



# Demon Hunting

Church growth turns toxic when the end of reaching people for Christ justifies the means.

## SHOW NOTES

We are people built for wonder, spiritual creatures looking for spiritual footholds in a culture often devoid of belief in the supernatural. We long for miracles—the defeat of sin and shame, displays of God’s power transforming our deepest pain. For some who attended Mars Hill, the instinct toward astonishment led them to Mark Driscoll’s charismatic deliverance ministry. In a world where belief is so often hard to come by, Mark claimed to have faith strong enough to move mountains and, literally, to cast out demons.

In this episode of The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill, host Mike Cospers asks the piercing question, “Where’s the line between the hand of God and a charismatic leader?” How do we know when our craving for astonishment is being manipulated? When do we accept the claims of someone speaking on God’s behalf? Using the lesser-known Mars Hill “demon trials” as a backdrop, Cospers explores the Pentecostal origins of Driscoll’s deliverance ministry, examines the extrabiblical rules that governed Mars Hill spiritual warfare, and considers our longing to hear from God and see him move in our midst.

## MASTHEAD

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

Executive Producer: Erik Petrik

Producer, Writer, Editor, and Host: Mike Cospers

Associate Producer: Joy Beth Smith

Music, Sound Design, and Mix Engineer: Kate Siefker

Graphic Design: Bryan Todd

Social Media: Nicole Shanks

Editorial Consultant: Andrea Palpant Dilley

Editor in Chief: Timothy Dalrymple

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Transcription: Cheryl Penner

Transcript Design: Alecia Sharp

**Mike Cospers:** Hey, folks. So a lot of you have asked about the show release schedule and what's been going on behind the scenes. The answer is that since the show began releasing episodes, we've had a lot of people who've come forward to share their stories. And at times they've been essential voices, people we'd hoped to talk to and asked to talk to almost a year ago. As a result, we felt like it was our priority to make the best show we could, so we opened the doors to include those voices, which obviously required a lot more work. I've literally done some interviews late night on Saturdays for episodes that dropped the following Tuesday. Again, our priority is to tell this story well, to honor those who've experienced it, and to make the best version of each episode that we can. We'd rather take a few extra days than force an episode out the door that isn't ready.

So to that end, we're adjusting the release schedule moving forward, and episodes will be dropping every other week from here out. In other words, no podcast next week. The next one will be the following. We'll have some extra content between now and the end of the season, like the short story we had a couple of weeks ago, and we'll have some bonus episodes in there as well. But every other week will be the pace from here out.

We really appreciate your patience and we appreciate you listening, and we're thankful for the enthusiasm around this show. We hope it serves the church and we hope it serves you. Thanks for listening.

**Voiceover:** This is CT Media.

**Mike Cospers:** Before we begin, an important note. This episode includes discussion of a variety of disturbing topics, including pornography, suicide, sexual abuse, and other sexual trauma. If those issues are especially troubling for you, or if you're listening where kids might hear, you probably wanna switch over to something else.

In 1917, in a village called Cottingley in England, two cousins named Frances Griffiths and Elsie Wright returned home, soaking wet from playing in a nearby Creek. Their mothers scolded them for ruining their clothes and shoes, but the girls had an excuse. It wasn't their fault; it was the fairies. They'd been lured down by them, into the muck. When the mothers rolled their eyes, they decided to prove it. So they borrowed Elsie's father's camera and returned to the creek. When they came back, her father developed the photographic plates and what appeared in the first picture was little Frances surrounded by four white fairies, weightlessly floating around her. In the coming weeks, they'd take more photos and in all, they'd have five images of one or the other of them surrounded by fairies. Elsie's father knew enough about photography and enough about Elsie's cleverness to be skeptical, but her mother Polly was inclined to believe it. She was actually a member of the theosophical society, which was a quasi-religious social club organized around the study and practice of global religion, philosophy, paranormal psychology, and the occult.

A couple of years later, she shared the photos with other members of the society and things took on a life of their own, attracting prominent figures with interest in the supernatural. In December of 1920, the Cottingley fairies went mainstream. Two high quality reproductions of the photos were published along with a lengthy account of their origins in the British magazine, *The Strand*, and the response was sensational, selling out the magazine almost overnight.

In the final paragraph of the article, the author wrote of the fairies, 'The recognition of their existence will jolt the material 20th century mind out of its heavy ruts in the mud, and will make it admit that there's a glamour, a mystery to life.' That author was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes, and Conan Doyle wasn't being facetious or playing for the crowd. He was a true believer. He'd always had an interest in the supernatural, in the mystical, increasingly so after the death of his son in 1918. Here he is in 1927, a few years later, talking about why the exploration of the supernatural and paranormal was so important to him, and how he was using his celebrity to help amplify it.



**Sir Arthur Conan Doyle:** All that I can do is to be a gramophone on the subject. To go about, to meet people face to face, to try and make them understand that this thing is not the foolish thing, which is so often represented, but that it really is a great philosophy, and as I think, the basis of all religious improvement in the future of the human race.

**Mike Cospers:** Later in the recording, he talks about his readiness to lay aside his writing career to focus on helping develop these explorations.

**Sir Arthur Conan Doyle:** But as I grow older, the psychic subject always grows in intensity and then one becomes more earnest upon it. And I should think that my few remaining years will probably be devoted much more in that direction than in the direction of literature.

5 MIN

**Mike Cospers:** The photos themselves are hypnotic and beautiful, but with more than a hundred years' distance from their origin, they don't seem like compelling evidence of the existence of fairies. Nonetheless, the story persisted. In 1966, Elsie was interviewed by The Daily Express and referred to the fairies as figments of her imagination, but she refused to elaborate what she meant or call them hoaxes. It wouldn't be until 1983, 66 years after the photos were taken, that Elsie and Frances together acknowledged that the photos were fake. Here's Elsie speaking in 1985. She was about 84 years old at the time.



