



BONUS EPISODE

A Conversation with Dan Allender

Mike Cospers talks with Dan Allender about his early interactions with Mark Driscoll and the very different paths of ministry they chose to pursue in the city of Seattle.

SHOW NOTES

When author and therapist Dan Allender met Mark Driscoll in 1998, he hoped the two might share building space for their respective ministries. While conversations remained cordial, it didn't take long for Allender to realize he and Mark aimed to build entirely different institutions -- Allender, a school for healing and trauma care, and Mark, a faith community with the aspirations of Babel. Narcissism would keep the two from building on a common foundation.

Thirty years later, Allender joins host Mike Cospers for an honest conversation about where that narcissism led and how Mars Hill Church and the city of Seattle suffered under its dogmatism. With incisive yet gentle wisdom, Allender opens the aperture beyond Mars Hill to discuss how trauma creates wounds on which narcissism thrives, how the numbness of anger can lead to isolation, and how the very real joy of spiritual connection can leave hurting people confused and ashamed after the structures they've trusted crumble.

If you've experienced spiritual abuse or you desire deeper honesty and humility in ministry, this bonus episode offers a foundational conversation about how to face trauma, how to identify unhealthy leadership patterns, and how to resist the siren call of sin that lures Christians to greatness without cost.

For more information about Dan Allender's work, visit theallendercenter.org

MASTHEAD

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

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Dan Allender: We arrived in Seattle, June of 1998.

🐦 @MikeCosper

Mike Cosper: This is Dan Allender. Dr. Allender is a widely known and respected Christian therapist with expertise in issues like trauma and abuse. He's also the author and co-author of a number of books on healing, marriage, intimacy, spiritual formation, and leadership.

🐦 @danallender

Dan Allender: A number of us left a school in Colorado and had the opportunity to start Western Seminary in Seattle. And that beginning point was a great privilege, but also an entry into a world that we were much unfamiliar with.

Mike Cosper: As you might have already guessed, being in Seattle meant being in proximity to Mars Hill Church. The school he started was actually called Mars Hill Graduate School, a name that led to no small amount of confusion over the years, given the different values of their organizations. They eventually changed their name in 2011. So their paths intersected quite a few times, starting when he first came to the city, and off and on in the years that followed. Perhaps the most notable intersection though was in late 2013, when plagiarism was exposed in Driscoll's books. In several instances, the author he plagiarized was Dan Allender.

From Christianity Today, you are listening to a bonus episode of the Rise and Fall of Mars Hill. I'm Mike Cosper, and today I'm talking to Dr. Dan Allender about both his personal story and connection to Mars Hill, and the broader story of abusive and narcissistic leadership. Its origins and incentives, and what happens when you've found out that you've been plagiarized.

Dan Allender: We had listened to the Mars Hill podcast, had some familiarity with Mark's radio work, and we met pretty soon after we arrived, probably in the fall of 1998. There was a beginning discussion, because we were Mars Hill Graduate School and he was just beginning to develop Mars Hill Church, that there might be some overlap, both of vision, but also the practicality of space. And so we early on met a few times to see if we could utilize space during the week that then would be available because we would not be using it on that Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday period. And that opened up a beginning conversation of who is Mark Driscoll and what does he represent, and who were those players in the early Mars Hill Graduate School.

Mike Cosper: Yeah. What was your impression of him at the time? He became this larger than life character in a lot of ways later. And you mentioned the radio show, that's one of the things we really didn't cover in the podcast, but I'm assuming you're talking about the show he did with Lief. Did he have that kind of bravado, sitting across the table from him in '98?

Dan Allender: Oh, most definitely. And in fact, the very first word, when I said, Mark, I don't know you, you don't know me, how would you describe yourself, and his first word was pugilistic. And by both the means and the force in which he said it, it was clear that he saw himself as a brawler, as somebody who essentially was a bar fighter. And that's a bit of my own background - not pugilism but bar fighting, I guess they somewhat overlap. So there was a certain degree of sync with regard to both of us having moderately to

significantly broken backgrounds, coming into faith outside of what could be called the conservative church. So there was at least initially intrigue and openness. But let's just say within a fairly short period of time, it became clear that the vision, the purpose, and far more the sense of how we operate as human beings in the world, that joining space was not going to be a good choice.

