

LaurenInterview

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SPEAKERS

Amy Fritz, Lauren T



Amy Fritz 00:00

Welcome to Episode 16 of the Untangled Faith podcast. In this episode, I talk with Lauren Thoman about whether sharing and talking about stories of church hurt and spiritual abuse is okay or if it's failure porn. And we talk about being open to being wrong, and the Christianity Today coverage of the spiritual abuse allegations at Bethlehem Baptist



Lauren T 00:24

Are we taking in these stories to learn from them? Or are we taking them in for just like titillation purposes? There's this tendency to say, "Well, it's all like a heart issue." But then police what is in other people's hearts.



Amy Fritz 00:39

No one thinks they're the bad guy.



Lauren T 00:41

Everyone's wrong about something. But the thing that I think was kind of my lightbulb moment, and I don't even know why, is that no one knows what they're wrong about. You know, that really passionate thread that I wrote about theology and our interaction with the greater good in humanity? I am equally as passionate about my Marvel theories. You've got to sign up for both.



Amy Fritz 01:02

This is Amy Fritz, and you're listening to Untangled Faith, a podcast for anyone who has found themselves confused or disillusioned in their faith journey. If you want to hold on to your faith, while untangling it from all the things that are not good and true, this is the place for you. The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill, a new podcast from Christianity Today, has inspired all sorts of reactions and conversation in the online world. It follows the career of Pastor Mark Driscoll

beginning with his planting of Mars Hill church in Seattle. If you've heard of Mark Driscoll, you probably already know how the story of Mars Hill unfolded. And you know, there was no happy ending. A lone note plunked on the piano four times in a row from Kings Kaleidoscope's Sticks and Stones, the theme music of the podcast, will play in my dreams for a long time. Would you be surprised to hear that some folks are pushing back on the podcast? Probably not. If you listen to podcasts the way my friends and I do, you're ready to talk about what you're listening to as soon as you finish listening to an episode. That's how I've taken in The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill. So when I saw pushback against the show, I knew I wanted to talk about this with my friend Lauren. We have already spent all sorts of time discussing these episodes, and I'd been looking for the perfect excuse to invite her onto the show. Lauren Thoman and I met in 2012 when my husband started working with her husband at Ramsey Solutions. Our paths to leaving the organization could not have been more different, but they converged a bit more in early 2020 when her husband's both ended up working for the same employer again. Lauren is a writer for hire with bylines at Looper, Collider and Parade Magazine. She is one of the wisest and deepest thinkers I know. And I'm thrilled to introduce you to her. Here's my conversation with Lauren Thoman. Not long ago, and I believe this was inspired by Mike Cosper's, The Rise and Fall of Mars Hill. A pastor from New York tweeted, "There's a fine line between cautionary tales and failure porn, and it's mainly in your own heart. We must be humble, not gloat in the fall of others and realize what each of us is also capable of." I had a lot of thoughts about that. We've listened to that podcast. We have watched a lot of rises and falls of churches, church leaders, Christian celebrities, and I am dying to know your initial reaction to that because there's been a lot of conversation online about you know, is this okay to talk about? Is it not? Should we share it? Should we not? There's a lot to that statement. So tell me your thoughts.

L

Lauren T 03:56

There is a lot. And it's interesting, because I actually agree with it, but not, I think in the way he meant it. There is a difference between, you know, as he puts it, "cautionary tales and failure porn." And that's probably not the terminology I would use. There's a difference in telling a story to learn from it, and basically, so you don't repeat history, or just reveling in the misery and downfall of others. And I do think he's right, that that's an internal thing. Where I think we differ is, I feel like this was probably in response to like the existence of that podcast and the fact that it's critiquing. I think there's this tendency in a lot of the discourse around these sorts of issues to say, "Well, it's all like a heart issue," but then police what we think is in other people's hearts.



Amy Fritz 04:57

Yeah.

