Randy: Welcome to LIFE Today! How are you doing, Sheila?

Sheila: I'm doing very well. I'm Sheila Walsh here with Randy Robison and we're excited about the show today.

Randy: We have a wonderful guest today. A gentleman I've enjoyed for years, listening to his teaching, his books. He's got a lot of great stuff out there. Mark Driscoll is with us. Mark, welcome to LIFE Today.

Mark: Thank you.

Randy: You've been a little hidden here for awhile. Where have you been?

Mark: Yeah. I've been in the witness protection program and just hanging out with the family.

[Laughter]

Yeah. Where do you want me to start?

Randy: You start wherever you want to because people -- some people don't know you. Some people know where you were, but don't necessarily know where you've been.

Mark: I grew up in Seattle. My dad was a union drywaller; oldest of five kids. Didn't know Jesus. In high school, at 17, I met a really sweet adorable gal, a pastor's daughter; gave me a Bible. At 19 got saved reading that Bible; 21, married that girl. My rule is always: a gal buys you Bible, buy her a ring. Call it a deal. So I married her at 21.

Sheila: It is what one does, people -- it is what one does.

Mark: At 22 we graduated; 25 we started a Bible study trying to reach primarily young
college-educated singles in what was at the time among the nation's least churched cities. In the early years we were broke and we didn't have kids and I was working a job and didn't think it would amount to anything. Eventually, in God's grace, God did some remarkable things through some wonderful people. We saw about 10,000 people baptized. We saw the church grow to 15,000 on a typical Sunday. We saw 15 locations in five states, just kind of superseded all expectations.

**Randy:** And this is the Pacific Northwest, this is not the Bible belt.

**Mark:** No. This is urban, single, young adults, all kinds of sexual issues, confusion, abuse, baggage and carry-ons -- so lots of stuff going on. We had a governance war at the church that went eight years behind the scenes over who is in charge and how things play out. At the end we had 67 elders in 15 locations in five states, a large percentage of whom I had never met. They wanted to have independent local churches and we were one large church in many locations. So there was an eight-year battle that finally went public the last year and it was very painful for everyone involved, especially the wonderful, dear, generous, amazing people that served and gave and made it all happen.

So the governing board in authority over me invited us to continue and we prayed about it and talked about it as a family and felt like we heard from the Lord and I resigned. And left without -- didn't have an opportunity to say good-bye to the people so I want to let them know how much I love them and appreciate them and wish I would have had that opportunity.

We took some time off just to heal up. I signed a non-disclosure agreement so you're not going to talk about it, which was fair and reasonable and I agree with. And just decided to spend time as a family to heal up, to meet with wise counsel, to learn what we could learn and to see what the Lord had for the next season of our life.

**Sheila:** Whoa there, horsie! Whoa!

**Mark:** There's the whole story. There are five kids in there now.

**Sheila:** That's a lot of information! What I want to talk about Mark, is you start so small, see God do amazing things and it grows and grows and then suddenly there's like this death by committee. I just want to know, what did that do to you as a person, not just as a pastor, what did that do to you?

**Mark:** I felt about the church as I did about my children. Once you share the gospel of Jesus with someone and they become a Christian it is kind of like you're a parent. They're born again and now they need to be fed and loved and raised up and encouraged. And so for me in my
heart, I adore my five kids; we've got three boys, two girls. And Grace is my nearest and dearest friend and she is still with me and she is the best. So we kind of felt a little bit about the church like we did our family. These are people that we love and care for and they've met the Lord Jesus under the ministry and we want to help love and encourage and raise them up.

So being unable to do that and unable to continue forward and leaving was very difficult. I'll be honest, I got up every Sunday for probably six months and sat in the shower and cried so my kids wouldn't see me because we couldn't go to church and it was a very complicated situation. I was very concerned about the well-being of those people because there's -- a lot of churches have fights or conflicts or governance battles, it is nothing new but it is the dear people that don't understand sometimes what's going on and they pay the highest price and they're unsure even of what happened.

**Sheila:** What did this do to you as a family? Because sometimes that kind of trauma is a greater wedge than a glue.

**Mark:** Well, we had 166 employees and now you've got zero so all the media, the critics, the protestors all show up at your house. Rocks are thrown at your kids. Helicopters are overhead.