Mike Cospers: Yeah. It's remarkable to me. One of the aspects of it that made it such a powerful phenomenon, especially in that first decade, was that there was a real richness of community and friendship. I'm sure this is something you've thought a lot about, is how does Christian community form. It's such a critical piece of spiritual transformation, emotional health, all the rest of it. How do you think about the idea that there is this pugilistic, dogmatic... The rallying point is this personality that doesn't even seem to really like - certainly doesn't trust relationships as things go along - and yet the community is the thing more than anything else that people were citing to say, this is why we're here.

Dan Allender: Communities are built on common values, which is another way of saying core commitments, in terms of scripture, in terms of understanding death, resurrection, ascension, core doctrine. So I think there was such a... This is a vital believing world, now, there are reasons to be together, and that sense of service of, we are transforming this dark, godless community and individual lives. So between those two realms of solid perceptive doctrine, then deep, deep, deep sense of purpose, you had another factor that often is not there even in current realms of evangelicalism, and that's a level of honesty. And Mark was honest about being pugilistic. He was honest about, in some ways, being a bully. And in that level of ownership of his own humanity, I think he drew at least initially a lot of people who were like, Finally, someone is telling the truth about how messed up we were and how still the reality of our own brokenness may be showing itself.

Now, I would say, though, I'm not a student of Mark Driscoll, I would say that changed by about 2002 to 2004. And there was a shifting into a level of his power, and the place within America, let alone Seattle, began to grow in such proportion that that same level of humility, at least at some level, was not the primary draw.

Now, though we had a number of discussions over what I would call from '98 to probably around 2006 - again, not frequent by any means, a handful of discussions - but with me at least, he was quite honest about his struggles with his father, with his relationship in his family. And in some ways the intensity of his pugilism made a whole lot of sense, given the nature of some of the trauma that he would own to some degree.

So when you look at trauma as a lens, you're looking at three factors, almost inevitably, some degree of fragmentation. Because the nature of trauma shuts down our left hemisphere particularly, our left frontal lobe, in the moment, but also in some sense, long term. So what you have when you've got significant past trauma is a history of fragmentation, which really bright, gifted people overcome by, in some sense, accentuating something of the left hemisphere. And he was well-read, brilliant, having not been to seminary. I was and graduated from a fine seminary. He was better read on many levels than I was.

So we had some really fascinating, good discussions about the reformed faith, where we agreed, differed, etcetera. Again, these are the early years. And in that conversation,

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I had great respect for his level of education. But what I would go back to is so often what seems to happen with fragmentation is that it gets covered over by a form of dogmatism. The more certain you become, the less fragmented you feel. And that lack of capacity, because the very nature of reflection on any matter where there are different views means that you're in the middle of some level of fragmentation. And in that, when it triggers a person historically from their own past trauma, you can see why so often, particularly communities that invite very traumatized people, and Mark's community, Mars Hill Church, offered highly traumatized people a place where they could be at rest. And oftentimes, when you're engaging diversity of opinion, you've got to be willing to enter into ambiguity, ambivalence. In other words, a lot of the very same biological structure that's there with regard to fragmentation.

So when you add then the reality that virtually all trauma opens the door to some degree of numbness, and that sense of, I'm shutting something inside of me down because I cannot bear all that I feel from my past abuse or from this auto accident, or any level of different kinds of trauma.

But what often happens in an environment like what Mark created is anger becomes the way of having emotion that's actually not numb yet keeps almost all other emotions somewhat on the side or at least numb. So what you've got is an incredibly traumatized man, Mark Driscoll, offering a highly traumatized population, a resolve of the fragmentation, and in some sense, resolve of numbness through an accusatory, almost punitive structure of us versus them, diminishment, degradation, power misuse, and yet, oh my gosh, that level of rage, anger, contempt toward others sort of resolves - while giving you still a sense of passion - but resolves the unaddressed heartache you don't want to deal with.