L

Lauren T 04:57

So I'd agree with him that it's like that's an internal thing as to are we taking in these stories to learn from them? Or are we taking them in for just like titillation purposes, because they're salacious and we find that deliciously scandalous. But I don't think we can actually determine that for other people. That it is good when a harmful, whether it's an institution or a harmful person, if the when the truth comes out, that harm can be stopped, right? It's good to celebrate that. It's good that we know what's happening here and this is no longer taking place. Some people would maybe interpret that as gloating, but I think there's a difference. There's a lot of truth to realize what each of us is also capable of. You and I have talked on numerous occasions about like, "I never thought I would have been the person to join a toxic and controlling organization. I never thought I would be the type of person to push toxic theology. We didn't mean to, it's sad, but you can't always just accept the the surface read. You have to use your critical thinking. You have to have that humility to be like, I can be wrong about things even if I feel like I went

into it with good intentions. One of the things that's so interesting about Mars Hill is I think a lot tends to focus on "We didn't mean to be part of this. We didn't want to hurt anyone." That's true. But what was the impact? We are each capable of contributing to systems and teachings and rhetoric that is harmful, even if we don't mean to.



Amy Fritz 06:36

it's important to think about that. Like there's a difference between intent and impact. Just because our intent is good, doesn't give us a pass on the harmful impact it has on somebody. It's really easy to say, "But they meant well."



Lauren T 06:50

Yeah. And I think even in the way that a lot of us kind of learn to apologize. Well, first of all, I think a lot of us don't learn to apologize. In general, the apologizing that is modeled, in a lot of ways, is more about "Well, here's why I didn't mean it. I'm sorry. But here are all my motivations. And here like, here's why I don't want you to think poorly of me." You know, something I've kind of come to realize is impact is what actually really matters when it comes to how you're interacting with another person. Yes, sometimes it's helpful to know if one of my children is flailing around and hits me in the face. It's good to know, "Oh, Mom, I didn't mean to hit you. I'm so sorry." Because whether you know someone's being malicious or just careless, that that makes a difference in how you interact with that person. Either way, you know, if she breaks my nose doing it, it's not less broken, because she didn't mean to.



Amy Fritz 07:50

Yeah, so we both have absorbed and taken in a lot of Avengers movies. I know you did not see me going this this place. Okay. The MCU. You watched Loki. Yes. Okay, so that quote where. (So this was the point in our conversation where I could not remember the name of one of the main characters of Loki. Lauren brought me up to speed. It was Mobius. Thanks, Lauren.) This is a paraphrase of a quote from Mobius. "There's not a lot you won't do, you know, when you think you're the good guy, and like the ends justify the means. And nobody, no one thinks they're the bad guys.



Lauren T 08:29

Yeah, it's that's the whole "everyone's the hero of their own story." And I don't even know where who first said that. But I think it's very rare to have someone who is self aware enough to know they're doing the wrong thing. Like in the first Suicide Squad movie, Harley Quinn has that line where she's like, "We're bad guys. What do you expect?" Real life, bad guys don't admit they're bad guys, because they think they're good guys, which is what gets into the whole like, well, if you're just judging by intent, everyone's a good guy. I think you have to say it's not really about intent. It's about impact.



Amy Fritz 09:06

When I see pushback on social media that says, "Ah, I don't know if we should talk about this." I see a category of person that's pushing back seems pretty consistent to me. And I wonder if you have seen that as well.



Lauren T 09:19

It tends to be people who are in positions that are similar to the person being talked about.



Amy Fritz 09:27

Yes.



Lauren T 09:28

Um So if it's a pastor, it tends to be pastors. If it's an organizational leader, it tends to be organizational leaders. If it's a member of your particular faith community, a lot of other members of the same community members of that church, I feel like it tends to be people on the same level.



Amy Fritz 09:47

I have a couple of theories of why I think that is you can tell me if you agree. One, I think it's sometimes these are their friends that are being talked about. And it's awkward to have your friends being called out. The second thing I think it may not be conscious for them, maybe subconscious, is that this is shining a light on something that may threaten some influence or power that they also have. People are asking questions of somebody of the same level that you are at the same credit category. They're going to ask questions of you sometime, probably.



