



# ‘I am Jack’s Raging Bile Duct’

Mars Hill found its mission field when it called men to live heroically for Jesus.

## SHOW NOTES

Mark Driscoll’s vision of manhood indelibly shaped Mars Hill culture. Drawing from his own difficult childhood story, Mark created an ideal for those searching for meaning and direction. Men responded enthusiastically. From “dad talks” about issues about sex, career, and family to “holy anger” over a feminized church culture, he invited men into a stirring narrative where manning up meant passionately loving God and their families.

In this episode of The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill, host Mike Cospers digs deep into the mythic origin story that shaped Mark Driscoll’s ministry to men. He reveals Mark as far more than just an agent of chaos but a man deeply concerned for the health and spirituality of other men, intent on pastoring them toward flourishing. And as Driscoll’s particular brand of masculinity grew toxic, Cospers asks the poignant question, “Why do you stay when things get bad?” How do you reckon with the movement of the Spirit in your midst when your community begins to shatter?

## MASTHEAD

“The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill” is a production of Christianity Today

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 @MikeCasper

**Mike Cospser:** Before we start today's show, a quick warning. This episode deals with issues of sexuality, masculinity, and it includes some frank discussion. As we have on previous episodes, we're censoring any swearing, but given the content as a whole, if you're listening with kids, you may want to pre-screen this first.

It's Sunday, January 28th, 2001, and Mark Driscoll is at the pulpit, giving announcements before his sermon.

 @PastorMark

**Mark Driscoll:** I encourage you to join us for that at 6:30. And lastly, for the men that regularly attend this church, next Saturday at 10:00 AM, we're going to get together over at The Paradox, would encourage you to be there. We have a little chit chat you need to have. So John chapter six, where we went last week, I'll get you up to speed...

**Mike Cospser:** That chitchat he mentions there at the end had been planned for awhile. It was first announced on January 10th on an internal message board the church had called Midrash, and the buildup online felt ominous. The original announcement read in part, We will convene Saturday, February 3rd at 10:11, only men are welcome. At 10:11, the door will be locked and all late men will be sent away. We will have a large and private conversation you do not want to miss. We will not be charging, though we may take a payment out of your hide. Bring your Bible, paper and a pen. Anyone who brings a Promise Keepers book should also bring a cup and some headgear.

Chat boards in the late nineties and early 2000's were kind of the Wild West, including this one. They were unmoderated, unfiltered, and most of the posters wrote under pseudonyms, including this one. His name was William Wallace II. A few days later, he posted again: Make sure to save the date. We will not have any food, we will not have any heat, we will not have any band. We do not have any name, we do not have any t-shirts, we do not have any bracelets. We do not have any psychologists. If you are late, we may only let you in after a cavity search, and force you to wear a dress.

A few days later, Mark Driscoll posted under his name, encouraging the ladies to pray and the men to make it a priority. He wrote: To the guys who are whining, gossiping, grumbling, and continuing their male lesbian tendencies, if I'm your pastor, you are hereby ordered to attend. On the 31<sup>st</sup>, Driscoll wrote simply, No snacks, no heat, no band. Then, on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, Wallace posted, I'm offline until tomorrow when we hold a funeral and bury the \*\*\* nation thread after our manly fight club.

If you're familiar at all with the Mars Hill story, or if you've dug around online, you likely have already heard of William Wallace II. Driscoll himself mentions him in his 2006 book, but it wasn't until July of 2014 that it became notorious, when someone dug up the old Midrash threads and shared them with several bloggers who regularly covered the Mars Hill and Driscoll beat. They were big news. Wallace was larger than life, absurdist really, posting comments that were variously homophobic, misogynistic, demeaning, degrading, and just inexcusably awful. You could fill an episode of this podcast with a litany of them. And like I said, they're everywhere online, and if you search around, you'll see I'm not exaggerating. I'm not sure it's that helpful to all of our listeners though, for me to read through a bunch of the worst of them here, so I'll leave it up to you how deep down that rabbit hole you want to go. And if you're listening and thinking that one unhinged

commenter isn't really news, you'd be exactly right. Except that behind the pen name, William Wallace II was none other than Mark Driscoll.

**Mike Cospers:** From Christianity Today, this is Mike Cospers and you're listening to the Rise and Fall of Mars Hill. It's the story of one church that grew from a handful of people to a movement, and then collapsed almost overnight. It's a story about power, fame and spiritual trauma, problems faced across the spectrum of churches in America. And yet it's also a story about the mystery of God working in broken places. Today on the podcast, Episode 4, I am Jack's Raging Bile Duct.

In a story from the New York Times magazine in 2009, Molly Worthen noted that the favorite movie of Mars Hill members wasn't *Amazing Grace* or the *Chronicles of Narnia*, it was *Fight Club*. And *Fight Club* is a great reference point for what worked about Mars Hill, and for the particular kind of appeal Mark Driscoll had for young men,

**Mark Driscoll:** I'm fine with *Fight Club*, I'm not fine with Oprah. You know what I'm saying? That's how I live, that's how I work. I always tell people, I'm Irish, we have two emotions - pissed off and asleep. That's our spectrum.

