

Pastor Mark Driscoll Quits Social Media Following Book Marketing Controversy

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(RNS) Seattle megachurch pastor Mark Driscoll has written a letter to his congregation to explain recent controversies, including the marketing campaign intended to place the book, "Real Marriage," on The New York Times best-seller list.

Driscoll has been an influential pastor within Reformed evangelical circles for several years, helping to found a church planting network called Acts 29. His own Mars Hill Church attracts some 14,000 people at 15 locations in five states each Sunday.

In recent months, however, reports have emerged that Driscoll plagiarized some of the material in his books. And earlier this month, World magazine reported that Driscoll hired a firm to buy copies of the book he penned with his wife, Grace, so that it would top the best-seller lists.

In a letter posted on Reddit on Saturday (March 15), Driscoll apologized for using the marketing strategy.

"I am sorry that I used this strategy, and will never use it again," he wrote. "I have also asked my publisher to not use the '#1 New York Times bestseller' status in future publications, and am working to remove this from past publications as well."

The church's spokesman, Justin Dean, confirmed that a letter from Driscoll to Mars Hill Church was posted to the church's internal network as "a private family communication."

"At this time we have chosen not to publicly release the letter," Dean said, adding that the pastor was not available for interviews.

Driscoll also apologized to his church in 2007 for lacking humility.

In the new letter, Driscoll said he would quit social media for the rest of 2014 to "reset" his life. "The distractions it can cause for my family and our church family are not fruitful or helpful at this time," he said.

Driscoll also wrote that "my angry-young-prophet days are over."

"I understand that people who saw or experienced my sin during this season are hurt and in some cases have not yet come to a place of peace or resolution," he wrote. "I have been burdened by this for the past year and have had private meetings one at a time to learn from, apologize to, and reconcile with people."

He said that he will not do as many speaking engagements in the future. "I don't see how I can be both a celebrity and a pastor, and so I am happy to give up the former so that I can focus on the latter," he wrote.

Driscoll also apologized for how recent staff turnover has been handled.

"I am deeply grieved and even depressed by the pain we have caused," he said. "Many have chosen to air their concerns online, and I apologize for any burden this may have brought on you, and I will do my best to clarify a few things without, I hope, being angry or defensive."

The entire letter was printed in [Relevant Magazine](#)

Dear Mars Hill Church,

Thank you.

I have received a great deal of love and encouragement from you for more than 17 years. I genuinely appreciate every person who prays for my family and me. Also, I continue to find great joy in teaching the Bible every week to people I have grown to love with a father's affection.

For those of you who have been around for a while, it is amazing for us to see all that Jesus has done. People often ask if our church today resembles what I had originally planned. Not even close. The smallest location of a Mars Hill Church is bigger than what my total vision was for the whole church when we started.

As the church grew over the years, it was clear that both the church and I were unhealthy in some ways, despite some wonderful people and amazing things that the Holy Spirit was doing in and through them. For years, I felt a joy in teaching the Bible and love for the people, but frankly was overwhelmed on how to organize and lead all that was happening. I felt the crushing weight of responsibility but did not know what to do, and I lacked the abilities to figure it out. I was frustrated at my shortcomings, but needed help from people who were more experienced and mature. In my worst moments, I was angry in a sinful way. For those occasions, I am sorry. As I've expressed in several sermons, I needed to mature as a leader, and we needed to mature as a church.

In the last year or two, I have been deeply convicted by God that my angry-young-prophet days are over, to be replaced by a helpful, Bible-teaching spiritual father. Those closest to me have said they recognize a deep change, which has been encouraging because I hope to continually be sanctified by God's grace. I understand that people who saw or experienced my sin during this season are hurt and in some cases have not yet come to a place of peace or resolution. I have been burdened by this for the past year and have had private meetings one at a time to learn from, apologize to, and reconcile with people. Many of those meetings were among the most encouraging moments in my time at our church. Sadly, not all of those relationships are yet mended, but I am praying that God is gracious to get us to that place of grace. Now that others have come forward, my desire is to have similar meetings with those who are willing.

In the past few years, we have also made significant improvements to how we are governed and organized as a church. This has been difficult, but long overdue. The Board of Advisors and Accountability is a great blessing to us all, as they combine wise counsel and strong oversight during this process. I have been a pastor for a long time, but have not had a close pastor since college. I now rejoice that God has been gracious to give me pastors for accountability and wise counsel. Through their counsel to confess my own sin, while not being distracted by the shortcomings of others, the Holy Spirit is making me a better man and pastor, which I pray helps us to become a better church. This is the truest and strongest pastoral love and accountability that I have ever had and I thank the Lord for it. Pastor Dave and Pastor Sutton have also joined me as Executive Elders. They have been very helpful in getting my team and me to the most unified, loving, and healthy place we have ever been. I really love our church, and I see where it was unhealthy, where it has gotten healthier, and where we can continue in that path. I am very encouraged by where we are and where we are going.