**Elsie Wright:** They said that...They said the thing was that they could see that the fairies were moving when the photograph was taken. But that was because they did it in the breeze. It was very embarrassing because, I mean, two village kids and a brilliant man like Conan Doyle, but we could only just keep quiet.

**Mike Cospers:** And here's Frances who is now about 77.

**Frances Griffiths:** I never even thought of it being a fraud. It was just Elsie and I having a bit of fun. Now, I can't understand it to this day why people were taken in, they wanted to be taken in. People keep often say to me, Don't you feel ashamed that you've made all these poor people look fools, they believed in you. But I don't because they wanted to believe. We didn't have to tell a lie about it at all.

**Mike Cospers:** That last line might be the most important part of the story to me, though I'd have a slightly different take on it. Rather than saying that people want to be taken in, that they want to be fooled, I think you can borrow a phrase from the X-Files and say; people want to believe.

GK Chesterton's words apply here, too. That just as we all like love tales, because there's an instinct of sex, we all like astonishing tales because they touch the nerve of the ancient instinct of astonishment.

We're spiritual creatures, looking for footholds in spiritual realities. A little lower than the angels, the Psalmist says. And with eternity in our hearts, the teacher of Ecclesiastes says too. It's tempting with more than a hundred years removed from the story of the Cottingley fairies, to look at Elsie's mother Polly or Arthur Conan Doyle, or any of the countless pilgrims who made their way to that creek in search of fairies, pixies, and gnomes, and think to ourselves, 'What a bunch of rubes'. But the more generous, and maybe more honest description is to say that they were seekers. They were pursuing astonishment, and they were open to it when it appeared in the figure of a brilliant, glowing white fairy on a photographic plate. Something similar is at work anytime you see religion or spirituality gone wrong in ways that shipwreck people's lives.

That includes some of the folks at Mars Hill. And it's likewise tempting here to look at true believers on the inside and think, How naive to be taken in. But that kind of condescension ignores the experience of life inside the community, where in spite of whatever might be going wrong, the horizon is also full of things that appeared to be going right: Baptisms, people finding a sense of purpose and calling, and marital, spiritual, and emotional healing of all kinds. And that's to say nothing of the experience of community itself. I can't tell you how many people I've spoken with who have no illusions about Mars Hill's flaws, and who left wounded, but also say it was one of the richest and deepest experiences of friendship they've ever felt in their life.

And of course, under that is the longing to believe, the instinct for astonishment. The ability to tap into that instinct is a powerful tool in the hands of a religious leader. And Driscoll could do that masterfully, even in his storytelling about the existence of the church. He regularly contrasted it with the city of Seattle, a city he lampooned in his sermons as a pansexual wasteland of child hating pagans. The success of the ministry in and of itself was seen as evidence that supernatural forces were at work.

**Mark Driscoll:** I think Mars Hill's a miracle. We're in the least church-ed city in America, there's more dogs than Christians, there's nowhere to park, and you're here. And everybody said it can't be done and people won't come to church. And you know what? People are becoming Christians. Last week, 63 people got baptized at Mars Hill. 63. You know what that is? 63 miracles. That's what that is.

**Mike Cospere:** Beyond that, when you begin to stack up Driscoll's storytelling about his call to ministry and his own experience with supernatural gifting, what takes shape is a powerful sense of Mark as God's man, uniquely gifted with calling, vision, and insight to take on the spiritual battle for the heart of Seattle.

**Mark Driscoll:** I was called into ministry through a prophetic word.

I got charged by a demon-possessed guy in my pulpit.

On occasion, I see things. I see things.

I could give you a list of people I've seen physically healed.

I don't want to see guys sleeping with their secretary, but sometimes like a film I get to see stuff. And I believe that is one of the expressions of the gift of discernment.

**Mike Cospers:** Before you let your inner cynic take over, remember that every Christian believes in a miracle if they believe that Jesus rose from the dead, and they're invoking the supernatural when they do something as simple as blessing a meal or saying amen after a prayer. But as Nigel Tufnel once said, 'There's a fine line between stupid and clever'. And in faith, there's a fine line between being astonished and being taken in.

**Mark Driscoll:** It's like The Matrix, you can take the blue pill, you can take the red pill. You go into this whole other world. And that's the way it works.

**Mike Cospers:** Sometimes in the momentum of ministry and the ordinary challenges of everyday life, it's almost impossible to know the difference.

From Christianity Today, this is Mike Cospers and you are 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, Episode Eight, Demon Hunting.

It's the summer of 2007, and Jen Smidt has been a part of Mars Hill for more than a decade. Her husband, Phil, had recently become a pastor.



**Jen Smidt:** Early on in being a pastor's wife, like, it had this level of scrutiny and this expectation that you look a certain way, measured and quiet and sweet and helpful.

**Mike Cospers:** That vision wasn't just for pastor's wives. As we saw on an earlier episode, a specific understanding of women's roles in the home and church was taught throughout Mars Hill's life, and Jen struggled to conform to it, even though at the time she wanted to.

**Jen Smidt:** So if I just can look like this, if a biblical woman is kind of meek and submissive and sweet and quiet, I'll try my darndest to do that. That's not my kind of normal or natural disposition, but if that makes me fit in, if that fits the mold of how this is supposed to look, I will try that.

**Mike Cospers:** Jen's default temperament is much more driven than that, comfortable speaking her mind and taking initiative. And even though that broke with what was presented as the feminine ideal at Mars Hill, which was domestic, retreating, deferential, she nonetheless became a leader at the church, serving alongside Phil in counseling and marriage ministries, and contributing regularly as a writer for internal resources and later their online platform

And to be clear, at the time she was an advocate for the church's theological vision for marriage, a complementarian vision in which men held primary responsibility for leadership in the home and in the church. She wasn't struggling with her beliefs about femininity in the church, she was struggling with her sense of place, her sense of belonging, feeling as though she didn't fit the mold as a pastor's wife.