**Mike Cospers:** In the film, the narrator, played by Edward Norton, is a frustrated white collar guy whose life consists of working a miserable job and shopping in Ikea catalogs. Then he happens to meet Brad Pitt's, Tyler Durden, a soap salesman, and an unhinged spirit, and they launch into a progressively more violent and destructive path. The whole thing's meant to be an expression of the discontent of Generation X with the world they've inherited, and Tyler is a prophetic agent of chaos calling out the misery that Norton's character wants to ignore. He tells him, Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy \*\*\* we don't need. We're the middle children of history, no purpose or place. We have no great war, no great depression. Our great war is a spiritual war, our great depression is our lives. We've all been raised on television to believe that one day we'd all be millionaires and movie gods and rock stars, but we won't, we're slowly learning that fact, and we're very, very pissed off.

Mark Driscoll spoke directly that he's does.

**Mark Driscoll:** You don't know what it means to be a man so you let marketing and advertising define masculinity, and you think if you buy the right things then you're a man. And it's all about consuming, as if being a man was defined by how much meat you can shove through your colon, and how many beers you can pound, and how fast you can drive, and how stinky you can fart, and how far you can spit, and how loud you can belch, and whose name's on your underwear, and how big the mud flaps are on your truck.

**Mike Cospers:** The common thread between *Fight Club* and Mars Hill was a deep dissatisfaction with the status quo. But where Tyler Durden wanted you to embrace nihilism and risk and pain to feel alive, Driscoll challenged men to get good jobs, marry young, buy a house, and have lots of kids. In a city as progressive as Seattle, these traditional values were a punk rock ethic all their own. And so many of the key leaders of Mars Hill followed exactly that path, starting from a place of real uncertainty and finding their calling as Christians and leaders through the message of the church.

🐦 @TimAndSmith

**Tim Smith:** There are a ton of young men that were called to step up to repent of their sin and to follow Jesus boldly, however they were able -

**Mike Cospers:** This is Tim Smith again.

**Tim Smith:** - whether that's in vocational ministry or whether that's in other ways. And there are a ton of men, myself included, that who knows where they would be or what they would be up to. It's not that we weren't about young women, but what Mark said all the time is that most of the problems in the world are caused by young men, and they're caused by young men that don't have a clear vision of who they are or who they're supposed to be, and Jesus gives them that. But looking back, at the same time, it was a mixed bag too.

🐦 @aaroncgray

**Aaron Gray:** Mars Hill... Obviously, Mark Driscoll, there's nobody more influential or central, but it's not monolithic, there were people that lived these things out really, really well, and there were people that lived them out really poorly.

**Mike Cospers:** This is Aaron Gray, who you heard from on our first episode. He was on staff from 2011 to 2014, and he saw this mixed bag up close, particularly in the ministry of redemption groups. These were intensive small groups where you were meant to deal with ingrained issues of sin or pain from your past. And they were often places where marital conflicts, sexual addictions or authority issues in the home would be drawn out and confronted by the leaders.

**Aaron Gray:** I worked as a season, as one of the leaders in that ministry, but from campus to campus, you would see it play out wildly differently. Some people seem to have really just wisdom and skills in how to do it. Other people... There was this language like, Well, it's time to go to redemption group again, and time to go get kicked in the balls again. That was just the language that people would use, like it was this weekly bludgeoning that we're going to go, get bludgeoned for Jesus. Yeah, they became a caricature. So instead of a loving word of confrontation, it was a baseball bat to the knee.

🐦 @WendyAlsup

**Wendy Alsup:** I think that Mark didn't care.

**Mike Cospers:** This is Wendy Alsup again.

10 MIN

**Wendy Alsup:** I think in some sense, and probably for all of us, our greatest strength is our greatest weakness, and so Mark's strength was a boldness and if he offended you with truth, he didn't care. He also didn't care if he offended you with sinning against you by making fun of you. But if you could listen through it and not be offended by his manner of teaching, He did have a gift for teaching the word.

I'll never forget the first Christmas we were there. One of his Sunday sermons was Ho Ho Ho, Merry Christmas. H-O H-O H-O Merry Christmas. Well, it was about the three whores in Jesus's lineage. And so he had this, like, very offensive way - I still think it's funny - very offensive way that he's talking about this thing, but then at the same time, He really presented how the lineage of Jesus specifically includes these women that have stories that we would all be embarrassed of... They would be embarrassed of back in that day.


They were not the beautiful stories. And it ended up being... Like he pokes you in the eye with the sermon title, but the actual content of the sermon was very life-giving. It wasn't misogynist, it was.... Which I do believe Mark definitely had a misogyny problem. But in this particular instance, I just remember the sermon title caught my attention, but the content of it was actually eye-opening.

