

## Engage360 | 1 - Meet the President: Dr. Mark Young

- Introduction: Welcome to Engage360, Denver Seminary's podcast. Join us as we explore the redemptive power of the gospel and the life-changing truth of Scripture at work in our culture today.
- Dr. Don Payne: Hi, I'm Don Payne. I'm glad to be your host for Engage360 and as we are getting under way with this semester's podcast one of our big objectives is to help you get acquainted with Denver Seminary by hearing from some of the key folks at Denver Seminary. So our guest this week on Engage360 is the President of Denver Seminary, Dr. Mark Young. So Mark, welcome to the podcast.
- Dr. Mark Young: Thank you Don, and thank you for doing this.
- Dr. Don Payne: Well, we've got a whole team of people who have really worked tirelessly for months now to make this happen. Let me introduce Mark to you. If you don't know Mark, Mark has a bachelor's degree from Marshall University, a master of theology from Dallas Theological Seminary in New Testament Literature and Exegesis. He has a PhD from Trinity International University in Educational Studies. Prior to becoming President of Denver Seminary in 2009 he was Professor of World Missions and Intercultural Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary from 95 to 2009. And kind of overlapping with that stretch, he held a variety of pastoral roles at Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas from 2000 to 2009. Mark travels a lot, as you might expect, internationally and domestically. He teaches, consults, and is well known as a leader in the field of missions. He's spoken a lot on issues related to theological education and missions, in various international symposia and conferences. And we're also proud to say that he serves on the board of one of our accrediting agencies, The Association of Theological Schools. Mark is married to Priscilla, they together have been involved in theological training and local church ministry with World Venture in Eastern Europe. They were there for 14 years living in Vienna, and for four years while there, they ministered throughout the former Soviet Block, they relocated to Poland and experienced firsthand some of the really world changing events of 1989. Mark was the founding academic dean of the Biblical Theological Seminary in Wroclaw how do you say that Mark, in Poland? Is it Warsaw?
- Dr. Mark Young: Well, no, a friend of mine just punts and calls it washcloth. But the real way is Wroclaw.
- Dr. Don Payne: Yeah, I knew that.
- Dr. Mark Young: Yeah. I thought you did.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah, that's clear from the spelling here. And I'm not even going to try to repeat that. Mark and Priscilla been married for 38 years. They've got three grown children, six grandchildren. And his passion, as we have learned over these last 10 years of his presidency, is to align everything he is and does with the eternal purpose of God, so that all people in all places can worship God alone. Mark, I want you to tell a little bit of your story, but I'll use this as a lead in. You are one of the few people I know who use the word holler as a noun. Now in my upbringing, we used that word holler a lot, but it was always a verb. You know, I was always being hollered at or hollering at somebody. But you're one of the few people who use that as a noun. So tell us what that means.

Dr. Mark Young: Yeah. So, holler is the Appalachian way or the mountain way to say hello. Great. Which is the Eastern, East coast version of a Canyon only with not so steep walls. So I grew up in Appalachia in West Virginia and got to enjoy that culture, and that place and the beauty of it. And as well as some of the things that I wanted to change in my life as a result of that upbringing.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Right. How did, how did the Lord and life kind of move you along, away from Appalachia into the kinds of things you're doing now?

Dr. Mark Young: Yeah, so my dad was the first in six generations of our family to go to high school, and he insisted that of course I would go to high school and then he insisted that I would go to college. And as a result of that, I began to envision life that was beyond the rims of the holler, where we and our family lived. We had a very comfortable upbringing. I don't want to paint the wrong picture. It was a delightful way to grow up with family, close friends, no fences between the yards, just a community that truly knew one another and cared for one another, so very secure. But I began to see that perhaps God gifted me in ways that I couldn't express fully in that setting. And I began to dream about becoming an educator, to be honest with you. Very early in my growth at the university where I went, Marshall University, and very early in my growth as a Christian, I began to envision that God could use me as a teacher. I love teaching. I love learning. I love seeing people learn. And so those callings really blended together as I was at the University. And then that led me to go to Seminary.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Now, you came to faith while you were at Marshall?