The last category in all trauma is isolation. So you've got fragmentation, got numbing, and then isolation. That sense of, I'm aware something in me is not well. And oftentimes, particularly with trauma, there is a sense of shame, and that, something's wrong with me or these things wouldn't have happened. Something's wrong with me given what I felt in the middle of whatever the traumatization is. And so often we isolate, and in some ways, Mark was an incredibly isolated human being, outside of the power struggles. Very few people knew him, very few people engaged him. And because of both his power and brilliance and pugilistic threat, nobody wanted to mess with him. And I think that kind of isolation almost always leads to consumption, consuming others. And that kind of, I'm for you as long as you serve me; the moment you threaten my work, I will destroy you. Those are the realities that I think so often don't get addressed, particularly for people who have been spiritually abused. That effect of both the dogmatism, the rage and the consumption that seems to always be bound together when there is that level of violation.

Mike Cospers: You talk about him being... The isolation. One of the things I've thought a lot about, I'm kind of fascinated with the work of Hannah Arendt, and one of the things she talks about is she says, Inside these totalitarian regimes - which is again, not a perfect metaphor - but inside these regimes, you have this phenomenon where you have the leader, and instead of it being a hierarchy, it's built more like the structure of an onion. Because there's this world that they create and there's these different layers, and the closer

you are to the middle, when you're looking in you see more of the reality, but when you're looking out, you feel the obligation to try and protect it, right? So the further you are from the middle, the more idealistic your understanding of the thing is. And she says the person living with the least touch with reality is actually the leader themselves. They're convinced that the world is exactly what they want it to be. And I've thought about that a lot with this sort of narcissistic leader, a leader like Mark. Because any time reality broke in and interrupted his ideal, the wrath was just crushing for people.

Because it seems to me it's one of those questions I've had for a long time, and I still wrestle with, is it seemed like it wasn't enough for Mark to win in a conflict, he needed to win and you needed to lose, you needed to lose everything. So staff members couldn't leave the staff and just be a member of the church or the community. No, they were shunned, they were isolated, they were cast out.

Dan Allender: Well, I am particularly fond of Hannah as well, because in some ways she and others prompted the discussion trying to address, how is it possible, a culture as sophisticated and elegant as the German world could evolve to this level of cruelty, of evil. And her most famous phrase, of course, is the banality of evil. That in so many ways, from Eichmann up and down, you had people who were just serving the state, who were doing just what they thought was the right thing, and yet violating every essential moral, even liberal, let alone what could be viewed as Christian category. And in that process, her discussion particularly prompted sort of this evolution of the category of the relationship between dogmatism and authoritarianism, and they're inevitably bound together.

So in some sense, when you use the word totalitarian, even though it's generally used for regimes of vast structural complexity, I think it's an actual good term for looking at smaller entities like a church or a school, or frankly, even a family. Yet with some level of, be a little bit cautious about overstatement.

But all totalitarian regimes run on two basic categories with a third. The first is fear: I will destroy you. But this will sound perhaps a little extraneous, but our deepest fear is actually not death, it's shame. So if you can combine fear and shame, and in some sense the fear of shame, you've got an understanding of, in some sense, not the carrot, but the stick. So the stick is primary. But in that, if you obey, in some sense, comply, give yourself over to, I will not go through what I saw this other staff member or other member go through, then the question is, loyalty has its advantages. And in that sense, there's a benefit to be at the table. There is good food, good drink, good laughter. There's life here in a way that you will not find it anywhere else. So in that sense, there was conviviality, warmth, commitment, delight, honor, love, among, but not addressing the power of fear and shame.

So when you've got the carrot stick there, you've got a pretty powerful system because you have seen when somebody questions, what happens. You move into the outer ring, essentially about the fourth or fifth ring of Dante's hell, and you don't want to take that risk. So you either leave totally - in a sense, abandon the movement - or you stay. And now, here's where the shame exists for so many of the folks I've worked with who have been involved in some degree of narcissistic, totalitarian, spiritually abusive systems, and

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that is complicity. Like I had some advantages, I had at least the knowledge of what's going on that's good and true and beautiful, at least for a season, and then the dark things, the violence, the degradation could always be looked at as no one's perfect. Mark's a mess, but look at all the good that is being done. And as you weigh it on the scales of justice, it's easy, especially with the fact that I enjoy the privilege of being part of this significant work of God and in relationships with really good, creative, powerful, thoughtful people. And yet the regime, totalitarian, will kill you the moment you step out.