**Mike Cospers:** Wendy's talking about Mark, the preacher and pastor, not the William Wallace character. But the appreciation for Mark's edge that she's expressing is typical of folks who were part of Mars Hill. They liked his boldness, his willingness to search for where the line was between provocative and offensive, and his willingness to push language and culture and metaphors in new places in an effort to connect people to a different way of talking about Christianity. He would often say that his biggest influences as a preacher were people like Chris Rock, and the shock jock approach in his preaching certainly reflected that. And it's worth noting that Rock in 2019 complained that the politics of the present day has made a lot of his jokes off-limits. At an award ceremony in 2019, he said from the stage, If it was five years ago, I could say something real funny and offensive right now, but I can't do that anymore. Those cultural shifts are worthy of consideration when we assess the offensiveness of some of Driscoll's comments. Not the William Wallace stuff, which was really always out of bounds, but the edgy stuff in his preaching and teaching. The norms have changed a lot since the late nineties and early 2000's. Shock jock stuff from Howard Stern or Adam Carolla, or stand-ups like Bill Hicks, Dave Attell and Chris Rock. Many of their jokes from the time would get them in massive hot water today. Sitcoms like 30 Rock, The Office, and It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia, have removed shows from streaming services for jokes that are now out of bounds, and their creators have issued apologies for them. To be clear, my point isn't to provide a justification for Mark's jokes or commentary, but it's important to properly situate it within the norms of comedy and entertainment at the time, which is the world he drew from for his approach and style. Whether or not a pastor is wise in making that the pool he swims in for content is a different question altogether.

As for the William Wallace character, I think we can look at Fight Club to understand what Mark was attempting to do with him. In a way, he's Tyler Durden to Mars Hill's young men online, an over-the-top agent of chaos, stirring trouble and provoking. And while we read those comments from a distance and with no small amount of shock and horror, those who were there when it all happened saw it very differently, and never saw it as something to take literally or seriously.

Here's Jeff Bettger, who was part of the church in a variety of roles from 1997 to 2013.

**Jeff Bettger:** I was able to justify in my head the \*\*\* hyperbole he used on the internet with the William Wallace crap, which now looking back when I saw that, when it got exposed again, I was like, Oh my gosh, I remember him saying those. And at the time, me and my friends were laughing because we thought it was ridiculous and he was... We didn't know it was him until he said it was him, like the story goes. But we did know that this guy was at our church, but yet at the same time, in the church forum, when this stuff's happening and he's saying all this chauvinistic sexist nonsense, we took little bits and pieces of the points that he had been preaching and talking about gender roles and men being men and owning stuff and valuing women more. So we took it as

 @jsuffering

15 MIN



hyperbole and it allowed us to justify Mark, essentially. And when he came out with it, we're like, Oh my gosh, he's the one who said that, oh, that figures, he's just using that hyperbolic stuff that he always does and being ridiculous, that's funny that it was him. So we just thought it was, like, punk rock of him. I think I took it with a grain of salt and thought it was funny, and now I'm disgusted that I would even do that. Like in hindsight, when I read those things that he said, and I know what happened and sort of see it, I'm like, Why did I even not question this stuff, and why did I think of it in my own way as storytelling and hyperbole. And I think it partly was. But I also think that it speaks for something larger and sicker.

**Mike Cosper:** Paul Petry was around back then too. And like Jeff, at the time, he didn't see the William Wallace stuff as something to take seriously. He saw it as a kind of over the top effort to get people's attention.

**Paul Petry:** I don't want to make light of some things that people would have found offense, but I think - at least I did - I saw a lot of the bombast as being a sort of tongue in cheek, if you will, a lot of it, and some people got so offended by it. And a lot of times I just felt like the people that got so offended by it probably needed to get offended, get sort of shaken out of their comfort zone a little bit. Because the church can be a pretty fake and phony place, and sort of false piety, if you will. And Mark was shaking that tree really hard. And I think for a lot of us, a lot of things that he said, some of it you would laugh at and some of it you just thought, Well, it's all done sort of tongue in cheek. But some people took it extremely seriously and got offended. I would say most of us didn't really see it that way. We saw that he was saying some things that needed to be said, and if he had couched at all in real sort of Christian ease, it wouldn't have had the impact that it had. Let's face it. A lot of guys took notice and a lot of guys did a step up, if you will. At the time that was new. Nowadays, you got everybody... You got pastors all over the country that have got their men's ministry like it's something new and unusual, but at that time it was new and unusual, nobody else was doing it.

**Mike Cosper:** Which brings us back to that Saturday morning, February 3rd, 2000. The men's meeting that Driscoll and Driscoll as Wallace had been hyping online. In Confessions of a Reformation Rev, he wrote about calling the meeting after taking on the Wallace character, fighting with people who were advocating liberal and feminist ideas, and generally trying to stir the pot online. He wrote, It got insane and thousands of posts were being made each day until it was discovered that it was me raging like a madman under the guise of a movie character. One guy got so mad that he actually showed up at my house to fight me one night around 3:00 AM. Things we're starting to get out of hand with the men, so I called a meeting and demanded that all of the men in our church attend.