Lauren T 10:17

Yeah. And I think there's another layer to it as well, that's also subconscious. And that's when we hear, and you know, I'm a writer, and I'm a reader. And I love stories. And when you're telling a story, when you're taking in a story, there is always the the audience surrogate. Like the character in the story that your audience is going to relate to, you know, normally you want that to be your protagonist in the story, right? But real life, we don't have protagonists, we just have real people. And so everyone's going to find that window into the story that is the person they most relate to. And it's just going to naturally, by default, be the person who's the most like them. If you are pastoring a church, and it's, you know, of a similar theological bent, if you see someone in a similar position who's being called out for a negative impact, it's just natural that you're gonna put yourself in their shoes, and not necessarily the congregation members, or whoever they were having that impact on. Because that's not the position you hold in your life. Sometimes it is exactly what you say, which is if this is happening to them, like I could get in trouble. But I think it's also that's just the easiest person to empathize with is the person that's the most like you, because that's what you want people to do for you is empathize with your position even if you don't think that you have the same problems.



Amy Fritz 11:42

Everybody has a little bit of influence and power. It's really hard to hold it all and to step out of it and see it from somebody else's perspective.



Lauren T 11:50

I've been in, you know, Christian churches, primarily evangelical churches, my whole life. In most of the churches I've been in, most of the sermons I've heard, and I think this is just a human nature thing too I don't think it's exclusive to Christians, we really don't like thinking we're part of the problem. We like thinking that other people are part of the

problem. And since we are doing our best, we are fine. Most sermons that I've heard have typically been, "Here's why we're okay. Here's why we're doing things right. And here's why, like, we really need to be, you know, vigilant in safeguarding against all those people who are going to do it wrong."



Amy Fritz 12:32

Yeah.



Lauren T 12:33

That has been true of conservative churches and progressive churches that I've been a part of. It's always "Here's why the other group people who are not in this room are part of the problem."



Amy Fritz 12:42

Yeah



Lauren T 12:43

You know, and a lot of times I agree. You know, I'll be like, "Yes, it is those people! Thank goodness, I am not among them.." But I mean, I think the Bible has something to say about that sort of mindset.



Amy Fritz 12:54

When we are listening to these sorts of accounts, like Mars Hill, Bill Hybels, James MacDonald, Dave Ramsey, some people are gonna listen and say, "Thank goodness, my church is not like that. My organization would never do that. I would know. And I would not be a part of it." What are your thoughts on that?



Lauren T 13:11

It seems obvious, but it's a thing I literally just realized within the last year. Everyone's wrong about something. But the thing that was kind of my lightbulb moment, and I don't even know why, is that no one knows what they're wrong about. Everyone's wrong about something. But if we knew we were wrong about that thing, we obviously wouldn't be thinking it. If you realize that that is true, that has to be true, you have to start from a place of humility. Of I do not know everything. I can be extremely convicted, and I can have put so much research and prayer and study into the positions I hold, but I cannot possibly be right about everything. Because no one is and I do not know the things I am wrong about. So the only way to continue pursuing truth is to be willing to change my mind about things I am currently sure about. You know, I don't think that means you can't have principles. You have to hold, especially things that are very changeable, with an open hand. Right now I believe the organization I am a part of is healthy and good and doing good things in the world. However, that's not immutable. Because organizations are made of people. People change. People make mistakes, people are wrong about things. You can't put all of your eggs into the basket of my church is never going to screw up. I am never going to screw up. The person that I have faith in right now is

never going to do something wrong. I do think there's a difference between like someone who's really trying to do the right thing at all times and messes up sometimes and someone who is an inherently abusive person and is in a pattern of



Amy Fritz 14:53

I don't want to do this like sin leveling thing where you're like, "Who among us?"



Lauren T 14:57

"There there, but for the grace of God, I go." with like child abuse. I'm like, no, that's not that's not a thing we're all just on the cusp of, save for like one slip up. You don't create a cult by accident. There's a lot of intentionality about creating an abusive system and perpetuating a pattern of abusive behavior. That is not just a little slip up. I don't think there's probably a lot of people who are serial predators listening to your podcast,



Amy Fritz 15:27

Probably not. I don't have to worry about that too much.



Lauren T 15:29

So I think for probably the people that are would be listening to this and your audience, it's probably mostly people that are really trying to get it right, and trying to do the right thing and trying to be a good neighbor and be loving and trying to balance that with like, what if someone that I trust, something comes out about them that sounds wrong? What if an institution that I put my faith in, someone else has hurt them? Like, what do I do with that? And I think the solution is to just like ostrich away and be like, "Well, I'm just not gonna listen to those stories. Listening to that is wrong, because you are slandering someone that I have faith in," because like, how do you know it's slander unless you're willing to listen to it? How do you know it's not true? I think you always have to be willing to consider perspectives outside your own. Consider the source. Is this coming from someone I know to be a truthful person? Is this someone that I know has a track record of integrity? And do they have something to gain?