So in that sense, as long as you're a - and it's a heartbreaking image here, and it's so potential to be misheard - but as long as you're a good Nazi, you will be given levels of privilege. Now, how are you going after the exposure of the regime, how are you gonna deal with the shame of your own complicity? And that's where the traumatization for many of the people that I've engaged with regard to Mars Hill, but even beyond that is what do I do with the fact I enjoyed that season and allowed my body to be fully part, even with the reservations and the justifications and the explanations that now look, so facile and so false and yet worked for a season to keep me there.

Mike Cosper: Yeah, I think maybe the single most traumatized person that I spoke to from Mars Hill basically ended our conversation by saying, I still look back on it as the greatest days of my life. There's just a depth of complexity there that I feel like I still haven't wrapped my head around entirely, even with my own experience of something similar.

Dan Allender: To be honest, this overlaps with, for me, the category of sexual abuse, in that the abuser grooms and Mark was a good groom. And it gave you access, involvement, meaning, power, but also care and intimacy. And in that season, there is a sense of bonding, which is what really faith is all about. The capacity to bond in a trusting relationship where we can internalize goodness.

So all that was so attractive and so life giving that when there were these fragmented dogmatic structures, the benefits that were there were immense, but eventually what often happens for the abuser is he works to remove a sense of your power. Your power is always under their authority, under their own power. As long as your power is correspondent to what it is their power is trying to achieve, then I'll let you have power, but the moment you take that power in a different direction. So in that sense, like all abusers, they bond, they groom, then they create a sense in which your life, power and presence only is good to the degree that you're serving something of the domain of my purpose.

But where it gets really hard, especially in the topic of sexual abuse, is the fact that whether you're 4 or whether you're 24, when your body's touched, there will be arousal. Even if you hate what is happening, there is a sense in which your body betrays you. And if we can use that category with regard to ambivalence, like I can see there are terrible things happening, yet there's also wonderful things happening. And in that, again, there's grief and loss, but there's also pleasure. And for the victim of sexual abuse, where the shame resides most deeply is in the arousal that their body felt. I'm at fault, I chose this, I'm actually part of the abuse. Now, nothing could be more of a damnable lie than that with regard to sexual abuse.

And I would also say for many of the people who are victimized in spiritual abuse, that sense of complicity is not true. The ambivalence that you experienced is what your body was intended to experience when the valence of good and evil are in one sense crossing one another with a degree of violence. So I think so often in dealing with the matters of Mars Hill, but certainly many other spiritually abusive contexts, we don't bring trauma as a primary lens, and we don't bring the trauma of betrayal, powerlessness, and ambivalence, particularly with regard to shame, into the reality of what needs to be done on the behalf of those victims, to address what needs to occur for there to be ongoing healing.

Mike Cospers: We'll be right back.

Do you feel like we're in a moment, in the last, let's say three decades. Is it a unique moment where these sort of narcissistic abusive leaders are taking to the pulpits and taking leadership of institutions more broadly? Or is it maybe more of a broadly historical phenomenon that is just being exposed now in ways that wasn't happening before?

Dan Allender: I will caveat to say I'm a psychologist, not a historian. Look, World War II was preceded by the Great Depression, and was preceded by World War I, and was preceded by the Civil War, and in one sense, the disruption that was there in terms of this country addressing both the violence against African Americans, but also the violence against women. There was such a profound desire for, again, certainty. So then you come into essentially the Great Depression and then the beginnings of the movement of the Versailles Treaty and all its severe consequences with regard to Europe in general, but Germany in particular, and you've got one of the most violent periods in the history of humanity and the Holocaust being in one sense, the deepest darkness ever on the earth. Yet you've got a generation that arises out of World War II and everything that I put words to, who seem to make a pact together. Like, we will never talk about this, we'll never talk about the war. We've got a whole new world to live into. And then you look at how suburbs were created, how redlining was created. The further violence and cruelty against the African American community, particularly after World War II, because there was clarity that African American pilots and warriors will fight and die as admirably and heroically and competently as so-called whites.