Like everyone, she carried other burdens into ministry too. As she described it, her past was a source of shame, and given Mars Hill's heavy emphasis on the topic of marriage and sexuality, she regularly faced it in a way that was never quite liberating.

**Jen Smidt:** I think one of the most indicative and shame-inducing stories for me is, I was sitting in a class taught by a pastor that was not Mark, and they were talking about family dynamics and what it looks to be about godly, biblical family. And he was talking about premarital sex and promiscuity, and somehow went off on this tangent about women who had been sexually promiscuous or permissive. And he literally used the word dumb, like how dumb can you be, at least prostitutes know to charge money, but these loose girls that just give themselves away for free are especially dumb. And I did my best to not shrivel up and just disappear into a puddle on the floor because he was speaking to my story and yet being so cruel and unkind. And so that's just one example for me, personally, of how, what I think was really a very deeply pervasive culture of shame that existed at Mars Hill, that in some strange way appealed to my giant burden of shame that if we were gonna almost shame people with the gospel, if you will, shame... Use the message of the gospel to remind you of how wretched and terrible you are, but then hook you in with that in a way that didn't necessarily free me from the shame, but said that deep seated fear that I really was bad and that I wasn't enough.

**Mike Cospers:** So she had that burden simmering in the background, and in the foreground she's feeling this tension about being a pastor's wife, and it really aided her during the season, which was challenging on its own.

Mars Hill had been going through a lot of transformation, launching its first video venues, and adapting and learning as a multisite ministry. Off and on during this, she processed out loud with Grace Driscoll. Those conversations set the table for what was to come.

**Jen Smidt:** I was sitting in the car at Shoreline, and Mark walked by the car and saw me, and he really kind of unlike him, opened the door and got in the car with me. I felt super nervous, because again, his presence was really a big deal and it just... He's like, Yeah, Grace mentioned to me you're really kind of struggling with some things. And I said, Yeah, I'm just trying to... It feels like a lot of pressure to be a pastor's wife, but I have so much just shame and trauma in my past, I don't know how to lead people well and teach. And he looked at me and he said, Jen, when you stop believing lies, God has a massively powerful ministry for you. And I knew what that meant, because he'd started talking kind of about demon trials. And so I just felt convinced after that conversation that he kind of saw into my soul, he knew something about me that I didn't, and that I really needed to... I needed to have this experience.

**Mike Cospers:** If you've never heard of a demon trial, you're not alone. I hadn't either. But at Mars Hill, it was the language used for what's elsewhere known as deliverance min-

istry, and it's a practice that emerges out of Pentecostalism. It's kind of related to exorcism. The foundational idea is that Christians can't be possessed by demons because they belong to God. But demons, through a variety of means, can gain a foothold in the lives of Christians. It's often through dabbling with the occult or sexual sin, or even experiences of trauma like sexual abuse.

They can also get a foothold through generational sin. So if your mother practiced witchcraft, you might have inherited a demonic presence in your life too. As a result, you experience long term struggles, nightmares, panic attacks, chronic pain, anxiety, bursts of anger or addiction, because the demon's foothold enables them to afflict you more deeply.

Deliverance then is a way to break the hold the demon has in your life, and set you free. While this isn't a common practice in mainstream evangelicalism, it's had moments where it's taken hold there too. Here's Daniel Silliman, news editor at Christianity Today, talking about the origins of this ministry.

 @danielsilliman

**Daniel Silliman:** Yeah. So I think you got a couple of stages. First is the like old school Pentecostal, and there it's never center stage, like demons and responding to demons is never the primary act, but it often shows up. It shows up as a way of praying for people, it shows up as a way of healing. Some of the early Pentecostals think that all faith healings are actually exorcisms. It's not that like a lame person's body physically changes, it's that a demon gets cast out, demon of lameness gets cast out and they can suddenly throw away their crutches or get out of their wheelchair.

Then you get the movie, the Exorcist.

**Movie narrator:** Somewhere between science and superstition, there is another world.

**Daniel Silliman:** Which really just explodes the idea of demons back into the American consciousness.

**Mike Cospers:** The Exorcist released in 1973, and by that time, there was a charismatic renewal movement spreading through the country. That movement covered a broad swath of American Christianity, including evangelicals and many in more traditional mainline denominations. The Jesus movement was certainly part of that renewal, but interestingly, most traced the origins of it to an Episcopal church in Van Nuys, California in 1960. By the time the Exorcist released, ideas like discerning the spirits and spiritual warfare were pretty common, and Christian leaders like Don Basham and Derek Prince had been practicing demonic deliverance of Christians for a while. So the idea began to take hold of a more popular imagination. It moved even more in the mainstream in 1986, with the release of Frank Peretti's novel, This Present Darkness.

20 MIN

**Daniel Silliman:** The spiritual warfare in This Present Darkness, which is partly based on Pentecostal ideas and partly just Frank Peretti's imagining it... He is not trying to write a theology text, it's very much fiction and he's trying to illustrate some ideas and get people to imagine that prayer works in a certain kind of way by activating forces and suppressing other spiritual forces. But that really opens up a lot of people to the possibil-



ity of what if demons are real. The work that you do in a novel... The work you do reading a novel of just suspending disbelief, it turns out that that gets you pretty far into a lot of charismatic practices, too.

**Mike Cospers:** And that brings me back to this idea we opened up with, that we want to believe in something, especially when someone shows up in our lives with assurances that they can heal our pain and help us live more at peace and at ease with ourselves. So inside Mars Hill, where Driscoll regularly talks about hearing from God and emphasized the spiritual authority of the pastors, there's a tremendous amount of trust extended from the congregation to Mark.

**Jen Smidt:** I believed that he had a power to see and heal something in me that I didn't, and I felt desperate for it.

**Mike Cospers:** As we talked to people about their experiences at Mars Hill, there were folks whose impression was that demon trials were the sort of thing that happened all the time, and there were others who'd never heard of it. That's because some of the pastors really embraced it and practiced it fairly regularly, and others didn't. In fact, some were opposed to it and raised significant concerns. It also seems like it was something that had a stronger emphasis in certain seasons.