**Sheila:** But you're not just -- this is actual stuff that happened. This is not just imagery.

**Mark:** No, we moved three or four times for safety issues; safe room, people arrested at the house. Lots -- so I had a bullet-proof, stab-proof vest from the Seattle Police Department.

**Randy:** Why are they so mad at you?

**Mark:** Well, it was from one of the police officers, I don't know if he was at Seattle S.P.D. but for high alert Sundays where there was protest or there was danger. And the kids knew on those days come in and out with police escort.

**Randy:** Why? Why were they so mad at you?

**Mark:** You know I'm a really lovely guy so I just don't know.

**Sheila:** That's clear to all of us.

**Mark:** I'm a Bible teacher and can be intense and there are times I've said and done things that I regret and publically acknowledge. But I'm seeing a lot happen in a culture that didn't have a lot of churches that were very large. There were some good churches but a very unchurched area.
So yeah, my family, the kids grew up, we have three boys, two girls all kinds of complexities -- some wonderful things, seen lots of people saved but also safety issues and people at the house and arrested; and media blocking the driveway; that kind of stuff. Very complicated.

**Sheila:** What are you saying to your kids in the midst of this? Do you even have the strength to say anything? When your whole life has been built around the fact that God is a God of love and redemption and now you're having to hide in your own house and protect your own children, what do you say to them?

**Mark:** Well, first you own anything you can that you contributed to it so that your children see repentance and humility and honesty and integrity. Then you teach them forgiveness. So when we -- it was just really weird. I've been a pastor 18 years. All my kids were born in the church. They've never been in another church. We started the church before we had kids and wake up on Sunday and I realize, I'm not a pastor, I'm not a church. We can't go to church. I think the media is on the other side of the fence wondering what we're going to do today so we'll just stay here.

So we sat down as a family and I was very emotional. My kids just decided, well, we're a church so my one daughter who can sing, the rest of us can't sing, she led worship and my other son led us in prayer and one of the kids did scripture reading. And we had brunch together and my eight-year old son came down and collected an offering.

**Sheila:** As eight-year-olds would. Yes!

[Laughter]

**Mark:** To give to a single mom that he knew wasn't going to have enough money for kids for Christmas. So he collected the offering. So I started teaching a Bible study on forgiveness because I believed the heart of the demonic is unforgiveness. I believe God does forgiveness and Satan and demons are never forgiven and never forgiving. I believe if you want to err enter into demonic torment and just get bitter and don't do forgiveness.

So I sat down with my kids. I said, "Okay, you need to forgive your dad for anything he's contributed. We need to forgive anyone else who has participated in this complex situation. Because what I don't want to raise is bitter pastor's kids who are in demonic torment because they have a church hurt. We need to forgive, we need to love, we need to heal up." And so we did church together at home as a family for many, many months; then invited some family and friends to join us just to have safe fellowship and community. So my kids basically ran their own church. And I got to teach, sometimes in my pajamas, which was really great.
Sheila: That's an excellent idea! Yeah!

Randy: So you've since left that setting.

Mark: Yeah. We waited; we felt like our oldest daughter should be able to graduate with her friends from high school. So we made that pledge to her. Then we prayed and my wife and I, we had written a book previously on marriage and really focused on friendship, was really one of our big things. And so thank God, we didn't know the hurricane is coming but we had really doubled down on our friendship and our friendship was super tight and close. Some say that a good friend makes the good times twice as good, and the bad times twice as bad. When your spouse is your friend and the pressure pushes you together rather than pulls you apart, that's a real blessing.

Randy: The bad times are half as bad.

Mark: Yeah! The bad times are half as bad, the good times are twice as good. I went to public school.

[Laughter]

So yeah, in that my wife and I prayed and we met with wise counsel and pastors and counselors we trusted and didn't say anything publically and tried not to vent and leak. So we prayed about it and we both came to agreement that it was time to transition. So we felt called to Arizona, West Coast. I like the sunshine. So it was So Cal or Arizona; my wife really liked Arizona, I really liked my wife so Arizona seemed really good to me.

So we moved down there not knowing what was next. It was one of the places I didn't have a job offer. Once we moved, a 200-foot tree fell on our house. We still had all our possessions in our home, back in Seattle --

Sheila: The one you were trying to sell?