Jeff Bettger was there.

**Jeff Bettger:** I had heard that there's this men's meeting, that Mark's sick of it, and so I was curious, Huh, I wonder what he's going to say. And so when we get there, it was all solemn and dark, but it was basically then him pretty much yelling at us.

**Mike Cosper:** Here's how Driscoll describes it in the book: I preached for more than two



hours about manhood, and basically gave the dad talk to my men for looking at porno, sleeping with young women, not serving Christ, not working hard at their jobs, and so on. I demanded that the men who were with me on our mission to change the city, stay, and that the rest leave the church and stop getting in the way, because you can't charge hell with your pants around your ankles, a bottle of lotion in one hand, and a Kleenex in the other.

**Jeff Bettger:** That was the first time I really heard some of the things that later became staples. But even at that time, I remember thinking the motivation was for me to find a way to take care of my family. The motivation... I think I was, yeah, I was newly married.

**Mike Cospers:** Joel Brown was there as well.

🐦 @bJoelBrown

**Joel Brown:** And you walk in and they hand you these rocks, and they're like, We're giving you your stones back. And then Mark yelled at us for an hour or two, and we went home. I do think that there were a lot of positive things that came out of that. I think for me as a young man, I probably could have gone a lot of different ways when it came to taking on responsibility, seeing women as not just objects, or seeing women as lesser than, but seeing women as those who we needed to protect and to honor and respect, and all these kinds of things. I think those were big values for me. It was intense because it was not what we were expecting. From a church meeting for men, you're usually expecting a conversation or, how can we help, something more positive and affirming, and it wasn't. It was very intense.

**Mike Cospers:** As Mark recounts though, and as a lot of others have affirmed to me, it was kind of a turning point in the life of the church, a big wake-up call. If William Wallace had been an absurdist approach to calling men to action, this had been the pastor prophet approach, and it worked and was kind of the model for Mark moving forward.

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Jessica Johnson is an anthropologist and Scholar of Religion at William and Mary, and she's the author of a book about Mars Hill called *Biblical Porn: Affect, Labor, and Pastor Mark Driscoll's Evangelical Empire*. This infamous Saturday morning came up in her research.

🐦 @dr\_jessjohnson

**Jessica Johnson:** I had similar experiences when I talked to men about that particular event and how pivotal it was to their real engagement within the church, that whole language of manning up. That was a pivotal event for them. And when they really decided that this was the right church and they were going to really invest in it. So that definitely is true. I think, again, it's something I talk about my book, it was something I was reading about at the time, there was this language being used about a masculinity crisis in the United States. Men, they were looking for purpose, something that would integrate family, their role in a family, their role as providers, their drive to be responsible. And this was very attractive to younger men. They spoke to how they wanted to be in this kind of fraternity with other guys - or in the language of that time, the other dudes. This was a very kind of masculine-driven, We're going to man up and be men and provide for our families and get the jobs that we need and serve our church, and take care and protect our wives, and that sort of thing. And I think that was a positive for a lot of the men that I spoke to, just having that sense of purpose and having that sense of connection to other men in that purpose.





**Mike Cosper:** It wasn't just men who bought into that vision. Many women were drawn in as well to the sense of certainty that came with Mark's leadership, and found the picture of marriage and family he described, compelling. People like Jen Smith.

**Jen Smidt:** I cheered him on, like, Yes, men need to be held accountable for their actions and take the responsibility for their homes. It's what I kind of hoped for in my husband who, at the time, was quite passive in the way that he responded, and I thought I needed a man to kind of put me in my place. But it was interesting because it took the pressure off of women.

**Mike Cosper:** And in some ways, that was kind of the point. The emphasis on empowering men, on creating a masculine culture, it was meant to take the pressure off women.

**Jen Smidt:** It was really hard on men and they would be saddled, burdened with the responsibility of, You are responsible for the spiritual health and tone of everybody in your home. In one way, it took the responsibility off of women, which we should have had, but it also erased our own dignity and humanity. And I didn't see that at the time.

**Mike Cosper:** I want to mention that in an upcoming episode, we're going to dig much deeper into the experiences of women at Mars Hill, and the way that sex was a key part of the church's messaging and appeal. What Jen is saying here though, reveals an important aspect of the issue of masculinity at the church. The way the church taught headship in the home, meaning that husbands were the leaders of their wives and family, is part of that mixed bag that Tim Smith mentioned earlier. Many women experienced it as suffocating and controlling or infantilizing even, but others found comfort in it, as many women who believe in a complementarian vision of marriage do. For the men at Mars Hill, the message was an unambiguous call to take on the burden of responsibility for the soul care of their wives and children. Where Fight Club appealed to young men by inviting them to break free of the status quo and embrace a testosterone-fueled kind of nihilism, Driscoll's invitation was a testosterone-fueled vision of pastoral and marital responsibility. Men were to be warriors for God, so they attended theological fight clubs. The ministries of the church were described as air war and ground war. They didn't go away from men's retreats because real men don't retreat from battle; they went away to men's advances. They had a sense that they were giving their lives away to a war worth fighting, and that they were being shaped and tested in the process.