So what you've got is so much in the air, and who comes along? Really remarkable people. Billy Graham. And so you look at the beginnings of Billy Graham Association, you're looking at the Navigators, you're looking at Youth For Christ, you're looking at Young Life. And again, I'm not saying all those people are narcissists. What I'm saying is there was the beginning of addressing through a means of offering hope that actually never addressed the untold heartache and violence that existed not only individually, but culturally.

So what did you expect was gonna happen when the fifties rolled into the sixties, with Vietnam beginning, actually in the Eisenhower period, '58 and on, taken on by Kennedy, and all of a sudden we've got two worlds. We've got the world of the atomic age fears of communism meeting Jimi Hendrix. So when you start messing with all that, you've got two structures. You've got dogmatism, you've got indulgence. Both are pretty significant means to escape trauma. I'm not gonna think about my life, I'm gonna get stoned. I'm not gonna think about my life, I'm gonna join the John Birch Society.

So what I'm saying as a trauma theorist is that the unaddressed trauma in an individual, in a family, let alone a culture, will always come due. You don't escape what the body materializes in the middle of heartache by simply believing something or doing something, or bonding yourself to somebody. Now, for a season, yeah, a shot of scotch may relieve certain levels of discomfort or disease, but the disease will have its own, shall we say, interior capacity to bring death. So that's my historical, unsophisticated assessment, that what we found is that the powerful leader who offers us escape from uncertainty, who indeed gives us purpose and meaning, seems to be whom we bear a certain degree of attraction to as a leader.

So take away my uncertainty, offer me purpose within your domain, and then use me, and then spit me out when you're no longer wishing to, in one sense, give me your light. That's the part where what I would say is the very structure of narcissism is a form of insanity. It is actually a form of evil. And why we are drawn to that, I've got a few categories, but the bottom line is it's madness.

Mike Cospers: I imagine you work with, or you have worked with, a lot of Christian leaders over the years, coming to you, dealing with conflicts, looking for, trying to figure this stuff out. Is it common to see pastors and leaders who are able to recognize some of these things in themselves and find a different way, or is it pretty baked in?

Dan Allender: The cost of addressing, both personally but also structurally, the domain of narcissism, often costs leaders their reputation, their current jobs. So a lot of times I end up seeing people who are either released from their position and now having to address all that was required, but also all that they violated. So that sense of, I got used and I used, how do I address the complexity of now being in a position I've been fired or let go.

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I also see a lot of folks, a lot of leaders who are in the middle of affairs, or of marriages that are collapsing, which is inevitable when you've got a narcissistic structure and a narcissistically, at least leaning, human being, in order to keep that power, that level of dogmatism, certainty. The honest human being has to say I don't know, a lot of times. So when marriages collapse, when affairs occur, or when there's been release, there's already a movement toward humiliation, which is the very death of and the core fear of most narcissists. I think the fear of most human beings. But nonetheless, in the opening of that, there's often a generosity to engage. And the generosity, I think, is the Spirit of God inviting that person to begin to, in some sense, ascertain, how did I get to where I am, and what does it mean for me in my marriage or in my friendships or in my future mission to indeed own the harm I have endured and the harm I've done. So what I would say is most people who actually seek a therapist who's not going to just, in some sense, empathize with the heartache, but actually require an engagement with the story that brought you to be where you are, I actually see a lot of great changes in the people I am privileged to work with.

Mike Cospers: That's the good news. The bad news is what it takes to get them to that place.

Dan Allender: And the reality that a lot of people, even in that place, simply move on to another church or to another ministry or to selling real estate. And so let's just say that

the nature of disruption does not ensure a movement toward goodness, but at least it is necessary if not sufficient.

Mike Cospers: On the flip side of that, when you look at what happens to Christians and church members who've lived in these systems, what are you seeing in the fallout and have you observed people healing from those processes of having to leave a system like that?