In 2008, for instance, a year after Jen's experience, Driscoll led a workshop on spiritual warfare for church leaders who were involved in community groups and care ministries, and much of that workshop focused on charismatic experiences, discerning the demonic and the practice of demon trials. Driscoll spent much of that workshop describing his own experiences with it.

**Mark Driscoll:** I don't use deliverance ministry language. I'm not big on parading this before people. This has been a quiet part of my ministry for a lot of years. People hearing voices, no longer hearing voices; people tormented, no longer being tormented; people with demonic manifestations, no longer experiencing that kind of thing. I've even seen people physically healed in my office, and I praise God because so much of it was demonic and satanic that was harming them.

**Mike Cospers:** The workshop provides a lot of insight into the theology and the philosophy of ministry that governed the church's perspective on spiritual warfare, and in many ways that teaching's very much in line with mainstream evangelical perspectives on spiritual warfare. But there are some emphases that are pretty unique and uniquely reflective of Driscoll's broader philosophy, including his take on gender.

So for instance, much of the workshop is driven by stories and examples from his own ministry, and while there are examples of men who follow under demonic oppression, most of the stories he shares are about women and Driscoll makes clear why that's the case.

**Mark Driscoll:** Most of my demonic counseling work has been with women. Can't explain that. Paul says that women are the weaker vessel, maybe that's the case. It says that women are more easily deceived. I know that most feminists don't like those verses.

If they're true, that would mean that those women who don't like them are deceived, which is kind of funny. And within that, I find that it's interesting to me, just an observation that Satan didn't even show up and attack Adam until he was married.

**Mike Cospers:** We're gonna come back to some of these passages he's dealing with in a little bit, but for now I want to notice the whole statement. He makes this generalization about his experience, that he deals with more women than men and says, I can't explain it. But then he immediately uses two scripture passages to justify the generalization, followed by a joke, followed by another sort of quasi scripture reference. This last one lands somewhere between a hacky wife joke and a spin on a scripture narrative that presents Eve as a burden who made Adam weak.

Again, this workshop was in 2008 and in the summer, so it comes on the heels of some of the most intense conflict and turmoil in the church's history. Paul Petry and Bent Myer had been fired that previous fall, and the church had rewritten its bylaws and required everyone to renew their membership. In the process, about a thousand people had left. It's hard to ignore that context when hearing Mark address First Timothy 5:11-15, a passage where Paul gives instructions to Timothy on how to pastor young widows.

**Mark Driscoll:** This one is amazing. Ladies, this one is especially for you. Some of you say, Oh, it's not me. Yeah, it is. They like to talk about people: How are you doing, what are you doing? And this isn't sisterly accountability. This is, I need to know what everybody's doing because I just like to know what everybody's doing, and then I could tell other people what other people are doing, and I could say, Hey, you need to pray for so and so. And I can make it sound spiritual, so that when I'm gossiping and busybodying, I'm doing so in a way that seems really Jesus-like.

25 MIN

**Mike Cospers:** When Driscoll addresses the satanic activity of men, the issues are pretty black and white. Sexual abuse of children, pornography, debauchery, adultery. Stuff that's pretty hard to argue with. But here, with an issue like gossip, which is surely a problem and can be divisive, there's no call for discernment, no framework for how the community might process grief or conflict after the year they've had together. It's treated as black and white as the other sins. The same goes for the desire to befriend Grace. Later in the talk, he begins to deal with issues of oppression, and these too have some serious implications.

**Mark Driscoll:** I had one woman, wonderful gal, sweet gal. She was convinced of the lie that her husband was committing adultery on her. So every time he would go to work, she literally had a panic attack and would go into the closet and shut the door and be there for hours having a literal, full-blown, nervous breakdown, panic attack. Her husband's a great guy, loves Jesus, loves her. It was a total lie, but something in her believed that lie. I think for her, that just struck at the core of her security and identity, and Satan got her to believe that lie, and it absolutely undid her. She went to counseling, she was diagnosed bipolar, paranoid schizophrenic, multiple personality disorders. I believe that such things are true, but sometimes they're junk drawer diagnoses for people that are experiencing real spiritual problems. They put her on all kinds of medications. She still had panic attacks, still freaking out, still in the closet. And I just told her, I said, sweetheart, it's a lie, it's a lie. Her husband's sitting right there. I said, Okay, God's honest truth, have you ever committed

adultery on your wife? No. When you leave the house, are you going to commit adultery? No, I'm going to work. Have you ever touched another woman, are you looking at porn, are you doing anything? He's like, I'm not doing anything, I go to work and I come home, that's what I'm doing. I love her, you know, I'm delighted to be with her, she's the best. I looked at her, I said, Okay, here's what faith looks like for. Believe the truth. Don't believe the lie. If you believe the lie, you're gonna ruin everything. If you believe the truth, you'll be okay. And you know what? By God's grace, she repented of her feeding the lie. She needed to see that believing a lie was a sin. It was a sin to be repented of. Here's the truth, here's the lie, I chose the lie, that's a sin; I need to repent, and I need to believe the truth.

**Mike Cosper:** In a lot of fiction, there's a trope known as the hysterical woman. The idea is that women are so emotional, their reactions can't be trusted, and they need men to help govern their emotions, settle them down and see that they're out of control. This story seems to lean into it, both in a certain kind of paternalism, like Driscoll calling her sweetheart, and in the way it seems to take the husband's word at face value, not taking her fears seriously. That may not have been the case practically, but the storytelling matters. It shapes the culture and presents patterns to follow.

