, cheating, cover-up and corruption, you literally *hate* Mark Driscoll? That’s absurd. A better name for those kinds of people — those who want their pastors to engage in godly behavior — actually would be “Christians.”

But it’s important to focus on a more important point here: Was Driscoll’s letter a demonstration of true, biblical repentance? Did he fully confess *all* the sin in his public scandals? Did he demonstrate sorrow? And has he truly changed?

In his book, “*Biblical Repentance*,” Dr. L.R. Shelton Jr. explains that the truly penitent sinner “*shows that his repentance is real by walking in the pathway of righteousness and true holiness. ‘Bringing forth fruits for repentance’ is evidence that a radical change has taken place in our lives (Matthew 3:8).*”

Given that description of repentance, did Driscoll truly and biblically repent? Is his apology letter so detailed, so overwhelmingly sorrowful, that — as Ortlund suggested — the moral burden is now to be borne by those who criticized him for, among other things, cheating his way onto the New York Times bestseller list, plagiarizing multiple books and a sermon, displaying allegedly heavy-handed leadership tactics and lying about the “Strange Fire” conference security staff confiscating his books after he crashed the event?

Only the Lord knows the depths of the man’s heart and mind, but one only needs to read Driscoll’s letter in full to come away with more than a little skepticism about what he said. Here’s why.

1. Driscoll says that when he hired ResultSource, his “*understanding of the ResultSource marketing strategy was to maximize book sales.*” What he’s saying here is that when the church hired ResultSource, Driscoll didn’t believe it to be an unethical strategy. But if that’s the case, why didn’t he fully disclose his plans to his congregation, openly and honestly, before the company was hired? Furthermore, why didn’t church members get to discuss and vote on spending a huge wad of cash just to promote his book? Surely if Driscoll believed the strategy was only “marketing,” he had no reason to keep it a secret in the first place.

2. How could Driscoll *not* have known it was an unethical strategy to secretly buy his way onto the New York Times bestseller list? ResultSource has a website explaining what it does, right? No doubt, he also had discussions with company staff about the process itself and how it works before handing over at least \$210,000. But even with all that information and disclosure, Driscoll didn’t know this whole strategy was unethical? This is significant. In making this claim, either Driscoll is admitting his moral character is too undeveloped to have discerned a clearly unethical strategy when he saw one, or he knew full well that it was unethical and simply covered it up. You can’t have it both ways.

3. Driscoll knew WORLD was working on the ResultSource story before the story was printed. So before anyone ever found out about the scandal, Driscoll had the opportunity both to learn that the strategy was unethical (assuming he didn’t know it was unethical until WORLD told him that it was) and to come clean before his congregation, negating any need for bad publicity that would shame him and shock his congregation. In other words, he could have preemptively repented. But he didn’t do that. So was this apology really biblical repentance, or just a necessary PR maneuver?

4. Nowhere in the letter does Driscoll disclose the exact amount of money the church spent to buy him a spot on the New York Times bestseller list. A previous statement from his Board of Advisors and Accountability (*on which he sits, by the way*) indicated that the church spent less than what has been reported. So how much was it, exactly? Driscoll didn’t say.

5. Nowhere in the letter does Driscoll discuss the exact source of the funding. Did it come from tithes and offerings, freely given in good faith by the members of his congregation? Or did it come from another source? Driscoll didn't say.

6. If the funding for the ResultSource strategy did come from the church, does Driscoll plan to return the money? He actually addressed the issue of repentance and restitution in a June 2011 blog post at MarsHill.com, based on a sermon series he delivered on Luke. Driscoll writes: *"Have you stolen anything? **You can't say, 'Jesus forgives me.'** You have to say, 'Jesus forgives me, and I have to give it back.' Some of you, the people you stole from don't even know. Some of you would say, "It's not illegal! It was called bankruptcy." But you intentionally were fraudulent in your dealings with people. If you're intentionally trying to find a legal way to take money out of someone's pocket, it may be legal, but it might still be sinful."* Given his own words on the subject, does Driscoll believe that he has a moral obligation to make restitution to his congregation, to return any money that he unethically used to promote his plagiarized book? Again, Driscoll didn't say. But one thing's for sure: He needs to return all that money.

7. Nowhere in his letter does Driscoll discuss or admit to his most significant and underlying sin in this entire situation: *pride*. He was so intent upon promoting himself and his plagiarized book that he was willing to fork over multiple thousands of dollars to falsely make the book look like a hot seller. In turn, the strategy would feed his ego, give him bragging rights as a "New York Times bestselling author" and fool people into believing his capabilities as a thinker and a writer were in great demand — when, as we now know, they weren't. In fact, the book contained thoughts he *tried* to pass off as his own which weren't his own *at all*.