Amy Fritz 16:29

Yes



Lauren T 16:29

This narrative, I think one of the most baffling narratives out there is that victims of abuse are speaking out for fame. And I'm like, who wants to be famous for that? I'm sure it happens, but that is very much an exception. I can say if I ever become famous, because I was tied up in like an abuse scandal. "Oh, may I one day become famous for being a victim of systemic abuse." No, not a thing that is enjoyable. So you have to consider like, is there anything to gain from speaking out on this? And if your answer's like "Well, fame." No, that's incorrect.





Amy Fritz 17:09

Wrong. Try again.



Lauren T 17:11

Go back to the drawing board on that one. Yeah. So I'd say consider your perspective. Consider your own bias. We're incapable of completely accounting for our own biases, but we can at least try to be aware of them.



Amy Fritz 17:25

Just having this conversation with Lauren reminded me, it's hard to make the case that we are not getting something of value when listening to a podcast prompts you to have these sorts of self reflective conversations. I really hope that that is what this sort of conversation does for you as well. You can take this home with you and have the same conversations with your friends and your family. When I read Julie Roys' article in World magazine about James McDonald, and it was Hard Times at Harvest, and it was all the things that happen there. And then reading about Bill Hybels. I think that what was redeeming for me, I learned a lot by paying attention to what was happening and seeing patterns and being willing to not look at it to say, "Look at these terrible people", but to say, "Oh, crap, this is happening." Being able to see it outside of your own circle is the start of being able to learn to see it in your own- in something that's going to cost you something. That was my my particular story. Like I went from from like, being a really big defender of Ramsey, because my husband worked there. But there came a point while we were still there, while I I'm watching these pastors and leaders fall, and I'm absorbing it and being willing to believe these accounts, I'm seeing patterns and I'm seeing things are very likely happening in my own community, or I've seen hints of it already. People telling their stories- having podcasts like this- have been very valuable for me. And I cannot speak to how other people consume them, but it has changed my life. You know, it's like I know that sounds like a really huge dramatic thing to say. It's been life changing for me to hear people be willing to share their stories.



Lauren T 19:12

Second Timothy one seven is often quoted in these recent times that "God has not given us a spirit of fear." Oh, here it is. Here's, what is that translation? "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love and sound judgment." And I mean, that's still all just one verse out, but I think it's interesting that it's like you're not supposed to be afraid but just to exercise discernment and sound judgment. I think that a lot of the "Don't talk about this" feels kind of fear motivated. Like, I don't want to know that. I don't want to think about it. I think we tend to couch it in, and I say "we" because I think there is a tendency within Christianity as a whole, not just evangelicalism, just Christianity, to really lean into that "no true Scotsman" fallacy and say, "Well, if you're doing it this way, you're doing it wrong. So you're not really a Christian, the Christians are the people doing it right and right means the way I interpret it. And if you're not doing it that way, you're not a real Christian." I think that kind of is a good way to distance ourselves from taking responsibility for like, well, this is, for better or for worse, we're all in this club together. And we got, we got to take responsibility for our own. And even though I don't want my own to include serial abusers,



Amy Fritz 20:26

right



Lauren T 20:26

like they do, we got to come collect our people, which is why I always say "us," even though I'm like, I don't want to be included in this group. And I'm like, but I am like, I have self selected into this group, for better or worse.



Amy Fritz 20:37

So that would be a way we shouldn't respond to these things. We shouldn't be like, "Well, they weren't believers anyways,"



Lauren T 20:44

I mean, I think gets back to that original tweet you're talking about, of like trying to determine what's in someone else's heart. Yeah. And like, "Well, they're not really a Christian. Well, they don't really believe the right way." This is not to say like, it's anything you say it is. I think there are lots of people really taking the Lord's name in vain, as far as the world we occupy. You know, there's Christians and the only people who are determining, are you a real Christian, not a real Christian, are the other Christians like from the outside? It's like, it's one club. I think we got to take responsibility for our messy parts. It's still part of the body, and if even if it's cancerous, gangrenous, you got to deal with it. You can't just be like, "Oh, that's not really mine."