Mark: We moved and put it up for sale because we couldn't have open house with us living there. It would have been a bunch of drama. Boom! A 200-foot tree falls on the house, shears the bedroom off, destroys our bed; would have killed us if we were home.

Sheila: This is getting very Job-like.

Mark: Yeah. I'm like really? I read the Old Testament but I didn't want to live it. So yeah, it was complicated.
So then we're down in Arizona. We can't sell the house, we can't buy a new house, I don't have a job. Where are the kids going to school? We've got elementary, junior high, high school, college trying to figure it all out. And in God's grace, I can tell you a year and a half later all the kids are walking with the Lord. They came to me and said, "Dad, we did church in our house, that was fun. Can we plant a church?"

So the kids wanted to plant a church. I was like, "Really? You want to plant a church?"

So they dreamt up the name of the church and the branding and had a lot of conversations around the dinner table and so we decided to plant a church as a family project.

**Randy:** That's great!

**Sheila:** I want to back up a little bit to what you touched on about forgiveness because I think it is huge. It was one of the lessons that I went through with my son of he wanted life to be fair. My thing to him is "fair doesn't live here but Jesus does."

**Mark:** Fair means we're all on fire. So anything beyond that is grace.

**Sheila:** But I also believe that the enemy has nothing in his arsenal to combat forgiveness. When you choose to forgive you're totally aligning yourself with heaven. I think it is the most liberating thing in the universe.

**Mark:** I always say when you forgive someone it's not letting them get away with anything, it's letting you get away from everything. You're basically saying, I forgive you and I'm going to let this be passed up to a higher court and I'll let God render the verdict. But for me, I'm going to move on with my life and I'm going to want God's best for you. But that's between you and God.

**Randy:** So your whole family gets together and you start a church in Phoenix.

**Mark:** We start a church. We don't know anybody. We don't have a building. We've got nothing!

**Randy:** Trinity Church in Scottsdale.

**Mark:** Yeah, we named it after Grace's dad; he planted a church called the Trinity Church and he had passed away. So the kids were like, "Let's name it after grandpa to honor him." I was like, "Okay." So we made an announcement, we're going to plant a church. We have no people. We have no money. We have no clue. And God provided a building in a supernatural way. We got a
mid-century modern historic cool church building.

My kids demoed it. Volunteers showed up. My kids did all the demo, helped throw away two dozen dumpsters of garbage, ripped out carpet, painted walls. We literally planted a church as a family and then other families showed up for work parties and we did it altogether. We put bouncy houses in the back of the auditorium because we didn't have a kids’ ministry and I would teach a Bible study; no sound, no lights, no video, no band, no transition. And then we would all get our gloves on and go to work; and it was 120 degrees out so you know those are good people if they show up for that. So that's what we did.

Sheila: You know what that says to me about you and your wife? That your children would say, "Let's plant a church" because if you had reacted differently, responded differently, you could have turned all your children against the Lord. But instead --

Mark: If I had embittered my kids against the Lord that would have been worse than everything I had been through. I mean I really love my kids. They're really wonderful kids.

Sheila: I have a feeling they might sit here and say the same thing about you.

Mark: They're really great kids and I didn't know the Lord until I was 19. So watching kids grow up to know the Lord is such a better plan that the one I had.

Randy: What has he taught you through your own children?

Mark: The father heart of God; that God loves me like I love my kids. And God is there for me like I'm there for my kids. And God intends good for me as I intend good for my kids. Yeah, I've learned a lot about the father heart of God through all of this. So when it all came people would ask, "How are you doing?" I didn't know how to answer that. All I know is we're in God's will.

Sheila: That's enough!

Mark: Sometimes that's all you've got. But the truth is that's all you need. So I remember one day we were literally going into the church for Bible study and work party and my daughter grabbed my hand. She always holds my hand. She is the affectionate one. I just thought, all I need to do is take my Dad's hand and walk with him. I don't know where we're going, I don't know what we're doing but I know I've got a good dad and I know if I stick close to dad, wherever we end up is going to be a good place.

Sheila: My prayer every morning when I get up is, good morning, Lord. I don't know where
you're going today but wherever you're going, I'm coming with you! And it is beautiful!