8. Which brings us to the plagiarism. Nowhere in the letter does Driscoll ever mention that *"Real Marriage"* contained plagiarism. Not only did Driscoll plagiarize sections from Dan Allender's book, *"The Wounded Heart,"* but, as Warren Throckmorton at Patheos.com has pointed out, the book also contained material remarkably similar to a passage from Leland Ryken's book, *"Worldly Saints."* In fact, Throckmorton has reported that the Kindle edition of *"Real Marriage"* now has been altered to add Dan Allender's name to the acknowledgements, and publisher Harper Collins Christian also has corrected the section involving Ryken's work. So where's Driscoll's repentance over his plagiarism? It's been shown now that, in fact, Driscoll has plagiarized in **seven** of his books, as well as a sermon. But he never mentions any of it in his "apology" letter. The only plagiarized book he's owned up to is the Mars Hill-published book, "Trial," and that was back in December, several *weeks* after the truth was exposed, in tandem with a statement from Tyndale House.

Much more could be said about Driscoll's letter (Example: His news that he, as a serial plagiarizer, will be teaching classes at a university and a seminary is particularly astonishing). But given what *isn't* in Driscoll's letter, another statement from Ortlund takes on a new hue.

Says Ortlund, *"Everyone who feels the power of the gospel will also feel that a penitent man deserves another chance. That man should be held to his professed repentance — but gently, with encouragement, with support, with prayer, with every positive expectation of beautiful outcomes. And if we don't cut him that slack, we are the ones whose turn it is to repent."*

It certainly is the case that truly penitent sinners always can find forgiveness in Jesus Christ. That's the beauty of the gospel! *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (I John 1:9) No true Christian should desire anything for Mark Driscoll *more* than true repentance and forgiveness.

But Ortlund is simply wrong that Driscoll, as a pastor, *"deserves another chance."* As a Christian, yes. But not as a pastor. I Timothy 3 (and Titus 1) clearly state that an overseer must be *"above reproach,"* and I Timothy 3 adds that pastors must *"have a good reputation with those outside the church."* From here on out, Driscoll can no longer claim either requirement as his own, and it's not possible to claim that he can. Like it or not, Ortlund must admit that Driscoll has disqualified himself from the ministry.

And there's the rub. Of all the things Driscoll never mentioned in his letter, the most glaring omission is...

To read this article in its entirety, go to:

<http://www.janetmefferd.com/true-repentance-ministry-really-just-happened/>

Note from Pastor Kevin Lea (for adults only): I have been warning our fellowship of believers for years about the leaven of Mark Driscoll (Matthew 16:6). My warnings were not about the issues above, although they are also very serious. Instead, my concerns were based on his obsession with sex (<http://www.wnd.com/2012/03/the-church-of-sex/> and <http://www.driscollcontroversy.com/>), his potty-mouth in the pulpit, and his claims that he is able to envision the past sinful sex acts of his counselees (while admitting that his visions are sometimes wrong) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aVyFyauE4ig&feature=player_embedded#t=0. These behaviors and attitudes are clearly not of the Spirit of Christ, but instead betray that he is a wolf in sheep's clothing as Peter warned us about (2 Peter 2:18-19).

What really amazes me is that no one (that I know of) is addressing the content of Driscoll's "Praise for Real Marriage" sex book. To date, people only seem to care that he plagiarized sections and then used fraudulent (but legal) methods get on the New York Times best seller's list.

Why is it that Miles McPherson, Bob Coy, James MacDonald, and the other prominent pastors who have written their endorsements in his book, do not seem to care that Driscoll says it is permissible for men to sodomize their wives (page 187-189)?

Driscoll tries to make the case that anal intercourse between a man and woman is not sodomy as the term is used in the Bible (although clearly defined as such in criminal law), and so God does not forbid it. But does Driscoll really think God has to define what He means by "the **natural** use of the woman" in Romans 1:26-27? Driscoll admits that the anus has no **natural** lubrication and therefore precautions must be taken to prevent injury. Isn't it obvious enough that God made the anus for expelling human waste, not for sexual acts between men and women (or between men)? Doesn't Mark care about the health of those who would take his advice? It is a fact that this practice is filthy and as such can give rise to very serious medical conditions that are known to shorten life spans (<http://www.wnd.com/2008/04/61856/>). The same is true for oral sex, which he also advocates.

Sexual perversion is a sign of being under the control of the flesh (if not demons) and not the Spirit. I agree with those above who say we should pray for Mark, but there is a lot more to pray about than what they discuss in their critiques.