Then there's the issue of psychiatric diagnosis. This is something I've spent quite a bit of time exploring with Mars Hill because there's a lot of mixed testimony as to what the church's philosophy was regarding counseling. I've heard a lot of stories of pastors telling members not to get counseling outside the church. I've also heard from members who were encouraged to get that kind of care. It turns out that the leaders of the counseling and care ministries had referral lists that they encouraged others in the ministry to use, and they used them as well. But in a church as big as Mars Hill, different factions can emerge over time, so depending on who you met with and asked for care, you might get referred to a clinical psychologist, or you might be told, as in this story, that the core issue was actually that you were believing a lie and that you needed to repent. In some cases as well, you might meet with a pastor who actually tells you to stop taking your medicine.

I think we underestimate how powerful storytelling is in a context like this and why it matters so much. We wanna believe in things like spiritual power and spiritual transformation, and it's true that miracles happen. There's something seductive in a story that invites us to imagine how we might be able to help liberate someone suffering by simply calling them to repent of the sin of believing a lie.

So even if the church had position papers to the contrary, and even if you'd pressed Driscoll and he'd said something to the contrary, which I think he would have, this story captures the heart and imagination and has a different, more compelling power for guiding behavior. For pastors, the seduction goes the other way, too. Being able to talk about how you helped liberate someone from suffering is satisfying in ways that can also be pretty dangerous.

The final question to ask is about the conclusion of the story. The idea that the wife's experience was the result of the sin of believing a lie. For me, it blurs the line between sin and suffering in ways that set those up who are suffering, for significant harm.

Even though this lecture took place a year after Jen's story, these ideas and similar

stories had been in the water for a long time. And many in the church had a sense that Driscoll had a unique set of spiritual gifts. When Driscoll talked to Jen about her demon trial, he said as much himself.

**Jen Smidt:** Yeah, there's all this stuff, Jen, and I can make it go away. I can feel it.

**Mike Cospers:** There's a pretty formal process to these demon trials and they start with an inventory that you fill out before you come.

**Mark Driscoll:** I'll give them a spiritual inventory. I send them home and I tell them this: Satan is a liar, John 4, and we want to be free of those. And the result is we need to speak the truth, walk in the light, and be honest. So I tell them, Look, tell me everything, don't lie, don't miss anything. Sometimes people will say, Well, do I have to put everything? It's like, Yeah, and whatever you don't want to tell me, that's probably the first thing I need to know. If it's so dark that you can't tell anybody, Well, that's probably the big issue that we have to deal with to get you some help.

**Mike Cospers:** The actual process is pretty systematic too. At the lectures in '08, he handed out point-by-point guidelines for how to carry one out, including scripts for specific phrases to use when rebuking the demon. And when you compare it to other demonic deliverance literature, like the work of Don Basham and Derek Prince, it's all pretty much the same thing. For Driscoll though, when he uses the word trial, he means it literally.

**Mark Driscoll:** This is important, when you're dealing with someone, there are two ways of dealing with someone who has demonic issues. One is to speak directly to the demon. If you do, the demon takes over the person, this is where their eyes roll back in their head, this is where their voice changes, this is where they demonstrate supernatural strength. This is where things go nuts. Don't ever do that. People need to be self-controlled and alert. You don't allow a demon to take over a person. You don't speak directly to a demon. I'll explain that a little more fully as we go. There's two ways to do that kind of demonic investigation and spiritual warfare trial. In any good trial, you need ground rules, a bailiff to enforce them, bring in the person, get the truth, sentence them, condemn them. That's all we're talking about. It's a trial, it's a trial. And the worst thing you can do is to let a demon take over a person. I've seen it on a few occasions. I've seen people try and kill themselves, or sitting in my office, just talking, voice changes, appearance changes, bodily posture changes. I've seen little tiny women demonstrate full man, masculine voices, superhuman strength. I've seen things levitate in my office, crazy stuff.

You don't want that.

**Jen Smidt:** He kind of laid the ground rules, said it's still gonna be you talking, and I'm gonna do my best to get to a point where I can actually speak to the demon that may be afflicting you.

**Mike Cospers:** This may seem obvious, but I think it's worth emphasizing. All of this is extra biblical: The specific rules, the do's and don'ts, who speaks, who doesn't. Even much of the imagery described as more faithful to the Exorcist than the Bible. But that's common of most deliverance literature. Patterns, processes, rules, and rights.

One aspect of it is the need to name the demon, which gets tied in with biblical ideas of authority from Genesis 2 and Jesus' ministry. So there's this emphasis on needing to know the name in order to be able to cast it away.

This was part of Driscoll's framework as well. The person who's come in because they're wanting deliverance or who the pastor thinks needs it, has to be able to hear that name and pass it along to the pastor. When Driscoll asked Jen the name, she didn't know what to say.

**Jen Smidt:** I remember myself saying, Legion. Like whatever, that's from the Bible. I feel skeptical and contemptuous and even ashamed about the story a bit now, but it's part of the journey.

**Mike Cospers:** At one point, he talks about how there will often be visions during these events, and he describes his own experiences of this. This is one of the more dramatic things in the lecture, because he doesn't describe what's often called a word of knowledge, an idea among charismatics in which the Holy Spirit reveals something to you supernaturally, but a vision, like it's being projected on a television. And visions he sees are pornographic. This next section's a bit disturbing.

**Mark Driscoll:** There was one woman I dealt with. She'd never told her husband that she had committed adultery on him early in the relationship. She's sitting there with her husband, I said, I think the root of all this, I think Satan has a foothold in your life because you've never told your husband about that really tall, blonde guy that you met at the bar, and then you went back to the hotel and you laid on your back and you undressed yourself and he climbed on top of you, and you had sex with him and snuggled up with him for a while, and deep down in your heart, even though you had just met him, you desired him because secretly he is the fantasy body type. I said, you remember that place, it was that cheap hotel with that certain-colored bedspread. You had sex with a light on because you weren't ashamed and you wanted him to see you and you wanted to see him. She's just looking at me like... I said, You know, it was about 10 years ago. I see everything. She looks at her husband. He says, Is that true? She says, Yeah, he was 6'2", blonde hair, blue...? Yeah.

Some of you, when you're counseling, you will see things. You will literally, gift of discernment, see things. I can't even explain it. It doesn't happen all the time.