**Mark:**  It is good to go to work with your dad.

[Laughter]

**Sheila:**  Son and dad's day. But sometimes it is almost severe mercy to lose everything and in the midst find what really matters and cannot be shaken.

**Mark:**  Here's my wife, here's my kids, I've still got a place in heaven and now God's being gracious. We get to teach. I get to go to church with my family. My kids sit on the front row every Sunday and they take notes, and then after church they give me feedback on the sermon. And now my kids are asking about going into ministry and how to prep sermons. And I'm like, you know, maybe this will be a season where we get to do things together as a family that otherwise were not possible. And if so, that makes it really rich and rewarding.

**Randy:**  Has anything changed in your message? I know the overarching message has not because you're preaching the gospel but has anything -- is there any nuance difference maybe?

**Mark:**  I think when I was a young man I focused a lot on Jesus. I still like Jesus -- yay Jesus! But now the fatherhood of God and the Holy Spirit, I'm getting to know the person, the presence, the power of the Holy Spirit in a deeper more intimate, emotionally maturing way, I hope. -- And again, the fatherhood of God. So I'll still be very focused on Jesus but I think sometimes depending upon what church or tradition you go to there's one member of the Trinity who sort of gets the billing and the rest are opening acts. So I'm spending a lot more time getting to know the Father and the Spirit.

And I think too, focusing a lot more on emotional health, relational integrity, and building a foundation on relationships at the church because I think apart from emotional health and healing, and relational health and healing, you don't end up with a healthy family or church family. So there's a lot of emphasis going that direction.

**Randy:**  Where do you hope you are in another year or two?

**Mark:**  You know, Scottsdale is not a bad place to be all winter. My wife and I are really good friends and I don't know what the Lord has next but I'm just really excited about who I get to do it with, Grace, the kids, the friends that we have, the new friends that we have, the old friends that have really proven true. When hard times come you really figure out who your friends are. And as the old puritans used to talk about the "swallow friends," they leave when winter comes. But we've really found some deep, profound friendships, old and new. We feel far less rich in
resources but honestly, very rich in relationships. So that's been really healing and really encouraging. It's actually been really enjoyable.

**Randy:** That's great. In the tough times we all need help. It's wonderful to hear you're experiencing it, living it out.

There are other people that we would like to impact with God's message of hope, people who are in some real tough times. Sheila, you went there.

**Sheila:** Yeah. It's honestly the most desperate thing I've ever seen in my life but what I've discovered is even in the most desperate place when you shine the light of Christ, everything changes. Would you watch this?

**On the mission field**

**Announcer:** Hope -- it's the currency of dreams, the fuel for life. And while hope is a treasured quality, like anything valuable it is often exploited by those with selfish intentions.

**Sheila:** I honestly don't think anything in life prepares you for what you see here. I've just spent the evening walking through the red light district here.

Part of the process of how they dehumanize these girls is that they take away any hope. One of the girls said, "I was told if I try to escape from this brothel, what they told me was, 'Okay, you go ahead. We know where your eight-year-old sister lives.'"

Well, honestly, when I look at their faces I think that could be my daughter -- that could be your daughter. You need to see beyond what's painted on the surface to a broken heart underneath. None of these girls wants to be here. There is a big plan in place for every girl to get them out of here and to get them to a place of safety, a place where they can begin to rebuild their lives again.

But don't be overwhelmed by the streets, don't be overwhelmed by the lights, don't be overwhelmed by the number of girls. See one girl -- see one girl who needs help and who needs hope and who needs it right now.

**End of clip**

**In the studio**

**Sheila:** It's unbelievable. Some people said to me when I came home, "Why don't they just leave? Why don't they just get out of there?"
If you knew the way that these men manipulate these girls, they have it down to really a fine art the way they demoralize them and break them down. They don't feed them. They don't let them sleep. And then they will take one of the girls outside of the room and she's never seen again. And basically the message is: If you don't do what we want you to do that's going to happen to you. They threaten their families. They break their wills down. They get them addicted to drugs.

There is such hopelessness there. When I was walking there, it was so clear to me that Christ would be on these streets. He would be the one reaching out his hand. He would be the one speaking to those girls and telling them, "You're worth more." One of the places I went into, the further back I went, it changed from girls with skimpy outfits to some girls with nothing on at all but a number stamped onto her leg. That's how they would be ordered, "I'll take number five." One of the things we know is that in God's sight no girl, no boy, no man or woman is a number. They are made in the image of God.