**Mark Driscoll:** What I want at Mars Hill is men. I'm going to say it as clean, as plain as I can. Did I say I don't want women and children? That's not what I said. But women had children with men who abandon or abuse or avoid, that's not nice for women. Ask a single mother how nice it was that the man abandoned his obligations. Ask a woman who's getting beaten by her husband, how much she would like someone to be stronger than him and to give him the truth. So I think the nicest thing we can do for women, the nicest thing we can do for children, is to make sure that the men are like Christ in a good way, in a loving, dying, serving way.

**Mike Cosper:** Men receive that call as a call to a fight, a good fight, a meaningful fight. And so they showed up at church, of all places, and they said, like Tyler Durden, I want you to hit me as hard as you can.

We'll be right back.

As we've looked at previously, there's a tendency in big churches to establish their DNA around the personalities of their pastors, and Mars Hill is no exception. You really can't separate the masculine ethos of the church from the personality of Mark himself. Its formation as part of the culture of the church came in part through his preaching and teaching. But just as importantly, and maybe more importantly, it came through the story he told about who he was and where he came from. In politics, academia, religion, even inside families, the stories that get told and retold inside that group form the core of its idea. They create the basis of authority for leaders, and they communicate aspirationally what a group who lives into that story or follows that leader can become. As Grant Morrison put it, we live in the stories we tell ourselves. Driscoll seemed to know this, as evidenced by how often he told his story at Mars Hill. Just about every person I talked to can retell it beat by beat, and it always begins with his origins in a world that demanded masculine strength.

**Mark Driscoll:** In my neighborhood, my dad hung drywall every day to provide for the family. If you've ever hung drywall, it's work, it's significant work. To the point where a few years ago, my dad broke his back hanging drywall and had to give up drywall because he literally severed his back. And my dad, when I was little, I remember him telling me, This is a rough neighborhood, you look out for your brothers, you look out for your sisters, if I'm gone, you take care of the family. You had to in my neighborhood. There was kids who were thugs or mean, they carried guns. They shot out one of the cars in front of our house in a drive-by. All kinds of stuff. They have knives, guns pulled on you all the time. So if you're going to be a big brother in that neighborhood, you have got to be tough. And so I turned into a bit of a street brawler and kind of the protector of my brothers and my sisters. And this is the way I think the world works.

**Mike Cospere:** By all accounts, Mark's childhood was filled with violence, and according to many who knew him more personally, it was more violent than he let on in contexts like this, though, he would occasionally hint at it, both talking about his own propensity towards anger and fighting, and in the suffering he may have endured as well.

**Mark Driscoll:** Before being a Christian, I was not a naturally loving guy. I had been lied to, cheated on, abused, taken advantage of and jacked with so many times. I didn't trust anybody, and I certainly wasn't going to give my heart to anyone because I'd learned the hard way, you're just going to get taken advantage of. So I tended to be a very violent, angry, bitter person, to the degree I fought a lot of guys and put a handful in the hospital. I was that guy. I didn't get most huggable in high school. I wasn't that guy at all.

**Mike Cospere:** Despite that background, and despite the rebellious image he'd like to project, he was actually a driven achiever. Maybe not most huggable, but captain of the baseball team, president of his high school class, and voted most likely to succeed. He was the first in his family to attend college, in part because of academic scholarships. The Driscoll family was Catholic, and Mark even served as an altar boy for awhile. But by his account, his actual faith was nominal at best, and abandoned altogether after his grandfather died when he was 10. His conversion to Christianity came about as a result of his relationship with Grace Martin, now Grace Driscoll, the daughter of a preacher.

They started dating their junior year of high school, and she knew he wasn't a Christian so she gave him a Bible as a gift. It wasn't until a few years later, though, when he'd gone off to college at Washington State, that he came to faith. That conversion story is also a big part of the Mars Hill mythology. In his book, *Real Marriage*, he wrote that he'd never heard a gospel presentation and that no one led him to Christ. He became a Christian when he opened that Bible for the first time. Here he is telling the story at Southeastern Seminary in 2009.

**Mark Driscoll:** And up until this point, to be honest with you, I had really no interest in Jesus and no interest in the Bible, but she'd given me this very nice Bible with my name stamped on the front, and so I began reading it. I remember sitting on my bed in my dormitory, reading Romans one that says, "And you were called from among those to belong to Jesus Christ." And I remember the Spirit of God absolutely flipping a switch in me, and I believe that is when God regenerated me.

**Mike Casper:** Shortly after that, he had another experience that would shape his life in the coming years. This was also a story that he told often.

**Mark Driscoll:** And so I was at this men's retreat, and God spoke to me and told me to preach the Bible, train men, plant churches, and marry Grace. Told me exactly what to do. And so I've been doing that ever since, to the best of my ability by God's grace.