Dr. Mark Young: You know, I was raised at a Baptist church, so I'm pretty sure I trusted in Christ as a child. And I was baptized when I was 10 but my faith really came alive while I was at Marshall. It began to mean something to me more than just having my sins forgiven. It meant that I was, in Christ in a way that I'd never experienced before. That gave me a sense of calling and a sense of purpose that I had never seen before as a believer.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Okay. What did you study at Marshall?

Dr. Mark Young: Communications.

Dr. Don Payne: Fittingly.

Dr. Mark Young: Well, yeah, I mean, while I stumble over all these words, you could see that I was a communications major and I'll be honest, I think that foundation has served me well at every stage of the path, every part of the path that God's laid out before.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah, I can see that. How did you and Priscilla meet?

Dr. Mark Young: We didn't meet until I was in Seminary. So, our stories come together in the most unusual way. She was raised in Africa. That's a long way from West Virginia.

Dr. Don Payne: I think.

Dr. Mark Young: Yes. Her parents were missionaries in Ethiopia. She came back to the U S when she was 16, and after her college experience through some friends, moved to Dallas to work for awhile and establish herself as a woman, as an independent woman, again began working at the seminary. We met there and married five days after I graduated from Seminary.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Alright. So you've been actively involved in some form of Christian ministry, vocational ministry for, what would you say for?

Dr. Mark Young: Since 1981.

Dr. Don Payne: '81. Okay. Yeah. So almost 40 years.

Dr. Mark Young: Yeah. And yeah, while I was a Seminary student, I was also involved in church ministry as well as with young life, early on, in Texas, it was a fantastic experience. So, yeah, I, I've never really considered anything else to be honest with you. And once again, the calling of the gospel to bring a message of hope to those who envision or want a life that's different than what they're currently experiencing, and that calling to be an educator are blended together for me in ways that are truly profound. When you think about it, people enter into an educational process because they hope that their lives will be different when they come out. They envision a future different than their present. And so they see education as a pathway. Isn't that often the motivation for understanding and responding to the gospel as well?

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. So as you look at this almost 40 year spread of various types of ministry involvement, what, I'm curious what you would pinpoint as some of your defining moments.

Dr. Mark Young: Sure.

Dr. Don Payne: In that time period.

Dr. Mark Young: Sure. So we moved to Vienna right after we were married, and during that time we were doing non-formal theological education in the Soviet Block. So I will say to you that sitting in a room full of primarily men, but also men and women, sitting in a room with people who woke up or went to bed every night wondering if they were going to be arrested because of their faith, changed me. It created within me a real question. Do I believe this enough to live the life that they're living? It humbled me, it convicted me and I, I've never lost that. I can't imagine someone having a casual faith because when you face the possibility of suffering a persecution, prison, however you want to describe it, because of your faith, you have to make that faith the centerpiece of how you live your life. That, I'd never experienced that before, Don. And it completely changed the way I viewed my own faith in what Christ had done in the power of the gospel. So that was one experience, then living in Poland in the early, in the late eighties I should say, and watching the entire country change from a communist system to a freedom democracy, a social democracy, as well as capitalistic economy. And seeing that there was, now an opportunity for folks to be able to create, that life wasn't just freedom, that there was a way forward. And seeing that the church came alive in ways that it had never envisioned, that also gave me a tremendous sense of real hope that the gospel can make a difference, even in difficult places, once it is set free in that capacity. So that changed me tremendously. And to be quite honest, when you welcome a group of young students into a school that's never existed before, and unlike any other school that's ever been created in that place, that was a real high point for us. It literally was a fulfillment of some dreams.

Dr. Don Payne: So when you came back to the States after those years in Poland, what was different for you? In the way you think you taught this, this may just be an extension of what you've already said, but I'm curious.

Dr. Mark Young: You want me to tell you the truth or do you want me to try to dress it up in Presidential language?

Dr. Don Payne: Well, it's the Seminary Podcast, so you can go anywhere you want.

Dr. Mark Young: You know, I think what we came back to the United States, we had a very, very difficult time coming face to face with an evangelicalism that had begun to pursue other ends than just the gospel. With Christians who were pursuing a life that really was separated from their faith in ways that we hadn't experienced before. And to be frank, we had to force ourselves to approach that culture, the United States culture where we were living, in the same way we had approached Austrian or Polish or other cultures. We had to learn to love people in that place and step back from all the things that we were experiencing, which really troubled us. That was hard. I'll be frank. It was way harder for us to move back to America than it was for us to move to another land.