Amy Fritz 21:25

Yeah, not looking at it isn't helping.



Lauren T 21:27

As the saying goes, "The first step is admitting you have a problem." A lot of us have difficulty admitting we have a problem, because we want to say they have a problem. When we get into that whole what should we talk about? What shouldn't we talk about? What is you know, to use a fun buzzword, what is gossip versus what is what is helpful? But truth is truth. I think you've said on this podcast for like, God's not scared of the truth. The truth says, examine me. God doesn't say, "Don't look over there. Don't ask those questions." If something is true, even if it's messy, it needs to be dealt with. The solution is not, "Let's just pretend it didn't happen." Or let's throw accusations of the person bringing this truth to light because we don't like knowing it.



Amy Fritz 22:11

I asked Lauren this next question, because I knew she'd have something really important to add to this part of the conversation. How do we engage in a way with these accounts in a way that brings health and healing. Move the needle towards more of a healthy Christian community? And also how do you decide how to engage on social media? Like retweet something, or when, you like we talk about, signal boost something, or add something to that. I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.



Lauren T 22:38

So much goes into that. I'm old school in the social media game. I can't do these newfangled snapchats and Tik Toks.



Amy Fritz 22:46

You said newfangled, that's the age you.



Lauren T 22:48

I think that the whole sentence that just came out of my mouth is going to age me. So I'm mostly on Twitter. I don't think there is a one size fits all. I try to think, first of all, in terms of, and this is definitely coming from our Ramsey lens.



Amy Fritz 23:04

Yeah



Lauren T 23:04

I think I do run things through a filter of, if I were called to court, to and said, "Did you retweet this? Did you say this online? Do you stand by it?" I'm like, would I be able to honestly say, "yes." Or would it be like, "Oh, I wasn't really thinking that one through." Like I was just angry that day. And I actually run it through my my deposition lens,



Amy Fritz 23:25

What a weird world you live in that you Yeah.



Lauren T 23:28

are unlikely to be ever called testify. It sounds almost trite at this point, but my Jesus lens. If Jesus is looking over my shoulder, is he going to be like, "What are you doing? What? What did you just type there?" Or is he going to be like, "Yeah, call that out." Whether it fits other people's Jesus lens, or their deposition lens, I don't know. But for me, I'm like, I can sleep at night. I feel good about what I'm putting out into the world. And sometimes I'll put something out there and then like an hour later be like that really wasn't it? And so either I'll delete it if it's gotten no engagement or if it has will be like, "I shouldn't have said that." Gotta own that one. I also think it's important to think of whose narrative and my centering. It's not just in who your signal boosting it's who you're following. Like, whose voices am I listening to? I have tried to be intentional about following people who have perspectives I don't have who have life experiences I don't have who I don't necessarily agree with everything, but I think speak intelligently and I want to consider what if I'm wrong? I need to at least hear the persuasive argument in the other direction so I can know if I stand by what I think. Honestly changed my mind on a lot just by being willing to listen to people who disagree with me, and thinking it through and then being like, "Oh, apparently the only reason I thought what I thought was because I had literally never allowed myself to listen to a well thought out counter argument." And then once I have them both, then it's a little more of a level playing field in making up my mind about where I stand and you know, kind of get into like your catch line for the podcast, which is "What is good and true?" You know, do I believe this just because I've always believed it or because it's actually good and true. And again, the truth is the truth no matter what. So you can throw every perspective you want at it. And the truth is going to be the truth. So as long as you're

digging for truth, and not just how to defend my position, and being open to being wrong, and changing your mind about things. That's a good approach to engaging with social media, is listening to voices not to become your opinion, but to challenge your opinion.



Amy Fritz 25:37

Right.



Lauren T 25:37

So as far as what I will like signal boost. I tend to want to signal boost people who don't necessarily already have the microphone, or even people who do, but are bringing up perspectives that I think are helpful to consider. So I don't tend to want to boost kind of the party lines that I've always heard, because I'm like, that's gotten enough airtime. I want to elevate the voices who I think are speaking compassionately, and intelligently on perspectives that I don't think a lot of people tend to consider.