**Mike Casper:** As the story goes, Mark's entry into church after his conversion was a rude awakening. He couldn't identify with anything about the culture of the church, especially the men.

**Mark Driscoll:** I went looking for a church and a few of the first churches I went to were just completely uncomfortable; it was like walking into Victoria's Secret. The décor, at first, it's like fuchsia and baby blue and there's pink, and it's just like, What in the world has happened here. And then the songs are very emotive, and it's like love songs to Jesus, like we're on a prom together or something. And then the guy preaches and he's crying and all this stuff, and trying to appeal to my emotions. I was just like... This didn't work. So I kept looking for a church. So I found a church where the guy got up and he said, This week I was out bow hunting – he used that as an illustration - so I became a member of that church. True story. I didn't have any theological convictions, but if a guy killed things then he could be my pastor.

**Mike Casper:** At Mars Hill then, Mark would turn the tables on this. Reaching men would be the priority, believing that there would be a cascading effect into families and into the city as a whole, when they took the lead. Taken together, I think all of this accounts for the founding mythology of Mars Hill, in much the same way as Bill Hybels' origin story created the founding myth of Willow Creek. Hybels would talk about leaving the family business for ministry and selling tomatoes door to door to raise the money to plant the church. For Mark, the story begins in the rough world of his childhood, then while reading the Bible Grace gave him when they were dating, he comes to faith. Shortly after that comes to call to ministry, and then he enters the church and finds it to be repulsively feminine, which motivates him all the more to pioneer something different.

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I also think the limited set of characters in this story is an important factor. While other pastors would show up in Mark's storytelling from time to time as either encouragers or disciplers, when it comes to Mark's vision, calling and purpose, they're all revealed in that intimate circle of Mark, Grace, God, and the Bible. And that solitary origin has implications down the line, particularly in the way Mark would respond to other potential sources of authority and accountability. As it turns out, you can justify almost anything if, like Elwood Blues, you believe you're on a mission from God. The whole thing is kind of a hero's journey too. He's raised in the obscurity of a harsh place, sent away to the wilderness where he finds God and a purpose for his life, and then he returns to Seattle as a fiery prophet, ready to build a new kingdom.

For Hybels, by creating an image of himself as an elite businessman, he gained credibility with men and women in the Chicago suburbs whose inclination was more toward the marketplace than the church. The story centered him as the rightful leader of a multi-million dollar bureaucracy, but it also established a critical kind of authority.

Driscoll's origin story also establishes his authority, not as a business leader but as a man's man in a church that's dominated by womanly sensibilities. Both present themselves as outliers and outsiders too, whose gifts and temperament could have led them to all kinds of successes elsewhere. And that narrative fit a spirit in the community that was not unlike that of the crowd stuffing bread in the jar of the piano man, yelling, Man, what is he doing here?

Both men also shared the ethos of missional entrepreneurship, a sense that their innovations, which were really their personalities, could cure what ailed the church in their time.

Here's Sociologist of Religion Gerardo Marti again.

 @praxishabitus

**Gerardo Marti:** The entrepreneurial sense of the leader who is establishing a faith community that could speak to the issues of the day means that you're going to have a more personal approach to that charisma. It's going to be a particular person who is going to be able to share their experiences as well as their thinking, their orientation, in order to draw together a circle, a community.

**Mike Cosper:** For Mark then, channeling that charisma through the lens of masculinity works on several levels. At its most basic, it taps into something deep in the heart of men, the longing that every man has to know that he's living up to what it means to be a man. It also empowered the church's ability to envision itself in an us versus them posture regarding the world around them. As Marti puts it, The emphasis on masculinity tapped into deep underlying attitudes about leadership that have long been central to evangelicalism. And these strengthened Mark's aura of authority.

**Gerardo Marti:** Being able to stand and define masculinity is going to be inherent to standing up for these kinds of messages, to be able to hold back against the forces of evil or the forces that are threatening, and to be able to then bolster the sense of who they are. And masculinity is not really a shared characteristic. Masculinity, as it is practiced, is an I am a man, I am the man, which further bolsters charismatic credibility. So the more a person can exude and assert a masculinity centered around their message

in the face of all these controversies and contentions, the more it further bolsters their celebrity status.

**Mike Cospers:** At first glance, this seems counterintuitive. You would think that a hyper-masculine pastor, planting a conservative evangelical church in one of the most progressive cities in the country, was a recipe for disaster. But what Marti is saying is that precisely the opposite is true. The ability of Mark to define Christian masculinity, to even embody it in himself, created a powerful base of authority from which he could gather and lead a community. When conflicts later arose around questions of gender, sexuality, church governance, and culture, one would expect that these would erode that base. But in fact, for many, maybe for most, it was the opposite. The criticism and attacks from the outside were to be expected because the church had already defined itself as an aggressive counter-cultural force. And since the identity of the church had been bound up in the personality of Mark Driscoll, an attack on him felt like an attack on you. And so the masculine vision of the church not only served to attract and empower young men, it was self-reinforcing, keeping Mark at its center when trouble and conflict came.