Dan Allender: Yeah. When people attempt to move out of dogmatism, tragically what often seems to be the protective barrier is a form of cynicism. So it's easy in that sense to assume anyone in leadership, anyone who teaches the Bible, anyone who actually believes death, resurrection, ascension is either a fool or manipulative. And again, there almost needs to be a period of stepping back and deconstruction. And sometimes cynicism becomes something of a necessary period to ask the hard question: What do I actually believe, what is it that I would allow my own heart to say yes to. And I don't want to commend cynicism, but I also don't want to say that it is the great danger that most people fear. Because a deconstructive process needs to occur to be able to see through where good doctrine was being used in a wicked way, where teaching on relationships was actually designed less to teach what the scriptures invite you to know, but far more to contain you so that you are loyal to this system. So deconstruction has to engage eventually this issue of numbness, which means there is so much anger, and it's so easy to honor and, indeed, to bless that you have been faced with cruelty and injustice, and if you're not angry, something is deeply amiss. However, in the anger is also grief, and the invitation to let your heart grieve when you feel already so vulnerable for having been misused. You don't trust yourself to actually enter your own grief for fear that it will suck you back into another system. So being able to slowly come to terms with your own grief, with lament. What it means to actually then come through both anger and grief, to be able to bless. There were good things, there were things that had a sweetness, and you don't have to throw all that out.

Now you're stepping people into this interplay of ambiguity and ambivalence, which is really hard work, but it's also necessary because you're beginning to break apart the power of dogmatism and that authoritarianism deconstruct. Yet you're inviting people into a grieving process where they're tending to their body, where they're learning to trust themselves in a way that if they had prior, they might have been willing to step back and say, This is not actually well for my soul.

But I think again, the hardest issue with regard to all of this is shame. And we come back to that category of complicity, which again, here's the dilemma. Trauma evokes trauma. And so the reality is yes, you've been spiritually abused, but it likely is connected to other stories in your life, to possible past sexual abuse or sexual violation, or to bullying or to again, the scud of realities that come from living in a fallen world.

So it isn't enough just to deal with the Mars Hill trauma, we've gotta open the door to what it's meant for you to live in a fallen world. And there has been harm that you likely have unaddressed, you've avoided, and in some ways, Mars Hill was a means by which you could escape the other traumas that indeed brought you to this community to begin with. And if you're willing to do that kind of deconstructive work, opening the door to

grief but addressing shame, it will sound a little too narcissistic to say, but there's a sense in which, oh, the goodness of God in the land of the living will bring you out of despair. But it is a long, hard process.

Mike Cospers: I wonder what you make of the fact that Mars Hill and so many similar churches, when you talk about people's experiences of trauma being part of what draws them there, there's a mandate to sort of give this intense level of disclosure of your traumatic experiences inside these churches. People would talk about how they show up in community groups and they're there for two weeks. And it's like, so tell me every single sexual experience that you've had since your childhood, and there was something about the community where people felt a burden to do it. I'm wondering how you think about that in particular.

Dan Allender: Relationships that are built on trauma have a phrase, trauma bonding. And they're deep, and they're almost instantaneous, and they seem to actually be filled with the presence of the Spirit because of how good it feels to finally tell what I've always held with such shame, and now I don't feel that same level because you and I share so much of the same story, and I'm not shaming you, you're not shaming me, isn't this redemptive. And in some ways here's the difficulty. Yeah, we are not meant to be alone in the heartbreak of our lives. Yet there is a patience, a slow development of honor. Not just trust, but honor. Where I do not ask of you to step into matters of such severity without a growing long history of trust. And yet, back to that point, we don't want to be bound by shame, but so often the structures in a community like Mars Hill, it was an offer of shamelessness, not an offer of actual redemptive slow honor, where we can begin to address those matters in a way that grows us, not only in love, but respect and honor for one another.

Mike Cospers: Let's jump to the latter part of the story. One of the details I'm definitely curious about was the experience of discovering the plagiarism in his marriage book. I actually have this interesting... We have audio from a sort of leaked audio to us of a Zoom call that involved all the different campus pastors, and one of the executive pastors, Sutton, is running down the list of all the things that are being caught in the process. And I remember your name comes up in the call and there's these issues with Dan Allender's book, Dan and Mark are really good friends, so they're gonna work this whole thing out. It was very dismissive - The whole thing's going to be easy to resolve. What was it like to walk through that?