However, this process has required a lot of changes, and admittedly we did not handle all of these changes equally well. We are fully aware of and grieved by ways we could have done better with a more effective process and more patience, starting with me. I am deeply grieved and even depressed by the pain we have caused. Many have chosen to air their concerns online, and I apologize for any burden this may have brought on you, and I will do my best to clarify a few things without, I hope, being angry or defensive.

First, a marketing company called ResultSource was used in conjunction with the book *Real Marriage*, which was released in January 2012. My understanding of the ResultSource marketing strategy was to maximize book sales, so that we could reach more people with the message and help grow our church. In retrospect, I no longer see it that way. Instead, I now see it as manipulating a book sales reporting system, which is wrong. I am sorry that I used this strategy, and will never use it again. I have also asked my publisher to not use the “#1 New York Times bestseller” status in future publications, and am working to remove this from past publications as well.

Second, in recent years, some have used the language of “celebrity pastor” to describe me and some other Christian leaders. In my experience, celebrity pastors eventually get enough speaking and writing opportunities outside the church that their focus on the church is compromised, until eventually they decide to leave and go do other things. Without judging any of those who have done this, let me be clear that my desires are exactly the opposite. I want to be under pastoral authority, in community, and a Bible-teaching pastor who grows as a loving spiritual father at home and in our church home for years to come. I don’t see how I can be both a celebrity and a pastor, and so I am happy to give up the former so that I can focus on the latter.

When I was a new Christian at the age of 19, God spoke to me and told me to do four things. Today, I see that calling as: Love Grace and our family, Preach the Bible Train leaders (especially men), Plant churches. Other things may be good, but I do not have the time or energy for them right now. My family and our church family need me focused and energized, and that is my deep desire. Therefore, I will be spending my energies growing in Christ-like character by grace, staying connected to Grace and our kids, loving and serving Mars Hill Church which continues to grow, teaching the Bible, and serving Christian leaders through such things as blogs and podcasts at Resurgence. Starting this fall, I will also be teaching at Corban University and Western Seminary in Bellevue to invest in young leaders. For a season, I want to pull back from many things in order for us to focus on the most important things: glorifying Jesus by making disciples and planting churches as a healthy, loving, and unified church, with our hands on the Bible and our eyes on Jesus.

To reset my life, I will not be on social media for at least the remainder of the year. The distractions it can cause for my family and our church family are not fruitful or helpful at this time. At the end of the year, I will consider if and when to reappear on social media, and I will seek the counsel of my pastors on this matter. In the meantime, Mars Hill and Resurgence will continue to post blogs, sermons, and podcasts on my social media accounts, but otherwise I’m going offline.

I will also be doing much less travel and speaking in the next season. In recent years, I have cut back significantly, but I will now cut back even more. I have cancelled some speaking events, and I am still determining the best course of action for a few that I’ve committed to, as they are evangelistic opportunities to invite people to salvation in Jesus Christ, which is something I care about deeply. I will be doing very few media interviews, if any. Also, I’m communicating with my publisher to determine how to meet my existing obligations and have a much less intense writing schedule.

Personally, I find this all relieving. The pressure and pace has increased every year since I started in 1996. I don’t want to be burned out or angry, and I want to become more like Jesus every year. I want to teach the Bible, love well, and run at a pace to finish my race many decades from now. My health is actually in the best place it has been in recent years. I have a skilled and unified team that loves you and can handle more responsibility, if I can free up the time and energy to love them and invest in them. Grace and the kids are doing very well, and my family is still my joy and priority. This year we will have three of our five kids as teenagers, and our oldest will be a senior preparing for college. I don’t want to miss this season, as these are years I can never get back. If I am going to err, I want it to be on the side of guarding too much time and energy for family and church family rather than not enough.

To be clear, these are decisions I have come to with our Senior Pastor Jesus Christ. I believe this is what He is asking of me, and so I want to obey Him. The first person I discussed this with was our first, and still

best, church member, Grace. Her loving agreement and wise counsel only confirmed this wonderful opportunity to reset some aspects of our life. I want to publicly thank her, as it was 26 years ago this week that we had our first date. She is the greatest friend and biggest blessing in my life after Jesus. When we recently discussed this plan to reset our life together, late at night on the couch, she started crying tears of joy. She did not know how to make our life more sustainable, and did not want to discourage me, but had been praying that God would reveal to me a way to reset our life. Her prayer was answered, and for that we are both relieved at what a sustainable, joyful, and fruitful future could be. As an anniversary present, I want to give her more of her best friend.

I have also submitted these decisions to the Board of Advisors and Accountability. They have approved of this direction and are 100 percent supportive of these changes. It's a wonderful thing to have true accountability and not be an independent decision maker regarding my ministry and, most importantly, our church.

Lastly, if God would lead you to pray for me, the Scripture he has impressed upon me this past year or two is 1 Corinthians 4:15: "For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel." As I get older, I am seeking to increasingly love our people as I do my own children in order for our church to be a great family, because of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

With the Father's affection,

-Pastor Mark Driscoll