Amy Fritz 26:09

Right.



Lauren T 26:10

Or are making an argument for something I feel strongly about in a way that I hadn't thought to make that argument. Kind of coming at things from different angles. Social media can be kind of an echo chamber and it can be just a way to reinforce what you already think. It can also be a great tool for critical thinking if you're willing to kind of step outside your comfort zone and listen to perspectives. So I try to both boost voices that are offering those different perspectives, and if I feel like I have a thought that I'm like, I haven't heard this particular thing talks about in this specific way and this is helpful for me as a framework, that's when I'll like tweet a thread on, "I've been thinking about this" and in this specific way. And maybe it's helpful. Maybe it's not. Sometimes I have thrown things out there and it has just completely fallen on its face. And I'm like, Okay



Amy Fritz 26:58

yeah



Lauren T 26:59

literally, no one is thinking about this the way I'm thinking about this. Maybe I need to reexamine what, and normally that's a good cue for me. I'm like, maybe I need to reexamine this. If this didn't resonate with anyone, why? It could be because because I tweeted it on Monday morning at 6am. But it could also be because there's really nothing here.



Amy Fritz 27:17



Yeah, yeah,



Lauren T 27:18

The thing was profound. It's not.



Amy Fritz 27:20

It felt profound at the time.



Lauren T 27:22

maybe I should have had coffee first.



Amy Fritz 27:24

Lauren, You make me laugh. Because sometimes you have thought through something, and you have this long thread on something and then you will get a bunch of people that will follow you from that. And then you will be like, "Um, hey, folks, I'm going to be talking about movies, theology, and you're going to get a little bit of all the things."



Lauren T 27:41

Yeah, like, you know, that really passionate thread that I wrote about like theology and our interaction with the greater good and humanity? I am equally as passionate about my Marvel theories. You got to sign up for both.



Amy Fritz 27:55

I love it. I love it so much. One thing I noticed that I really appreciated from you, Lauren is with the Christianity Today article on Bethlehem Baptist and seminary, where a lot of the people on or off the record or on background for that, were disappointed in how that article came together in the end. And I thought I really appreciated how you were able to interact with some of those people's accounts and reshare them and synthesize some of that, what was your thinking?



Lauren T 28:23

First of all, it takes a lot of vulnerability to go on the record with your story of how someone really wounded you that you trusted. For anyone who hasn't read that article about Bethlehem Baptist, the article kind of gave equal footing to the victims of the abuse and then the leaders who were perpetuating it. It was framed in a way that it was very equivocating of both sides. I understand the instinct to think that the way to be fair is to always weigh both sides equally. But in practice, in matters of abuse, especially, there is always a power imbalance. The abuser has been the one in power and being able to shape the narrative. And so, if you're going to then try to tell the story of the victims, and you're giving them equal page space, but it's not equal because you're, you have to view it as a whole, with the narrative that's already been out there, which is largely shaped by the people holding that power. It's just tipping

those scales even further. And that's I think, what a lot of the people that had spoken for that article were upset about and that's what they were tweeting about is, "I wouldn't have talked for this if I knew that the people who hurt me were going to be given equal footing." And so I think it takes a lot of vulnerability to speak on the record in the first place, and then it takes a lot more to then speak up publicly and say, "I feel betrayed by this narrative. That is not what I was presented. And if I had known I would not have been that vulnerable." So these people have already been twice vulnerable publicly. I thought, first of all, it's important to kind of help them reclaim some of that narrative power by boosting those voices. Make sure they're the ones that are getting heard. When you're hurting, and it's fresh, you don't have a more like macro perspective on the whole thing. Whereas if you're a masochist, like you and I are, and you keep following these,