Some of this analysis probably feels pretty cold, but it's crucial to remember that as things unfolded at the church, as its leaders - not just Mark - taught this message, it was profoundly transformative, in ways that many men, even with the benefit of hindsight or the pain of wounds, still appreciate to this day.

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Here's Joel Brown again.

**Joel Brown:** I remember Mark would often say things like, A young man is like a truck; he drives straighter when he's got weight in the bed. And that really resonated with me. I was like, very active, busy young guy, and I think it inspired me and encouraged me to get married at a young age and to just jump into it, to take a step forward in starting a family and things like that. But also seeing all of that as connected to my faith.

**Mike Cospers:** In those early years, Mark wasn't just a critic in the stands though, heaping scorn on young men. He was investing in guys like Joel, inviting him in particular to take on various roles, as a volunteer, then an intern, and eventually as a staff member and a pastor.

Tim Smith's experience was similar. In 1998, he was working at a church in St. Louis, but he was originally from Portland and he and his wife both missed the Pacific Northwest. When he attended an event put on by the Young Leaders Network, he met Mark, and he began to feel drawn to pack up and move to Seattle.

 @TimAndSmith

**Tim Smith:** Having met Driscoll at a conference and talking to him on the phone a few times, he invited us to move into his basement. And so we rolled in - because we didn't have anywhere to live - so we rolled in, I had a pickup at the time, with a U-Haul trailer, and we unloaded it. He had a good-sized basement in his house near the University of Washington. There was a few single guy interns living there, and one of them was moving out, we moved into that room. It was not awesome for a couple, but it was fine. We lived there for, I can't remember, a month or maybe two, until we found jobs and got an apartment. But that's how we really got to know the Driscoll's.

**Mike Cospers:** Even though he wasn't much older than most of them – he was only 26 when the church was planted - Mark took the role of pastor, as spiritual father, seriously, doing what he could, where he could, to help the young men in the church take steps towards more responsibility. For Tim, that meant extending an invitation to him to uproot his life and move to Seattle. Shortly after, he'd come on staff as the Pastor of Worship, and he'd serve in that role for more than a decade, right up until it was time to leave to launch Mars Hill Portland.

Jeff Bettger experienced a similar kind of investment. When Mars Hill was first being planted, Jeff was a musician, playing with a variety of punk and indie rock bands, and he lived and died by the money he could make while either on the road or working wherever and however he could, when he was home. He played in a worship band at Mars Hill called Team Strike Force, and one night they'd been asked to join Mark at an event where he was speaking.

**Jeff Bettger:** So he was getting paid by doing, like, youth group things or whatever. At some point that's how he made some money was he'd go talk to somebody else's youth group. Because Mars Hill early on wasn't making a lot of money for him or Grace. So we did this big, huge church retreat and Team Strike Force went and led worship. Afterward, we're at some, I don't know, Denny's or somewhere, eating food, and he's sort of railing into me: Why aren't you marrying her? Why haven't you married her?

**Mike Cospers:** He was referring to Jeff's longtime girlfriend, Teresa. They'd been together about eight years.

**Jeff Bettger:** And I was like, Dude, I'm broke and I don't have any money for a ring, and she deserves better, and all these kind of things like that. So he literally gave me the money he made that night to buy my wife a wedding ring. Like, he just handed it to me and said, Now you don't have an excuse. Stuff like that made me, early on, definitely be loyal to him, because I'm a pretty loyal person. Things like that, the acceptance of us. He also gave our bands... Like, we came back from a horrible tour one time and he... The church gave me and Matt money for rent because we didn't come back with any cash, and we were gone for a month and had to get back to coffee jobs or whatever we were doing, flipping bagels, I don't remember.

**Tim Smith:** I remember at one point, somewhere in the mid 2000's. We were at a meeting somewhere - I don't even remember what it was, maybe an elders meeting. But I remember asking Mark, just in passing, Man, why did you... Like, you just met me at a conference and we met once and we talked on the phone two or three times. Why did you invite me to come to Seattle and move into your basement? Because at this point, I was like, You and I have both met a lot of guys at conferences and we haven't asked any of them to come live in our basement. And he's like, Oh bro, yeah, I had a dream, God told me he was sending you here. I had a vision, and God told me he was sending you here and we were going to be friends, and you were going to be an important leader in the church, so I invited you to come live in my basement.