Even though I felt the desperation of the darkness I saw such hope. I saw such hope. I saw what happens when the people that we work with go in there and rescue these girls and bring them to a place in Southeast Asia where they can recover their lives, discover that God did hear their prayers, that they have a future, that your history doesn't dictate your destiny in Christ -- that anything is possible.

But we can't do it alone. And Randy, we have some friends who have said, "Listen. We're going to partner with you. We're going to put up a gift of $200,000, a matching gift."

**Randy:** And they're doing that matching to motivate you. When you're talking about the evil and what's going on in these places, and I've been there, I've seen some of it too. If you've been in the church very long you've heard this phrase "the gates of hell will not prevail." Well, gates are defensive. Gates are not offensive. You won't see gates marching down the street and taking people prisoners. Gates are meant to defend. Do you know what that means? They only prevail when we don't bash them down, and this is how we bash down the gates of hell. This is how we go in and rescue those who need to be rescued.

We want you to join with us as we go into these dark areas with the light of Jesus Christ because he can break down every wall. He can set every captive free.

The way we're asking you to join with us today is in your prayers, and if God prompts it, in your finances: $64 you can partner with someone else with a matching gift and that's the average cost of the operation to go and get people out. So for $128 we say you can help rescue two girls and maybe boys, actually. But the point is, you join with us as we are going into these dark areas. You join with us as we share the life of God, the love of God, the truth of God, the saving
power and grace of God. But as we go into these dark areas, these beyond the gates of hell, we reach in and we pull these people out, give them love, and give them life.

Will you go to the phone and join us? Will you go online and help? Do what you can and do it right now.

Begin video clip
Announcer: Innocent children and young people longing to be loved and cared for are being abducted and sold at the hands of violent predators, their spirit and body broken under horrific emotional and physical abuse. Through Mission: Rescue Life you can reach out to save children vulnerable to sex traffickers. You can help rescue those already enslaved and you can help restore their lives and give them a future.

Now a generous opportunity of a $200,000 matching gift means your gift of $128 to help rescue a child will be matched to help two children. Your $64 gift will be matched to help rescue one child from the horrors of human trafficking. And a $32 rescue gift will be doubled to $64.

With your gift we will send you James Robison's new book, *Living Amazed*: How divine encounters can change your life. As you read these inspiring stories you'll learn how to live amazed in the presence of God 24 hours a day.

With your gift of $100 or more you'll receive James's new book, along with the companion Amazed Journal so you can record accounts in your own life where you're amazed at God's goodness.

Finally, please consider a gift of $1280 which will now help rescue 20 children and you may request our beautiful new "Determined Eagle" bronze sculpture.

Please call, write, or make your secure gift online today.

End of clip

In the studio
Carol: These little orphans were in a village where human trafficking is prevalent. There are people on this planet that feel like they have the right to own a child to do whatever they want to that child. I promise you, that human trafficking of children, human trafficking of people is real. We will not stop until every child is free or safe.
Jeanne: You know when you go to that phone or you get online and check at LifeToday.org, and you find out the way you can be involved, what your part is, is vital in rescuing children's lives from human traffickers. And thousands of children are literally waiting for us to come and rescue them but we can't do it without your help.

Sheila: Thank you so much. And if you haven't gone to the phones, would you do it? If the phones are busy, try again. And for any gift at all we would love to send you this Living Amazed, James' new book. It is fantastic.

Randy: It is a nice little book. We want to thank Mark Driscoll for being here. But Mark, if someone wants to get in touch with you, hear some sermons, see what's going on with you, when your latest books available, get it -- what's the place?

Mark: MarkDriscoll.org, daily devotions, blog, sermons, eBooks, back catalog. You get what you pay for. Most of it is free but there it is.

[Laughter]

Randy: Thank you so much. Would you thank Mark Driscoll for being with us today on LIFE Today? Do go to the phones. Do go online. We want to see you help us because we help others with Rescue Life. Thanks for being with us today.

Announcer: When planning their future, keep their future in mind. Contact LIFE Planning Services today!