Amy Fritz 30:30

you do you have a little bit of perspective, outside perspective,



Lauren T 30:33

and the pattern that I've seen emerge in coverage of abuse. And I saw with the Bethlehem Baptist article with the Mars Hill podcast, you know, with a lot of the coverage of you know, RZIM, is this real desire on the part of the person writing the story to be balanced, but their version of balance is I'm going to present both sides equally, and not acknowledge the significant power imbalance that is already present in this narrative. I like to, when I see patterns, I like to point them out and kind of walk through, "Here is how all these things are kind of doing the same thing. And I don't think it's intentional." And I think the reason that I was felt like I needed to not just boost their voices, but kind of add some commentary, is I think we all need to periodically reexamine what our default settings are. Is my default setting to view people who have traditionally held most of the power and the people who have traditionally been oppressed as equals? 'Cause they're not. As humans we are equals. as participants in a society, we are not. Am I accounting for that? In my narrative, I thought for that specific instance, it was important to kind of connect those dots and show like, "Look, no one in telling these stories is doing it out of maliciousness." They're not doing it to wound the victims further. They're trying to help. But if we don't examine our own biases, and our own default settings, in how we shape stories, we can contribute to the problem of perpetuating a power imbalance instead of correcting one.



Amy Fritz 32:12

Yeah, I think it's really valuable to think about that. Because again, it brings back to that introspection. You're not processing all this and saying, "Man, these people are terrible." You're processing it and saying, like, "How have we contributed to that? And how can we make sure that that doesn't happen anymore?" So this morning, I sent you a link to the tweet from a gentleman that was asked to be on the Rise and Fall of Mars Hill. And again, I think this goes to the attempt to be balanced. Mike Cospers, reaches out to former communications person, I think, from Mars Hill, and he must have considered it a little bit of any posted today, his response to Mike about why he didn't want to be on the show after he listened to it for a while. And it seemed like his main argument was, "It's not balanced. I feel like I'm going to get very little airtime in the end. And it's going to be it's not going to be in my favor."



Lauren T 33:01

The way he worded. It was "I've listened to the podcast, and I don't think it's balanced. I don't think it's fair, I think you've got a narrative that you're pushing", Which is funny to me, because in my perspective, listening to that, I'm like you're giving too much airtime to kind of the defenders. He was clearly on the side of, you're not giving enough. So

my read of his letter was, "I don't want to participate in this because I don't think I will be treated fairly, I don't think that my perspective will be given equal weight as some of these other people." Because I think it all comes back to we don't want to believe we're part of the problem. So what I read, obviously, I was not part of Mars Hill and I do not know this gentleman, but my read on his response was I was like, this is someone who very much wants to not have been part of the problem and wants to really focus on "But look at all the good that came out of this. And that's why I was there. And I really want to focus on that and not all the harmful things." Because he seemed to even acknowledge, like Driscoll was a problem, but his stance was like, "but it was just Driscoll. The church itself did a lot of good." I had a few reactions. One was, I was not surprised. Again, none of us want to feel like we're complicit in abusive systems. So obviously, you know, the human reaction is go on the defense, and not look inward and be like, oh, wow, did I perpetuate this? Was I part of the problem? And you know, I know you and I both reckon with that with all our



Amy Fritz 34:36

Yeah, we're having ongoing conversations



Lauren T 34:37

about complicity. You know, we believed we are doing good, but like, how much harm did we perpetuate by working for this organization? Right? The first one is like it's understandable. That is a human response to say, "I don't want to have been part of the problem. I want the problem to have been this one guy, and he has been dealt with and everyone else needs to be absolved." Because the problem is this one guy. Cause it's a lot easier to blame one person than a system that is flawed. I also am not surprised that he believes that if there is an implication in the narrative that it was the organization that was toxic, and not just the person, that he doesn't think that's fair. He doesn't find that balanced. It doesn't surprise me. Because, you know, we always talk about like, what is the cost of the truth? And the cost for someone that was in that position is high for admitting the truth. From listening to the stories, my read on the truth is that Driscoll was kind of a focal point for a church organization that had some very harmful structures inherent inside it, and that it had to have been kind of upheld by a lot of people. A lot of people had to buy into this and enable it for it to reach the level did. A lot of people had to sit there and listen to some of the things he said and say, "Yes, this is good teaching," or very least, "Maybe I don't agree with this, but this is not enough to take away some of this man's power."



Amy Fritz 36:04

That's a great point. Cause I think about people probably in organizations and churches that are maybe reckoning with that. They're realizing getting rid of one person probably doesn't solve the problem. Maybe it wasn't just that. There was maybe an elder group that sat back and saw this dysfunction and weighed the cost and decided we don't want to disrupt the building program. We're just gonna hope for the best, rolling the dice, really being willing to sacrifice other things, because this other thing is just too painful to deal with.