**Mike Cospers:** When people talk about what happened at Mars Hill, or what happened at any church where things went so terribly wrong, someone will inevitably ask, Why was

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it able to go on for so long? Why didn't the staff leave? Couldn't everyone see what the problems were? And for Mars Hill, at least, I think stories like these from Joel, Tim and Jeff provide at least a partial answer. Mars Hill was where they grew into their calling and their sense of purpose as men, husbands, fathers, and pastors. Mark empowered them and invested in them, and affirmed them. And there are a few things in this world as powerful to young men as someone whom you respect telling you, I believe in you, and I'm excited to see what God is doing with your life. Mars Hill was where they learned to give their lives away in service to something bigger than themselves, and where they saw unbelievable things happen as thousands of people flocked to Jesus. It was where so many young men heard the call to embrace the responsibilities of adulthood, to revere marriage and pursue it. It's where they got married and had babies, it was the place they watched their kids grow up. When you consider the scope of life experienced in the span of 14, 15, or 16 years, like these guys spent there, you can imagine how many inflection points, how many moments of suffering where the community gathered around you, or moments of deep and shared joy took place inside the context of that community.

**Tim Smith:** Easter, 2008, like the week of, Driscoll had a last minute idea, which is like, What if instead of doing baptisms afterwards, we do them like in the moment.

**Mike Cosper:** This was actually a pretty big break in tradition for them. Baptism usually involved a deeply engaged conversation with a pastor to ensure that an individual understood exactly what was happening, and why. Mark though, made the case to the other pastors that baptisms in the New Testament were pretty much spontaneous, so why not just open it up.

**Tim Smith:** Classic lead pastor, last minute, everybody's like, Ah, scrambling.

Man, I was nervous. I was going to be leading worship that day and just like, Geez, it's going to be so lame if nobody responds. But he was pretty confident some people would respond and good grief, it was a huge response.

**Mike Cosper:** Brad House told me the story as well. He attended the church starting in 2000 and was on staff from 2005 to 2012.

 @PBHouse

**Brad House:** It was overwhelming. We didn't have towels, we didn't have shirts. We didn't know... We had soaked the whole back of the stage.

**Tim Smith:** And we quickly realized - this is just the classic, you don't think it through - like, they were just coming in their clothes, whatever they were wearing, and quickly, it was like, Oh my goodness, what have we done? The people that were helping to give towels to everybody are just rushing in to cover people up. We sent people to the store immediately to buy every pair of dark colored t-shirts and cheap shorts that we could buy in a multiple-mile radius because people just kept responding.

**Brad House:** So this lady who apparently had a lot of cats comes in the tank and she gets baptized, and then I'm sitting in the tank, covered in cat hair on the top of the water, just dunkin' the next person that came in. It was complete insanity, and it was beautiful. There was no... There's no manipulation, no guile in the midst of that. It was,



We're calling people to Jesus, but it was coming so fast and it was like, This is beautiful. And you have those moments and then you're like, Ah, so I got yelled at in a meeting or... You would take that home and you'd be frustrated with it, but then you'd go, But on the whole, it's a pretty amazing week.

**Tim Smith:** So we get to the end of the day, it's been super emotional. We did probably, I don't know, at least four services, maybe it was five. I don't remember. We get to the last service of the day, and the longer the service goes, the more we have to add songs. So we had a bunch of songs picked out and we had another list of songs, like, on deck to add. And so I'm just... We'd gone over again, we went over it every service, and we'd gone through... So many people were coming forward that we'd gone through all the songs we played and I'm trying to think of what we're going to play next and how to tell the band while I'm in the middle of a song. I see people waving at me and everything and... Man, it's hard for me to even talk about it without getting emotional because it was just a beautiful moment. But they're all waving at me, and I think they're telling me to just keep going and keep playing. But finally, somebody comes over and is like, Dude, look.

[recording] All right, is this the last one? Or we got more backstage? Okay. Oh, I know that one.

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And we got to the end of the song and I realized my oldest daughter was standing in the tub. She came forward, she'd just turned six. She had responded. She was there with my sister, my wife wasn't even there. And I guess she turned to my sister was like, I need to get baptized right now, I've been thinking about it and I've got to do it right now. And so my sister brought her up and she got all the way into the tub before I even knew what was happening because I was just trying to keep playing the songs. So I put down my guitar and walked over and I baptized my daughter over the side of the tub.

**Pastor:** [recording] You want to do it?

**Tim Smith:** [recording] Yeah, I'll just do it over the edge here. Do you love Jesus? Why do you love Jesus? Because she's shy. Did Jesus die for your sin? Does Jesus changed your heart? Does Jesus give you love? You love Jesus? Then, it's very happy for me to baptize you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Not a dry eye in the place. Driscoll's there in the front row. Everybody's just crying their eyes out. And it was just an amazing day. And that became something we did a lot of over the years, and saw so many people come to Christ in the midst of it all. So that is definitely my number one Mars Hill memory of all time.

**Mike Cosper:** Stories like the Fall of Mars Hill are never just about the failure of one person. They're about the shattering of community, and they're about years, decades in some cases, of memories that turn from beautiful to bittersweet because of the loss. Why do you stay? Because this is the place that you found a purpose and a sense of calling, a sense of who you are as a man, and a pastor, and a husband, and a father. Because you hope, despite all evidence to the contrary, that you're one good conversation away from things getting back to how they used to be. Because you've given everything to this community,

and in some ways, this community has given everything to you. That is why you stay.

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