**Mike Cospers:** He describes similar visions that are even more disturbing. Scenes of childhood sexual abuse. And in his telling, it doesn't just happen in demon trials.

**Mark Driscoll:** I see things too. I've seen women raped, I've seen children molested, I've seen people abused, I've seen people beaten. I've seen horrible things done, horrible things done. I've seen children dedicated in occultic groups. and demons come upon them as an infant by invitation. And I wasn't present for any of it, but I've seen it visibly. Upon occasion, when I get up to preach, I'll see - just like a screen in front of me - I'll see somebody get raped or abused, and then I'll track 'em down and say, Look, I had this vision, let me tell you about it. All true.

**Mike Cosper:** Let's make it clear. This is a claim that the Holy Spirit is inspiring pornographic visions of adultery and the sexual abuse of children. Not just a word of knowledge, something fairly familiar in charismatic streams, but in his own words, television-like visions. He sees it.

Every pastor makes a claim of authority when they open the Bible to teach, and the Bible itself endorses authority, calls it good, asks the church to honor and submit to pastors. The Bible also provides a context for the supernatural and the resurrection, the miracles of the apostles, the spiritual gifts as outlined in the New Testament. Jesus' own ministry includes 55 encounters with demons, knowledge of people's secrets, profound authority. Church history is full of Christians healing, getting visions from God, and doing battle with Satan and his demons. You see it in the desert fathers, you see it in Martin Luther, and in churches across the world today.

The question though is where's the line between the hand of God and the charisma of a gifted leader. How do we know when our instinct for astonishment is being manipulated, or to think about the Cottingley fairies for a moment, how do we know the difference from spirits that are just beyond our sight, and paper dolls?

In the end, what's the limiting principle? When do we accept the claims of someone speaking on God's behalf, and when do we draw the line? We'll be right back.



**Sam Storms:** I am today a charismatic, not because of any experiences I've had. I'm a charismatic because I think that's what scripture teaches.

**Mike Cosper:** This is Sam Storms. Sam is the pastor of Bridgeway Church in Oklahoma City, and he's a biblical scholar who's written a number of books on the charismatic gifts and spiritual warfare, amongst others. I wanted to talk to Sam because as we examine the role that spiritual warfare in particular played at Mars Hill, he's in a unique place to speak to it, and that's in no small part because of his biography. He began pastoring in Dallas in 1973, and then pastored to church in Ardmore, Oklahoma, starting in 1985.

**Sam Storms:** In 1993, I went to Kansas City largely through the influence of Jack Deere. He connected me with Mike Bickle. This was the home of the so-called Kansas City Prophets, although most of them had left by then. And I was Mike's associate and the president of our Bible school for seven years.

**Mike Cosper:** Mike Bickle is probably best known as the leader of the International House of Prayer. But in the eighties, he planted and pastored a church called Kansas City Fellowship. In 1990, after building a relationship with John Wimber, who you'll remember from an earlier episode:



**John Wimber:** And we're gonna invite him to come and minister now. Come, Holy Spirit, and whamo, the Spirit of God comes!

**Mike Cosper:** The church joined the Vineyard Movement and changed its name to Metro Vineyard Christian Fellowship. It was around that time that there was a significant outpouring of charismatic practice with a variety of leaders involved, including Bob Jones,

Paul Cain, John Paul Jackson and others. The name, the Kansas City Prophets, wasn't something Bickle or the others necessarily claimed for themselves, but they gained a reputation as a hub for charismatic activity and attracted people from far and wide, including detractors, and some of those leaders aren't without controversy. Even though they were mostly gone when Sam got there, it was still a place with a lot going on.

Bickle left in 1999 to start the International House of Prayer, and Sam left in 2000 to join the theology faculty at Wheaton College. But during those years in Kansas City, he saw a lot.

**Sam Storms:** The first month we were hosting a conference, and I was kind of in charge of it, and someone came to me and said, Sam, there's a lady behind the sound booth doing incantations and chanting, and I think she's worshiping the devil. I said, Well okay, let me come take a look. I went over there. They were correct. She had created some sort of little altar and she was doing all sorts of incantations, strange gyrations. And so I said, all right, I'll keep an eye on her.

About five minutes later, she comes walking toward me, and I don't know how else to explain it. For people who've never experienced this, it sounds really weird because it is really weird. But all I know to do is to give an honest account of it.

I felt this wave of dark energy that just engulfed me. And somebody who was there who was feeling the same thing, had the wherewithal to grab me by the arm, pulled me aside. As I moved farther away from this lady, it began to lift and I kinda regained my senses. I had never experienced anything like that before in my life.

Three days later, it's our prayer meeting, our weekly Monday morning prayer meeting. My wife was the receptionist at the church. I'm in the prayer room with about 30 or 40 other people. And this lady walks in, and the most horrific stench you can possibly imagine. It wasn't body odor, trust me. People say, do demons smell, Yeah, trust me, they do when they want to. And my wife was just sickened. And she rushed into the prayer room. This lady was following her. The whole prayer meeting just froze because everybody was overcome by this horrid odor. We were able to escort this woman upstairs, several of us gathered around her. Somehow we were able to tolerate the smell, and we prayed for her, shared the gospel with her. She came to faith in Christ. This woman actually became very active in the church in the years subsequent to that.

**Mike Cospes:** Encounters like this are shared not only within charismatic circles in the US, but even more amongst missionaries. And while there's no shortage of deliverance ministries involving intense effort and shouting, stories like this one abound too. And as Sam sees it, that's really the biblical norm.

**Sam Storms:** It's amazing. When you look at how Jesus did it, it says he cast out demons with a word. No incantations, no holy water sprinkled on folk, no prancing around, no shouting. Demons aren't hard of hearing. He casts them out with a word, and He's given us that authority. We have to start there.

**Mike Cospes:** There's another aspect of Sam's biography that makes him a helpful voice

to think about the Mars Hill story. And that's because in 2008, when he planted Bridge-way Church, he planted with Acts 29 and he chose Acts 29 in part because he shared so much of Driscoll's theological vision.