Lauren T 36:33

Yeah. And I think again, I don't think that it's likely that the Mark Driscolls of the world are listening to your podcast.



Amy Fritz 36:38

— Right.

L

Lauren T 36:38

But I do think it is likely that the people that would have been sitting in the pews would. Trying to sense of, "Can a rotten tree bear good fruit" Cause that's, I think, Episode Four, in particular, the Mars Hill podcast really tried to focus on "Look at all the good that has come out." But my question is, "How do we quantify that that's good?" Because if you count like number of baptisms, or number of people like claiming they came to Christ there, again, I'm not going to say "not Christians", not, you know, because if you claim to be Christianity, you get to be in the group that is considered Christians. But it's like if the teaching that led there was degrading to women and this violent rhetoric of running people over with a bus.



Amy Fritz 37:12

Yeah.

L

Lauren T 37:21

And of casting out critics and and slandering anyone who dared question Driscoll's narrative. Is that good fruit? And, you know, this is not a question at all, the faith of anyone that came out of Mars Hill. Like, I'm sure there are many, many with very strong faith that are very good people that are really trying to do the right thing. But it's, you know, you kind of have to unpack the, how much toxicity did I accidentally take in on my journey to this? And you know, how much of that do I have to untangle from my faith? And



Amy Fritz 37:59

There's a bit of narcissism to say these people would not have come to Jesus, if not for our church.

L

Lauren T 38:05

Yeah. And I mean, I think I tend to believe that I don't think that God is so fragile, that if you remove one abusive person from the lineup, suddenly like everyone's lost.



Amy Fritz 38:18

Right.

L

Lauren T 38:19

I feel like God's bigger than that. There are so many different ways to encounter God. And to discover the truth of God. I don't think you have to put all your eggs in one basket. Like I was thinking, recently, I was like, has anyone? Is there any example in the Bible? And maybe you can answer my question. I can't think of any. Is there any example in the Bible of where God had a plan and then a person stepped in and was like, "No," and then God's whole plan was

thrown off? There are definitely examples of you know, the one that comes to mind is Moses, where God's like "Moses, speak to the rock," and Moses, like, "I'm gonna hit it." He's like, "Why would you do that?" And he's like, "Well, now you don't get to go in the promised land. Good job, Moses," but the plan is still the same. And so I think that's kind of the same. I don't think you can actually completely throw off the way God works in the world by being like, well, if we remove this one person from ministry,



Amy Fritz 39:11

or by talking about it. Nobody is gonna want to follow Jesus if they know what happened here. So just close that curtain. Don't look. Don't talk about it.



Lauren T 39:18

How is what happened here integral to following Jesus. You know, when you talk about people that were emotionally abused, and had to lose their communities and go into counseling and all that, like, is that what Jesus required?



Amy Fritz 39:35

I hope you enjoy this conversation with Lauren, but more than that, I hope you go away with some questions to consider. What might I be wrong about? Who needs me to listen to their voice or even amplify it? What have I learned from watching people in places behave in ways that hurt others? And I'm sure you can think of your own questions. Lauren and I aren't actually finished with our conversation. We kept the tape rolling and she answered a few more questions about how listening to stories of spiritual abuse has helped her in her own personal journey. This interview is available exclusively for the Untangled Faith membership community. I would love for you to learn more about it and to do so you can go to [Untangled Faith podcast dot com slash member](https://untangledfaith.com/member). Again that's Untangled Faith Podcast dot com slash member. Thanks for listening to this episode of Untangled Faith. For transcripts and show notes, go to [Untangle Faith podcast dot com](https://untangledfaith.com). You can also find me on Instagram and Facebook as Untangled Faith. And you can find me on Twitter as [faith untangled](https://twitter.com/faithuntangled) on the next episode of Untangled Faith but this is how I remember it going. Dave says, "Look at all these people. If I mess up, they will directly be impacted by that." And he hears about his team members. Wouldn't that be amazing? In 2011, my husband Nathan applied for a job at the Lampo group, Dave Ramsey's company. Providing hope for people? Sign us up. We want to provide hope for people. In this season, I tell the whole story starting with that hopeful beginning, to the point where we started questioning if things really were as good as we desperately wanted them to be.