Dan Allender: I have to admit that I was not particularly a reader of Mark's material so...

Mike Cospers: That doesn't surprise me.

Dan Allender: ...I didn't have a clue. But we share the same literary agent, so Sealy called me to basically say, Have you heard. And I'm like, No, heard what? And when he told me about the accusations, I pinned him down to say, Accusations or allegedly true. And he was gracious enough to say there's enough truth here that it's plagiarism. So I put Sealy in a bit of a bind. What I said was, You're essentially calling me to find out whether or not I'm going to sue. And I just don't - for multiple reasons - I just don't have time to sue people. So I just said to him, Look, it needs to be clarified in his writing, etcetera. As

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an academic, look, there's almost no sin more severe than plagiarism. So I asked him to make it clear that needed to be changed in future editions. But then what I said was, In order to avoid a lawsuit, this is what I ask. I want a personal letter apologizing, and I want a \$25 Starbucks card. And I got neither.

Mike Cospers: Sorry for laughing, but it's just...

Dan Allender: No, it's all right. It's fine. But here's the sadness. I totally forgot about it. And next book project, something came up and Sealy and I are talking and it was one of those moments like you have, especially if you're somewhat forgetful, where we're in the middle of a conversation, it was like, Wait a minute, I never got my letter nor did I get a \$25 gift certificate. And he informed me that he was no longer Mark's agent, had no more contact. And I said, Well, Sealy, then we just need to resolve this by you sending me a \$50 Starbucks card, which I did receive. I'm very fond of Sealy. But that's the process by which I dealt with the plagiarism.

Mike Cospers: That's so funny. Before we wrap, I just want to come back to this question of impact. The impact of Mark and his impacts on the city of Seattle, the people around you. And I guess I'm also curious, like, how do you see that connected to this broader phenomenon? The abusive pastors, this awful story after story after story. What are the lessons, on the small scale and the large scale. What are the lessons to be drawn and what does the way forward look like?

Dan Allender: When there is an implosion - and in some sense, Mars Hill Church became like a dark hole that sucked so many good people in and added to the community's deep suspicion and disrespect for the evangelical community - it's heartbreaking. And yet at least I find in a community, as I said, that has only 1.8% of people attending any kind of religious context, it's still a context to talk about the heart, about life, ultimately about the gospel. So there's no sugar coating. It will have an effect, I think, for generations and not just in individual lives, but a kind of cloud. Yet within that, I still believe that there is this freedom to be able to tell the truth. We begin with this framework of the truth will set you free. And if we can tell the truth about our own failures, tell the truth about our own structures, that even if we cannot be diagnosed as narcissistic personality disorder, nonetheless, anyone who's done much of anything has to have some level of grandiosity, some level of confidence, some level of risk taking. And in all that, can we just tell the truth about ourselves in a way in which we're not indulging in our own darkness, but actually joining others with something that resounds with Paul's statement in First Timothy chapter one. Here's a worthy statement, worthy of your full acceptance: Christ. Jesus came in order to bring forgiveness for whom I am the worst. And that framework, I think, becomes where narcissism breaks down with the presence of both honesty and humility. And that needs to be a further cry for us as an evangelical community. No more narcissistic leaders.

Mike Cospers: You can learn more about Dr. Allender and his work at theallendercenter.org. The link is in our show notes. You can also find his books wherever they're sold. For church leaders in particular, and those that are picking themselves up after experiences of pain and loss, I want to highly recommend the book, *Leading With a Limp*. It's meant a lot to me over the years.

45 MIN

We have one final episode coming, where after all these conversations, I head to Seattle to visit the people at the heart of the story, to revisit what was once Mars Hill, and to ask where we go from here.

The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill is a production of Christianity Today. It's executive produced by Erik Petrik. It's produced, written and mixed by Mike Cospers. It was edited by Mark Owens. Joy Beth Smith and Azurae Phelps are our associate producers. Music by Kate Siefker. Graphic design by Bryan Todd. Social media by Kate Lucky. CT's editor in chief is Timothy Dalrymple. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you one more time, very shortly.