**Sam Storms:** What drew me to Mark in my first encounter with him was his commit-ment to both reformed theology and the centrality of scripture, as well as his commit-ment to the operation of the charismatic and miraculous gifts of the Spirit. And he was one of the few people at that time who was doing it, and that was very much a standard characteristic feature of most Acts 29 churches at that time.

**Mike Cospers:** This matters, I think, because I want to examine in particular Driscoll's comments about women and spiritual warfare, and it would be easy to find people who fundamentally disagree with him about gender, to critique these comments. But it's worth noting that they're an aberration within his own theological framework as well. So I asked Sam to speak to this idea that women were more susceptible to demonic oppression than men, because Eve was deceived and because women are referred to as the weaker vessel.

**Sam Storms:** The idea or the suggestion that women are more susceptible to demonic influence than men, I find ridiculous. I find it offensive. I certainly think it's unbiblical. In my ministry, if there were even a small smattering of truth to that - and again, under-stand, I'm speaking as a complementarian when I say this - if there is a measure of truth in that, and I'm not sure that there is, it may well be because of the oppressive bullying and domineering of women by their husbands and by church leaders.

45 MIN

Now again, I'm speaking as a complementarian. I do believe in male elders and male headship in the home, but the male headship that I read about in scripture is loving and leading and serving and sacrificing the way Christ has done for us. And oftentimes women are subjected to brutality both verbally and physically and emotionally. They are domineered in ways that quenches the Spirit in their lives, that suppresses their gifting, that makes them fearful of making good use of the gifts and the opportunities God has given them. So I think that... I'm not saying that is a pervasive mentality in churches, and certainly complementarians are by no means the only ones guilty of this. Egalitarians can be just as bad. I'm simply pointing out the fact that if women do experience certain emotional struggles, and perhaps open themselves up to a demonic influence in an inordinate way, it's not because they're women. It's oftentimes because of the way that they have been treated or mistreated, I should say, both in the home and in the church.

So in my experience in my ministry, I've never tried to count, I've never been able to say the proportion is this or that. I think men are just as susceptible to demonic influence as women are. Sometimes it manifests itself in different ways. If you stop and think about the number, the percentage of men who are addicted to pornography, is there a de-monic element in that? You bet there is.

**Mike Cospers:** Sam also draws a contrast to the dismissive paternalism we heard earlier.


**Sam Storms:** I think it is essential that Christian men, both complementarian and egal-itarian or somewhere in between, truly take to heart First Peter 3:7, where Peter says,



Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way. Literally, live with your wives according to knowledge. And I don't think he's talking primarily about the knowledge of God, although that's certainly important. I think he's talking about the knowledge of your wife, understanding who she is as a person, as an image bearer. And then Peter says, Show honor to the woman as the weaker vessel. Weaker not intellectually, mentally, emotionally. Weaker, I think, physically, weaker perhaps sociologically. She's exposed and more vulnerable in the world in which we live. So here he's telling us, Honor your wives. It's the dishonoring of wives and of women in general that I think has contributed so much to the struggles that they encounter. All of us as men need to take seriously because Peter says, If you don't, your prayers won't be heard. It's amazing when God says, Don't talk to me, honor your wife, apologize to your wife, forgive her and ask her to forgive you for the things that have passed between you, and live with her with a knowledge and an understanding of what makes her tick as an image bearer. And if you don't, that's a stunning statement. He says, Otherwise your prayers will be hindered.

**Mike Cospers:** Christians come at stories like this - demonic oppression, charismatic gifts, the experience of the supernatural - from all kinds of angles. But regardless of your perspective, it's hard to look at the specific dynamics inside Mars Hill, and not see them as an expression of pride and power. Driscoll's lectures on this are essentially one story after another in which he's the hero. He has the insight to know what's happening in people's heart. He's protecting women from abusive men. He can see the secrets people would rather leave in the past. He can draw out demons and cast them away. In a way, it's not unlike another expression of pride heard regularly in the earlier years at Mars Hill. But it's one thing for a guy to talk boldly about how many books he reads, and maybe he did. But in the case of the demon trials, the stakes are so much higher and the claims of authority are so much more significant because the people who come to you are struggling and suffering.

Here's Jesse Bryan, who was Mars Hill's creative director for almost a decade.

 @jessebryan

**Jesse Bryan:** You go, What did I do that was so messed up, at five, to piss off God so much He'd let demons destroy me. What did that person with chronic pain do that was so messed up to God, that God's just opened the floodgates and handed him over to the devil? And the good thing is that you have a magical person that stands between you and God, named Mark Driscoll. And this magical person can come in and just like one of the prophets in the New Testament or the Old Testament, he can deal with demons in a way that you can't. Think about it from this... Think about the pyramid that was built: Children, women, husbands, pastors, Mark, God. So there's always a person between you and God, which means I am dependent on that person to talk to God for me, to be the - I don't know - my own personal Merlin. Because certainly God won't listen to me, but he's gonna have to listen to Mark, right?

**Mike Cospers:** This, I think, is at the heart of this story and this challenge for all of us. We live in this secular age where in contrast to the past, belief is contested in a variety of ways. So where 400 or 500 years ago, it was almost unimaginable to not believe in some kind of God or transcendent reality. Those beliefs are more difficult today. We're given a thousand reasons to be suspicious of our own faith. So when someone shows up in our lives with the kind of certainty that Mark had, ready to tell you that he's heard from God,

that he has spiritual insight, that he can heal you, the part of us that wants to believe can be moved in profound ways. We may not think it consciously, but unconsciously there's something in us that says I don't have what it takes for this, but they do, so I'm willing to throw my hat in with them.

**Daniel Silliman:** So I always think of William Seymour as an example of how Pentecostals are sometimes really aware of this power and really cautious about this power that charismatic gifts have. When the Azusa revival broke out, Seymour is at the head, he's the guy leading this weird meeting in Los Angeles.