Dr. Don Payne: Interesting. I've heard that kind of thing from a number of people who have served abroad. I think third, third culture, kids, missionary, kids experience a

version of that, but when you're reflecting on what all of that means theologically, it's an even thicker challenge, I suppose.

Dr. Mark Young: No question. I mean, when you step out of your own culture, you're, you're bombarded by different ways to think and different values and different behaviors, and it at some level it's stimulating. In some level, it's, it's invigorating to reconceptualize what you've believed and to live it in new ways. But when you come back to a culture that you thought you knew, the reaction isn't as invigorating as it is angering. It isn't as, as motivational as it is, demotivational. So we had to willfully say we're going to love this place and love these people, and to the degree that we can, move into their lives in ways that are meaningful for them. You know, frankly it was two years before we could say about America, home.

Dr. Don Payne: Well, I appreciate your honesty in that, that's going to help a lot of people relate to, right. I think some of the stretch points that putting our lives on the line for the gospel will always involve for us.

Dr. Mark Young: Yeah. I think we need to pay attention to the language we're using today, Don, for example, I hear a lot of chatter about religious freedom, right? And generally speaking that language is being crystallized into personal choices, moral choices that we make. I have a hard time with that. I think the issue of religious freedom is when someone is saying to you, you can't believe, you can't even express your faith without severe consequences. Now is expressing my faith. A personal moral choice. Are we talking about the whole community of the believing community? I think we need to reframe that conversation to be honest with you. And I have, you know, I have a little different perspective because of my experience of living in a communist country.

Dr. Don Payne: Well one thing I appreciate about your work here at Denver Seminary is you're always helping us reframe conversations. And I tend to think that's one of the most valuable things we can do rather than merely recycle the ways we've always talked about the same things, which never really gets us anywhere.

Dr. Mark Young: Missionaries are dangerous people. They're dangerous because they've had to ask questions that you don't ask when you stay in your own culture.

Dr. Don Payne: And that asking questions has historically gotten people in trouble.

Dr. Mark Young: Yes, that's right. No question.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. So you moved, came back to the States and then served as a faculty member in the arena world missions for 14, 15 years and then assumed the Presidency here at Denver Seminary 10 years ago, which we just celebrated a month or so ago.

Dr. Mark Young: We did.

Dr. Don Payne: To at least our great delight. Hope it was to yours as well. But we know we did our best to embarrass you and hope we succeeded.

Dr. Mark Young: You did, you did.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay. Great.

Dr. Mark Young: But I'm deeply, deeply satisfied and gratified and thankful for that.

Dr. Don Payne: So over 10 years time, how have you seen Denver Seminary change?

Dr. Mark Young: I think the core question in all ministry and definitely the core question in theological education is not that what question, it's not the how question, it's the why question. And so what we've attempted to do during the last 10 years is reframe using your language. The why question, why do we do theological education? So what I observed coming back into Theological Education Institution in the United States is that theological education really was an inwardly focused experience. It was either personal formation or personal learning, or if you wanted to step outside of the individual student, it was like, how do we prosecute competing denominational faith claims or theological tradition claims. So, you know, to use vernacular language, I thought it was like an intramural sport. Yeah, we're all on the same team, but we're playing against one another. I really wanted to turn theological education outward and say that the rationale for theological education is the great mission of God, the redemptive mission of God in the world. So what would theological education be like if we construct it in our learning experiences, our programming, our campus experience around this great mission, this redemptive mission that God has in the world. In other words, let's make the world a part of theological education. What the world fears, what the world wants, what the world is, is doing. It's brokenness. It's simpleness, it's beauty. How can we make the world and our place in the world a part of the theological education? I believe that's the answer to the why question. Why do we do theological education? Because God's about restoring the world.

Dr. Don Payne: You've, gone onto the board of the ATS, the Association of Theological Schools, which makes us very proud. I know that's thick extra layer of, of work for you, but as you know, through that involvement with the ATS are getting a sense of what's going on in theological education across North America, what are you seeing happen that either concerns you or maybe brings you hope?

Dr. Mark Young: I think there's a general uncertainty and anxiety among theological educators in the United States. It doesn't matter if you're on the evangelical side of the equation or you're part of a mainline Protestant, mainline denominational Seminary or Roman Catholic Orthodox Academy or Seminary. We're all experiencing pressure on enrollment. So evidently the value placed on formal theological education is diminishing across those traditional boundaries. Mostly

I think you see a sense of urgency for us to change, right? So change is the keyword. It doesn't matter what school you're a part of, or tradition.

Dr. Don Payne: Everybody's talking about that, about change.

Dr. Mark Young: Everybody. But it's interesting because there are some schools who change because the financial model needs to be changed. They have to have enrollment. There are some schools who are talking about change because they have all the money they ever want, but they have no students. Something in me says, I wish we could just share a little bit between those two things. And I think the, that what I'm afraid of is that change becomes our modern day [inaudible], it's never to drive us. Change is a tool. It's a conversation partner for us. I think what we're going to, what we're going to see as we move forward is so much fatigue, institutional fatigue from change and living in uncertainty, that we'll see some schools cease to exist and some schools merge. We have, the last five years. I think we'll see more of that. But I also think you'll see schools begin to ask deeper questions than what do we have to change about how we program, how we deliver programming to, what do we have to change about what students are learning and are we creating learning that addresses their sense of what God's doing in the world and what the world needs to hear from the believing community. Once we get there, I think we'll be in a much better place.

Dr. Don Payne: You mentioned, evangelical schools, mainline schools and so forth, and I know you've been involved quite a bit in this conversation of late about what does it mean to be evangelical, and that that term alone has in many sectors been so politicized that now you find a lot of people who historically would be very happy to consider themselves evangelical who are becoming rather disaffected with the term. And I know you wrote a piece about that in an edited volume recently, but speak to us a little bit about that whole conversation and if people haven't read the chapter you wrote, we'll recommend that to them. I think the book title is, Still Evangelical. But talk to us a little bit about where that movement's headed and why you think it's a good thing to still stay with that term? If you do?

Dr. Mark Young: I do, I do. In fact, you know, there's a part of me that says I've got to hold onto the term because I lead an institution that has 60, almost 70 years of identity in the movement. I think if we were to be frank with one another, just be honest for a moment with ourselves as a movement, there is very little about the term evangelical that is perceived positively in the broader culture, particularly that part of the culture that really at this point wants nothing to do with our faith. Imagine what I just said? An identity that causes people to want nothing to do with our faith. Why would we ever want to create that kind of an identity? Yet we have. Again, coming back to the United States in 1995 after being essentially out for 14 years, I heard language around the word evangelical I'd never heard before. And you're right, most of our country sees us as evangelicals, as politically conservative activists. If that's the case, if our identity isn't that we are gospel people, then what on earth have we done and how do we begin to reshape the meaning of that term? So I, I don't know what the future of the

term is, I know that in some settings it is not helpful for the hearing of the gospel, for me to call myself an evangelical or to bring up that language, because it creates such a negative reaction. And we'd like to say, well, you know, that's not what we mean, that's not what we mean. But when you're involved in communication theory or particularly in intercultural communication, the arbiter of the meaning of a term is the person who is interpreting it.

Dr. Don Payne: Yeah. The receptor.

Dr. Mark Young: Exactly. So we can say, well, we don't mean that, but most of the population is hearing that.

Dr. Don Payne: And it creates enormous work that just bogs down the conversation to have to qualify and qualify and qualify.

Dr. Mark Young: It's like telling people about Jesus standing in the wake of a jet airplane. Nobody can hear you. No one because of the roar that's around you that distorts and ultimately submerges the message that we've been called to pronounce.

Dr. Don Payne: How do you think we're going to redeem the term if that's possible?

Dr. Mark Young: We have to redeem the term relationship by relationship, conversation, conversation as we focus our language, speech, identity, action, whole being on the good news of Jesus Christ and the hope of the gospel. And at the same time, minimize anything that we did to create a distortion or a distraction from that message.