**Mike Cospers:** The Azusa revival is largely considered the birthplace of modern Pentecostalism.

**Daniel Silliman:** And people attack him in particular. The Los Angeles times famously says, It's this on-eyed, giant black man who's clearly not a serious religious leader. But other white holiness people also condemn him and just say, We can't take him seriously. But he himself is so concerned that this move of God will be identified with him, that as people are starting to pray in tongues and crazy stuff is happening all over the place, he develops the practice of going into the corner and putting a shoebox over his head. So he spends large chunks of the revival where he literally can't see the revival. And it strikes me that this is the opposite of the statement where someone says, Yeah, our leader is a terrible person, but we see the fruit, so we gotta keep with him. The fear that Seymour has, and the fear that you sometimes see in pentecostal leaders, is how horrible would it be if the work of God got identified with just me, if people thought it was me doing a magic trick or my personality producing this loosening on people's hearts and minds.

**Mike Cospers:** Jen Smidt described her own demon trial in a way that was almost in direct contrast to this. She felt like she had to perform the role, like naming the demon and following all of the directions, even though it felt forced and inauthentic, because that was the expectation that came from Driscoll. But church history is often a story about God showing up in spite of the failure and corruption of the church. And there was a moment in that experience for Jen that had a significant impact. It happened when Driscoll was asking her to relay what she was hearing from the demon.

**Jen Smidt:** I heard myself say, She's not ours. And whether or not - I look back at that now, and I'm like, Okay, I spoke about myself in the third person, that's silly, whatever. The power of that statement and realizing that all of what I had been through, what I'd done, what had been done to me, did not make me this dirty, tainted, unable to be loved or belonged to God, woman. It made like I belonged to Jesus. So that proved incredibly powerful for me and freeing and healing. I would describe it very differently... And I wouldn't even describe as then, like, I had a demon and Mark took it away. But that's probably how he would've described it. But I did leave feeling relieved, lighter, amazed, thankful.

**Mike Cospers:** These mixed emotions are actually a pretty common part of the experience.

**Daniel Silliman:** People talk about those experiences pretty regularly, just like it is simul-

taneously manipulative and controlling and a life-transformative event. It is delivering. People feel empowered to change. Like, people feel empowered to throw stuff off in their lives. Whether you think that's spiritual or not, there is these moments where you say, Okay, I'm done with that, I'm free with that. I'm not that person anymore.

**Jen Smidt:** All of our growth and change - and even to use a church word, sanctification, if you will - is non-linear and messy and complex at best. But that was a moment of change for me and I'm thankful for it. And intertwined in with that are some grotesque abuses of power and manipulation in ways that taint that story even for me a little bit.

**Mike Cosper:** Part of what's grotesque about the story came afterward. It started with a letter she received from Mark. A thoughtful, heartfelt pastoral letter about her story and about the power of grace in her life. Then about a year later, without having asked or even told her, she found out that he'd included it as a chapter in a book.

Mars Hill's well known for its embrace of military language and themes. In fact, these lectures where Mark taught on spiritual warfare, were described as part of the ground war of the church in contrast to the air war on Sundays and online. But they're hardly alone in that. Do a quick search and you'll find churches holding men's events with rented armored personnel carriers and wild hyper-masculine names. And for sure, there are war-like themes in the Bible, and the language of spiritual warfare isn't out of place in the Christian life. But as Sam Storms points out, the way the war is won is pretty subversive and runs against the chest thumping, guns blazing imagery that's all too common in American evangelicalism.

**Sam Storms:** Perhaps the most important passage, I think, that all Christians need to be reminded of is in Revelation 12, where it says that the accuser of the brethren has been thrown down who accuses them night and day before God. So he's talking about Satan. Satan's authority has been broken through the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. And then it says this amazing thing: And they conquered him. And of course we think, Wait a minute, how could they conquer, they died, they lost their lives. How can that be victory? And he says, No, in their death, they conquered him, and the way they did it, by the blood of the Lamb, which I think is kind of a short handed way of saying the gospel, the truth of life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and by the word of their testimony, and they didn't love their lives even unto death. So how did they conquer the enemy? They didn't yell at him, they didn't pick up stones and throw them in the direction of what they think might be a demonic manifestation. They maintained their confidence in the gospel, they proclaimed the truth of the salvation that Christ had brought to them, that's the word of their testimony. And they said, Look, if you're gonna take my life, if I don't recant my faith, you can have my life, I don't love it that much, I love the gospel and Jesus more. And that is how they conquered the enemy. That might not sell, that might not fill conferences, that might not get people to listen to your podcast. It's not as sensational. It doesn't feel necessarily supernatural. But that is the strategy that is given to us by John in this passage, and I think elsewhere in the New Testament. It's the same strategy that Jesus gave us, and I think that's what Christians need to come to grips with. So that passage, I think, is so critical and so important for us to understand and implement in our lives.

**Mike Cospers:** A few years ago, a friend of mine captured this audio in Sitka, Alaska. It's from a monastery where throughout the day, the monks gather to pray the hours, and are often joined by members of the community. Their lives are a day in, day out rhythm of work and prayer, full of the normal human drama that we all have, along with their vows. I think of it when visiting this story, because it's such a contrast. It's a life designed in many ways to eliminate hype and spectacle. Because while these chants are beautiful, they're simply a routine. The heart of the community is the rhythm. The desire to place your life before God at a steady pace, to trust He's doing work over that long, slow obedience.

I don't think we should all become monastics, but I think that along with the imagery of Revelation 12, the imagery of the monastery, and the rhythms of the hours, the commitment to a way of life is a provocative contrast to the hype, entertainment, and expressions of power that drive much of evangelical life.

Jesus warned about demanding signs. That didn't stop him from doing them, but it did challenge us to find satisfaction in something else. Because when you want to believe, there are people who want you to believe in them, whether they're hunting for demons or selling paper fairies.

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60 MIN

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