Dr. Don Payne: Good work. Mark, I know you and Priscilla have been very, very actively involved in ministry together both in, well, all along the way it seems, and I know in your 10 years here at Denver Seminary, that Priscilla has been a very active presence on our campus and it's clear that the two of you are deeply committed partners in this ministry. And I'm curious what, what the two of you have learned about partnering in ministry as you have done that through the years?

Dr. Mark Young: I think that the foundation of a marriage that flows together for the sake of the gospel is creating a common sense of mission while recognizing that you have distinct gifting and distinct activities oftentimes. So I think we make a mistake when we assume that a husband and a wife have to be involved in the same things, doing the same things. When in reality the foundation is that you're doing what you're doing for the same purpose. It's no mistake that the marriage relationship is both in the old Testament and the new Testament a metaphor for the relationship between God and his people. So when marriage is lived out well for the sake of the gospel, then your presenting to the world the clearest picture of the relationship that God desires to have with all people. Whether it's in the old Testament where adultery is the same language as idolatry or used as a metaphor for idolatry or in the new Testament where you have the bride of



Christ and his people, marriage is the single most powerful metaphor, tangible expression of the relationship that God desires to have with his people. So therefore as a couple we've asked ourselves the question all along the way, how are we going to take our unique personalities, our unique gifts, our unique abilities, our unique passions, and bring them together intentionally so that people will want to know Christ.

Dr. Don Payne: Thanks for that. Well and I can tell you that everything you've said does come through, and pass that along to Priscilla as well if you would. I guess my final serious question would be, as you know from where you sit in, you know, after these decades of ministry and the various things the Lord has given you the opportunity to do, as you look ahead, what do you think some of the key forks in the road, what are some of the key forks in the road that the church is going to face the next decade or two?

Dr. Mark Young: Sure. Well I think the, the interesting thing that, or I should say a troubling thing that I see happening in, you know, in the American church is where I see us pulling back from our global engagement. And that's to our laws. What I would rather see us do is increase our engagement with the global church, but as a learner more than as a teacher. Because the global church has lived out their faith in contexts that have been far more difficult than our own, and I'm not sure we're ready to live out our faith in a context that may become more difficult. I do believe, I'm very hopeful, that a new generation of leaders will help the church step beyond some of the prison cells of our history that we've chosen to live in, whether that be racism, whether that be sexism, whether that be materialism, whether that be the inordinate ability we have to condemn and critique and divide from one another. Those are all parts of our history that have flowed, have flowed into what we're experiencing today. What I see in those who are the age of my children, let's say the under 45 crowd, is a willingness to address those issues in ways that my generation wasn't willing. And so I'm optimistic that we can create a new presence of the gospel that's willing to step into those tough issues, and live in ways that certainly many of us in my generation were.

Dr. Don Payne: You know, I think there is in the generations you're referring to. There is a level of courage that, and I remember when I was a student here, one of our convocation addresses by Dr. Grounds. He spoke about the importance of moral courage or moral nerve, I think was the way he put it. And, I think I too see that now in younger adults more than maybe I've ever seen it before.

Dr. Mark Young: Oh, I totally agree. The question is, for those of us who still occupy places of power in evangelical institutions, are we going to be those who create more energy around that willingness to have moral courage and to step into really sensitive issues that challenge the way we've lived and the way we've thought? Or are we going to constantly be snapping it back, snapping them back, bringing them back in to what we've done and what we've thought. So if we're willing to set people free to provide a foundation for this generation to think

theologically, think gospel, think in terms of moving into these messy places we haven't wanted to go, then I have great hope for the church in the future.

Dr. Don Payne: Okay, you know, I was going to ask you a really stupid question just to end the podcast on a last note, but I'm going to let that sit because I don't want to dilute the force of that point you just made.

Dr. Mark Young: Thank you.

Dr. Don Payne: Mark, thanks so much for all that, we've been interacting with Dr. Mark Young, President of Denver Seminary, and it's been a real delight. We appreciate Mark's support of all of us who've worked for some months now to launch this podcast and he's been a big fan and we're really grateful for that and grateful that you can hear from him. Again, I'd encourage you to interact with us [podcast@denverseminary.edu](mailto:podcast@denverseminary.edu). I'm Don Payne, this has been Engage360. We'll talk to you next week.